

## Unit I

### I a. Introduction

Literature is the reflection of life recorded. The main purpose of literature is essentially the enhancement of life and the **propagation of human values**. In literature the **silent showing and demonstrating** of the purpose prevails rather than just explaining or saying.

Human nature is essentially unchanging. The same passions, emotions and situations are seen again and again throughout human history. **English literature is the concrete representation of thought and idea**. In the representation words would mime, demonstrate, act out and sound out what they signify. The job of **literary criticism is to interpret the text, to mediate between it and the reader**. It brings out **the merits and demerits** of the text. At the same time these theoretical positions about literature have been implicitly formulated.

#### What is Literary Theory?

**Literary theory** is the philosophical discussion of **literature's** goals and methods. Literary theory sometimes is known as **Critical theory**. It is generally a cultural analysis of a particular thing. Most commonly, it's just the application of the theoretical tools to a text. Literary Theory doesn't render any meaning **out** of the text; it renders cultural and historical significance **into** the text. **It's not about our reading of text; it is about our reading of our reading of the text**. It is the culture that invents new meaning from old things. **Literary Theory is how a society treats a text**. Principal areas of literary theory are formalism, structuralism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Literary theory covers a broad spectrum of thought. In certain classic texts 'everyone can have their own interpretation'. Sometimes, it tells how the author could possibly have meant all of these things to be in here. The history of **literary theory is pretty intertwined with philosophy**, especially European Continental philosophy of the last couple centuries. The key thinkers of Literary Theory are Nietzsche, Sartre and Marx. They **analyse life and how we live it and find that books are metaphors for life**.

#### 1. Literary theorising from Aristotle to Leavis

Literary theory, its idea has been not so direct to the readers and students upto 1970s. But the theory about literature has been existing in **an under-pinning form**. Critical theorising goes back to Greek and Latin originals. **Theorising individual works were also from early ages**. The earliest work of literary theory was Aristotle's *Poetics* (4<sup>th</sup> century BC). The book is about the nature of literature itself. Aristotle offers **famous definitions of tragedy**, insists that literature (drams) is about character and that **the character is revealed through action**. He tries to identify the required stages of character in the progress of a plot. Aristotle was the first to develop **a reader-centred approach to literature**. Since Aristotle's idea of drama tried to describe how it affected the audience. He said tragedy should **stimulate the emotions of pity and fear - sympathy for and empathy with** the plight of the protagonist. The combination of these emotions came out to the effect called 'catharsis' and these **emotions are exercised with the plight of the central character**. And this plight is identified by the audience.

The first prestigious writing about literature is **Sir Philip Sidney's** "Apology for poetry" in 1580. Sidney expanded the implications of the ancient definition of literature formulated by the Latin poet Ovid. Ovid said that the mission of literature is '**docere delictendo**'- to teach by delighting (entertaining). Sidney says that a poem is "**a speaking picture**", with a purpose "to teach and delight". Thus the central idea of reading of literature is to get pleasure. Sidney aims at distinguishing literature from other forms of writing because **literature has the unique purpose of**

**giving pleasure to the reader.** Sidney is writing about literature in general, but not about individual works or writers.

After Sidney, Literary Theory was advanced by Samuel Johnson in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* and *Preface to Shakespeare* exist as the major step forward in critical theory and this marked the tradition '**practical criticism**'. He was the first to present detailed commentary on the work of a single author. Before Johnson, **the Bible was the only individual scrutiny** existed.

Next to Johnson there arose a considerable growth of critical theory through the works of the romantic Poets. William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats were the great contributors. Wordsworth published his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. When he published the second edition, he added **the preface**. The book brings out the features of high literature and popular literature. *Lyrical Ballads* contains literary ballads constructed on the model of the popular oral ballads. The readers of *Lyrical Ballads* disliked the abandonment of the conventional verbal decorum. Different poetic vocabulary of everyday terms as simple as prose was introduced by Wordsworth and Coleridge. The aim of the book *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* is to **provide a rationale for Wordsworth's own poetic work and to educate the readers for it**. It laid foundation for **the contemporary literary critical theory** regarding the **relationship between literature and ordinary language and between literature and other kinds of writing**.

The next significant work of the Romantic Era was Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (Biography of Literature). This book mostly **addresses the ideas in Wordsworth's Preface**. Both the friends had different views about the nature of poetry. Coleridge disagreed with the view that the language of poetry is more like the language of prose. Coleridge felt that merging of prose and poetic language would prove suicidal and kill the poetic effect. As Aristotle and Sidney had maintained, if poetry aims to teach by entertaining, it must be done through the language in which it was written. The language entertains by its 'fictive' qualities and this is the source of the aesthetic effect.

Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* sees poetry as essentially engaged in the modern term '**defamiliarisation**'. The term was later applied by the twentieth century Russian critics. The following lines of Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* show that Shelley conceived this idea of 'defamiliarisation' in **the eighteenth century itself**, "strips the veil of familiarity from the world... it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity.... It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know". The notable critical document had also used earlier Eliot's idea of impersonality. T.S. Eliot said in his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" the distinction between the author who is the creator of the work and the writer who is the speaker of the work. He also said that poetry is not simply the conscious rendering of personal experience in words. Shelley wrote this idea almost a hundred years earlier in his *A Defence of poetry*. There is also an anticipation of the Freudian notion of the mind as made up of conscious and unconscious elements. The idea of the 'Unconscious' is an essential element in Romanticism.

Romantic poet John Keats did not write any document of literary theory like other Romantics. Keats reflects the theory in his letters. He too formulated the idea of the workings of the **unconscious**. In his letter to Bailey on 22 November 1817 he wrote .... The '**silent working**' is the unconscious and 'spirit' into which it erupts is the conscious. Keats's idea of "negative capability" is also a note of the unconscious only. Negative capability is a literary quality (capability) of an impersonal or objective author who maintains *aesthetic distance*. It is opposed to a subjective author who is **personally involved** with the characters and actions represented in a work of literature. It is opposed also to an author who uses a literary work to make his/her personal beliefs convincing. In the critical writings of the romantics, there are many anticipations of the concept of today's critical theories.

Matthew Arnold's most significant thinking is contained in the essays "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" and "The Study of Poetry" (1880). For Arnold literature should remain '**disinterested**' which means '**politically detached**' and should be **uncommitted** to any specific programme. The goal of literary criticism is to attain pure and **disinterested knowledge**. Literary criticism should simply appreciate 'the object as in itself it really is' without insisting any

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specific line of action. Arnold's key literary-critical device is "**Touchstone**" method. This method avoids definitions of literary qualities and suggests using **aspects of past literature** as a means to **measure and assess the literature of today**. Arnold advises us to have in mind the lines and expressions of the great masters always and apply them to other poetry as a Touchstone. This Touchstone method should provide the basis for a '**real**' estimate of poetry but not '**historic**' or '**personal estimate**'.

In the first half of the twentieth century **F. R. Leavis, T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards and William Empson** contributed greatly to the concept of critical theory. Eliot's contribution to critical ideas was the greatest. His major critical ideas were on '**dissociation of sensibility**', '**impersonality**' and '**objective correlative**'. The seventeenth century idea of '**dissociation of sensibility**' was reconsidered by Eliot in his work *The Metaphysical Poets*. This critical concept separates **thought from feeling**. But for this **historical evidence** has never been found. Eliot tried to do something by describing the **special qualities of mind and sensibility** found in the metaphysical poets.

In the idea of **impersonality** Eliot provides his own way of detecting **current thinking about poetry**. He saw **poetry not as a pouring out of personal emotion and personal experience** but as **a transcending of the individual by a sense of tradition**. This **tradition** was spoken through literature and is **transmitted by the individual poet**. The best parts of a **poet's work** are in the way he **expresses the idea** (voice) of his predecessors most clearly. Thus there is a large distinction between the **mind of the individual** and **the voice** which speaks in poetry.

The "**objective correlative**" holds that the best way of **expressing an emotion** in art is to find some **vehicle** for it in gesture, action or concrete **symbolism** rather than approaching it directly through **description**. Thus in literature (fiction or poetry) the feeling of the characters or narrators is shown as a picture in words and actions. This distinction was made by Plato between *mimesis* and *diegesis*. *Mimesis* is a **showing of something** in the character's **own words or actions** which are seen on the stage dramatically. *Diegesis* is telling the reader or audience about things they don't see for themselves (an interior view of world). All the major critical ideas of Eliot are unsatisfactory.

The most influential British critic related to critical theory movement was F. R. Leavis. He assumed that the study and appreciation of literature is a pre-condition to the health of society. Like Arnold's Touchstone method, he looked for a system of literary appreciation not through fixed criteria. He emphasised that there should not be any attempt to politicise either literature or criticism. F. R. Leavis attacked the reputations of even major established figures. The essence of his method is not to have a **fixed point** to '**reputation**'. When **close textual scrutiny** is done many reputations would not stand up to the kind. For Leavis, the critical text is whether the work is **conductive to 'life'** and vitality. Leavis was a kind of **combined avatar** of Johnson and Arnold. He offered **Johnson's moralism** and **Arnold's social vision** and anti-theoretical critical practice.

William Empson was the student of I. A. Richards at Cambridge. He published the book *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). The book insisted on the **ultra-close readings of texts**. This was a text-led extreme critical method. The book was somewhat ambiguous in its effects, the term **ambiguous** means '**textual difficulty**', and it provides several examples of **textual surgery**. Empson felt that **language is a slippery medium**. When we handle language, we need to be careful of the fact that the language is totally to be the meanings without anyone's presence. The seven types of ambiguity seem to end up into a void of linguistic indeterminacy and the **unreliability of language** as a medium (poststructuralist view). But the placing of language within any context reduces the ambiguity (eg. Pain, pane).

I. A. Richards is the **pioneer of the decontextualized** approach to literature. This approach became a norm in Britain from the 1930s to the 1970s as '**practical criticism**' and in America as '**New Criticism**'. He presented students and tutors with unannotated and **anonymous poems** for commentary and **analysis**. The first hand opinion of the reader is the 'true judgement'. He did such experiments in the 1920s and paved the way for '**practical criticism**' that has still been existing.

### **The transition to theory**

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The growth of critical theory in the post-war period was remarkable and varied. Those waves illustrated the theories of 1930s-1950s. In the 1960s two new approaches namely **Marxist** criticism and **Psychoanalytic** criticism came up forcefully. These two technical movements tried to overcome the liberal humanist orthodoxies. In the same decade yet another set of critical approaches called **Linguistic** criticism and **Feminist** criticism emerged. In the 1970s two more critical approaches **Structuralism** and **Post-structuralism** came to Britain. These two approaches originated in France. Their entry and establishment produced a stamping crisis in the field of English. Their thrust areas were language and philosophy. There was another stage of theories sprang in England and the United States. These two were **New Historicism** and **Cultural Materialism**. These two took a holistic approach to literature. Besides, they maintained some insights of structuralists and post-structuralists.

In 1990s yet another approach called **Postcolonialism** took place. This approach emphasises the separateness of the post imperial nations and peoples. Towards the end of 1990s **Feminism** started dissolving to become a loose federation called '**gender studies**'. Simultaneously gay texts and lesbian texts showed their prominence to change as distinct fields of literature.

### **Some recurrent ideas in critical theory**

Critical approaches have their individual histories and traditions and their theories are separate. However, several ideas are recurrent in these critical theories and show that they have a common basis (bedrock). Thus critical theory becomes a single entity having a number of beliefs. They are:

1. The basic tenets of our existence such as gender identity, our individual selfhood, and the notion of literature itself are 'socially constructed' ones and are unstable things. They are contingent categories showing temporary status and circumstance dependent. They are not absolute ones. So no fixed truths can ever be established except some presumable points. These points are the essentials of the theories.
2. All investigators of literature have a thumb on one side of the scales. No one is capable of standing back from the scales and weighing things up dispassionately. Every procedure like literary criticism presupposes a theoretical perspective of some kind. The contention is made explicit as a counter to specific arguments put forward by opponents. This tends to discredit one's own project by cutting the ground from any kind of commitment. The idea of relativism thus disables argument.
3. All reality is constructed through language. Language itself conditions, limits and predetermines the things we see. Thus everything is a linguistic/textual construct. Language creates and shapes reality; the whole of our universe becomes textual. Meaning is jointly constructed by the reader and writer. It requires the reader's contribution to bring it into meaning.
4. The meanings within a literary work are never fixed and reliable. They are shifting and ambiguous. So there is no possibility of establishing fixed and definite meanings. Literature can generate infinite layers of meanings. Literary texts are independent linguistic structures whose authors are always 'dead' and 'absent'.
5. Theorists distrust all totalising notions. Great books arise out of particular socio-political situation and this situation should not be suppressed. The concept of human nature as a generalised norm is to be disturbed too. Briefly, Politics is pervasive, Language is constitutive, Truth is provisional, Meaning is contingent and human nature is a myth.

**Structuralism** is an intellectual movement that has its roots with the **Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure** (1857-1913). The word 'structuralism' in Latin meant 'mode of construction'. Saussure was a key figure in the development of modern approaches to language study. He emphasised that the meanings we give to words are purely arbitrary and these meanings are maintained by convention only. Words are 'unmotivated signs'. There is no inherent connection between a word and the meaning it provides. All linguistic signs are arbitrary. They are relational only. The meaning of a word depends upon its relation with other adjoining words. For example the word 'hut' depends for its meaning on its position with a chain of related words.

hovel    shed    hut    house    mansion    palace

If the order is changed or any word is removed from the chain, the meaning of the word changes.

Saussure said that language is not a collection of individual words but a structured system of relationships among them at a given point of time. Structuralism is not interested in finding the origins of language, but in finding out the rules that govern the functioning of language. The structure of language is termed as 'langue'. 'Langue' in French means language or speech. The individual utterance is called as 'parole'. Parole in French means 'speaking'. Langue deals with the literary texts on the basic rules of grammar/language. The structures are units that interact with one another. We perceive the units as existing differently. For example, 'red' colour in traffic signal denotes 'stop'. It is a cultural practice. It is connected with green and yellow. The human mind perceives the differences that are opposites. These opposites are called 'binary oppositions'.

According to Saussure language is a structure, a system of signs. Individual components of this system can be understood only in relation to one another and in relation to the system as a whole. A word is just a linguistic sign consisting of two inseparable parts, like the two sides of a coin. These linguistic signs are called *signifier*. A *signifier* is the sound image. The sound image becomes a word and it is linked with a concept. The concept to which the *signifier* refers is the *signified*. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. These arbitrary concepts are the result of social contact and cultural conventions. There is no law governing the relationship between the *signifier and the signified*. It is only a matter of social customs bound by cultural requirements.

**Semiology** is the science of signs and it applies structuralist insights to the study of sign systems. A sign system is a non-linguistic object which can be analysed like language. Advertisements and popular cultures rely on semiotic systems. Semiotics recognises language as the fundamental sign systems. Sign = signifier + signified. Sign says that the relationship between the *signifier and the signified* is arbitrary. The relationship is decided by the conventions of society (community). For semiotics the symbol is the subject matter for interpretation. For semioticians the whole world is a sign system and structuralism provides them with the framework to interpret. It stands in opposition to all other views of art (the mimetic, the expressive, the formalist and the sociological).

### **The scope of structuralism**

Structuralism is not just about language and literature. Structuralism is not a new way of interesting works but only an attempt to understand how works have meaning for us. Structuralism is an attempt to catch the force of the text, its power and reduce the possibilities of boredom. Saussure's model language works was transferable to all signifying systems. The anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss applied the structuralist outlook to the interpretation of myth. He said that the individual tale (the parole) can be understood by considering its position in the whole cycle (the langue) and the similarities and differences between that tale and others in sequence.

Structuralist process is moving from the particular to the general (eg. tales, sonnets, ballads, rituals, etc) placing the individual work in a wider structural context (from one work to the author's whole work and to the genre) (Oedipus myth to all the tales connected within the city of Thebes).

The culture of today can be read with the consideration of the past. The dress we wear can be studied with reference to the past dress code.

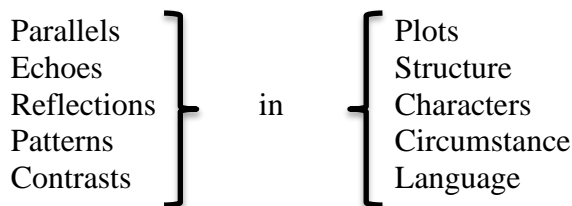
The literary critic applied the structuralist method to the general field of modern culture. He examined modern France of 1950s from the stand point of a cultural anthropologist going to the past (culture). He published his ideas in the book *Mythologies*. He analysed the difference between boxing and wrestling, eating steak and chips etc. Boxers don't shout when hit; boxer fights not in the elaborate guise of a make-believe villain or hero. On the other hand, wrestlers grunt and snarl with aggression; they elaborate displays of agony and triumph.

Roland Barthes made specific examinations of aspects of literature. In 1970s a number English and American academicians took courses under the leading structuralist figures. Key terms were translated into English. A number of academic figures like Jonathan Culler, Terence Hawkes and Frank Kermode read untranslated materials regarding structuralism and interpreted structuralism for English-speaking readers. David Lodge, Professor of English at Birmingham, combined the ideas of structuralism with more traditional approaches. Books such as *Structuralist Poetics* (Jonathan Culler 1975), *Structuralism and Semiotics* (Terence Hawkes 1977), *Working with Structuralism* (David Lodge 1980) all came to be published with enthusiasm. Thus structuralism affected many disciplines such as Anthropology, Philosophy and Literary Criticism.

### Structuralist Criticism – examples

Literary critic Roland Barthes's book *S/Z* (1970), describing and demonstrating the methods of literary analysis is the first example of structuralist criticism. The book with thirty-page story about Balzac's named "Sarrasine" is methodically patterned for analysis. Barthes divided the story in to 561 'lexis' (units of meaning) and classified them based on the five codes – 1. The proairetic code (indications of action), 2. The hermeneutic code (provides narrative suspense), 3. The cultural code (references to cultural knowledge), 4. The semic code (connotative code linked to theme), and 5. The symbolic code (Consists of contrasts and pairings related to the basic binary polarities – male and female, night and day, good and evil, life and art and so on). These codes are seen as underlying structures of all narratives. Thus it aims to understand the individual item by placing it in the context of the larger structure to which it belongs.

The second example of this approach is the tale "The Oval Portrait" by Edgar Allan Poe. The story is studied in parallels, echoes, reflections, patterns and contrasts in plots, structure, character, circumstance and language so that the narrative becomes highly schematised.



Stylistics is a branch of linguistics concerned with the study of characteristic choices in use of language, especially literary language, as sound, form, or vocabulary, made by different individuals, writers in different situations of use. Stylistics is the study of style as a means of analyzing works of literature and their effect. Stylistics is a critical approach that uses the methods and findings of the science of linguistics in the analysis of literary texts. By linguistics here we mean the scientific study of language and its structure (but not the learning of individual languages).

Such specific study uses methods for applying linguistic methods to literature in mathematical and statistical way. It is an aspect of literary study that emphasizes the analysis of various elements of style such as metaphor and diction and the study of the devices in a language that produce expressive value. Stylistics is a twentieth century development in the study of literature analytically and linguistically. Its aim is to show how the technical linguistic features of a literary work such as the grammatical structures of its sentences contribute to its overall meanings and effects.

### **Rhetoric to philology**

Stylistics is a modern version of the ancient discipline called 'rhetoric'. Rhetoric taught the rhetoric students how to structure an argument and how to make effective use of figures of speech. Rhetoric taught how to pattern a piece of writing to produce the maximum impact. In the medieval times rhetoric trained people for the church, the legal profession and political/diplomatic life. Throughout the nineteenth century the term rhetoric was gradually absorbed into linguistics. During this time linguistics was known as 'philology' which meant studying the evolution of languages and the interconnections between the languages. It is also involved in speculating about the origins of language itself. In the twentieth century there was a movement away from this historical emphasis.

A new concentration was on how the system of language was structured. It maintained in the structuring of sentences. In the first decade of twentieth century just before the First World War rhetoric had a rebirth having a new interest in literary style and its effects. Conferences on style were held. A notable conference on 'style' was held at Indiana University in 1958 and the proceedings were published in the form of a book *Style in Language*, edited by Thomas Sebeok. The conference emphasized on the part of linguistics. The material in the book claims that linguistics offers more objective way of studying literature. The book tends also to set up a 'confrontation' between literary and language studies.

The period upto the 1980s saw the development in the form of 'discourse analysis'. Discourse Analysis enabled linguistics to analyse the structure of complete piece of writing, rather than just the isolated phrases and sentences (that was the practice earlier).

### **The Ambitions of stylistics**

1. Stylisticians try to provide 'hard' data to support existing institutions. Stylistics interpreted individual literary works. Stylistics tries to back up the impressionistic hunches of common readers with hard linguistic data. For example, if the reader of Hemingway's short story says "Hemingway has a plain style which is very distinctive", stylisticians would specifically ask "what do we mean exactly by 'plain'? The stylisticians might calculate Hemingway's usage in a given tale: In a statement like "seventy three per cent of nouns and verbs used by Hemingway in... are without adjectival or adverbial qualification". There might be a comparison with works by other writers with less plain style (having just thirty per cent of nouns and verbs unqualified).
2. Stylisticians suggest new interpretations of literary works based on linguistic evidence. Stylistics brings a special expertise to bear on the linguistic features of a text. Therefore it sees a different dimension of the text which the ordinary reader would not be aware of. Stylistics analyses the ambiguity in the meaning. For instance, in the essay on stylistics MacCabe argues that Falstaff of Shakespeare's play has an element of sexual ambiguity. In the place of 'stomach' Falstaff uses 'womb': "My womb, my womb, my womb undoes me". At Shakespeare's time 'womb'

generally meant 'stomach'. Now the word 'womb' in modern language means 'a particular part of female reproductive organ (uterus). Today 'womb' means a gender-specific part. So Falstaff might have used the word ambiguously (MacCabe).

3. Stylisticians attempt to establish general points about how literary meanings are made. Like other new approaches to literature stylistics is not only interested in the individual literary work but also questions how literature works. Linguists argue that a literary effect is created simultaneously in terms of both form and content. Stylisticians argue in terms of grammatical structure and sentence patterns. Literary effect comes from different factors such as word choice, imagery and so on. Thus literary meaning goes down to the very roots of language. Hence no aspect of language is neutral; patterns of grammar, syntax, morphemes and phonemes are all implicated in literary meaning. Thus stylistics tries to establish things which are true about the way literature works.

### **Stylistics – examples**

Stylistics examines the technical aspects of the language, for example, the use of 'transitivity' and 'under-lexicalisation'. Transitivity is just to see whether the verb is transitive or intransitive. A verb is said to be transitive when the action has a 'recipient' or 'object'. In the sentence 'She shut the door', the action of shutting is received by the door. So the verb 'shut' is 'transitive' or the action 'passes through' to the door. 'Door' is the object of this verb in the sentence. In the sentence 'She vanished', the action of 'vanishing' is not received by an object. So the verb 'vanished' is intransitive.

'Under-lexicalisation' is a term invented by Roger Fowler. Under-lexicalisation refers to the case where there is a lack of an adequate set of words to express specific concepts' (K. Wales). In such cases the reader might not understand exactly what a particular word means. It is called a 'thingy' or a 'wotsit'. For example the word 'handle' for 'the handling thing'.

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming towards where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit.

### **II b. Narratology**

In literary theory **Narratology** is the study of narrative and narrative structure and the ways these affect our perception. Narratology looks at what narratives have in common and what makes one different from another. Narratology examines the ways that narrative structures our perception of both cultural artifacts and the world around us. The study of narrative is particularly important since our ordering of time and space in narrative forms constitutes one of the primary ways we construct meaning in general. Modern narrative media like television, film, fiction has been given the prevalence and importance of in our lives. But the function of narratology is also a useful foundation to analyze popular culture.

The origins of narratology has a strong association with the structuralist quest for a formal system of useful description. This system of description is applicable to any narrative content. For Jonathan Culler (2001) "story" is a sequence of actions/events conceived as independent of their manifestation in discourse and "discourse" is the discursive presentation or narration of events.

Like structuralism and semiotics, from which it derived, narratology is based on the idea of a common literary language or a universal pattern of codes that operates within the text of a work. Its theoretical starting point is the fact that narratives are found and communicated through a wide variety of media such as oral and written language, gestures, and music and that the "same" narrative can be seen in many different forms. The development of this theory **and its corresponding terminology** accelerated in the mid-20th century.



Stories are spontaneous aspect in human life. Telling of stories is a pervasive aspect of our environment. We often forget that stories provide the continuing means for shaping our experience. Without stories our experiences would merely be unevaluated sensations from an undifferentiated stream of events. Stories are the storehouse of our collective wisdom about the world of social/cultural behavior. They are the key mediating structures for our encounters with reality.

Thus, it is not surprising that a great deal of scholarly investigation has focused on both the nature of stories and their central role in human affairs. Telling and hearing stories have invaded through many disciplines including linguistics, literary criticism, anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Researchers of these disciplines see how the analysis of story structure is fundamental to our understanding of individual intention and potential. Significantly, the words "narrative" and "story" can both be traced back to an original meaning of "to know." It is through stories that people come to know, to construct and maintain their knowledge of the world. Through a story, an individual creates meaning out of daily happenings, and this story, in turn, serves as the basis for anticipation of future events.

The psychologist George Kelly has described how our personalities grow out of the stories we have chosen. For him stories construct our perceptions out of what has happened to us and how these stories influence our future expectations. Similarly, sociologist Peter Berger has emphasized the importance of stories in shaping social realities, showing how people's characteristic stories change as they progress from one life theme to another. This label refers to the structuralist study of narrative. The structuralist seeks to understand how recurrent elements, themes, and patterns yield a set of universals that determine the makeup of a story. The goal of such analysis is to move from a taxonomy of elements to an understanding of how these elements are arranged in actual narratives, fictional and nonfictional.

Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp (1895 – 1970) was a Soviet folklorist and scholar who analyzed the basic plot components of Russian folk tales to identify their simplest irreducible narrative elements. Propp identified a sequence of 31 narrative elements or functions that typically occurred within Russian folklore and fairy tales. These functions occurred in a typical order within each story, with some variation. Vladimir Propp's **Character Theory** suggests that every narrative has eight different character types, these character types are: The Hero, The Villain, The Helper, The False Hero, The Donor, The Despatcher, The Princess (The Heroine) and The Princess's Father. This is called Propp's character theory. Propp's work in *Morphology of the Folk Tale*.

- 1. The Hero:** In every story, there is usually a main character and the storyline will revolve around this character. This character is the hero or protagonist. The protagonist will be in search of some metaphorical treasure, will face conflict on the way, will defeat the villainous character, will overcome all conflicts and ultimately achieve the goal.
- 2. The helper:** This character's sole helper and supporter of the hero. There can be more than one helper, and in some stories, there are multiple helpers working alongside the hero. They will often bring wisdom or simply support the hero.
- 3. The Villain:** Every story has a villain. The villain always has the aspirations of destroying something or selfishly taking from the evil and vulnerable. He/She will always be defeated by the hero.
- 4. The False Hero:** This character tries to claim that he is the hero but in fact the whole opposite. The audience can tell who the false hero is. The false hero is 'found out' and confronted by the hero where he often regains his heroic status. The false hero also always suffer some sort of punishment for their actions.

- 5. The Donor:** The donor plays an important role in any story, as he is responsible for giving the hero something special that will help to defeat the villain. This can be a weapon, a piece of vital information or even magical powers. This character will often take the role of the helper and vice versa journeying with the hero.
- 6. The Dispatcher:** The dispatcher often brings a message to the hero and sends the hero on his quest. In many stories, this can be an authority figure like a king or a general but in many other cases, it can simply be a messenger and follow the hero to take the glory for himself.
- 7. The Princess (Heroine):** The character is feminine heroic portrayal. She is the motivation for the Hero's quest and the reward for the hero's success. She is saved from danger and the clutches of the villain. In many narratives she is an integral part of the plot as she falls in love with the hero. This character type is very versatile to the storyline.
- 8. The Princess's Father:** In many stories, the princess' father can also play the dispatcher who sends the hero on their quest, especially when the quest is to find her. The father and the hero can at times be battling for the affections of the princess and the hero must gain the father's respect and take her hand in marriage. Sometimes the princess' father is just unexpected somebody or the villain himself to protect his daughter's interests.

If you examine any story, whether it's a blockbuster movie or a romantic novel, you'll come across many of these character types. As an audience, we love familiar characters, simply because we can relate to them and the way they behave. We sit back and follow their journey, observing their transformation and cheering them on their way. As a society, we love the good vs evil plotline in storytelling and we are subject to the hero/villain concept from a very early age. If we look around us at any given moment we are surrounded by these character types in everyday life, without really realising it. So next time you watch a movie or read a book see if you can spot these generic character types for yourself.

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|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Absentation      | 2. Interdiction | 3. Reconnaissance               |
| 4. Delivery         | 5. Trickery     | 6. Villainy or Lacking          |
| 7. Complicity       | 8. Mediation    | 9. Violation of Interdiction    |
| 10. Departure       | 11. Guidance    | 12. Beginning Counteraction     |
| 13. Branding        | 14. Pursuit     | 15. Victory Hero's Reaction     |
| 16. Struggle        | 17. Liquidation | 18. Receipt of a Magical        |
| 19. Rescue          | 20. Return      | 21. Unfounded Claims            |
| 22. Solution        | 23. Exposure    | 24. Unrecognized Arrival        |
| 25. Transfiguration | 26. Recognition | 27. Punishment                  |
| 28. Difficult Task  | 29.             | 30. First Function of the Donor |
|                     |                 | 31. Wedding                     |

