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NARRATIVE THEORY

Elaine Auyoung

Fabula and *syuzhet*. Focalization. Heterodiegetic narrator. Proairetic code. Critics who discuss *Wuthering Heights* (1847) or *David Copperfield* (1850) in these terms seem to be speaking a different language—the language of narrative theory. One of the unheralded functions of narrative theory (and a not insignificant part of its allure) is to satisfy our discipline's long-standing need for a specialized vocabulary that, as with terminology in mathematics or chemistry, differentiates the expert from the layperson, the initiate from the outsider. While contemporary narratology continues to serve this function, providing our discipline with an ever-expanding set of often unwieldy neologisms, the narrative theorist's impulse to break down a literary narrative into its component parts, to describe how narratives work, and to abstract them into shared underlying structures long predates literature departments. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragic drama by its ability to elicit a particular affective response (fear and pity). To achieve this effect with maximum success, he asserts, tragedies must adhere to a certain set of rules, which includes focusing on a certain type of protagonist (an ordinary person) and turning on a particular sequence of action (reversal and recognition). What we find modeled here, however, is more than the critical method of identifying and classifying literary structures that we still see in contemporary narrative theory. By presuming that crafting a tragic drama imposes its own constraints on the story that is told (not just any protagonist but an ordinary one and not just any plot but one that leads to a reversal of fortune), Aristotle approaches storytelling as an activity that comes with its own rules and demands. How these rules and demands shape the stories we tell animates the work of modern narrative theorists from the early twentieth century to the present.

The story of narrative theory's emergence and development in the twentieth century, from Russian Formalism to French structuralism to contemporary narratology, has been told many times over, with figures such as Mieke Bal, Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Wayne Booth, Seymour Chatman, Dorrit Cohn, Gérard Genette, David Herman, James Phelan, Gerald Prince, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Viktor Shklovsky playing more or less prominent roles depending on who is doing the telling. In the 1920s, Vladimir Propp applied the approach we see in the *Poetics* much more thoroughly and systematically to the Russian folktale, working out a typology of characters and plot functions, which in turn paved the way for the work of A. J. Greimas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Tzvetan Todorov in the 1960s. One concept fundamental to the work of many narrative theorists is the distinction between discourse and story, or between *fabula* and *syuzhet* for Russian Formalists and between *récit* and *histoire* for French structuralists. Whereas *story* consists of the chronological sequence of events in a plot, *discourse* is the manner in which those events are presented by the narrative. Recognizing that the contents of a story can be represented in countless ways in turn makes it possible to recognize the range of strategies

by which narratives handle the passage of time (as when Genette distinguishes between summary, scene, stretch, pause, and ellipsis) or the variety of discursive possibilities for representing a character's thought or speech (as when Cohn draws distinctions between quoted monologue, narrated monologue, and psycho-narration).

Such categories reflect another aim of narrative theory or narratology: to develop a systematic approach to analyzing narration that would be tantamount to a science. Much like the New Critics working in mid-twentieth-century America, Russian Formalists and the later French structuralists sought to consider literary texts as freestanding, self-contained systems, with rules that operate independently of context. In this regard, narratology could not seem more at odds with Victorian studies, which by definition is concerned with literature and culture produced during the reign of a particular British monarch, Queen Victoria. And yet some of the criticism that has been most influential in Victorian studies, such as that by Peter Brooks and D.A. Miller, is grounded in and derives its force from key structuralist claims and concepts. The enduring appeal and importance of this work attest to the methodological ambition and analytical power that perspectives from narrative theory afford.

1. Narration's Inherent Tensions

Critics working at the intersection of narrative theory and Victorian literature tend to take one of two approaches that seem unique to their field. The first is to identify some fundamental property of narrative by means of close critical attention to nineteenth-century novels [on the novel, see Michie's chapter]. While this work is consistent with the spirit of classical narratology, it is distinguished by a tendency to build drama around a specific conflict or tension between discourse and story—between the act of storytelling and the contents of the tale. While critics who take this first approach alert us to the formal demands and constraints that shape Victorian narratives, others take a second approach, which is to examine the relationship between Victorian narratives and their audience, and to make a case for this relationship's cultural, historical, or ethical significance.

We see both approaches—to identify a property fundamental to narrative in general and to theorize the relationship between text and reader—in Brooks's *Reading for the Plot* (1984). This work is presented as a corrective to the static structures of classical narratology, which, Brooks argues, fail to capture the dynamic experience of reading and writing. Brooks is concerned with the forward-moving "force" or "energy" that drives narratives to their end—along with the act of reading and interpreting these narratives. To account for this force, he draws on a psychoanalytic model of erotic desire. For him, the plots of nineteenth-century novels are not just *about* desire, propelled by the libidinal energy of young male protagonists, but also arouse in their readers a desire for meaning that sustains their progress through the text. The drama of Brooks's account lies in his recognition that the moment when our desire for meaning is fulfilled is also the moment when the narrative comes to an end. Paradoxically, the drive toward meaning is also a drive toward the death of desire [on desire, see Dau's chapter]. By calling attention to this tension inherent in narrative desire, Brooks makes a move that also characterizes major claims about the nature of narrative by Miller, Audrey Jaffe, Garrett Stewart, and Alex Woloch. They similarly seek to expose tensions inherent in narration itself. In the work of these critics, we continue to see the narrative theorist's interest in how what is represented on the page emerges from the struggle between the demands of storytelling as an endeavor in itself and the attempt to present an account of characters and incidents.

Brooks's observation that the arrival at full knowledge marks both the consummation of narrative desire and the death of desire builds on Miller's more predominantly structural study of narrative closure in *Narrative and Its Discontents* (1981). Miller argues that the production of narrative is only possible when settlement, closure, and the arrival at a definitive meaning is deferred. To keep going, a narrative must maintain the state of "disequilibrium, suspense, and general insufficiency" that characterizes the "narratable" (ix). The drama or tension inherent in narration is a fundamental asymmetry:

“The narratable is stronger than the closure to which it is opposed” (266). For Miller, the conclusion that a novel provides can never truly resolve the conditions of disequilibrium that first set it into motion. Writing against the long-standing assumption that the endpoint of a narrative possesses a kind of teleological finality, he redefines narrative closure as a mere “denial or expedient repression” of the narratable (267). While, in *Narrative and Its Discontents*, Miller celebrates the narratable as something that cannot be fully mastered, the anxiety or uneasiness that this book identifies as inherent in the narratable becomes, in his *The Novel and the Police* (1988), an instrument of social discipline. More recently, Robyn Warhol provides a taxonomy of “unnarratability” in “‘It Is of Little Use for Me to Tell You’: George Eliot’s Narrative Refusals” (2013). She distinguishes between the subnarratable (what need not be told because it is too obvious or boring), the supranarratable (what cannot be told because it is ineffable or inexpressible), the antinarratable (what should not be told because of trauma or taboo), and the paranarratable (what would not [yet] be told because of literary convention).

If *Narrative and Its Discontents* unsettles our assumptions about the tidiness of narrative closure, Audrey Jaffe unsettles our assumptions about omniscient narration in *Vanishing Points* (1991). She takes up the question of “who is speaking” posed by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*, arguing that the narrative point of view that we label as “omniscient” is defined by a tension between a specific voice that implies a concrete physical being and the fantasy of being able to transcend the boundaries of an individual identity (and to achieve the unlimited knowledge and mobility that such transcendence affords). Focusing on Charles Dickens, Jaffe demonstrates how first-person narrators like Boz, David Copperfield, and Esther Summerson self-reflexively dramatize the contradictory way in which omniscient narrators are “at once inside and outside character” (16). Esther Summerson’s extreme self-effacement, for instance, alerts us to just how much the impersonal, disembodied quality associated with omniscient narration is at odds with the embodied specificity that defines fictional characters. By suggesting that what we refer to as omniscient narration is actually poised at the juncture between individuality and impersonality, Jaffe brings out a tension that has all along been inherent in a familiar strategy of narration.

The same effort to bring out a tension inherent in narrative representation defines Alex Woloch’s groundbreaking *The One vs. the Many* (2003). Attention to literary characters has long been divided between structural attempts to reduce characters to their functions within a narrative, as in the work of Propp and Greimas, and the persistent tendency for readers and critics to think about characters mimetically, as if they have implied personhood outside of the narrative. Woloch argues that our sense of a character’s implied personality is inseparable from the space or position they occupy within the narrative as a whole. At the core of this theory is the drama by which a narrative’s minor characters become flattened or distorted as a result of the unequal distribution of a novel’s limited narrative attention.

All these critics pursue their argument with varying support from close readings of passages that allegorize the formal tensions they seek to identify. When claiming that desire is the engine of plot, Brooks cites the literal motors and engines that appear in nineteenth-century fiction (61), while Woloch interprets Magwitch’s severed leg iron and file in Dickens’s *Great Expectations* as emblems of the fragmentation that befalls the type of minor character he represents. Miller interprets a moment of indecision in Jane Austen’s *Emma* as an allegory of the deferral of closure on which all narration depends, while Jaffe focuses on how Dickens’s first-person narrators dramatize tension between “self-effacement and self-assertion” inherent in omniscient narration (168). This desire to find coherence between multiple levels of the text and between form and content brings out narrative theory’s continuing debt to New Criticism, which emphasized unity between structure and meaning in a literary work. We find the fullest expression of this debt in Garrett Stewart’s *Novel Violence* (2009), which is presented as a corrective to narratology’s tendency to discard surface features of texts to bring out the abstract structures and codes underlying them. Stewart proposes instead a method that he terms “narratography,” a micropoetics of prose effects that are lexicographic, syntactic, syllabic. Drawing on

Roman Jakobson's notion of linguistic "violence" as a moment of disruption or surprise—a violation of expectation—at the scale of the sentence, Stewart models a form of close attention attuned to "prose's own tensile energy" (6). He traces, for example, "the squeezing out—and to death—of a single phonetic cluster" in a sentence from *The Mill on the Floss* ("These words were wrung forth from Maggie's deepest soul, with an effort like the convulsed clutch of a drowning man") that bends the narrative toward Maggie's own tragic fate (161).

From *Narrative and Its Discontents to Novel Violence*, critics working at the intersection of Victorian fiction and narrative theory have shown how the act of narration itself shapes or constrains the content, because storytelling comes with its own rules, demands, and effects. The drama of such criticism centers on a tension or conflict between content and form. For Jaffe, omniscient narration is defined by a conflict between the attempt to present a depersonalized, disembodied voice and the inability of any speaking voice to be free from personal and cultural identity. Woloch reveals that a literary character's personality is shaped by his or her structural position within the character-system, while Stewart argues that violence at the linguistic scale warps and bends the trajectory of the larger drama. For Miller, narrative content is shaped by the conflict between a novelist's personal ideological commitments and the demands inherent in the enterprise of narration. Thus George Eliot, who wants to hold out for transcendent possibility, resists the social limitations that make narrative closure and settlement possible. When we recall that the New Critics also sought to identify the tensions, paradoxes, and oppositions inherent in literary works, Miller's interest in bringing out the drama at the heart of the relationship between form and content—or between discourse and story—again reveals the deeply New Critical method and aesthetic employed by narrative theorists.

2. Metaphors for Text and Reader

If a number of critics have elucidated tensions between narrative content and form, others have focused on how narrative form affects its audience and the significance of these effects. Here we can circle back to Peter Brooks's use of erotic desire as a framework for reading in *Reading for the Plot* [on reading, see Buurma's and Heffernan's chapter]. For Brooks, "the need to tell" is "a primary human drive that seeks to seduce and to subjugate the listener" (61). This account of the relationship between text and reader as one of dominance and submission has served as a seductive image of the text as an entity that compels, trains, and disciplines its readers. While erotic desire and psychoanalytic theory more generally have continued to influence critical approaches to narrative, other critics have introduced new metaphors for thinking about what a narrative is and what it does to readers.

Whereas Brooks uses male erotic desire as a metaphor for reading, Caroline Levine enlists the metaphor of the scientific experiment in *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense* (2003). While the Freudian model of desire is meant to be universal, Levine grounds her approach in a moment when Victorian scientists and philosophers were becoming attuned to the importance of suspending judgment during the pursuit of knowledge. She argues that, by withholding information from their readers, Victorian novels provided a form of "rigorous political and epistemological training" that fostered "energetic skepticism and uncertainty rather than closure and complacency" (2). Levine shifts our attention from the force that drives readers toward the end of a novel when they arrive at full knowledge to the cultural and ethical significance of narrative middles, which heighten readers' sense of how much they are unable to know [on ethics, see Mitchell's chapter]. For further approaches to the middle of a narrative, readers can consult Caroline Levine's and Mario Ortiz-Robles's (eds.) *Narrative Middles* (2011). Jesse Rosenthal takes a related approach in *Good Form* (2016), which focuses on how our interest in a narrative, along with our sense of the "formal satisfaction" a novel provides, is based on our moral intuition. In lieu of Brooks's erotic model, Rosenthal argues that Victorian narrative strategies—the twists and turns of plot—are designed to provoke readerly reactions that stem from a moral sense of whether a plot outcome is just, fair, or "right" (13). Rosenthal's claim that narrative

structure is not an arbitrary set of rules or codes but has a profoundly moral dimension returns us to Aristotle's assertion that tragic dramas are most effective when they focus on plots about unmerited misfortune. To account for an audience's interest in whether fictional characters are punished or rewarded for their actions, William Flesch's *Comeuppance* (2007) draws on evolutionary theories of altruism.

The Aristotelian notion that a tragedy can be constructed in a manner that is maximally affecting is also central to Nicholas Dames's *Physiology of the Novel* (2007), which recovers Victorian views of the novel as a metaphoric machine designed to produce certain effects on readers' bodies, whose responses were also seen in mechanical terms. In this way, Dames argues, novel reading was understood as "a training ground for industrialized consciousness" at odds "with our own habitual sense of reading novels as an escape" (7) [on industrialization, see Carroll's chapter]. Whereas Brooks sees the engines and motors that appear in the novels of Émile Zola as emblems of the erotic force that powers the forward movement of plot, Dames attends to the rhythmic structure of a narrative across time, to the "moment-to-moment affects and processes of reading prolonged narratives" (12). In *Still Life*, Elisha Cohn dwells on moments of rest or un-plotted moments of "non-reflection, inaction, and absorption" in a narrative (2), which for her expose the Victorian novel's ambivalence about the relentless drive toward what needs to be "realized, revealed, or accomplished" (29). While many critics have understood both reading and critical practice in terms of the "passion to discover meaning" that Barthes celebrates in his 1975 "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative", Cohn draws on another text by Barthes, *The Neutral*, to make a case for the value of a neutral, lyrical mood in which the productivity of reading is temporarily suspended (271). To recognize such moments is to recognize that Victorian novels do not perfectly fit the structures and models used to describe them. Suzanne Keen captures the messiness of these narratives by adopting the spatial metaphor of the house (a metaphor that Henry James made famous in his 1908 preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*). In *Victorian Renovations of the Novel* (1998), Keen introduces the concept of the narrative "annex," a moment when a novel temporarily crosses over into a different generic realm, introducing characters, subject matter, and incidents that fall outside the cultural and literary norms of Victorian fiction but are essential to the progress of the narrative. By framing the Victorian novel as a house divided into distinct, bounded spaces, Keen presents yet another metaphoric way in which to understand what a novel is and what this does to or for readers.

When critics describe the novel as a house, a machine, an experiment, or an engine of desire, they adopt a metaphor for thinking about what kind of thing a novel is and about the relationship between fictional narratives and their readers. As a house, the novel has separate spaces for readers to explore; as a machine, novels work on readers' bodies, which respond mechanically in turn; as a scientific experiment, novels invite readers to generate hypotheses that may or may not be disproved. And, in his account of the relationship between reader and text as one of erotic desire, Brooks gives us a specific relationship of dominance and submission, in which the reader is seduced and reading is defined by an experience of surrender. These models reflect a critical desire to move beyond classical narratology's representation of the text as a closed system but to retain some kind of abstract framework or model, so that thinking about the novel will proceed in a manner that seems systematic.

Many of these accounts also reflect the broader values not just of the nineteenth century but also of the *critical* moment in which they appeared. We see nineteenth-century values on full display in the Victorian theory of the novel as a machine that trains readers to be members of industrial society, just as we see the influence of psychoanalysis on Brooks's use of desire to understand narrative as an attempt to seduce and subjugate the reader. Levine's claim that novels train readers to suspend judgment is compatible with contemporary views about literature's role in the cultivation of critical thinking, while Cohn's contention that fiction can provide a respite from self-cultivation comes at a moment when the discipline has turned to affect as an alternative to the single-minded pursuit of meaning.

3. Narrative and Comprehension

What if we could explore the intersection between texts and readers without resorting to metaphors for the relationship between them? I propose that psychological research on the reading process can provide literary critics with a conceptual vocabulary for the mental acts involved in reading *qua* reading, rather than as a figurative form of seduction, a scientific experiment, a mechanical response, or an exploration of the house of fiction [on psychology, see Keen's chapter]. What's more, although our discipline was founded on a belief in the causal connection between what literary texts are about and what readers learn from them, a vast body of psychological research on learning, problem solving, and decision making makes it possible to explore how this process might work in practice, allowing us to go beyond the straightforward causal relationship in which literary texts shape the reading subject.

Although many scholars remain resistant to cognitive psychology in literary criticism, I would argue that engaging with empirical findings presents an unexpectedly effective way to move beyond narrative theory's current methodological limitations while also advancing its long-standing aims. Here we might recall that one of the defining aims of classical and contemporary narratology has been to approach the study of narrative as a science. Yet narratologists, in their effort to examine literary texts systematically, have tended to construe narratives as closed systems with a logic and structure of their own, independent of the human beings who create and consume them. Put another way, the desire for a systematic methodology has led narratologists to proceed as if narratives themselves operate systematically as well, which downplays all the ways in which the stories we tell ourselves violate the formal patterns and structures that literary critics seek to impose upon them.

Because the psychological study of how readers comprehend and retain narrative information is grounded in the scientific method (a method that aspires to the systematicity that narratologists have also pursued), it presents literary critics with a set of orderly and disciplined procedures for examining the messiness of literary texts and their relation to the human activities of constructing and comprehending narratives. Concepts from the psychology of reading can assist us with thinking about narratives as human artifacts that may not be organized in a perfectly logical and systematic way. In *When Fiction Feels Real* (2018), I point out that narratives are subject to the biases, limitations, and inclinations of the human mind, which complicates the structuralist assumption that every part of a text is equally (and enormously) significant.

Roland Barthes asserts in the 1975 "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" that art "does not acknowledge the existence of noise (in the informational sense of the word). It is a pure system: there are no wasted units, and there can never be any" (245). He models this approach in "The Reality Effect," which makes a case for the discursive significance of narrative details that seem to resist interpretation. By devoting unlimited time and attention to units of a text that might otherwise be overlooked by readers chiefly concerned with the plot, critics bring out content that the text itself works to obscure. Yet precisely because this specialized reading practice overrides the ordinary ways in which readers approach a text, it obscures the dynamic relationship between the constraints on a reader's interest, memory, and attention and the ways in which narrative information has been arranged. Just as readers may not devote equally intensive attention to every part of a text, organizational structures within a text also influence a reader's ability to comprehend, remember, and retrieve narrative content. For instance, studies from the 1970s and 1980s suggest that readers display a much greater ability to retain information when it is structured around a causal relationship than when it was presented as a series of unrelated events. What this opens up for narrative theory is the relationship between narrative structures and how the human mind makes sense of and retains new information.

Knowing more about what happens when we read can also alert us to aspects of the reading process that are at odds with the felt experience of reading. Whereas Brooks's model of a passive reader

who is seduced by and submits to the text is one of many influential accounts of how readers are under the grip of what they read, research on the reading process reveals that comprehension is far from mindless or passive, even when readers feel as if they have surrendered to the text. Even when readers seem to be passively borne along by a text, a precondition of this self-forgetful experience of “flow” is a sense of being in control of their actions and environment (Csíkszentmihályi). And even when a reader feels immersed in a narrative about a fictional character who is at rest, asleep, or dreaming, the reader’s attention remains fully engaged by cognitive processes that include recognizing words, parsing sentences into propositional content, drawing on background knowledge to make inferences necessary for comprehension, and organizing narrative information into mental representations that can be retrieved and revised.

While the belief that reading is a mindless activity has a long history, we can trace our discipline’s assumptions about how literary language works back to structuralist interpretations of select passages from Ferdinand de Saussure’s 1916 *Course in General Linguistics*. Now that more than a century has passed since that book’s publication, we need to become acquainted with more recent ideas about language. For instance, Barthes repeatedly dismisses the significance of the “referential illusion,” or the notion that the words of a fictional narrative refer to persons, places, and things (“Reality Effect” 148). Yet well-established psychological studies from the 1970s suggest that comprehending a narrative necessarily involves constructing a mental representation of what the text describes, regardless of whether a real referent is present. When the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* says, “I have been pressing my elbows on the arms of my chair, and dreaming that I was standing on the bridge in front of Dorlcote Mill” (11), readers may draw on their knowledge of what a chair is and what it means to press one’s elbows on something as part of the comprehension process.

Since its nineteenth-century emergence, our discipline has been oriented toward how literary texts enable readers to acquire the knowledge and abilities they lack. I argue, however, that knowing more about the reading process alerts us to just how much literary artists depend on a reader’s existing background knowledge and abilities. This includes not just forms of literary competence and cultural knowledge that literary critics readily recognize, but also areas of expertise that require no specialized training and therefore tend to be taken for granted, such as the social and emotional intelligence readers acquire through everyday lived experience. Cognitive literary critics such as Alan Palmer, Blakey Vermeule, and Lisa Zunshine have already drawn attention to how literary texts engage readers’ capacity to exercise Theory of Mind, or the ability to make inferences about other people’s implicit motives and feelings. Yet there are many more concepts in social psychology and sociolinguistics that are remarkably suggestive for literary critics.

For instance, impression formation, which I discuss in *When Fiction Feels Real*, is the cognitive process of accumulating and integrating available information about a person to construct a mental representation that can be retrieved from memory. Our facility with organizing information about other persons into coherent mental models in turn assists us with comprehending narrative information about characters such as Maggie Tulliver and Philip Wakem. Novel readers frequently speak of “meeting” characters who do not exist because they so readily undertake the social process of forming, retrieving, and revising mental models of fictional beings. From a sociolinguistic perspective, our acute sensitivity to social information also extends to the style or manner in which someone speaks. This attunes us to the social effects produced by the distinctive narrative styles of writers like Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, and Anthony Trollope. Moreover, it introduces a new way to account for Audrey Jaffe’s claim that omniscient narrators emerge from the tension between personality and impersonality. Try as they might to efface their distinctive voices, third-person narrators display social cues to which we readily respond.

Psychological perspectives on reading can also expand narrative theory’s fundamental understanding of what readers do with literary texts and what texts do to their readers in turn. In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks displays a notably narrow view of what counts as reading, equating it with the “passion

for meaning” that Barthes celebrates (19). If reading is synonymous with the epistemological desire to find things out, it is quite closely related to the quest for interpretive significance that has long characterized the work of many literary critics. What psychological research on reading comprehension reveals, however, is that readers can approach a narrative with a wide range of reading goals; that the pursuit of these goals can be affected by many additional factors, such as varying levels of motivation, interest, background knowledge, skill, and attention; and that all of these factors often have a profound influence on what we get out of a text. Empirical findings even suggest that it can be surprisingly difficult for information in a text to change a reader’s existing beliefs.

Once we become open to the possibility that the interpretive meaning readers find in a text is not necessarily synonymous with how that text affects them, the claims we make about what texts do to their readers can acquire greater nuance and sophistication. We can recognize, for example, that not every aspect of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* or its cultural context has equal weight when it comes to comprehension, which in turn enables us to become more precise about the significance of specific historical conditions. At the same time that causal relationships render narrative information in *Jane Eyre* easier for readers to comprehend and remember, our own causal reasoning is often shaped by cognitive biases. Developing greater awareness of these biases can help us interrogate our own disciplinary practice of inferring causal relationships between textual details and broader cultural conditions, such as between specific passages in *Jane Eyre* and large-scale historical movements. In the absence of full knowledge, we often resort to basic causal principles that are learned at an early age, readily perceiving causal relationships between phenomena that have temporal and spatial contiguity, such as the books in Brontë’s home and the novels she wrote, and between stimuli that are especially salient to us, such as the literary texts we study and contemporary current events. At the same time that we might consider how literary narratives play with these habitual expectations, we can also examine how interpretive readings are themselves narratives that reflect and reinforce the cognitive biases that shape our causal reasoning.

Indeed, it is important to recognize that, as influential as narrative theory has been in Victorian studies, it has been disproportionately shaped by specific claims within the work of a surprisingly small set of theorists and literary artists. Barthes’s view of texts as “pure system” with “no noise” is grounded in the work of Honoré de Balzac, whose relentlessly allegorical understanding of his realist project lends itself to the symptomatic quest for meaning that many critics have celebrated. Similarly, Genette’s emphasis on narrative time and diegetic levels is grounded in Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which foregrounds the operation of memory, the passage of time, and the frequency of reported events. I urge the next generation of narrative theorists to consider the relationships between narrative form and how the human mind makes sense of a text (and of information more generally). By exploring this rich, uncharted territory, we can develop new tools (theoretical, digital, and otherwise) and perspectives on narration grounded in a larger set of primary texts, writers, and genres in Victorian studies and beyond.

Key Critical Works

Aristotle. *Poetics*.

Mieke Bal. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*.

Roland Barthes. *S/Z*.

Peter Brooks. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*.

Seymour Chatman. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*.

Nicholas Dames. *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction*.

Gérard Genette. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*.

Audrey Jaffe. *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and the Subject of Omniscience*.

Suzanne Keen. *Narrative Form*.

D. A. Miller. *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel*.

Robyn Warhol. *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel*.
Alex Woloch. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*.

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