

A SHORT ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF NARRATOLOGY TEXTS
FOR USE IN THE CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

prepared by

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Calvino, Italo. *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. New York: Vintage, 1988.

Invited to Harvard for the Charles Norton Lectures, Calvino obsessed over the lectures until his death. He was only to finish five: “Lightness,” “Quickness,” “Exactitude,” “Visibility,” and “Multiplicity.” The last lecture was to have been titled, “Consistency.” In *Six Memos*, Calvino articulates what makes a strong narrative. While he spends time discussing his own work, *Six Memos* also situates narrative historically.

Intermediate to Advanced

Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978.

In his comprehensive account of how narrative works, Seymour draws on both Anglo-American tradition of fiction rhetoric as established by James, Lubbock, and Booth, and the continental theories of narrative put forward by Genette, Todorov, and Barthes. Seymour’s explanation of narrative is based in an illuminating analysis of both film and fiction. His examples from film and fiction illustrate what each genre can and cannot accomplish in respect to different narrative possibilities—where the two genres walk hand-in-hand and where they part ways. Since so many students understand and appreciate filmic narrative more than fictive narrative these days, this work helps students make connections between the two modes within a general discussion of narrative theory.

Intermediate to Advanced

Cohan, Steven, and Linda M. Shires. *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1988.

Cohan and Shires look at the pervasiveness of narrative (from literature to TV ads) to argue that that narrative meaning is always contingent on larger cultural networks. Their work examines the structures of narrative (via Genette’s *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, etc.) as well as the ideological coding (or semiotics) of narrative (via Barthes’s *S/Z*, etc.). To this end, it first establishes the linguistic basis of narrative (via Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*, etc.). This work can be helpful to students wishing to bring a critical analysis to their own narrative practices.

Advanced

Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes of Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978.

Cohn provides an incomparable analysis of how consciousness is expressed in narrative fiction. The language patterns of fiction, Cohn argues, are primarily “the conveyors or signals of mental activity.” His analysis goes beyond a simple identification of kinds of narrators to an examination of the linguistic and stylistic nuances that define each “fictional mind.” His discussion is subtle and studied and offers a great complement to Booth’s “point of view” and Mieke Bal’s “focalization.” Cohn’s work also demonstrates the how integral the presentation of consciousness is to characterization and the establishing of chronology and setting within a narrative. In all, while fairly advanced, it is an excellent resource for students seeking to understand the complexity (and potential) of narrative voice.

Intermediate to Advanced

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

The definitive narratological text. More expansive than Booth’s *Rhetoric of Fiction*, explores issues of temporality and narrative discourse as a subject. Effectively establishes the foundations of a “poetics” of prose fiction, beyond the merely rhetorical. Goals are accomplished via an ultra-close reading of Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*. Genette’s main focus is a discussion of temporality and narrative, one that he achieves through fairly hardcore structural analysis. It’s tough to read but really worth it.

Advanced

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse Revisited: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Published in France 11 years after Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, this book responds to critical reactions to the parent work. It also clarifies Genette's methodology and approach but does not greatly develop his ideas. This is a good companion to *Narrative Discourse*, but it's nearly useless on its own.

Really Advanced

Lingis, Alphonso. *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*. Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1994.

Lingis, following in the tradition of Emmanuel Levinas, argues for the importance of recognizing the other's imperative. Without such a recognition, communication cannot take place. Presented as a series of philosophic essays, Lingis uses travel as a foundation for his discourse. While not directly tied with narrative terminology, Lingis is important because he insists that readers recognize the inherent narrative constructions in all interactions.

Advanced

Prince, Gerald. *Dictionary of Narratology*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1987.

An authoritative collection of narratological terms and definitions, cross referenced and linked to exhaustive bibliography of foundational narratological texts. One of the most useful aspects of this text is the way it gives a reader access multiple terms for a given structural part or function of a narrative, such as story, histoire, events, fabula.

Beginning to Advanced

O'Neill, Patrick. *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1996.

O'Neill brings a penchant for Plain English to the tangle of terminology in which narrative theory sometimes ensnarls itself. He explains most of narratology's key distinctions, including those between truth and fictionality, story and discourse, and text and textuality. His discussion of "story world," as distinguished from the story itself, becomes particularly apt for students trying to conceive of all that goes into (and will be left out of) the fiction they write. This work provides an accessible primer to narrative theory, introducing students to the major concepts and figures.

Beginning to Advanced

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London: Methuen, 1983.

Rimmon-Kenan synthesizes various rhetorical and theoretical approaches to narrative to address the question What is narrative fiction? She takes pains to distinguish narrative fiction from non-verbal forms of narrative such as film and dance as well as from non-narrative texts such as lyrical poetry and expository prose. Using Genette's distinction between "story," "text," and "narration," she considers time, characterization, voice, and other key elements of narrative. This work is a clear introduction to narrative theory and its practitioners.

Beginning to Advanced

Wallace, Martin. *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

While not a narratology text as such, Wallace provides a thorough introduction and comparative analysis of major threads in current narratological discourse. Provides a broad historical context for the development of current theories from roots with Russian formalists such as Bakhtin and Shklovsky and theories of the novel to the semiotic methodologies of Barthes. What it lacks in depth, it makes up for in breadth. This book is like a motorized overview of 20th century critical issues and discourses. Excellent bibliography.

Intermediate