General Introduction to Narratology

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. As Hayden White puts it, "far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (*Content* 1). Given the prevalence and importance of narrative media in our lives (television, film, fiction), narratology is also a useful foundation to have before one begins analyzing popular culture. The pages in the narratology site therefore attempt to introduce important theorists of narrative and the basic terms needed to explain both fiction and film.

Narratology is complicated by the fact that different theorists have different terms for explaining the same phenomenon, a fact that is fueled by narratology's structuralist background: narratologists love to categorize and to taxonomize, which has led to a plethora of terms to explain the complicated nature of narrative form. In this site, I have attempted to present those terms that seem to me the least confusing in describing how narrative functions. My goal has been to provide a basic foundation, one that should help you then tackle the works of individual narratologists. As in the other sections of this Guide to Theory, I here also provide Modules on individual theorists in order to give a somewhat more detailed introduction to a few influential figures. The links on the left will lead you to Modules explaining in more detail specific concepts by these individual thinkers; however, you might like to begin with a quick overview:

PLAYERS

PETER BROOKS is of particular interest for this site since he melds the insights of narratology and of Freudian psychoanalysis in his examination of the erotic charge of narrative form. In so doing, he provides a dynamic as well as organic model for the understanding of narrative progression, one that has influenced a number of important theorists (including his former student, D. A. Miller). This module also allows the viewer to think about the ways that different critical schools can enlighten each other.

ROLAND BARTHES's original critical work, *S/Z*, provides an alternative way of thinking about narrative plot, one that refuses to be bound by traditional (what Barthes terms "readerly") structures. Barthes's distinction between hermeneutic and proairetic codes is also extremely helpful in thinking about the two driving forces of narrative form.

ALGIRDAS GREIMAS provides us with a hyper-structuralist approach to narrative form. These Modules pay special attention to Greimas' understanding of the semiotic square since this term will be picked up by Fredric Jameson in his Marxist understanding of ideological contradiction. (For Jameson's theories, see the Modules under Marxism.)

PETER BROOKS, IN THE VERY FIRST SENTENCE of *Reading for the Plot,* states that "This is a book about plots and plotting" (xi), which he understands as "the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent of meaning" (xi). Brooks is specifically interested in questions of "temporal sequence and progression" (xi). Indeed, by "plotting" Brooks means "that which makes a plot 'move forward," and makes us read forward, seeking in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intention and portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning" (xiii). Brooks therefore sees his own theories as moving away from structuralist narratologists (like Barthes or Greimas) who he sees as "excessively static and limiting" (xiii). Instead, Brooks turns to "the temporal dynamics that shape narratives in our reading of them, the play of desire in time that makes us turn pages and strive toward narrative ends" (xiii). He is interested in "the motor forces that drive the text forward, of the desires that connect narrative ends and beginnings, and make of the textual middle a highly charged field of force" (xiii-xiv). Whereas Barthes in S/Z wishes to explode the boundedness of a narrative, Brooks is interested in exploring precisely a work's boundedness, the ways it "demarcates, encloses, establishes limits, orders" (4). As a result, Brooks also reads "plot" in the sense suggested by a grave plot: a bounded space, one that is, indeed, intimately tied with questions of death, or at least closure; in other words, Brooks reads plot as following "the internal logic of the discourse of mortality" (22). This is not to say that Brooks does not build on Barthes; he just concentrates on the two codes that Barthes sees as tied to narrative temporality: the hermeneutic and proairetic codes. Indeed, Brooks writes that plot "might best be thought of as an 'overcoding' of the proairetic by the hermeneutic, the latter structuring the discrete elements of the former into larger interpretive wholes, working out their play of meaning and significance" (18). Brooks argues, that is, that we keep reading (proairetically) in order to achieve the sense at the end of the narrative that everything finally makes sense (hermeneutically): "Perhaps we would do best to speak of the *antipation of*

retrospection as our chief tool in making sense of narrative, the master trope of its strange logic" (23). Whereas Barthes dismisses as "readerly" the temporal structures of the hermeneutic and proairetic codes, Brooks concentrates precisely on the logic of that temporal structure in order to make sense of the drive that keeps us reading (or viewing) until the end of a narrative. Largely for this reason, Brooks' favorite texts for analysis are from the nineteenth century (the great period of the classic novel) whereas Barthes tends to turn to modernist, anti-narrative forms like the *nouveau roman*.

In addition to seeing a relationship between the hermeneutic and proairetic codes in his understanding of plot, Brooks also sees plot as the principle by which a narrative organizes the relationship between story and discourse. Few narratives present events in a chronological order but, rather, manipulate the story in various ways (starting in medias res or jumping back and force, revealing certain facts while concealing others). This discursive manipulation of the story provides the dilation necessary for a story to create suspense, the dilation that is necessary also to give us a sense at the end that the narrative has reached a proper closure—that feeling of "ah yes, of course!" The simple chronological progression of our lives, by contrast, rarely affords us the same feeling of proper fullness or correctness, which may be one reason we feel compelled to keep telling stories that re-order events in more satisfying, narrative, bounded ways. For this reason, Brooks presents the detective story as exemplary of narrative logic, for such stories are all about how narrative makes sense of the traumas of life. The detective's plot also amounts to "the active repetition and reworking of story in and by discourse" (25). Brooks therefore concludes that "all narrative posits, if not the Sovereign Judge, at least a Sherlock Holmes capable of going back over the ground, and thereby realizing the meaning of the cipher left by a life" (34).

Brooks makes sense of the relation between space and time in narrative (the grave plot vs. the narrative plot) by mapping that relation onto not only the hermeneutic/proairetic opposition but also the opposition between metaphor and metonymy or between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic poles of language. Brooks convincingly shows that narratives often begin with metaphors of temporality that are then worked out metonymically through the telling of the story until we reach a closural metaphor (similar to but perhaps slightly different from the opening metaphor) that then sums up the whole story that came before. Brooks thus builds on Roman Jakobson's claim that narratives tend towards the rhetorical figure of metonymy since narratives tend to work by moving from one connected thing or event to another. Metonymy is, similarly, the rhetorical figure by which one names something by turning to something adjacent in space or time, for example, "the crown has spoken" in place of "the king has spoken" or "the pen is mightier than the sword"

rather than "writing is mightier than military action." Metaphor, by contrast, brings together disparate elements into a single unity outside of temporally or spatially contingent elements, for example, the dead metaphor "table leg." A table's leg and a creature's leg are not tied together because they are contiguously connected in space or time in a particular situation but because they are similar (though also different). As Brooks puts it, metaphor is the "substitution... of a present signifier for an absent one" (59). According to Jakobsen, poetry is especially dominated by metaphor since poetry is concerned with tying together all its rhymes and images into a single atemporal, metaphorical unity. Metonymy is syntagmatic because it tends to work temporally like the syntax of a sentence; metaphor is paradigmatic because it ties together disparate things outside of time as in a graph or paradigm.

According to Brooks, narratives are not solely dominated by metonymy but, rather, always work out a dynamic interplay between metonymic and metaphorical forces. Brooks' innovation is to align metonymy and metaphor respectively with the pleasure principle and the death drive. The final metaphorical meaning of a narrative retrospectively orders or makes sense of all the metonymical deviations of the narrative that came before the end. As Brooks puts it, "the metaphoric work of eventual totalization determines the meaning and status of the metonymic work of sequence—though it must also be claimed that the metonymies of the middle produced, gave birth to, the final metaphor" (29). Endings and beginnings are automatically related metaphorically, according to Brooks, a fact that is often underlined in narratives by quite specific, explicit metaphors. One need only think of the many films that begin and end with metaphors for their own plots: for example, the closed gate and "No Trespassing" sign at the beginning and end of *Citizen Kane* (see Lesson Plans: Citizen Kane), the winding road of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, even the game of cards being played in the Star Trek: TNG episode that I analyze with my class under Lesson Plans: Star Trek.

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND the ways that plotting and narrative are intimately tied to our sense of the human life-world, Brooks turns to Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, specifically Freud's articulation of man's struggle between the death drive and the pleasure/reality principle. (See, in particular, the Freud Module on Transference and Trauma for a primer on Freud's theories.) Brooks aligns our desire to keep reading with Freud's understanding of desire: "Desire as Eros, desire in its plastic and totalizing function, appears to me central to our experience of reading narrative, and if in what follows I evoke Freud—and, as a gloss on Freud, Jacques Lacan—it is because I find in Freud's work the best model for a 'textual erotics'" (37). Brooks argues that we are driven to read because of our drive to find meaningful, bounded, totalizing order to the chaos of life; however, that drive for order is most fulfilling after the detours or dilations that we associate with plot. If the

order of closure comes too soon, it can feel like a short-circuit, as if we were cheated somehow.

Brooks makes sense of these apparently competing desires (for dilation and for closure) by aligning our pleasure in reading with the psychodynamics articulated by Freud. We read because of the mechanisms of sexual desire but that desire is ultimately "subtended by the death instinct, the drive of living matter to return to the quiescence of the inorganic, a state prior to life" (51). The heroes of a narratives could be called "'desiring machines' whose presence in the text creates and sustains narrative movement through the forward march of desire, projecting the self onto the world through scenarios of desire imagined and then acted upon" (40-41); however, the ultimate goal, according to Brooks and Freud, is to fulfill desire, to reach the quiescence of closure. It is this play of forward momentum and ultimate closure, aligned respectively with Eros (the pleasure principle) and Thanatos (the death drive), that structures the "erotics" of narrative. As Brooks puts it, "the paradox of the self becomes explicitly the paradox of narrative plot as the reader consumes it: diminishing as it realizes itself, leading to an end that is the consummation (as well as the consumption) of its sense-making" (52). Narrative desire is, therefore, ultimately, "desire *for* the end" (52), although any narrative also requires the dilations and transformations of the middle to make such an end desirable. As Brooks puts it, referring to the metaphor/metonymy dynamic I described in the first module, "If at the end of a narrative we can suspend time in a moment when past and present hold together in a metaphor—which may be that recognition or anagnorisis which, said Aristotle, every good plot should bring—that moment does not abolish the movement, the slidings, the mistakes, and partial recognitions of the middle" (92).

In such an understanding of plot, all actions tend to be geared towards an anticipated closure (which Brooks aligns with the quiescence of death), when all loose ends will be tied: "The sense of a beginning, then, must in some important way be determined by the sense of an ending. We might say that we are able to read present moments—in literature and, by extension, in life—as endowed with narrative meaning only because we read them in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings that will retrospectively give them the order and significance of plot" (94). For this reason, Brooks aligns the structural function of narrative closure with the death drive: "All narrative may be in essence obituary in that... the retrospective knowledge that it seeks, the knowledge that comes after, stands on the far side of the end, in human terms on the far side of death" (95).

The same fascination with the ordering power of closure structures our own lives, according to both Brooks and Freud. We are compelled to repeat those events in our lives that we find traumatic, for example, until we are able finally to give them a sense

of proper "boundedness" or mastery, as in the child's fort-da game that Freud analyzes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (see the Freud Module on Trauma and Transference). As Brooks puts it, "If repetition is mastery, movement from the passive to the active, and if mastery is an assertion of control over what man must in fact submit to—choice, we might say, of an imposed end—we have already a suggestive comment on the grammar of plot, where repetition, taking us back again over the same ground, could have to do with the choice of ends" (98). As in Freud's understanding of the repetition compulsion, then, the repetitions (often metaphorical) of narrative could be said to perform the work of what Freud terms "binding"—or, as Brooks puts it, "a binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into serviceable form, usable 'bundles,' within the energetic economy of the narrative" (100). For Freud such a drive to repeat is intimately tied to the death drive, which he sees as even more primary than the sexual instinct. What Brooks adds to Freud's theories is to argue that the "binding" of such repetitions is analogous to narrative discourse's structuring of story (particularly the ordering of temporal progress into a satisfying whole, which is particularly reliant on a proper closure). Repetition compulsion and the death drive are, therefore, according to Brooks, crucial to any narrative; however, the deviances of narrative are crucial to create the sense of achieving a proper end and proper boundedness; otherwise, one has a sense of traumatic short-circuit: "The desire of the text (the desire of reading) is hence desire for the end, but desire for the end reached only through the at least minimally complicated detour, the intentional deviance, in tension, which is the plot of narrative" (104).

BROOKS BUILDS ON HIS THEORIES by applying his Freudian understanding of narrative to what he sees as a tranferential relationship between a storyteller and his or her listener. Brooks is interested in understanding that relation between storyteller and listener as a "contamination" (218) of sorts: we cannot help but be affected by stories in surprisingly intimate, even psychosexual ways. We then often feel the need to re-transmit that contamination, "the passing-on of the virus of narrative, the creation of the fevered need to retell" (221). Brooks is interested, then, in "the desire, power, and danger of storytelling" (233).

Of particular interest to Brooks are those stories that are framed by other stories and that thus highlight the act of narration, of transmission. Such frame narratives, especially those that include a series of framed narrations, are often precisely about the ripple-effects caused by a traumatic or extraordinary event that lies hidden in the most embedded tale. The examples are many: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (as well as the two important movies that tale inspired, Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*), among many others. In each example, part of what is

represented in the narrative is the psychic dynamics of transmission, which spill out to each framing listener all the way to us, the readers or viewers. Indeed, what is often being represented is precisely Freud's theory about repetition compulsion. When we hear a traumatic story, we feel obliged to tell it ourselves to others; through such repetitions, we manage to bind the traumatic elements of the transmitted tale, though we also thus pass on the wound, so to speak, to others. What Brooks explores is thus both the psychodynamic logic of narration and the power of narrative to possess our imagination, to keep us listening until the end because of the power of—and our drive to reach—narrative closure.

As explained in the two previous modules, that drive to reach narrative closure, as well as the compulsion to repeat, are both subtended by the death drive, following Freud's theories in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (see the Freud Module on Transference and Trauma). The drive to reach closure explains, for example, why we are often compelled to watch even terrible films all the way to the bitter end. We are caught, like the Wedding Guest in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner," Coleridge's famous poem about the power of narrative over a listener. To understand the power of narrative over us, Brooks turns to Freud's theories about transference, suggesting that the relationship between a narrative and its "listener" is analogous to the relationship between the analyst and the analysand or patient. Such narratives, like the tales told by an analysand in the talking cure, seek to "make an obsessive story from the past present and to assure its negotiability within the framework of 'real life'—the outer narrative frame—and thus to work the patient's 'cure'" (226). In such frame narratives, "the interlocutionary situation becomes the place of repetition and working through of a past not yet mastered and brought into correct, therapeutic relation with the present" (226).

As in the transferential situation, what occurs in such narratives is the strange repetition of past traumatic events or tales, sometimes forcing the *listener* of the framing story to re-enact the events of the framed story. In all of the examples above (except perhaps *Citizen Kane*), what we see is the potential repetition of the framed tale's events by the listeners of the framing situation: Marlow/Willard are tempted to repeat the events of Kurtz, just as Walton is tempted to follow the same hubristic path as Dr. Frankenstein. Because of the related tale, Marlow, Willard, and Walton all step back from the brink of madness, thus enacting a positive resolution to the traumatic embedded tale. As Brooks puts it, "The transference actualizes the past in symbolic form, so that it can be replayed to a more successful outcome" (235). In *Wuthering Heights*, by contrast, a tale that is more about the failure of the tranferential narrative cure, a series of Catherines allows Heathcliff to repeat continually the same sexual relationship. (Another good example of a similar narrative, by the way, is Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.) According to Brooks, what the analyst must try to do is get the

analysand to recognize this traumatic repetition as something past, something that no longer has a hold on him or her, which then frees the patient to recast "past desires into terms that can be realized and made to render real rewards" (228). The goal is "to make an end to its reproductive insistence in the present, to lead the analysand to understanding that the past is indeed past, and then to incorporate this past, as past, within [the analysand's] present, so that the life's story can once again progress" (228). Some stories, of course, record the failure of the cure, which can be the impetus for further narration (almost as compensation). Heathcliff, as I have suggested, continues his repetition compulsion, circling literally at times around the grave plot of the first Catherine; his insistent desire for an impossible object of desire (a desire, in fact, to return to the prelingual unity he remembers from his childhood union with Catherine) turns out in the end to be a drive towards death, which is, indeed, Heathcliff's own perhaps inevitable end

By turning to Freud's theories, Brooks is thus able "to consider not only what a narrative is, but what it is for, and what its stakes are: why it is told, what aims it may manifest and conceal, what it seeks not only to say but to do" (236).

ACCORDING TO ROLAND BARTHES, all narratives share structural features that each narrative weaves together in different ways. Despite the differences between individual narratives, any narrative employs a limited number of organizational structures (specifically, five of them) that affect our reading of texts. Rather than see this situation as limiting, however, Barthes argues that we should take this plurality of codes as an invitation to read a text in such a way as to bring out its multiple meanings and connotations. Rather than read a text for its linear plot (this happens, then this, then this), rather than be constrained by either genre or even temporal progression, Barthes argues for what he terms a "writerly" rather than a "readerly" approach to texts. According to Barthes, "the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages" (5). This closing of the text happens as you read, as you make decisions about a work's genre and its ideological beliefs; however, when you analyze any one sentence of a work closely, it is possible to illustrate just how impacted with meaning (and possibility) any one sentence really is. Barthes exemplifies what he means in *S/Z*, in which he takes a short story by Honoré de Balzac (*Sarrasine*) and analyzes each individual sentence for its relation to five master codes. The forward progression of plot is, he illustrates, only part of the "story"; indeed, that forward progression can itself be separated into two elements that drive our desire to continue reading (the proairetic and hermeneutic codes, which are explained in the next module). In addition, Barthes pinpoints three additional codes that have nothing to do with temporal sequentiality (see the next

module). When analyzed closely, every sentence in a story is replete with multiple meanings, all of which are functioning simultaneously in the reading process. As Barthes puts it, "the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one" (5). In other words, Barthes' goal is to illustrate how "plotting," as it is traditionally understood, is in fact a retroactive construction. Instead of seeing a text as conforming to a plot triangle (an opening exposition followed by rising action, a conflict leading to a climax, then falling action leading to a resolution), Barthes understands narrative as more akin to a constellation. He refers, for example, to "'nebulae' of signifieds" (8). According to this logic, there is no necessity that we begin a story at the beginning and proceed to the end; a "writerly text," according to Barthes, has multiple entrances and exits. Barthes therefore chooses to cut up the texts he analyzes into "contiguous fragments" (13), which he calls lexias or "units of reading" (13) or "starred" segments. Barthes' form of criticism ultimately "consists precisely in *manhandling* the text, *interrupting* it" (15). Rather than read a text for its closural moment, Barthes is interested in rereading: "rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology ('this happens *before* or *after* that') and recaptures a mythic time (without *before* or *after*)" (16).

As an example of what Barthes is getting at, I will here reproduce his analysis of the title and first sentence of Balzac's story (pages 17-18 of S/Z). Barthes's method is very much a heuristic one, so it may well be that the best way to illustrate what Barthes is getting at is to reproduce his method. (As a result, one of the best ways to understand Barthes is to begin to apply him; for an application of Barthes to *Wuthering Heights*, see Applications: *Wuthering Heights*.) In the following module, I will explain the five codes in more detail. Before we get there, here is Barthes on the opening of Balzac's *Sarrasine*:

(1) SARRASINE * The title raises a question: *What is Sarrasine*? A noun? A name? A thing? A man? A woman? This question will not be answered until much later, by the biography of the sculptor named Sarrasine. Let us designate as *hermeneutic code* (HER) all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution. Thus, the title *Sarrasine* initiates the first step in a sequence which will not be completed until No. 153 (HER. Enigma 1—the story will contain others—: question). ** The word *Sarrasine* has an additional connotation, that of femininity, which will be obvious to any French-speaking person, since that language automatically takes the final "e" as a specifically feminine linguistic property, particularly in the case of a

proper name whose masculine form (*Sarrazin*) exists in French onomastics. Femininity (connoted) is a signifier which will occur in several places in the text; it is a shifting element which can combine with other similar elements to create characters, ambiances, shapes, and symbols. Although every unit we mention here will be a signifier, this one is of a very special type: it is the signifier par excellence because of its connotation, in the usual meaning of the term. We shall call this element a signifier (without going into further detail), or a *seme* (semantically, the seme is the unit of the signifier), and we shall indicate these units by the abbreviation SEM, designating each time by an approximate word the connotative signifier referred to in the lexia (SEM. Femininity).

(2) *I was deep in one of those daydreams* * There will be nothing wayward about the daydream introduced here: it will be solidly constructed along the most familiar rhetorical lines, in a series of antitheses: garden and salon, life and death, cold and heat, outside and interior. The lexia thus lays the groundwork, in introductory form, for a vast symbolic structure, since it can lend itself to many substitutions, variations, which will lead us from the garden to the castrato, from the salon to the girl with whom the narrator is in love, by way of the mysterious old man, the full-bosomed Mme de lanty, or Vien's moonlit Adonis. Thus, on the symbolic level, an immense province appears, the province of the antithesis, of which this forms the first unit, linking at the start its two adversative terms (A/B) in the word *daydream*. (We shall mark all the units in this symbolic area with the letters SYM. here—SYM. Antithesis: AB.) ** The state of absorption formulated here (*I was deep in*...) already implies (at least in "readerly" discourse) some event which will bring it to an end (...*when I was roused by a conversation*...No. 14). Such sequences imply a logic in human behavior. In Aristotelian terms, in which *praxis* is linked to *proairesis*, or the ability rationally to determine the result of an action, we shall name this code of actions and behavior*proairetic* (in narrative, however, the discourse, rather than the characters, determines the action). This code of actions will be abbreviated ACT; furthermore, since these actions produce effects, each effect will have a generic name giving a kind of title to the sequence, and we shall number each of the terms which constitute it, as they appear (ACT. "To be deep in": 1: to be absorbed).

(3) *which overtake even the shallowest of men, in the midst of the most tumultuous parties*. * The fact "there is a party" (given here obliquely), soon to be followed by further data (a private house in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré), forms a pertinent signifier: the wealth of the Lanty family (SEM. Wealth).** The phrase is a conversion of what might easily be a real proverb: "*Tumultuous parties: deep daydreams*." the statement is made in a collective and anonymous voice originating in traditional human experience. Thus, the unit has been formed by a gnomic code, and this code is one of the numerous codes of knowledge or wisdom to which the text continually

refers; we shall call them in a very general way *cultural codes* (even though, of course, all codes are cultural), or rather, since they afford the discourse a basis in scientific or moral authority, we shall call them reference codes (REF. Gnomic code).

AS EXPLAINED IN THE PREVIOUS MODULE, Barthes argues in *S/Z* that every narrative is interwoven with multiple codes. Although we impose temporal and generic structures onto the polysemy of codes (and traditional, "readerly" texts actively invite us to impose such structures), any text is, in fact, marked by the multiple meanings suggested by the five codes. The five codes are as follows:

The hermeneutic code (HER.) refers to any element in a story that is not explained and, therefore, exists as an enigma for the reader, raising questions that demand explication. Most stories hold back details in order to increase the effect of the final revelation of all diegetic truths. We tend not to be satisfied by a narrative unless all "loose ends" are tied; however, narratives often frustrate the early revelation of truths, offering the reader what Barthes terms "snares" (deliberate evasions of the truth), "equivocations" (mixtures of truth and snare), "partial answers," "suspended answers," and "jammings" (acknowledgments of insolubility). As Barthes explains, "The variety of these terms (their inventive range) attests to the considerable labor the discourse must accomplish if it hopes to *arrest* the enigma, to keep it open" (76). The best example may well be the genre of the detective story. The entire narrative of such a story operates primarily by the hermeneutic code. We witness a murder and the rest of the narrative is devoted to determining the questions that are raised by the initial scene of violence. The detective spends the story reading the clues that, only at the end, reconstructs the story of the murder. See the Star Trek Lesson Plan for an example of a television episode that invokes this code.

The proairetic code (ACT.) refers to the other major structuring principle that builds interest or suspense on the part of a reader or viewer. The proairetic code applies to any action that implies a further narrative action. For example, a gunslinger draws his gun on an adversary and we wonder what the resolution of this action will be. We wait to see if he kills his opponent or is wounded himself. Suspense is thus created by action rather than by a reader's or a viewer's wish to have mysteries explained.

These first two codes tend to be aligned with temporal order and thus require, for full effect, that you read a book or view a film temporally from beginning to end. Barthes at one point aligns these two codes with "the same tonal determination that melody and harmony have in classical music" (30). A traditional, "readerly" text tends to be

especially "dependent on [these] two sequential codes: the revelation of truth and the coordination of the actions represented: there is the same constraint in the gradual order of melody and in the equally gradual order of the narrative sequence" (30). The next three codes tend to work "outside the constraints of time" (30) and are, therefore, more properly reversible, which is to say that there is no necessary reason to read the instances of these codes in chronological order to make sense of them in the narrative.

The semantic code (SEM.) points to any element in a text that suggests a particular, often additional meaning by way of connotation. In the previous module, for example, in the first lexia that I quote from Barthes' *S/Z*, "Sarrasine" is associated with "femininity" because of the word's feminine form (as opposed to the masculine form, "Sarrazin"). The question of femininity later becomes an important one in Balzac's story about a man's love for a castrato that he, at first, believes to be a woman. By "connotation," Barthes does not mean a free-form association of ideas (where anything goes) but "a correlation immanent in the text, in the texts; or again, one may say that it is an association made by the text-as-subject within its own system" (8). In other words, Barthes marks out those semantic connotations that have special meaning for the work at hand.

The symbolic code (SYM.) can be difficult to distinguish from the semantic code and Barthes is not always clear on the distinction between these two codes; the easiest way to think of the symbolic code is as a "deeper" structural principle that organizes semantic meanings, usually by way of antitheses or by way of mediations (particularly, forbiddend mediations) between antithetical terms. The concept is perhaps most analogous to Algirdas Greimas' understanding of antagonism and contradiction in narrative structure. (Note that the modules on Greimas are still under construction; however, for comparison, you can read an application of Greimas to the sentence, "There is a road"). A symbolic antithesis often marks a barrier for the text. As Barthes writes, "Every joining of two antithetical terms, every mixture, every conciliation—in short, every passage through the wall of the Antithesis—thus constitutes a transgression" (27)

The cultural code (REF.) designates any element in a narrative that refers "to a science or a body of knowledge" (20). In other words, the cultural codes tend to point to our shared knowledge about the way the world works, including properties that we can designate as "physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc." (20). The "gnomic" code is one of the cultural codes and refers to those cultural codes that are tied to clichés, proverbs, or popular sayings of various sorts.

Together, these five codes function like a "weaving of voices," as Barthes puts it (20). The codes point to the "multivalence of the text" and to "its partial reversibility" (20), allowing a reader to see a work not just as a single narrative line but as a contellation or braiding of meanings: "The grouping of codes, as they enter into the work, into the movement of the reading, constitute a braid (*text*, *fabric*, *braid*: the same thing); each thread, each code, is a voice; these braided—or braiding—voices form the writing" (160).

ALGIRDAS GREIMAS seeks in his writing to find the "deep structure" of all narrativity. As a result, he is less interested in what Roland Barthes terms the proairetic and hermeneutic codes than he is in the formal elements in a narrative that create implicit (if not always consciously recognized) oppositions. To tie Greimas to Barthes once again, Greimas could be said to explore those codes that Barthes sees as outside of the mere forward temporal progression of narrative; that is, the symbolic, semantic, and cultural codes. (See the Barthes module on the 5 codes.) Greimas' influences in understanding the deep structure of narrative include Vladimir Propp's exploration of the deep structure of folklore, Claude Lévi-Strauss' work on the structure of myth, and Etienne Souriau's work on theater. Like the structural linguists that also inspire him, Greimas looks for what we might call the underlying grammar of narrative, "the semiolinguistic nature of the categories used in setting up these [narratological] models" (63); he wishes to find behind any "manifestation of narrativity" a "*fundamental semantics and grammar*" (65). Greimas is also interested in extending the relevance of narratology to all experience: "Our own concern... has been to extend as much as possible the area of application of the analysis of narrative" (63). Greimas therefore can be found applying his narratological models to phenomena that we might think fall outside of structural rules, for example passion (as he does in "On Anger: A Lexical Semantic Study" or *The Semiotics of Passions*). Greimas can do so because of a foundational precept of post-Saussurian linguistics: all language is arbitrary. There is no connection (other than convention) that links linguistic signs like writing or speaking to their referents. The sounds or written lines that make up the word "cat" have only an arbitrary, conventional connection to the actual cat that exists in the world. "Because of this," Greimas writes, "linguists became aware of the possibilities of a generalized semiotic theory that could account for all the forms and manifestations of signification" (17). Anything that we as humans articulate in language (which is to say, pretty much everything) should therefore conform to structural rules: in this principle, we find the heart of Greimas' discipline, semiotics or the study of signification (which is to say, the study of the use of signs to refer to things). To put this another way, the connection between signification and the real world is completely arbitrary; however, signification is in itself not arbitrary since language tends to follow structural rules. Humans are therefore caught in a system of rules and deep structures that bear no relation to the real world. This disjunction between language and reality is, in fact, a central precept of contemporary theory, from Jacques Lacan's understanding of the real to Judith Butler's understanding of performativity to Jean Baudrillard's theorization of the simulacrum. Lacan, Butler, and Baudrillard all do rather disparate things with the knowledge of language's arbitrary relation to the real world. Greimas' goal is purely structuralist: he wishes to find the deep structures by which all

signification orders the world of perception. As Greimas puts it, "From this perspective the sensible world as a whole becomes the object of the quest for signification. As long as it takes on form, the world appears, as a whole and in its various articulations, as potential meaning. Signification can be concealed *behind* all sensible phenomena; it is present behind sounds, but also behind images, odors, and flavors, without being in sounds or in images (as perceptions)" (17).

When it comes to analyzing specific narratives (say, a novel), Greimas is interested in seeing how any specific instance of narrativity relates to a larger process of general meaning-making (or semiosis). A good example is the distinction he makes (following Propp) between actors and actants. An actor refers to the actual character that appears in a narrative; however, such "actors" tend to follow the structural logic of narrative deep structures. They always fulfill the position of structural functions and thus are related to "actants." A given character can, for example, serve the function of "acting subject" or "passive object." A narrative action can be said to imply a character who is the "sender"; a character who serves as the "object"; and a character that serves as "receiver." Building on Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Greimas also looks at the actantial opposition, helper/opponent; that is, those characters that serve either to aid or hinder the quest of the protagonist. Consider, for example, the love triangle, a pervasive narrative convention in which we find two male characters competing with each other in order to gain the love of a woman, who serves as the passive object of their competition. Were the two male characters to enter into a fight because of the woman, the two characters would change places as senders and receivers (of punches, invective, etc.). On a structural level, the woman serves merely as the passive object of their contending affections. (Eve Sedgwick makes much of this structural relation in her understanding of homosociality.) As this example illustrates, a single character can at different times in the narrative serve different actantial roles: "one actant can be manifested by several actors and, conversely, one actor can at the same time represent several actants" (111), as Greimas puts it. We can understand this relation of actor to actant as a spectrum of possibilities: "If we polarize these observations we can theoretically conceive of two extreme types of possible actorial structures: (a) Actorial manifestation can have a maximal expansion characterized by there being an independent actor for every actant or actantial role (a mask, for example, is an actor having the modality of seeming as its actantial role). We would say that, in this case, the *actorial structure* is *objectivized*. (b) Actorial distribution can show a minimal expansion and be reduced to just one actor responsible for all of the necessary actants and actantial roles (giving rise to absolute interior dramatization). In this case, *the actorial structure* is *subjectivized*" (112-13). A good example of the former case is religious allegory (e.g., Spenser's *Faerie Queene*), which tends to reduce characters to types. A good example of the latter extreme is James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, which occurs completely inside the unconscious of a single "actor."

The situation with regard to actants is made even more complex because of the tendency of any one actant to suggest or give rise to its opposite: you can have a positive subject in a narrative as well as a "negative subject" or "anti-subject"; a positive object (for example, the good woman) can be opposed to a negative object (for example, the tempting

femme fatale). In a given narrative, value judgments may be applied to these oppositions (hero vs. traitor, for example); however, what is important, according to Greimas, is the structural relation, so that the same oppositions will occur in purely aesthetic productions where value-judgments are largely withheld. Any number of "modalities" can also be applied to actants: for example, the actant's degree of competence ("the *wanting and/or being-able and/or knowing-how-to-do of the subject*" [109]) or the degree of simulation ("The overdetermination of actants according to this category of *being* and *seeming* accounts for the extraordinary game of disguises (*jeu de masques*), which includes confrontations between heroes who might be hidden, unrecognized, or recognized and disguised traitors who are unmasked and punished" [111]). Strider in *The Lord of the Rings* is a good example of both of these modalities, since he questions his competence as king early in the tale and is, for most of the first book, an ambiguous character (his identity is quasi-secret).

According to Greimas, any narrative is merely a manifestation of such deep structures: "narrative forms are no more than particular organizations of the semiotic form of the content for which the theory of narration attempts to account" (114). As a result, he claims that his structural principles apply both to the most complex narratives consisting of thousands of pages and to the most minimalist of narrative units. Even a single word entails a limited panoply of related terms that could potentially be strung out across a narrative: "Thus, to take a familiar example, the figure *sun* organizes around itself a figural field that includes *rays, light, heat, air, transparency, opacity, clouds*, etc." (115). (To illustrate this point, I have attempted, under "Applications," to apply Greimassian principles to the simple sentence, "The road is clear,") Because of this relation between the structural oppositions implied in characters and the thematic oppositions implied by any given word, Greimas argues that we can posit a structural relation between a given narrative's characters (narrative structures) and themes (discursive structures): "A character in a novel, supposing that it is introduced by the attribution of a name conferred on it, is progressively created by consecutive figurative notations extending throughout the length of the text, and it does not exist as a complete figure until the last page, thanks to the cumulative memorizing of the reader" (119). Peter Brooks' theory of narrative is strongly influenced by this sort of semiotic principle. (See the Brooks module on plotting.) For Greimas, "An actor is... a meeting point and locus of conjunction for narrative structures and discursive structures, for the grammatical and the semantic components" (120).

What links thematic oppositions and actantial oppositions is the fact that any theme or actant automatically entails its opposite, thus creating a field of potential oppositions linked together in what Greimas calls the "semiotic square." For more, see the next module on the semiotic square.

ACCORDING TO GREIMAS, the semiotic square is the elementary structure of signification, marking off the oppositional logic that is at the heart of both narrative progression and semantic, thematic, or symbolic content. The semiotic square has proven to be an influential concept not only in narrative theory but in the ideological criticism of Fredric Jameson, who uses the square as "a virtual map of conceptual closure, or better still, of the closure of ideology itself" ("Foreword" xv). (For more on Jameson, see the Jameson module on ideology.)

Greimas' schema is useful since it illustrates the full complexity of any given semantic term (seme). Greimas points out that any given seme entails its opposite or "contrary." "Life" (s_1) for example is understood in relation to its contrary, "death" (s_2). Rather than rest at this simple binary opposition (S), however, Greimas points out that the opposition, "life" and "death," suggests what Greimas terms a contradictory pair (-S), i.e., "not-life" ($-s_1$) and "not-death" ($-s_2$). We would therefore be left with the following semiotic square (Fig. 1):

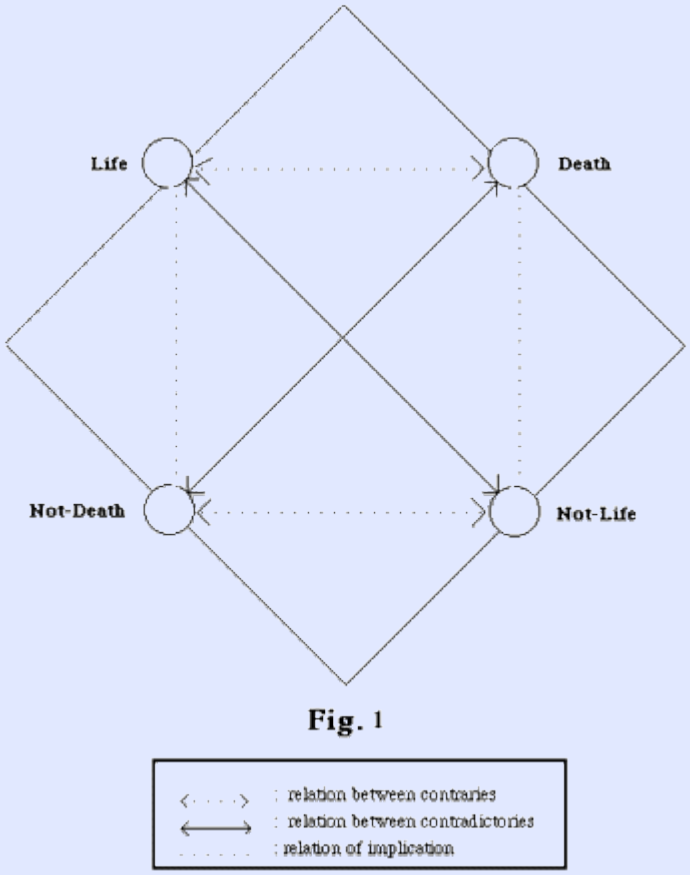

Fig. 1

As Jameson explains in the Foreword to Greimas' *On Meaning*, "$-s_1$ and $-s_2$"—which in this example are taken up by "not-death" and "not-life"—"are the simple negatives of the two dominant terms, but include far more than either: thus 'nonwhite'

includes more than 'black,' 'nonmale' more than 'female'" (xiv); in our example, not-life would include more than merely death and not-death more than life. Indeed, in a given narrative, alternative terms will often suggest themselves for $-s_1$ and $-s_2$. As I explain my application of Greimas' theories, we can infer in even a simple phrase like "the road is clear" an implied dominant binary, "activity (s_1) and quiescence (s_2)." Were we reading a narrative where we find a post-apocalyptic world in which the last surviving humans are presented walking through a series of deserted streets in which they must fight the machines that have taken over, the contradictory seme not-activity ($-s_1$) might be taken up by machine parts or the abandoned city itself. Not-quiescence ($-s_2$) could conversely be taken up by human consciousness. Our semiotic square would therefore look something like this (Fig. 2):

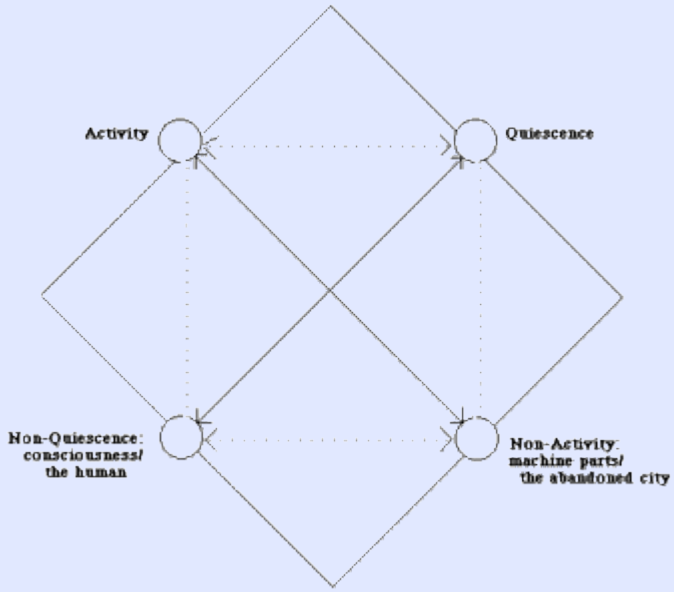

Fig. 2

Such a semiotic square might in turn be tied to other dominant binary oppositions in the narrative, including quite possibly "life and death." As Greimas explains, "nothing permits us to assert that a semiotic manifestation is dependent on only one system at a time. And so far as it is dependent on several, its closure can be attributed to the interaction of the different systems that produce it" (60). In other words, one can construct a series of, say, three semiotic squares that explore various levels of a story's manifested diegesis, each semiotic square related to the next.

Narratives will also tend to find figures that resolve the implied oppositions of a given semiotic square. The union of the dominant binary (S), here "activity" and "quiescence," will often be reserved for the utopic solution for the problems of the work's diegesis, perhaps represented in the hero of the tale; in our hypothetical sci-fi narrative, perhaps the hero is able at the end of the story to reconstruct the pre-

apocalyptic bourgeois lifestyle that saw the balance of work and leisure (or activity and quiescence) as the principle of human freedom. The resolution of the opposition, "activity (s_1) and the human ($-s_2$)," might be taken up in the story by, for example, a slave force; the resolution of the opposition, "quiescence (s_2) and machine parts ($-s_1$)," might be represented by the use of humans as batteries for the machine (as in *The Matrix*). Finally, the resolution of the combination not-quiescence ($-s_2$) and not-activity ($-s_1$) might be taken up by the central A.I. that runs the post-apocalyptic world (as in *Neuromancer*'s Wintermute), a figure that would also inhabit the contradictory space of both not-life and not-death. As Jameson continues, "The entire mechanism then is capable of generating at least ten conceivable positions out of a rudimentary binary opposition (which may originally have been no more than a single term, e.g., 'white,' which proves to be internally defined by a hidden opposition we articulate by promoting the concealed pole 'black' to visibility)" (xiv-xv). In our hypothetical sci-fi narrative, the ten terms would be: activity, quiescence, non-activity, the abandoned machine, non-quiescence, human consciousness, A.I., human slaves, human batteries, and the utopic hero.

Greimas illustrates how all sorts of phenomena are organized by this semiotic logic. A good non-literary example is the logic of traffic lights in Europe. In Europe, Greimas explains (52-53), the yellow light has two functions: when a yellow light follows green, you are expected to slow down and prepare to stop (as in the United States and Canada); when a yellow light follows a red light, you are warned to get ready to move forward. As Greimas explains, the green light (s_1) is, in this example, in a contrary relation to the red light (s_2). The green light represents "prescription" or a "positive injunction" (cross!); the red light represents an "interdiction" or a "negative injunction" (don't cross!). In the European system of lights, we are also given both possible contradictory pairs ($-s_1$ and $-s_2$): when the yellow light follows green, the signal is a nonprescription (get ready to stop!); when the yellow light follows red, the signal is a noninterdiction (get ready to go!). If the yellow light stands alone without changing, it assumes the neutral position: both a nonprescription and a noninterdiction (get ready to stop if you see someone crossing but be ready to go if you see no one!). Greimas' point is that we are all constrained by the finite series of possibilities opened up by such semiotic oppositions: "An author, a producer of any semiotic object, operates within an epistemy, which is the result of his individuality and the society in which he is inscribed. Within this society it is possible for him to make a limited number of choices, which have as an initial result the investment of organized contents, that is, contents endowed with valencies (possibilities of relations)" (61).