

A Study of Film and Fiction Towards: Narrative Examination Study

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ABSTRACT: *Narrative in film rests on our ability to create a three-dimensional world out of a two-dimensional wash of light and dark. A bare facticity of graphics on the screen- size, color, angle, line, shape, etc. - must be transformed into an array of solid objects; and a texture of noise must be transformed into speech, music, and the sounds made by solid objects. Light and sound in narrative film are thus experienced in two ways: virtually unshaped on a screen as well as apparently moving within, reflecting and issuing from, a world which contains solid objects making sounds. The study of narrative has a long history, but as a self-conscious body of inquiry, this enterprise is principally a creature of the 20th century. It was then that it came to be called narratology, an ugly term but one that apparently we can't easily do without. Whatever we call it, the study of narrative is very important. Storytelling is a pervasive phenomenon. It seems that no culture or society is without its myths, folktales, and sacred legends. Narrative saturates everyday life too. Our conversations, our work, and our pastimes are steeped in stories.*

KEYWORDS: Narrative, Fiction and Film, human maturation, light and dark, speech, music.

INTRODUCTION:

Narrative appears to be a contingent universal of human experience. It cuts across distinctions of art and science, fiction and nonfiction, literature and the other arts. So it's not surprising that studying narratives brings together students of not only literary studies, drama, and film, but also anthropology, psychology, even law and sociology and political science. Narratology is a paradigm case of interdisciplinary inquiry.

The above statement by Branigan sets the whole frame within which narrative in film can be understood and studied. Film is a techno-art which communicates through its audio-visual media. While viewing a film a spectator encounters a screen on which certain shadows seem to be moving. Three-dimensional world of reality is projected on a two-dimensional screen. Thus, spectator's mind operates "in two different frames of reference, namely the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional" and he creates a three-dimensional world for himself by watching those images on a two-dimensional screen. Visual images along with sound track of a film constitute the whole world of fiction (in film) in which a spectator finds his narrative. No doubt, audio and visual elements move in two different frames of time and space, but "the task of narrative is to reconcile these systems" and to understand a film narrative is to comprehend how these elements operate there to bring causality which is intrinsic to any narrative.

Unlike other forms of art, film is such an art that does not operate at a moment either in Time or Space. Though film primarily operates in the frame of time but time in films is revealed through the movement in space. Film, operating in both the domains of Time and Space, encompasses in itself almost all the other forms of art. Film being an audio-visual art form falls back on painting, photography, architecture, music, drama and novel. According to Greek philosophers, art is understood as an imitation of reality on a medium and a mode.

The closer the art is to reality the less abstract it is. In ancient times, art was no way capable of reproducing reality with such fidelity that modern cameras can produce. In ancient times, art was divided into various categories depending upon the level of its abstraction. Design which was the most practical art form was considered to be the least abstract, it was followed by architecture which shares borders with practical and environmental form of art; Sculpture was both environmental and pictorial; paintings, drawing and graphics were purely Pictorial; stage drama was dramatic; story, fiction were narrative; poetry and dance were again sharing borders with narrative and musical and music belonged to the category of Musical. Keeping above classification in mind, if we look at film, it incorporates almost all the forms on the spectrum of art in itself.

“Film, in general, covers a range from practical (as a technical invention it is an important scientific tool) through environmental (many contemporary theorists regard television as more environmental than narrative), on through pictorial, dramatic, and narrative to music”.

Film is shot in open spaces which gives it the element of environment given to architecture; framing of a shot, control of light and colour are followed by the principle of painting and photography; the performance of actors gives it the dramatic element, music is undoubtedly an integrated part of this medium and the way narration is controlled by camera and other agencies makes it a narrative form of art. It would be superfluous to state that film has largely borrowed its aesthetics from painting and photography. Paintings or pictures also have a tradition of narrating stories through the images. No doubt painting and photography freeze a moment and all its emotions, its anxieties are reflected either on a canvas or on a film negative. But single image or a group of images also communicate stories in their own way. We do find stories in comic strips which can be easily found in any magazines or newspaper. The most common instance of finding narration through a group of images is pictorial portrayal of fables - an exercise often done in schools. Through a group of four or five pictures the entire fable is narrated on a single drawing sheet. In the tradition of narrative painting, one moment of a historical event is chosen that reminds the viewers of the events happened before and after.

Thing and activity, in the head and in the world: Widespread as narrative is, though, it retains a distinct identity. Considered as a thing, a certain sort of representation, a story seems intuitively different from a syllogism, a database, and an fMRI scan. My opening joke isn't exactly like other forms of humor, such as a bumper sticker (“Today is the day for decisive action! Or is it?”). How should we try to capture narrative's uniqueness? Perhaps narrative is like grammar in a natural language, or perhaps it's a sign system, like traffic signals, as semiotic theories suggest. Narrative is more than a kind of thing; it seems to involve distinct activities as well. One activity we call storytelling, and the other... well, what do we call it? Story consumption? Story receiving? Story pickup? In any event, we have capacities that enable us to grasp and present stories. This talent too opens up many questions. From one angle, our stories come from our psyches, involving mental contents and processes. The very act of remembering something is coming to be seen as less a retrieval of fixed data than an ongoing construction according to principles of narrative logic. Yet narrative is as well preeminently social, a way of organizing experience so that it can be shared. Narrative conventions invoke lots of particular knowledge, and my opening joke wouldn't be understood in a culture that lacked bars, lawyers, and lawyer jokes. Narratives activate social skills, and although some people become expert storytellers (some can tell 'em, some can't), nearly all of us recognize well-formed stories when we encounter them. Our narrative competence relies on social intelligence.

Distinct as narrative seems, it's also polymorphous. It blurs and blends into a lot of other forms and activities. In a novel, it's often hard to carve out the descriptive passages cleanly from the plot, because accounts of people crowding a train station or skiing easily pass into little suites of action. The rhetorical tradition, theorizing about what persuades audiences, recognizes that stories can carry weight in an argument; the summary of the facts of a law case were known to the ancient Greeks as the narratio. I could use my joke to illustrate an argument about why lawyers get no respect or a tirade about what conservatives call the coarsening of our culture. Peter Greenaway's film *The Falls* (1980) provides a purely categorical macrostructure—a directory of people whose last names begin with the letters Fall—but soon we find that every Fall- has a life course full of incident.

Language-based or beyond language: One reason that narrative emerged as a distinct area of study rather late is that for centuries it was identified largely with spoken language. According to ancient tradition, a narrative was a story told, whereas a story that was enacted was considered drama. The rise of film, comic books, and the like encouraged theorists to rethink things. Now narrative is usually considered a transmedium phenomenon. A story can be presented not only in language but also in pantomime, dance, images, and even music. My lawyer joke could manifest itself in a comic strip, a radio skit, or a TV sketch. In certain respects, we can think of narrative as a preverbal phenomenon. Still, language remains our most important way of communicating with one another, and language-based narrative is our default. (We do call it storytelling.) So what are the connections between verbal

narrative and other sorts? Perhaps the other sorts derive from verbal storytelling. We might be able to follow the string-figure battle and the Aboriginal stories in sand only thanks to verbal cueing. Perhaps a child learns to understand TV shows and movies based on the fairy tales she has heard at bedtime. Alternatively, perhaps both verbal and nonverbal narratives tap into some more basic conceptual skills—ideas of agency, causality, time, and the like—which we deploy to make sense of anything we encounter. Once you have the idea of a person, you can understand characters' identity, motives, and the like, whether you meet them in the pages of a book or on the screen.

NARRATION: In line with the introductory essay in this book, I propose that we conceive the poetics of film narrative within a framework that's mentalistic. That is, we ought to assume that a film cues spectators to execute operations, and one central goal of these operations is to comprehend the story. So I propose an inferential model of narration. Instead of treating the narrative as a message to be decoded, I take it to be a representation that offers the occasion for inferential elaboration. As per the model of spectatorship I offered earlier, I suggest that given a representation, the spectator processes it perceptually and then elaborates it on the bases of schemas she or he has to hand. These schemas aren't necessarily codes in the strict sense, because many are loosely structured, semantically vague, and open-ended. Still, the elaboration isn't wholly a matter of individual taste either. If you and I see a driver swigging out of a bottle and swerving his car along the road, we'll probably both suspect that he's under the influence. The conclusion isn't guaranteed: The bottle might contain iced tea, and he might be avoiding road kill we can't see. But our inference about DUI is more plausible. Films rely centrally on just such garden-variety inferences; it's one of the ways in which narratives trade on real-world knowledge.

NARRATOLOGY AND FICTION: Narrative means anything that tells a story. This 'anything' includes novel, short story, drama, ballet, film, painting, history book, comic strip, gossip, newspaper et al. Thus, narrative can be found everywhere and its presence everywhere can be easily attributed to its being the oldest form of communication. Even in our own life span, a child is introduced into the "order of language" through narrative. Be it grandma's tales or fairy tales, they are but a form of narrative. Every religion has also relied upon narrative mode of communication to spread the message of God and to teach ignorant masses how to live their lives in a way that is liked by God. Parables, fables and fairy tales are, perhaps, the earliest forms of narrative that every human being, who lives in a society, encounters. Since languages grew as the civilization grew, we can say that narratives also grew with the growth of civilization. If we look at the history of literature, early Greek narrative works such as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey are the works about the exploits of great heroes. Since early days of English literature, narrative has been extensively used by the poets. Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales and Spenser's The Fame Queen are famous examples.

Though the novel as a literary form emerged in the eighteenth century, the same cannot be said about narrative. English literature is replete with famous ballads. Thus, narrative is old and yet, at the same time, new because it has always been adjusted, reformed and restructured according to the needs of various creative minds. The latest use of narrative can be seen in film which is a product of technological advancement. Jahn Manfred defines film as "a multimedia narrative form based on a physical record of sounds and moving pictures." Film as a form of performing arts stands very near to drama, but a film is more than drama. Drama is a live performance of the artistes whereas film is recording of men and women in action which is shown in a cinema hall. A film can be shown for infinite times without any alteration- a claim that cannot be made about drama. Moreover, the use of latest technology, especially towards the last decades of the twentieth century, has altogether changed the appearance and atmosphere of the films. The use of voice-over narration, titles about the setting and time of the story and narration through camera and characters differentiate film from drama and establish it as a narrative form of creative art.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS: Somdatta Mandal classifies Indian novelists into two categories. To the first category belong most of the contemporary novelists such as Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterji, Allan Sealey, Anurag Mathur, Rukun Advani, Mukul Kesavan and Makrand Paranjape who, according to her, cannot locate

themselves in a “distinct regional or ethnic identity, for majority of these writers are part of a pan-Indian community” (Mandal 43) and she feels that owing to their pan-Indianness “the Indian novel in English is at crossroads today and also seems to be a product of distinct culture” (Mandal 43). The second category, that she classifies, is on the basis of gender as post-independence India witnessed emergence of various women writers. Most of them are exploring man-woman relationship and portray middle class in their novels. Somdatta Mandal places Ruth Praver Jhabvala among such novelists.

As already stated, Ruth Praver Jhabvala was born in Germany, brought up in England, got married to an Indian architect and stayed in India for about twenty-five years. Problematizing her position vis-a-vis Indian society, she has been discussed either as “insider-outsider” or/and “outsider-insider” (Prasanna 30). She has written extensively on the middle-class and marriage. “The major motif in her fiction is the marital dissonance which may arise from maladjustment” (Ram 81). In *The Householder* Jhabvala has exhibited her “understanding of the socioeconomic dimension” (Newman 92) of marriage. Set in Delhi, *The Householder* is about a young man, Prem who has recently got married and is struggling to find his feet both in personal and professional life. The young man along with his wife, Indu has shifted to Delhi and by virtue of his father’s influence, who himself was a principal in a government college at Ankhpur, has got a job in a private college. Though he has been married to a young lady, yet his mind and heart are at his mother’s feet. His troubles increase as he also finds it difficult to control his students. His inability to control his students, his feeling of homesickness and his expectations of Indu to treat him the way his mother used to treat her husband show that he is yet to grow as a man. In the entire narrative, the narrator has given insightful portrayal of Prem’s character, his psychological problems, the way he grapples with his psychological complex, comes to terms with the outside/inside world and finally, attains manhood.

Various critics have largely discussed *The Householder* as a comic portrayal of Indian society as seen by Jhabvala. Such discussions are largely focused on Prem’s growth as a householder. “Jhabvala creates a number of incidents which mark Prem’s graduation to the status of a householder. He attends a marriage of Sohan Lai’s relative with his wife and feels quite happy. He also invites Raj and his wife for lunch” (Agarwal 45). Prem feels proud when his wife is appreciated. On the surface level, all the events seem to be arranged in a linear chronology; but after a critical analysis, one finds that the narrative moves between the outer space and inner space quite frequently and there is also a considerable emphasis on memory. This makes treatment of time and space worthy of analysis. The novel is divided into three parts; each part shows different aspects of a middleclass householder in Indian society; his battle in his personal life and struggle in the professional life. The first part of the novel introduces Prem as a struggling man who is yet to come to terms with his economic conditions, work environment and is also fumbling to act as a man. In the second part, the narrator has focused on the institution of marriage in India. This part explores the structure of Indian families in which mother tends to dominate over her son. The relationship between husband and wife is not an inter-personal relation between a man and a woman. A young and newly married man has to find balance between two women who pull him in two opposite directions. Most of the time, he looks for his mother in his wife and even if, he wants to wean himself away, the mother does every thing to pull him back. Thus, begins a tug of war- a power politics in the family that a man has to grapple with. As shown in the novel, Prem is not mature enough to manage problems dealing with power politics, economics of the marriage and to make his condition more ridiculous, even his sexuality. He finds himself thrown in a situation he has never demanded. Since the time to get married is also decided by the parents, it works as the last straw. In the third part, Prem learns to live with his problems. He realizes that facing them is a part of married life and every man undergoes it. A man has to learn how to manage emotional, economic and social problems in order to grow into a successful householder. At the end of the novel, Prem gets himself separated from the umbilical cord. He very cleverly sends his mother over to his sister. Despite having failed in finding a solution to his economic problems, he gets support from his wife and graduates from being a young fumbling man to a householder.

CULTURE AND CONVERGENCE: Someone might go on to say that my belief in convergences of comprehension is naïve. Perhaps women don’t comprehend stories as men do, and people in Japan don’t understand their stories as Europeans do. Note that this objection does presume some convergence, if not between social groups

then within them. Why believe that only certain groups share understanding and others can't share it? Why can't comprehension strategies crisscross groups in that hybrid fashion beloved of postmodernists? It's very hard to avoid some sense of convergence when talking about the understanding of any audience, no matter how culturally localized. Moreover, because comprehension involves such features as tracking psychological states, causality, time shifts, and the like, the onus is on the skeptic to show that women or cultural insiders possess different senses of cause and effect or time relations than other perceivers do. One of the most commonly cited examples is that in watching a Western, Native American audiences might cheer on the Navajos attacking the settlers. Even this apparently apocryphal anecdote, however, doesn't damage my case. I assume that the audience understood the story—that the settlers were crossing Indian land, that the Indians wanted to wipe out the settlers—and that the viewer's took sides in a way not anticipated by the film's makers. To say that there's convergence in understanding is not to say that all spectators act upon their understanding in the same ways.

Narration goes all the way down: Narration is more than an armory of devices; it becomes our access, moment by moment, to the unfolding story. A narrative is like a building, which we can't grasp all at once but must experience in time. We move from static spaces to dynamic ones, enclosed spaces to open ones, peripheral areas to central ones—often by circuitous routes. That journey has been arranged, and sometimes wholly determined, by architectural design. Narration in any medium can usefully be thought of as governing our trajectory through the narrative. This analogy helps us see that we don't gain by treating narration as something like an envelope enclosing the story action. As a process, narration burrows all the way down into the material, shaping it for our uptake. It governs how we grasp overall structural dynamics and the immediate scene before us. It controls how we build an inferential elaboration of any event.

Narration and story: I've said that through narration, the film encourages us to indulge in inferential elaboration. What is the product of that process? Basically, what we call the story. Most of our inferences are merely enforced perception. Our eyes and ears turn a configuration of images and sounds into the simple output "The hero is running down the street." But even this apparently brute uptake will go beyond the data given. We'll presume that "The hero is rushing to a wedding," or "The hero is fleeing his pursuers," or we'll ask, "Why is the hero in such a rush?" As we encounter a stream of such configurations, we build up a story world of characters, relationships, motives, decisions, reactions, and all the rest. The configuration itself, the arrangement of information for the sake of pattern and point, will have its own structure, as we'll see. But for now, I'll concentrate on the way that organizing the given items coaxes us to build that story world in a particular way. Narratologists have long distinguished between the organization of the action in the narrative text and the action as it's presumed (inferred, extrapolated) to occur in the story. Aristotle referred to *praxis*, all the events constituting the action, and *muthos*, those events as structured into a plot.⁷ Theorists influenced by French structuralism of the 1960s distinguish between *histoire* (story) and *discours* (discourse). I've found it most useful to follow the Russian formalists in using the concepts of *fabula*, the story's state of affairs and events, and *syuzhet*, the arrangement of them in the narrative as we have it. In addition, recall my claim that the fine grain of the medium shapes our construal of events, as in the Mommy-Santa sentences or the phone-call menu. So I would add that narration must include the patterning of the film's surface texture, its audiovisual style.

CONCLUSION: The development of recording media was a significant invention. Photography, film and sound recording taken together have shifted completely our historical perspective. Thus, in the twentieth century, recording studios and latest technology also added new chapters to the ancient form of art - music, film and photography emerged as new forms of art. Despite this, some conservative people have always looked down upon film as merely a manifestation of popular art devoid of aesthetic grace generally associated with any art form. They think that film and photography do nothing but reproduce reality mechanically. Such a criticism is made perhaps because in painting an idea, conceived by an artist, is translated on a canvas with the help of brushes, colours and organic hands. In this respect, literary fiction is no different from real-life reportage or trial testimony. Whatever a speaker

says, we balance the information conveyed and the trustworthiness of the source against standards of behavior and judgment. When a reporter or trial witness presents information, we don't infer an "implied recounter" or "implied testifier" backstage strategically shaping what we hear. Likewise, in film, we are guided to make inferences about the narration we encounter, regardless of whether the information is recounted by characters or presented by the overall organization of the film. Needless to say, those inferences may fit together smoothly or they may contradict one another, just as in life. Naturally, in narratives, the fit or the contradictions are largely created by the makers, in order to take us through a particular experience, whereas life has no such artificer in the wings. In any event, we don't need to personify an agent hovering over the text that is transmitting the truth of the situation. If the implied author is the set of overarching principles of design governing the film, we can simply talk about those principles themselves, even, or especially, when they create problems of unreliability for the spectator.

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4. See for example the manual by Christian Biegalski, *Scénarios: Modes d'emploi* (Paris: Dixit, 2003), 164–96.
5. He finds two-act and five-act patterns as well. See Francis Vanoye, *Scénarios modèles, modèles de scénarios* (Paris: Nathan, 1991), 89–98.
6. Michel Chion, *Écrire un scénario* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1985), 144.
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