

Title	Invention and Transmission : Seymour Chatman's Narrative Theory
Author(s)	Takeda, Masafumi
Citation	待兼山論叢. 文学篇. 1997, 31, p. 1-15
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/47907
rights	
Note	

Osaka University Knowledge Archive : OUKA

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

Osaka University

Invention and Transmission:

Seymour Chatman's Narrative Theory

Masafumi TAKEDA

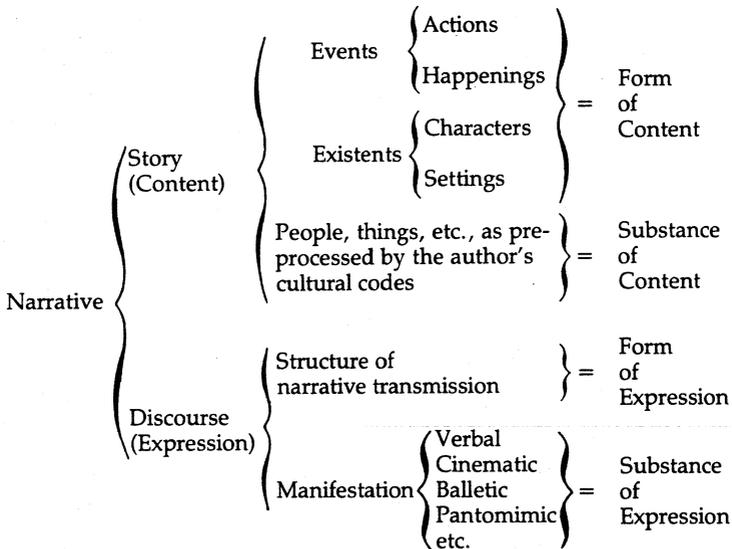
Seymour Chatman,¹⁾ in his *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978), integrated continental narrative theories of Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Gerard Genette, and Anglo-American critical tradition of Henry James, Percy Lubbock, and Wayne Booth. The French word "Narratologie" was transplanted to English soil as "Narratology", the theory of narrative. Chatman's primary interest focuses on the question: "What is narrative *per se*? What properties must a text have to be called a narrative, and what properties disqualify it?" From the fact that the same story can take various forms (novel, play, film, ballet, comic strips, and so on), narrative is assumed to have a deep structure which is quite independent of its medium. The deep structure consists of story elements, which different modes of representation convey to the audience. His approach, as he openly admits, is "dualist" and "structuralist." This leads to his examination of the surface and deep structures of narrative, his dichotomy of story and discourse, that is, the what and the how — the story content (actions, characters, settings, themes) and the means by which the story is presented. His work was a systematic attempt to probe into the narrative structures of story and discourse.

In *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (1990), Chatman refines his narrative theory with notable developments as well as some modifications of his former work. In response to the criticism against *Story and Discourse* that his accounts of film are too scarce, he offers extended investigations of cinematic description, narrator, and point of view, and allots one whole chapter to the analysis of John Fowles' film version of the famous novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in detail. The analysis of different discourses —

novel and film — representing the same story helps to clarify the distinctive features of the two modes of discourse. My concern here, however, is with his newly developed analysis of the narrative transmission on the discourse level in verbal fiction, especially novels. In addition to the redefinition of important narratological terms, Chatman describes more minutely the positions and functions of narrative components such as implied author, narrator, character, and implied reader, in the context which he calls “invention” and “transmission” In this paper I will review his theories of Narrative-text and the narrative components on the discourse level, and the problems with regard to the interpretation of narrative on the basis of his transmission model.

Definition of Narrative

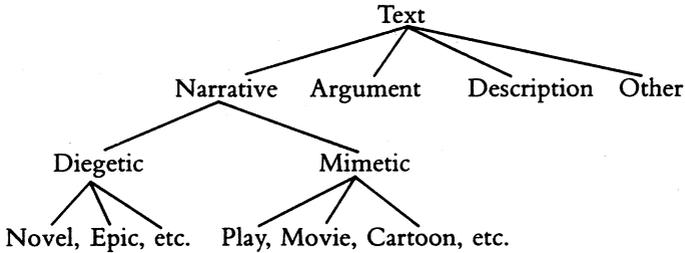
For a systematic study of narrative, what is needed first is the definition of narrative. In *Story and Discourse*, Chatman analyzes the structure of narrative in his strictly binary-oppositional way: Narrative



(ND, 26)²

is divided into Story (content) and Discourse (expression). And Story and Discourse are respectively divided into Substance and Form.

On the other hand, in *Coming to Terms*, he considers narrative from an external viewpoint, that is, in terms of the relations of Narrative to other kinds of text-type, such as Description and Argument.



(CT, 115)

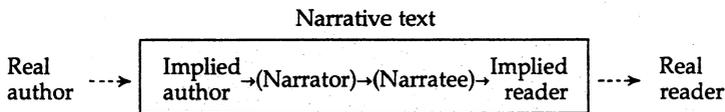
Description is a text that renders the properties of things either visible or imaginable. Argument is a text that attempts to persuade an audience of the validity of some proposition. The property of Narrative is “its doubly temporal logic” that entails the external time (the duration of the presentation of the novel, film, play) and the internal time (the duration of the sequence of events that constitute the plot). (CT, 9) Chatman’s point is that while literary works are generic subclasses of the Narrative text-type, fictional narrators utilize the other two as well in narrative transmission. These three kinds of discourse “operate at each other’s work” in fiction as well as in every situation where writers or speakers are involved in the acts of description and argument.

The narrator uses Argument to give commentaries on actions or characters and his own discursive manner, sometimes as a form of maxim and generalization. On the other hand, Description, which conveys the qualities attributed to a story-object, has more subtle differences from Narrative. Description is rendered (1) as assertions (“Simon is simple.”); (2) as nonassertive mentions or inclusions (“Simple Simon....”); (3) as elliptical implications (“A passerby asked Simon for a

shilling, and Simon gave it to him. The passerby laughed and ran off.”) In the last example, the reader infers his simplicity by interpreting the two sentences, according to codes which he believes to operate in the context (a capitalist code in this case, and there are other possibilities). And we should note that Description can render action, but fundamentally in a different way from that of Narrative: the description of action functions only as part of the narrative settings; on the other hand, the narration of actions must contain the dual-time logic and present an action that leads to the event chain of plot, which is of narrative significance. Thus, the examination of each text-type of the sentences makes it clear that verbal structure can direct us to the narrative structure.

Discourse Elements

Next, I would like to review the discursive components of narrative. In *Story and Discourse*, Chatman offers the following much-cited diagram:



(SD, 151)

The Real Author

In Chatman's theory, real life authors and readers are quite alien to textual communication. One of the advantages of the notion of the implied author is that it enables us not to commit "intentional fallacy." If the same writer's several works are quite different or even contradictory in themes, it is meaningless in a narratological sense that the reader tries to attribute the thematic shifts to certain transitions of his personal views or moods, which we cannot exactly understand from reading his biography or from knowing him personally.

Chatman explains the stance of a narratologist:

Just as linguistics argues for a logical model, not a behavioral account of

actual speech performance, narratology offers a theory which assumes the task of defining its subject (all and only narratives in the universe of texts) on a logical model, with no reference to the contingent life histories of those who make or partake of stories. (N, 261)

Narratological text theory presupposes that the source of the generation of meaning is the text itself, and therefore, "Real authorial behavior is a subject for literary biography, not text theory." (CT, 80)

The Implied Author and the Narrator

When Wayne Booth used the term "the implied author," he meant that it was the real author's "second self," "an implied version of himself," which the reader constructs from the text.³⁾ The emphasis was placed upon the value-laden picture of the author which was proper to a particular text only. When narrative theorists utilized the notion, it was incorporated into narrative communication model. They emphasized the importance of the notion of "implied," that is, the reader's act of inferring the author's image, norms, or intent.

For Chatman, narrative is "an invention, by an implied author, of events and characters and objects (the story) and of a modus (the discourse) by which these are communicated." The implied author is, so to speak, "a guiding intelligence" and the narrator is "a means or instrument." The implied author assigns to the narrative agent the task of articulating story elements, of actually offering them to some projected or inscribed audience (the narratee). While the narrator is only the transmitter of the story, the implied author is responsible for "its whole design." But "there is some contentual disparity between text's intent and narrator's intention." (Here, "Intent" means a work's "whole" or "overall" meaning, including its connotations, implications, unspoken messages.) (CT, 74) As he puts it, "there is a good reason in theory to keep invention and transmission separate as text principles." The theoretical distinction is essential because the two terms explain different levels and sources of information. The source of a narrative text's whole structure of meaning — not only of its assertion and denotation but also of its implication, connotation, and ideological

nexus — is the implied author. (CT, 75-6)

In verbal fiction, the act of the narrator is a surface structure, and a deep structure is the story components. The representation by the narrator of the story generates meaning, but the meaning may be supported, questioned, or ironized by the underlying implied author's distinctive meaning. It is the central point of Chatman's narratological theory that the two text principles of invention and transmission function separately in the communication or actualization of narrative text.

The Implied Reader and the Narratee

The implied reader is, like the implied author, not a real reader, but the reader who is presupposed by the narrative text. It is constructed by the implied author's values or norms; put in another way, it is the reader who can understand the implied author's intent. On the other hand, the narratee is a counterpart of the narrator, one who is addressed by the narrator. When one of two characters speaks to the other, we can easily identify a narratee. Though, in many cases, the narrator, standing outside the story world, seems to address directly to the reader, theoretically the narratee is inscribed in the narrative text and must be distinguished from the implied reader.

The implied reader is required not to take the narrator's meanings literally, but to seek deeper meanings which the text implies. According to Chatman, the implied reader's task is to infer and reconstruct the implied author's intent from the text, developing assumptions that lead to a satisfying interpretation.

Then, the question is, how can we discern the implied author's intent from the narrator's intention? The narrator does not always reflect the values of the implied author, especially in unreliable narration. By definition, the implied author does not "speak," does not deliver direct messages to the reader. "The implied author only *implies* messages, and we understand those messages only by *inferring* them from the total fiction — not only from what the narrator says, but from what happens, what the characters are like, what they say about each other, what the setting and atmosphere suggest, and so on." (RNF,

242) This leads to the problems involved in the interpretation of narrative texts, which will be discussed later. Though the structuralist reading is ultimately to find meanings from the relationship of narrative components, Chatman's analysis of narrative structure seems to center on the production of meaning among discursive agents.

The recognition that the represented words and deeds of the characters get transformed and may well be distorted by the narrator always gives us clues to the discovery of new meaning. In the actual reading of the text, we ask ourselves: Why does the narrator choose this particular word? How does the narrator direct the reader's attention toward or away from this? Do we gain equal access to the minds of each character? Why does the narrator use a flashback? Taking into the consideration the basic distinction of story and discourse, and the arrangements of the story elements in the narration, we can fix our thought on rhetoric from the "choices" of the narrator, under the control of the implied author.⁴⁾

Slant and Filter

Narratology originally began with the study of narrative content (such as Propp's study of folktales), but after Barthes' *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives* (1966), the interest was directed toward the form of narrative, the way how the story is communicated. There are two mainstreams of narratology: the thematic study of narrative content and the formal study of narrative mode of representation. According to Martin's further classification, modern theories of narrative fall into three groups, which treat narrative in terms of (a) plot (sequence of events), (b) point of view (a discourse produced by a narrator), and (c) reading (a verbal artifact that is organized and endowed with meaning by its reader).⁵⁾ According to his classification, one would say that Chatman belongs to the second party.

As discussed earlier, Chatman's distinction between the implied author and the narrator, in the most basic sense, serves to separate the textual denotation (what the narrator says) from the connotation (what

the implied author means). This point is more clearly explained by his refined discussion of narrative perspective.

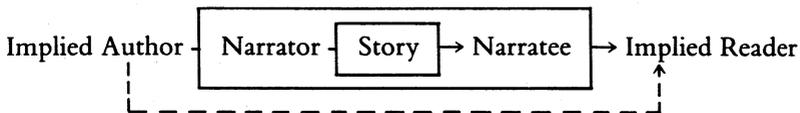
The terms “point of view” and even “focalization” are insufficient to cover both the narrator’s and characters’ different mental acts. Originally the term “point of view” has two senses: “a point from which things are viewed” and “a mental position or viewpoint.” It can be used both literally and figuratively. To avoid confusion of the narrator’s and characters’ mental behaviors, stances, attitudes, and interests, Chatman proposes the separate names for the two. The attitudes and mental nuances of the narrator who is in the discourse world is “slant”; the mental activity characters experience in the story world is “filter.” (CT, 143)

“Slant,” Chatman writes, “catches the nuance of the choice made by the implied author.” The implied author, explicitly or implicitly, manipulates the narrator’s psychological, sociological, or ideological attitudes to “illuminate” or “keep obscure” particular aspects of the story world. “Filter” belongs only to the story world, indicating the various mental attitudes of a character toward the story-objects. Here Chatman’s theory of narrative invention makes quite an important distinction. When a character plays a role of a narrator, what we get is his slant, not his filter, because his narration is performed on the discourse level. Theoretically, what the character-narrator presents (what he tells, shows, or reports) is nothing but his reflection of the original events that he experienced or is experiencing. When he, as a narrator, presents the original events, there is always a possibility that they are subjected to some transformation or filtration, (though this is also, in the final analysis, manipulated by the implied author).

Narrative text can include two kinds of “untrustworthiness.” First, the narrator’s account of the events or characters seems at odds with what the text implies to be fact. Second, a character’s speeches and thoughts about the story events or other characters seem at odds with what the narrator is presenting on the discourse level. Chatman names the former “unreliable narration” and the latter “fallible filtration.” (CT, 149) The distortion of story information by the narrator is

attributed to various traits of his personality — his cupidity, cretinism, gullibility, innocence, inconstancy, or a lack of information, and so on. (Remember that these are also assigned to the narrator by the implied author, the inventor. The limitation on the narrator's capacity to render the details of the story world depends not on "knowledge" but on how much the implied author has delegated to him to present. (CT, 121)) "Fallible" is used to refer to the character's inaccurate, misled, or self-serving perception of events, situation, and other characters. Never conscious of being reported by the narrator and having no direct access to the transmission of the story, the character cannot be charged with unreliable narration, and the term "fallible," which means "liable to mistake or to error," is appropriate for the character.

Unreliable narration and fallible filtration can be conveniently explained in the transmission diagram.



(CT, 151)

The fallibility of a character is shown by the narrator explicitly or implicitly. An reliable narrator could explain and comment on it clearly, but in many cases, the narrator covertly presents it seemingly in an objective manner. Between the narrator and the narratee, the narrator points out a filtered view of a character, to make the narratee enjoy an irony at the expense of the character. On the other hand, the narrator's unreliability is always implicit, and it must be inferred by the implied reader with the implied author's secret message. If the reader perceives two conflicting messages in what a narrator says (one is an ostensible meaning of the narrator; the other is an implicit meaning which he is never conscious of), the narrator becomes the target of the irony between the implied author and the implied reader.

What Chatman clarifies by his renewed theory on perspective is the more explicit distinction between the narrator's act on the discourse level and the character's act on the story level, and the power of

narrative transmission to generate meanings on different levels through its components.

Problems in Chatman's Theory

As part of theoretical model, the notions of the implied author and the implied reader are necessarily abstract ones. Genette, who completely rejects Wolfgang Iser's notion of the implied reader, also feels the necessity of correcting the image of the implied author. Though he agrees that such a construct as the implied author is necessary to reading, he complains, "if one wants to establish this idea of the author as a 'narrative agent,' I don't go along, maintaining always that agents should not be multiplied unnecessarily."⁶ Taken in terms of production and reception, the implied reader is the idea, in the real author's head, of a possible reader and the implied author is the idea, in the reader's head, of a real author. For Genette the implied author is almost an equivalent for the real author, or at least the "induced" author and the implied reader is only the possible or "potential" reader. Thus he insists that the implied author and the implied reader, as irrelevant agents, should be excluded from the communication model. But as he asserts that his study is limited to the narrative discourse and the narration and he has no concerns for its objects (the story elements, and norms of text, the deficiency of which in his study led to Booth's criticism), what one includes and excludes in the model depends on one's own purpose for discussion.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan raises the objection to the notion of the implied author, in that if it is only a construct which has no voice, no direct means of communicating, it is a contradiction to assign to it some kind of a role as an addresser in a communication situation. She, instead, proposes to de-personify it and understand it as "a set of implicit norms."⁷ In *Coming to Terms*, Chatman claims no insistence on referring to it as if it were a human agent: "That inventor is no person, no substance, no object: it is, rather, the patterns in the text which the reader negotiates. He is willing to substitute "text principle," "text design" or "text intent" for the "implied author." (CT, 86-7)

Another criticism of Rimmon-Kenan's is directed to the existence of the narrator and the narratee. In his model in *Fiction and Discourse*, Chatman put the narrator and the narratee in brackets as "optional," on the grounds that in the cases where the narrator seems to be effaced or disappear, as in Hemingway's "The Killers" and the pure dialogue short story, such narratives are "non-narrated." Chatman revises his view on the narrator, saying that every narrative is by definition narrated (narratively presented), and that the story is "shown" by a silent, extradiegetic narrator. The narrator's task consists of not only telling but also showing. "Any narrator, whether authorial, camera-eye, or dramatized, is a tool of the invention." (CT, 85)

Finally, Michael J. Toolan also offers a negative view on the status of the implied author.

The implied author is a real position in narrative processing, a receptor's construct, but it is not a real role in narrative transmission. It is a projection back from the decoding side, not a real projecting stage on the encoding side.⁸⁾

What is common to the criticisms of the three critics is the problem that the implied author is never a narrative transmitter. As Chatman admits that the narrator is the only voice of narrative discourse, and that the implied author is what the implied reader infers and reconstructs, they are right in saying that the implied author can have no position in the transmission process. But in Chatman's theory, narrative entails two separate text principles, invention and transmission. Because as the inventor, the implied author is the source of a narrative text's whole structure of meaning, and because Chatman excludes the real author for his resolute reasons, there needs absolutely to be an agent before (behind) the narrator. With regard to transmission, though the implied author only implies messages, or though he emerges only in the implied reader's act of reconstruction, he manipulates from behind everything the narrator presents. What I mean is that there are communications between the narrator and the implied reader, and between the implied author and the implied reader. The direction of arrows is trifling; the most important thing is that Chatman's model

indicates clearly that the implied author functions as both the inventor of narrative and as the medium of the implied reader's act of communicating in narrative text.

Interpretation

Finally I consider the problem of interpretation of narrative texts. In the act of interpretation, we regard the implied author as an authority. If we do not posit such a construct, we have to search for an authority either in the narrator or the characters of the text, or in something outside the text, in a wide range of social, ideological, historical sources. In the recent critical situations, the interaction between the text and the critic constructs a number of critical narratives.⁹⁾ The exclusion of the real author and the real reader is bound to limit the possibilities of interpretation. But it is no doubt true that structuralist reading will always be useful for close reading.

But uncertainty lies in the text-centered criticism. If we hope for any certainty in the text, narrative uncertainties emerge not only in narration but also in the principle we attempt to infer behind the narrator. It could be said that "it is precisely the unreliability of the implied author that has come to typify post-modernist narrative."¹⁰⁾

Poststructuralist theorists have pointed out a crucial contradiction immanent in narratology, called "double logic of narrative."¹¹⁾ One principle emphasizes the priority of story over discourse, insisting on events as the origin of meaning; the other stresses the priority of discourse over story, insisting on events as only the product of discourse. Because the two contradictory principles can never be synthesized, narratology will always be deficient. Jonathan Culler calls this narrative problem "a relation of dependency," which contains in narrative "a self-deconstructive force."¹²⁾ When one discusses story and discourse in narrative, one must first determine which is the given and which is the product, but either choice will miss the curious complexity and the impact of narrative. This concerns a matter of hermeneutic practices, but as Culler suggests, apart from the possibility of synthesis, the reader should shift from story to discourse, and from discourse to

story.

Chatman seems to be inclined to stress the narrative discourse, and more interested in the production of meaning through the narrative transmission. Structuralist theories have been criticized for being static and unable to capture narrative dynamics (in addition to ignorance of history). But through the shifts of perspective, from discourse to story, and from story to discourse, narratology can grasp narrative dynamics, such as tension, suspense, and surprise. And Chatman's theory, though in fact never too theoretical, makes enough room for the thematic interpretation, because the implied author can function as a text's whole structure of meaning.

Admitting that the scope of narratology is a limited one, Mieke Bal states that she has used her narratological theory for both aesthetic and ideological (feminist, in her case) criticism.¹³ Chatman's narrative theory also can be utilized in reading narrative texts in general, as "an indispensable tool."

My defense [of the implied author] is strictly pragmatic, not ontological: the question is not whether the implied author exists but what we get from positing such a concept. (CT, 75)

Notes

- 1) Seymour Chatman, Professor Emeritus of Rhetoric, Professor in the Graduate School at University of California, Berkeley, specializes in narrative structure and style in literature and film. His recent study is targeting the analysis of narrative devices in film and other popular media. He is the author of *The Later Style of Henry James* (Greenwood Pub Group, 1972), and *Antonioni: Or, the Surface of the World* (University of California Press, 1985).
- 2) Page numbers of quotations from Chatman's works are indicated in the text with the following abbreviations.

SD: *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978)

CT: *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990)

- RNF: *Reading Narrative Fiction* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993)
- N: "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)" and "Reply to Barbara Herrnstein Smith," in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 117-36, 258-65.
- 3) Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 71.
 - 4) Patrick O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). Treating the implied author as "a director" and the narrator as "a performer," he briefly summarizes the elements of narration on the standpoint that narration is the process of transforming story into text, by way of the implied author's acts of *arrangement*:
 - (a) chronologization (the agreement of time, transforming action into plot.
 - (b) localizaiton (the arrangement of space transforming space into setting)
 - (c) characterization (the arrangement of personality traits, transforming actors into characters)
 - (d) focalization (the arrangement of narrative perspective)
 - (e) verbalization (the arrangement of words on page, making all of the implied author's arrangements known to the reader—and duly received by the reader as the 'voice' of the narrator)
 - (f) validation (of the narrator's degree of reliability) (p. 68.)
 - 5) Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 82.
 - 6) Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 149.
 - 7) Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1983), pp. 88-89.
 - 8) Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 78.
 - 9) Mark Currie, "A Narratological Reading of 'Snowed Up'," in *Liter-*

ary Theories: A Case Study in Critical Performance, ed. Julian Wolfreys and William Baker (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1996), p.59. Currie says: “where the structuralist was concerned with structure, the poststructuralist is concerned with structuration, or the ways in which the text is constructed by criticism.”

- 10) O’Neill, p.70.
- 11) Gerald Prince, “Narratology,” in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 527.
- 12) Jonathan Culler, *The pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 186-87.
- 13) Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. x.

(Graduate Student)