



Literature Theory and Time 2023-24

Week 2: "The infinitely variable gearbox that links the *told* to the ways of its *telling*" (Peter Brooks on Genette's object of study)

We are looking at Gerard Genette's classic study of narrative, *Narrative Discourse*, next week (section linked under this week on the module website), and in particular what he writes about **order**. This may seem a bit pedestrian, but it is really useful to have these concepts to hand and to think about what they mean for the structures of feeling as well as just in terms of the form of the book.

I think they can unlock some really interesting work in thinkers/writers such as yourselves (and past iterations of the course have proven this to be the case).

Genette uses Proust's great novel *In Search of Lost Time* as an example, which isn't especially helpful (unless of course you've read it and know it intimately!) but I think it's reasonably clear how the concepts work even without knowing the Proust. And it's a model that you can adapt and improve on.

So...

AHEAD OF WEEK 2:

1. Read carefully the passage of *Mrs Dalloway* linked to on the module webpage for this week. It's pp. 28-31 from my edition.

Think about these general questions about time as/after you read, and prepare a few notes on (at least) **TWO ahead of our seminar discussion:**

- How do the apparent transitions in time and the tensed aspect of the sentences relate to the feelings produced?
- What do we learn about memory in these descriptions? (Does it ring true to you?)
- If Clarissa Dalloway were to feel emotions in the present in remembering feelings she felt in the past (and it isn't a given of course that she will do so, as this passage suggests...) what are these emotions: are they a repetition of those feelings felt in the past? Are they a sort of fake version (a simulacrum) of them? Are they something different? (Does this vary?)
- Shifts in time are also (as they so often -- but not always -- are) also shifts in place. Think about place/space too and how emotion attaches to place. Does the level of precision/ imprecision about place map directly onto that about time?
- **NB.** What relationship do these memories of Sally, and Sally at Bourton, have with the rest of the novel?
- Is there any relation at all between the 'sexual' content (e.g. the fact that many of the feelings talked about and the kiss are "between women", a little discussed and quasi-illicit phenomenon at the time) and the treatment of time? [I don't know the answer to this -- perhaps none -- but see what you think.]

2.

Please **a)** read **Genette, *Narrative Discourse: 'Introduction'*, pp. 25-32** (where he sets out what the word 'narrative' can mean (already helpful), and his absolutely key and canonical narratological distinction between **story** (by which he means what happened or was imagined to happen in real time in the world of the story, the chronological ABC of events), and **narrative** (the discourse describing the story, which may go back and forth in time, leave things out, return to fill them in, leap forward in time to anticipate events in the future etc.). This is on the module website:

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/literaturetheoryandtime>

b) Read the first chapter of Genette, '**Order**', pp. 33-85 (particularly 33-71) as well, and think about what he means by 'Anachronies', and how '**analepsis**' and '**prolepsis**' work.

It's challenging to 'sequence' Woolf in the way that Genette sequences the passage from *The Iliad* on p. 37 (see below, Appendix 1!), or the passage from Proust's *Jean Santeuil* on pp. 37-40 -- there are some unconventional uses of tenses, and some of the things described are quite ambiguous in terms of time, or outside of time (or at least 'tensed time') altogether.

But we're going to try (in a playful spirit!) to 'code' a short bit of *Mrs Dalloway* as Genette might **next week**, using the passage of the novel you've read in advance.

The task to be done in the seminar next week:

a) Try to divide the Woolf's passage (as above) according to when it shifts in time (between A, B, C etc.) on Genette's model. It may be helpful to read on a bit in Genette to see how he 'codes' passages from Proust, which share some similarities with Woolf.

b) Think too about how the different segments can be organized into the two categories **[1] 'then' (or 'once'**—one issue with his theory is it doesn't think enough about the difference between these two – something you may want to ponder) and **[2] 'now'**.

There *may* be prizes for those who produce an inventively or clearly or thoroughly marked up bit of text in the session! If I remember...

c) Just to think about in reflecting on this task. Do we need other (intermediary?) categories? Are some allusions to the past more firmly, narratively speaking, set *in* the past than others (and some still coloured by the present, the emotional experience of them in the present)?

[You probably won't get through the whole passage but see how far you get. Shortish section is fine. But try to look at a section that allows you at least a few shifts in time (and location).]

Try to apply the relevant terms from Genette re. the passage. Is there **analepsis**, and is it 'internal' or 'external'? Can you apply other terms of his to the passage? Is there any **prolepsis**? (What does the young Clarissa realise or predict about the future based on her experience in this past episode?) Are these distinctions actually helpful in this case (i.e. does it work like this in Woolf), or do you need to refine or adjust Genette's model?

Genette's model may seem a little dry to start with, but I hope there's some interest (even fun?!) in applying it and we can talk about the bigger conceptual issues to do with time, feeling, memory, identity -- perhaps sexuality? -- that the material might raise in the session. And you will (by the end of week 2!) already have some fantastic narratological tools at your disposal for analysing texts on other modules / in your research work.

(Optional, but... What literary work have you read that might be interesting to break down / analyse in a 'Genette' kind of way? Any thoughts?)

Appendix 1: Genette, 'Order', *Narrative Discourse*, p. 37

Sing, goddess, the wrath of Achilles Peleus' son, the ruinous wrath that brought on the Achaians woes innumerable, and hurled down into Hades many strong souls of heroes, and gave their bodies to be a prey to dogs and all winged fowls; and so the counsel of Zeus wrought out its accomplishment from the day when first strife parted Atreides king of men and noble Achilles.

Who then among the gods set the twain at strife and variance? Even the son of Leto and of Zeus; for he in anger at the king sent a sore plague upon the host, that the folk began to perish, because Atreides had done dishonour to Chryses the priest. (Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 1, ll. 1-11)

Thus, the first narrative subject Homer refers to is the **wrath of Achilles**; the second is the **miseries of the Greeks**, which are in fact its consequence; but the third is the **quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon**, which is its immediate cause and thus precedes it; then, continuing to go back explicitly from cause to cause: the **plague**, cause of the quarrel, and finally the **affront** to Chryses, cause of the plague. The five constituent elements of this opening, which I will name A, B, C, D, and E according to the order of their appearance in the narrative, occupy in the story, respectively, the chronological positions 4, 5, 3, 2, and 1: hence this formula that will synthesize the sequential relationships more or less well: A4-B5-C3-D2-E1. We are fairly close to an evenly retrograde [moving backwards] movement.