

NARRATIVE TEXT THEORY: A SYSTEMATIC ANALYTICAL APPROACH BASED ON TEXT, STORY, AND FABULA

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Abstract: This article explores contemporary theoretical approaches to the analysis of narrative texts. It examines the layered structure of narrative systems based on the relationship between the text, story, and fabula. Within the scope of the article, the interaction among the three core levels — fabula (the chronological sequence of events), story (the structured presentation of those events), and text (the verbal expression through signs and linguistic tools) — is analyzed. The study also highlights how this structure can be critically examined. Concepts such as interpretation, subjectivity, and focalization are discussed to underscore the cultural and aesthetic significance of narrative texts. This approach bridges theory and practical analysis, encouraging readers to engage in critical and systematic thinking.

Keywords: Narrative text, fabula, story, text layers, focalization, narrator, subjectivity, interpretation, cultural context.

Narrative analysis is a means of exploring human experience, cultural memory, and processes of conscious understanding through texts. At the center of this article lies an inquiry into the fundamental forms and structures of storytelling — namely, the concepts of text, story, and fabula. The theoretical distinctions between these layers, their interconnections, and analytical methods for studying them constitute essential tools for understanding a wide range of literary and cultural texts.

Narratology — the field dedicated to the study of narrative systems and their functioning — has in recent years found wide application not only in literary studies but also in disciplines such as semiotics, film studies, and even architectural design. The core focus of narratology revolves around questions such as how a narrative is constructed, by what signs it is conveyed, and through what visual or auditory media it is delivered to an audience. This leads us to three key distinctions: text refers to the surface expression composed of signs; story is the structured representation of events based on a fabula; fabula is the logical and chronological sequence of events. Text is always a finite, ordered unit expressed through signs. These signs are often linguistic (i.e., words and sentences), but they may also be visual, acoustic, or part of other semiotic systems. Thus, text is not limited to written or oral forms; it can also appear in formats such as film, painting, or architecture.

Narrative texts, by their nature, are analyzed across three interconnected levels:

Fabula – the sequence of events carried out or experienced by characters.

Story – the selection and organization of fabula events in a specific narrative order, often including time, space, and character development.

Text – the actual expression of the story, “told” through linguistic or other semiotic means.

These layers are closely interrelated, and each plays a distinct role in analysis. From a theoretical perspective, however, they are considered separately, as each has unique structural characteristics. For example, in the tale of Tom Thumb, the fabula remains consistent (a weak child outsmarts a villain and triumphs), yet the mode of storytelling, language, and style can vary widely across versions.

Studying narrative texts is crucial not only for literary works but also for understanding everyday texts — news articles, advertisements, films, and even narratives shared via social media. The process of interpretation is inherently subjective, shaped by personal experience and cultural background. Therefore, the theoretical foundations presented in this article are not merely tools for discovering an “objective truth,” but rather instruments for initiating dialogue, discussing nuance, and articulating ideas.

This study employs core concepts from both classical and contemporary narratology as its theoretical foundation. The analysis centers around a three-layered narrative model — fabula, story, and text — with each layer examined independently. This model allows for a comprehensive understanding of narrative structure, its analysis, and its comparison with other texts. The primary goal is to help the reader grasp the mechanism of storytelling and to apply analytical tools in practice.

The fabula is the foundation of any narrative. It consists of a logically and chronologically ordered sequence of events experienced or carried out by actors. A fabula generally includes the following elements: Events – transitions from one state or condition to another; Actors – agents who perform or experience events (humans, animals, abstract concepts, etc.); Time – the duration, sequence, and intervals of events; Space – the physical or imagined setting where events take place. As an example, let us consider F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. The fabula revolves around Jay Gatsby’s love for Daisy Buchanan and his attempts to rekindle their past relationship. Gatsby builds his fortune in the hope of winning Daisy back. Over time, the narrative unfolds into a tragic outcome as his hopes are shattered. The fabula develops across a temporal axis: Gatsby’s accumulation of wealth, his romantic obsession with Daisy, and the ultimate misunderstanding and collapse of his dream. The central themes of the fabula are love and the pursuit of success.

The story refers to the specific arrangement and presentation of fabula elements. During the storytelling process, the following narrative techniques are employed: Temporal rearrangement – the chronological order of events may be altered (e.g., flashbacks, flash-forwards); Compression or expansion of time – narrative time may be condensed or prolonged in comparison to fabula time; Characterization – actors are presented with distinctive traits, becoming fully developed characters; Spatial description – locations gain aesthetic or symbolic significance; Semantic linkage – symbolic, cultural, or traditional connections between events and characters add deeper meaning to the story; Focalization (point of view) – the perspective through which events are perceived shapes the narrative’s subjectivity. In *The Great Gatsby*, the events are structured around Gatsby’s passion for Daisy and his relentless quest to recreate the past. Gatsby attains wealth and status to impress Daisy, unaware that she is already married. Their relationship is reestablished briefly, but ultimately fails. This story concludes with Gatsby’s death and the disintegration of his dreams, illustrating how narrative order and selection give shape to the fabula.

The text is the actual realization of the story through signs. These signs may be linguistic (words, sentences) as well as visual (film frames, colors), or auditory (music, sound effects). Textual analysis focuses on the following elements: Narrator – not the real author, but an imagined figure within the text responsible for telling the story; Style – use of language, imagery, idioms, rhythm, and tone within the narrative; Genre elements – the genre of the text (e.g., fairy tale, novel, article, graphic story), which determines its structural and stylistic conventions; Textual layers – beyond events, texts include descriptions, authorial commentary, interpretations, irony, and more. The narrator may appear in various forms — sometimes fully hidden, sometimes highly visible, commenting on and evaluating the events of the narrative.

This article has presented the theoretical tools of narratological analysis — the layers of fabula, story, and text — as an effective framework for examining any cultural artifact conveyed through narrative. By breaking down the model into distinct analytical layers, it becomes possible to achieve a

deeper, more systematic understanding of texts, allowing for richer interpretation, comparative study, and contextual analysis.

The fabula, as the logical and chronological foundation of the narrative, forms the core structure of meaning. Its internal composition reveals the semantic depth underlying the narrative. The story, as the aesthetically and dramatically structured version of the fabula, generates emotional engagement and subjective experience for the reader. Through narrative techniques such as focalization, temporal manipulation, and character construction, the story layer renders the narrative more nuanced and personal.

The text, as the sign-based expression of the story, serves as the communicative medium that reaches the reader, viewer, or listener. Analyzing this layer helps identify the narrator's position, stylistic choices, and genre-specific features.

Importantly, the analysis has shown that narrative tools can be applied beyond literary texts. Films, plays, comics, advertisements, music, and visual art can all be studied through the lens of narrative structure. This transforms narratology into a contemporary tool for cultural analysis.

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