

ontological (see ETHICAL TURN; PHILOSOPHY AND NARRATIVE; POSSIBLE-WORLDS THEORY; PSYCHO-ANALYSIS AND NARRATIVE).

Plot as gender construction

The feminist analysis of plot is primarily concerned with the (stereotypical) allocation and limitation of roles in narrative fiction due to a protagonist's gender. In the history of narrative fiction, gender discrimination was long practiced because major roles and key plot types were reserved for male characters. The historical diversification of plot types for women, which occurred in the early twentieth century, reflected the watershed of female emancipation. In studying eighteenth-century fiction, Miller (using a distinction first made by Greimas) distinguishes between 'euphoric' and 'dysphoric' texts: on the one hand the heroine's course in life can follow a trajectory of ascent in society with final integration, or on the other hand the heroine may die in the flower of youth. DuPlessis (1985) differentiates between the female protagonist as *'hero', in which she is an independent agent in her own 'quest plot', and as 'heroine', in which she is constrained within a love or 'romance' plot (see AGENCY). Hirsch (1989: 59) observes that pre-twentieth century heroines 'have a plot only insofar as it leads them to their eventual and inevitable marriages'. Feminist plot analysis also involved the deductive evaluation of plot absences as well as presences. Hirsch (1989) charts the development of the 'mother/daughter plot' in fiction, focusing on the striking absence of mother/daughter relationships in pre-twentieth century fiction.

Plot as mental configuration

Ricoeur and Brooks both see plot as the product of an act of mental construction (see NARRATIVE COMPREHENSION; PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO NARRATIVE). Ricoeur separates out the sense-making activity brought to plots by using the related term *'emplotment', which for him refers to 'the dynamic character of the configuring operation' (Ricoeur 1984–88; vol 1: 65). For Brooks plot is not localisable as a single definition but has many manifestations. His psychoanalytic model comprehends plot as a force which drives the reader and which he calls 'narrative desire' or 'textual erotics' (see DESIRE). Brooks describes the

readerly desire aroused prior to the consummation of *closure as 'the *anticipation of retrospection*' (23). Ultimately, however, the reader's narrative desire for definitive closure is frustrated by the recognition that the 'mastertext is not available, [so that] we are condemned to the reading of erroneous plots' (142) (see MASTER NARRATIVE).

Cognitive approaches to plot centre on the understanding that plot and the mental operation of emplotment involve the attempt to make sense of a larger, unorganised entity by imposing some kind of reductive and selective explicative system of order on it. This view of plot as a mapping operation involving cognitive, temporal, and spatial aspects is stressed by Brooks (1992 [1984]: 11–12), who enumerates four semantic divisions of plot: the 'measured area of land', the 'ground plan' or 'diagram', the 'series of events consisting of an outline of the action of a narrative or drama' and the 'secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose'. Beer implies a similar understanding of plot as referring to the 'organizing principles of [...] thinking' (1983: 47). In her specific investigation the concept of plot refers to the 'evolutionary metaphor' contained in Darwin's theory and its impact on man's hitherto anthropocentric conception of life. Other more recent approaches to plot as a system of explanation focus on the varied configurations of the explanatory systems of chance and causality (see NARRATIVE AS COGNITIVE INSTRUMENT; NARRATIVE EXPLANATION).

From a *historiographical position, White equates the term plot with narrative closure and thus views it as an ideological strategy which can be used to impose an artificial or literary structure on chronologies of events (see IDEOLOGY AND NARRATIVE). He is sceptical of plot in the Aristotelian sense, precisely because of its imposition of a rigid and limited structure on the larger flow of events and time.

Plot and the narrative dynamics of progression and tellability

Other recent models have perceived plot as a dynamic structure which exists before closure creates the kind of rigid configuration focused on by White. This approach sees plot as the open, fluid, and dynamic patterning of events, precisely because, seen from a pre-closure position, plot is still moving towards the final organising telos of the narrative.