

White, Hayden (1980) 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.) *On Narrative*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

HILARY P. DANNENBERG

PLOT TYPES

Theories of *plot have almost invariably produced categorisations of plot. Often the understanding of 'plot' used in the concept of 'plot type' has more to do with the story that a narrative tells than with more complex conceptualisations of plot. Consequently, the study of plot types often focuses on the basic scheme of *events in a narrative. Plot categorisations can have either a *thematic or a structural focus, or combine both these aspects. Plot types range from the definition of fundamental patterns occurring in narrative to distinctions which divide narrative texts into sub-genres (see *GENRE THEORY IN NARRATIVE STUDIES*; *TEXT-TYPE APPROACH TO NARRATIVE*). The identification of plot types also overlaps with the question of *narrative structure, but the latter tends to focus more exclusively on basic techniques of narrative construction without considering thematic patterns (see *NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES*).

A simple example of a plot type is Bremond's distinction between two types of narrative movement: improvement and deterioration; Bremond describes narrative as having a cyclical pattern which alternates between these two types. A more complex example is Propp's isolation of thirty-one functions or character acts in the Russian *folktale (see *FUNCTION (PROPP)*).

Genre-based categories of plot are widespread in narrative theory: Crane defines plot types according to the narrative's subject matter, distinguishing between plots of *action, *character, and *thought. Frye's archetypal theory of *myths distinguishes between four 'generic plots' – comedy, *romance, tragedy, and irony/satire – which he sees as being fundamental narrative categories over and above literary genres (see *ARCHETYPAL PATTERNS*; *IRONY; SATIRIC NARRATIVE*). Todorov and Eco both use the question of repeated formulae, i.e., whether a narrative rigidly conforms to a plot type, to make a fundamental distinction between popular and high forms of narrative. Whereas popular fiction, for example the *detective story, relies on the repetition of a basic plot formula, the classics of

high literature each deviate in an original way from any previous set formula. For Eco (1981 [1979]: 160) repetition in a genre with a formulaic plot gives the reader pleasure because it allows him 'to recognize something he has already seen and of which he has grown fond'. The structure of this type of plot, Eco concludes, leads the reader to 'imaginative laziness'; it 'creates escape by narrating, not the Unknown, but the Already Known'.

Feminist criticism has identified a plethora of plot types which focus on the life trajectories and roles of female characters in narrative fiction (see *FEMINIST NARRATOLOGY*; *GENDER STUDIES*; *LIFE STORY*). One fundamental distinction is between the 'quest plot' and the 'romance plot'. The quest plot involves a 'progressive, goal-oriented search with stages, obstacles and "battles"' (DuPlessis 1985: 200) and has been used more frequently in the depiction of male characters than in the portrayal of females. In the 'romance plot', meanwhile, the role of the female character is completely subordinated to the *telos* of love and marriage (see *ROMANCE NOVEL*). Abel charts how the 'maternal subplot' and the 'plot of female bonding' gradually emerge to take their place in narrative fiction alongside the more traditional 'plot of heterosexual love'. Gutenberg offers the most comprehensive feminist survey of plot types to date, mapping variants of the romance plot (courtship plot, seduction plot, wedlock plot), the quest plot (social and spiritual quest, initiation plot, *coming-out plot, limit plot), and the family plot (generation plot, mother-daughter plot, sister plot, group plot, friendship plot) (see *FAMILY CHRONICLE*).

Brooks' psychoanalytical approach to plot also produces a Freudian array of plot types (see *PSYCHOANALYSIS AND NARRATIVE*). He shows how individual texts can be read as the battleground of different systems of signification. Thus, in Dickens' *Great Expectations*, 'official' or 'censoring' plots stand over 'repressed' plots, with the result that 'Pip has misread the plot of his life' (1992 [1984]: 130).

Ryan's (1991) definition of plot as the product of *conflicts between the various private worlds of the character domains and the actual state of affairs in the narrative world (the textual actual world or TAW) leads to a new typology of plot defined according to the specific dynamics of *conflict (see *POSSIBLE-WORLDS THEORY*). Key forms of conflict within Ryan's typology are: the conflict between the different private worlds of