Illustrations

The author and publisher are grateful to be able to include the following illustrations.

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Figure 2 Black and white photograph of *Belshazzar's Feast* by Rembrandt, copyright © National Gallery, London. Used by permission. 7

Figure 3 *La douce résistance* by Michel Garnier, 1793. Private collection. Every effort was made to contact the owner, but without success. 8

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Figure 5 Black and white photograph of *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* by Francis Bacon, 1944. Copyright © Marlborough Fine Art, London. Tate Gallery, London 2000 and Art Resources, New York. 10

Figure 6 Black and white photographic still from *Wuthering Heights* (United Artists, 1939). Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. 110

Figure 7 Black and white photographic still from *Cleopatra* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1963). Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. 113

Figure 8 *Understanding Comics* (page 66) by Scott McCloud, reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. 116

Preface

The purpose of this book is to help readers understand what narrative is, how it is constructed, how it acts upon us, how we act upon it, how it is transmitted, how it changes when the medium or the cultural context changes, and how it is found not just in the arts but everywhere in the ordinary course of people's lives, many times a day. This last point is especially important. We are all narrators, though we may rarely be aware of it. A statement as simple as "I took the car to work" qualifies as narrative. As we seek to communicate more detail about events in time, we become involved in increasingly complex acts of narration. We are also the constant recipients of narrative: from newspapers and television, from books and films, and from friends and relatives telling us, among other things, that they took the car to work. Therefore, though much of this book is devoted to narrative in literature, film, and drama, it grounds its treatment of narrative by introducing it as a human phenomenon that is not restricted to literature, film, and theater, but is found in all activities that involve the representation of events in time. In its early chapters, the book moves back and forth between the arts and the everyday. At the same time, the book honors the fact that out of this common capability have come rich and meaningful narratives that we come back to and reflect on repeatedly in our lives.

This book is descriptive rather than prescriptive; it seeks to describe what happens when we encounter narrative, rather than to prescribe what should happen. All along the way questions arise that are very much alive in current work on narrative. These are often tough issues, and, with a few important exceptions (as for example the definition of narrative that I employ), I try to keep these issues open. In organization, the book introduces the subject of narrative by moving outward from simplicity to complexity, from the component parts of narrative in Chapters Two and Three to its numerous effects, including its extraordinary rhetorical power and the importance of the concept of "closure," in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Six deals with narration and the key role of the narrator.

Chapters Seven and Eight, in taking up issues connected with the interpretation of narrative, shift the focus from the power of narrative to the power of readers and audiences. In this sense, narrative is always a two-way

street. Without our collaboration, there is no narrative to begin with. And if it is true that we allow ourselves to be manipulated by narrative, it is also true that we do manipulating of our own. These chapters take up this interplay of audiences and narratives in the process of interpretation and culminate in Chapter Eight's treatment of three fundamentally different ways of reading that we all engage in: intentional, symptomatic, and adaptive. The differences between them are important and bring in their wake different understandings of what we mean by meaning in narrative.

Chapter Nine turns to the differences that different media make in narrative and to what happens when you move a story from one medium to narrate it in another. Chapter Ten opens out the subject of character, both as a function of narrative and as intimately connected with what we loosely call "the self" in autobiography. In the final two chapters, we return to the broad subject of narrative's role in culture and society. Much of politics and the law is a contest of narratives. Chapter Eleven looks at the ways in which these conflicts of narrative play out, particularly in the law. And in Chapter Twelve, I look at the ways in which narrative can also be an instrument by which storytellers and readers seek to negotiate the claims of competing and often intractable conflicts. Stories, for example, that are told over and over again (cultural masterplots) are often efforts to settle conflicts which are deeply embedded in a culture.

In this book, I have endeavored to avoid writing another anatomy of narrative, of which there are fine examples available in print (Genette, 1980; Prince, 1987). Instead, I have sought at all times to restrict focus to the most useful concepts and terminology. The field of narratology has produced a great arsenal of distinctions and terms. I have kept my selection of these to a minimum, using only those that are indispensable. These key terms will be found throughout the book and are featured in boldface in the Glossary. As such, this is a foundational book. The tools and distinctions it supplies can be employed across the whole range of nameable interpretive approaches.

Nonetheless, by selecting the terms I do and by treating them the way I do, I have written a study that is bound to be controversial. The simple reason for this is that all studies of narrative are controversial. Despite a burst of energetic and highly intelligent research over the last thirty years and the genuine progress that has been made, there is not yet a consensus on any of the key issues in the study of narrative. If, like language, narrative is an inevitable human capability that we deploy every day without conscious effort, it is also, like language, a complex and fascinating field that often seems to defy our best analytical efforts at exactitude. Therefore, and above all else, I have aimed at clarity in this introduction to narrative. I have also been highly selective in recommending, at the ends of Chapters Two through Twelve, secondary texts that seem at this date to have

stood the test of time (though for some areas, like hypertext narrative, the works have only barely been tested). At the same time, it is important to acknowledge here the assistance I have received from the work on narrative by many brilliant scholars, among them: M. M. Bakhtin, Mieke Bal, Ann Banfield, Roland Barthes, Emile Benveniste, Wayne Booth, David Bordwell, Edward Branigan, Claude Bremond, Peter Brooks, Ross Chambers, Seymour Chatman, Dorrit Cohn, Jonathan Culler, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Monika Fludernik, Gérard Genette, A. J. Greimas, David Herman, Paul Hernadi, Wolfgang Iser, Roman Jakobson, Fredric Jameson, Robert Kellogg, Frank Kermode, George P. Landow, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Wallace Martin, Scott McCloud, J. Hillis Miller, Bill Nichols, Roy Pascal, Gerald Prince, Vladimir Propp, Peter J. Rabinowitz, Eric Rabkin, David Richter, Paul Ricoeur, Brian Richardson, Robert Scholes, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Marie-Laure Ryan, Saint Augustine, Victor Shklovsky, Franz Stanzel, Tzvetan Todorov, Boris Tomashevsky, Hayden White, and Trevor Whittock.

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10. Anton Chekhov, trans. S. S. Koteliansky and Philip Tomlinson, Letter to A. S. Souvorin (27 October 1888) in S. S. Koteliansky and Philip Tomlinson (eds.), *Life and Letters of Anton Tchekhov* (London: Benjamin Blom, 1925; reissued, 1965), p. 127.
11. Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: the Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 1.

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Glossary and topical index

What follows are definitions of useful terms for discussing narrative. Terms in **bold face** are the terms that are essential and that have been emphasized in this book. You will also find other terms that have either proven their use or been used so often that they are now unavoidable in the discussion of narrative. This glossary also serves as a topical index for the book.

Act: Event caused by a character (as opposed to happening).
Action: The sequence of events in a story. The action and the existents are the two basic components of story. Some (including this author) prefer the term "events," since "action" can conceivably mean the collective acts in a story. 12, 16, 123–6
Adaptation: The transmutation of a narrative, usually from one medium to another. 105–22
Adaptive reading: One of three fundamental modes of interpretation (see also intentional and symptomatic readings). Adaptive readings range from interpretations freed from concerns for overreading or underreading to fresh narratives of the story either in the same medium or in a different one, as, for example, the film versions of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* or Shakespeare's *Henry V*. 100–2, 130, 172
Agency: The capacity of an entity to cause events (that is, to engage in acts). Characters by and large are entities with agency. 124, 130
Agon or **conflict:** Most narratives are driven by a conflict. In Greek tragedy, the word for the conflict, or contest, is the "agon." From that word come the terms prot*agon*ist and ant*agon*ist. 51–2, 140, 153, 156–74
Analepsis: Flashback. The introduction into the narrative of material that happens earlier in the story. The opposite of prolepsis. 157
Antagonist: The opponent of the protagonist. He or she is commonly the enemy of the hero. 51, 140
Author: A real person who creates a text. The author is not to be confused with either the narrator or the implied author of a narrative. 36, 63, 77–9, 95, 97, 99
Authorial intention: The author's intended meanings or effects. The concept of authorial intention has taken a beating in this century on a variety of grounds. It has been argued that authorial intention is indeterminable; that authors are as fallible as the rest of us in reading their own work and therefore unreliable guides to reading; that the idea of an author essentializes and presumes to fix an identity that is indeterminate and fluid; and finally that seeking authorial

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