# **How to Use This Book**

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The impulse behind the essays collected in *Analyzing World Fiction: New Horizons in Narrative Theory* spins out of a symposium sponsored by Project Narrative, "Multicultural Narratives and Narrative Theory." This symposium, held at the Ohio State University during Oct. 25–27, 2007, brought together scholars from around the world working in, among other fields, narrative theory, U.S. ethnic studies, English studies and Anglophone literatures, linguistics, feminist and critical race theory, cognitive approaches to literature, and creative writing. Many of these scholars demonstrated how scholarship in narrative theory and work done under the umbrella designation of U.S. ethnic and postcolonial studies could create a productive synergy.

Nonetheless, although *Analyzing World Fiction* was inspired by this symposium—and seeds planted there grew into several of the following essays—the collection expands the purview to include analyses not just of African American, Asian American, Filipino American, South Asian Indian, and U.S. Latina literature but also of literature from China, France, and the Francophone Caribbean. Moreover, it does not limit itself to the analysis of literature, for it encompasses work on Afro-Caribbean British televisual stories and cinematic narratives by South Asian Indian and Mexican directors.

Whereas each contributor uses a distinct theoretical approach, they all share a common sensitivity to the exigencies of proof and corroboration, as well as an understanding that ideological dogmatism impedes the exploration of the principles and mechanisms involved in the production and reception of narrative fiction. In this, the essays I have collected here have affinities with the work I have been doing since the publication of *Postethnic Narrative Criticism* (2003), followed by *Brown on Brown* (2005) and *A User's Guide to Postcolonial and Latino Borderland* 

Fiction (2009). And, like the other scholars represented here, I consider both critical theory and critical practice to be most productively served by first understanding narrative fiction within its worldwide dimension and then analyzing its myriad expressions as particularities in each time and place. The kinds of fiction in which we are most interested all comprise unique, idiosyncratic works that cohere into unified wholes; at the same time, they are all part of the ongoing dialogue sustained by authors the world over.

### Part I: Voice

Brian Richardson's essay, "U.S. Ethnic and Postcolonial Fiction: Toward a Poetics of Collective Narratives," opens the collection. Richardson offers a widely encompassing overview of the ways tools and categories (e.g., narrative, story and plot, narrative temporality, character, and "reception and the reader") can be used to enrich our understanding and appreciation of a great range of literary texts. In a discussion of point of view, Richardson teases out the various nuances of the "we" narrative and other unusual voices in Jamaica Kincaid's A Small Place, Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, Nuruddin Farah's Maps, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Grain of Wheat. Focusing on the varying degrees of presence of multiple and divided voices, Richardson shows how authors can create all sorts of tensions among the individual, the community, and a dominant society. Indeed, the narrative voice provides authors writing under constraints of artistic and political censorship an important technique for speaking both to an "ideal reader" who will get the "deeper, hidden meanings" and to the censoring audience.

The subsequent essays in this section continue to sharpen our understanding of the way narrative techniques such as voice work in a number of world narrative fictions. For example, in "Language Peculiarities and Challenges to Universal Narrative Poetics," Dan Shen demonstrates how linguistic markers of tense in Chinese differ from English ones in ways that significantly alter the category of voice in narrative fiction. To understand the narrative richness in Chinese novels such as Mao Dun's Shop of the Lin Family and Cao Xueqin's Dream of Red Mansions, where the Chinese narrating voice lacks tense markers, we must keep in mind the tense-ambiguous category of the "finite blend." While Shen demonstrates certain overlaps between Chinese and non-Chinese literatures, such linguistic variations create differences in the device of voice.

In "Reading Narratologically: Azouz Begag's Le Gone du Chaâba," Gerald Prince also attends to nuances of language in his exploration of beur literature (i.e., works written in French by children of North African immigrants to France). Prince attends to code switching between standard French, French Lyonnais slang, and Algerian Arabic in Azouz Begag's Le Gone du Chaâba and the way such linguistic shifts mark the narrator-protagonist's movements among his neighborhood, his school, and the city. Prince's focus on language and narrative voice "systematically" allows us to characterize the particular functioning of Begag's "narrativity."

Using the concept of the "narratee" originally introduced and sharpened by Gerald Prince in 1980, Robyn Warhol analyzes Bharati Mukherjee's tense shifts and chronological disruptions, as well as the narratornarratee configurations, in the novel Jasmine. In "Jasmine Reconsidered: Narrative Structure and Multicultural Subjectivity" Warhol identifies how the narrator-narratee configuration presents an instance of the impossibility of integrated subjecthood for its Indian narrator-character, known variously as Jyoti, Jasmine, or Jane. Unlike its alluded-to predecessor, Jane Eyre, where "the heroine's subjectivity is monocultural [and] her reader—the narratee to whom she is speaking—perfectly aligned with the narrator's and narratees's values and teleology," Warhol argues, Jasmine presents a character-narrator whose difference from other middle-class North American characters is marked both by the presence of such characters in the storyworld and the identification of a like-positioned narratee.

Also attending to the importance of voice, James Phelan teases out how Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God establishes at the outset a certain type of dynamic interaction among the various components of the narrative fiction blueprint and the reader. In "Voice, Politics, and Judgments in Their Eyes Were Watching God: The Initiation, the Launch, and the Debate about the Narration," Phelan identifies "initiation" (the initial rhetorical exchanges among author, narrator, and audience) and "launch" (the taking off of the narrative when a "global instability" is introduced) to reveal the formal and political importance of Hurston's initial use of an authoritative narrator who subsequently aligns the reader's interest with the characters Janie and Pheoby and with the telling situation generally. In some cases of dialogue, Phelan further argues, Hurston presents a "block of monologic discourse from a collective voice" that guides the reader to "strongly negative ethical judgments of the speakers." Phelan shows that as the narrative unfolds, it triggers in the reader competing demands for a negative ethical judgment of the collective and a positive judgment of Janie.

In a shift from written narrative fiction to the function of voice in televisual narrative forms, Hilary Dannenberg considers how the first-person, polyphonic "we" narrative voice works in a number of documentaries, sitcoms, and comedy shows to displace official narratives of a pure British identity by placing at their center a range of black and Asian British experiences in the United Kingdom. In "Narrating Multiculturalism in British Media: Voice and Cultural Identity in Television Documentary and Comedy" Dannenberg analyzes Lenny Henry's *This Is My Life*, revealing how the first-person narrative voice combines with a "satirical mock voice-over" to make for a "new narrator who blends the authenticity of personal historical knowledge with the satirical edge of comedy."

#### Part II: Emotion

The essays that make up this part consider how formal structures and narrative techniques used in narrative fiction (film and literature) can convey the emotion of narrators and characters as well as cue and trigger emotive responses in readers and viewers. In "Anger, Temporality, and the Politics of Reading *The Woman Warrior*" Sue J. Kim considers how Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* offers a "narrating-I" who draws us into her plight not by presenting an us (Asian and Asian American) versus them (U.S. mainstream) melodramatic sentimentality but rather by conveying a range of emotions that draws readers into a particularized Asian American experience and reminds them of the critical distance that separates the flesh-and-blood author from the fictional narrator and the characters. As Kim argues, *Woman Warrior* demands that we not read such a novel as an ethnographic document and instead consider seriously its aesthetics and thus its politics.

In "Agency and Emotion: R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*," Lalita Pandit Hogan argues against cookie-cutter postcolonial approaches that, for instance, declare an author's use of the English language as somehow procolonial. Rather, she demonstrates how a traditionally acclaimed Indian "native" author such as R. K. Narayan writes in English yet remains a "syncretist," borrowing broadly from numerous narrative conventions. In *The Guide* we see how Narayan, like other Indian authors, blends "aesthetic models and narrative tropes of the West with models and

tropes derived from the Sanskrit, Tamil, and Arabic-Persian traditions." Narayan's "integrative model" triggers specific "emotion memories" and offers a complex anticolonial critique.

In "The Narrativization of National Metaphors in Indian Cinema" Patrick Colm Hogan considers the relations among emotion, narrative, and metaphor. Specifically, he explores how metaphors of family (kinship, marriage, and home) organize and orient nationalist thought and action in six South Asian Indian films. In the analysis of director Yash Chopra's *Dharmputra*, for instance, Hogan shows how the film expands the kinship metaphor into a national story. At the same time, the film avoids some risks of the metaphor by (narratively) criticizing its supposed literalization in a politics of ethnocultural purity.

In "Fear and Action: A Cognitive Approach to Teaching Children of Men" Arturo J. Aldama uses recent findings in the cognitive and neurobiological sciences to shed light on the ways audiences are affected by scenes of torture and threats of terror in the Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón's Children of Men. His analysis shows how Cuarón's mise-enscène of immigration detention camps in a futuristic England alludes to the Abu Ghraib prison, to Nazi concentration camps, and to Latin American death squads. These and other evocations have a cognitive and emotive impact that moves audiences to question present realities while linking them to a dystopia represented in a very proximate future. Thus, Aldama concludes that Cuarón's film as a whole asks audiences whether hope, as an executive cognitive order, is still possible in a world of pervasive and relentless political oppression.

## **Part III: Comparisons and Contrasts**

Several essays seek to establish important differences and commonalities within and among different world narrative fictions. In "The Postmodern Continuum of Canon and Kitsch: Narrative and Semiotic Strategies of Chicana High Culture and Chica Lit," Ellen McCracken uses the notions of paratext and implied author to tease out a rich array of different types of contemporary Latina narrative fictions: the consumable type seen in Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez's Dirty Girls Social Club and the less readily digestible type seen in Sandra Cisneros's Caramelo. Mc-Cracken explores how devices used in both types of fiction coupled with the paratexts (blurbs, cover photos, and the like) establish simple or complex text-to-reader contracts.

In "Initiating Dialogue: Narrative Beginnings in Multicultural Narratives" Catherine Romagnolo asserts that narrative beginnings can destabilize preconceptions of U.S. ethnic identity and experience. In an analysis of Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, Romagnolo demonstrates how the loosely defined family relationships in the family tree that appear at the beginning of the novel begin to do the work of the novel as a whole: to "destabilize traditional immigration paradigms that rely on notions of definitive cultural origins and concrete new beginnings." In looking at the different ways that Alvarez, Zora Neale Hurston, and Toni Morrison utilize narrative beginnings, Romagnolo reveals how a number of narrative fictions establish at the outset the construction of an array of U.S. ethnic gendered experiences and worldviews.

The next two essays in Part III focus primarily on Asian American novels. In "It's Badly Done': Redefining Craft in *America Is in the Heart*," Sue-Im Lee shows how Carlos Bulosan does not so much write a clumsy novel, as some would have it, as willfully invent a wobbly narrator—a single narrator entity that is at once naive (an "experiencing self") and knowing (a "narrating self"). Lee explores the full social and political implications of Bulosan's invention, whereby the "experiencing self" becomes the object that must be explained by the "narrating self" in ways that continually unbalance both.

In "Nobody Knows: *Invisible Man* and John Okada's *No-No Boy*" Josephine Nock-Hee Park uses Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* to unlock John Okada's *No-No Boy*. Both novels follow the journey of raced outsiders: Okada's "nobody" or "no-no boy" and Ellison's invisible man. As Park shows, however, the characters' outsider status does not absent them from history. Their various refusals to identify as part of the nation (their "invisibility") put into high relief racist policies toward African Americans and Japanese Americans in different historical moments. And both novels find expression for their "strategies for resistance" not just in character action but in the very narrative form itself; they choose the vehicle of the "improbable fiction," Park argues, rather than a straightforward realism in order to "weave a grim fable around an empty center."

Paul Breslin's essay "Intertextuality, Translation, and Postcolonial Misrecognition in Aimé Césaire" offers new translations of key passages of Césaire's *Une Tempête* and *La Tragédie*, to powerfully demonstrate how readers tend to prefer works that do not resist translation (either into their own language or into the categories of familiar theories) to those that do. Yet, as Breslin observes, resistance to translation is often

a sign of greater complexity and originality of insight. La Tragédie du roi Christophe tells about postcolonial events that readers don't want to hear about, whereas Une Tempête tells readers what they want—and expect—to hear.

The collection ends with William Nericcio's afterword, "How This Book Reads You: Looking beyond Analyzing World Fiction: New Horizons in Narrative Theory," Nericcio forcefully reiterates the necessary move to study narrative fiction in all its guises as always comparative and worldly. He reminds us that while authors, artists, and directors alike use universal storytelling techniques and structures, they do so to create vitally new idiosyncratic narrative fictions. As he states, "We'll need a bigger closet."

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