

# Functional Criticism, Literary Pedagogy and the Value of Narrative Literacy

[‘Uses of Literature’ Online Conference](#)  
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**Resistance to Value e.g.**

New Formalism

New Criticism

*fin de siècle* 'art for art's sake'.

See also Poovey (2008), for a historical account of 'the function of the discipline' (p. 1) and of how nineteenth-century writers claimed for literature 'a special kind of value – one not defined by the market' (p. 2).

**VS**



**Value lies in Critique e.g.**

Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1981)

the Frankfurt School

Marxism

Psychoanalysis

New Historicism

Deconstruction

feminist, queer, & postcolonial criticism.

See Sedgwick (1997) and Felski (2015) for a critical mapping of this history.

**Postcritique**

**(and new theories of value):**

Anker (2017)

Anker and Felksi (2017)

Best and Marcus (2009)

Castiglia (2013 & 2017)

Castronovo and Glimp (2013)

Dillon (2022)

Dillon and Craig (2021)

Felksi (2008 & 2015)

Moi (2017).

See also Latour (2004) and Sedgwick (1997).

This paper's **postcritique premises**:

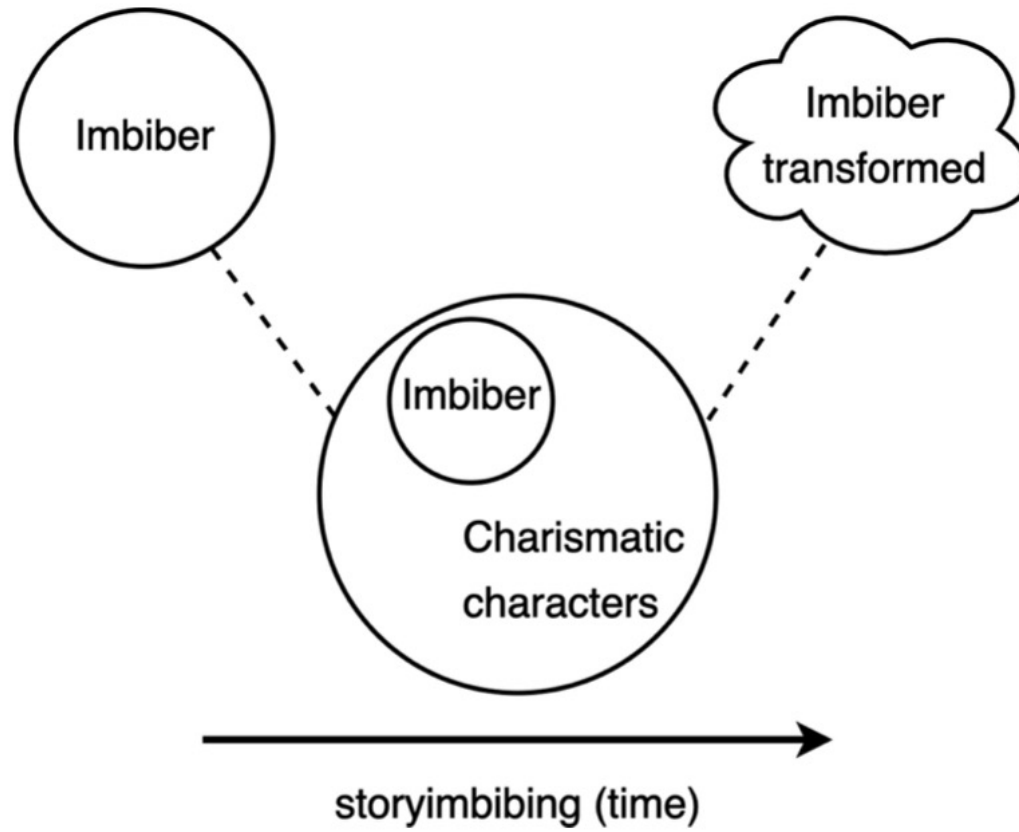
- 1) that there is neither a necessary nor essential relationship between literary criticism and opposition (political or ideological) BUT that that does not mean that any literary criticism that is not ideologically informed is a form of quietism;
- 2) that both context and form matter;
- 3) that the new thought needed about how literary criticism might be embedded in the public realm requires relinquishing any claim to literature's uniqueness or specificity.

## Four Functions of Stories:

1. Stories enable multiple **points of view**, increasing knowledge and understanding of a system.
2. Stories create and consolidate collective **identities**, helping identify social groups, understand motivations and actions, and recognise social norms and how they are or might be changing.
3. Stories are narrative **models**, functional tools that enable explanation and understanding.
4. Stories function as **anticipatory** narrative models, part of their wider role in anticipatory systems, imagining and testing a range of futures in order to enable better reasoning in the present.

**Function 1:**

**Points of View**



**FIGURE 1.1** Representation of the Narrative-Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis (NEAH).

# POINTS OF VIEW

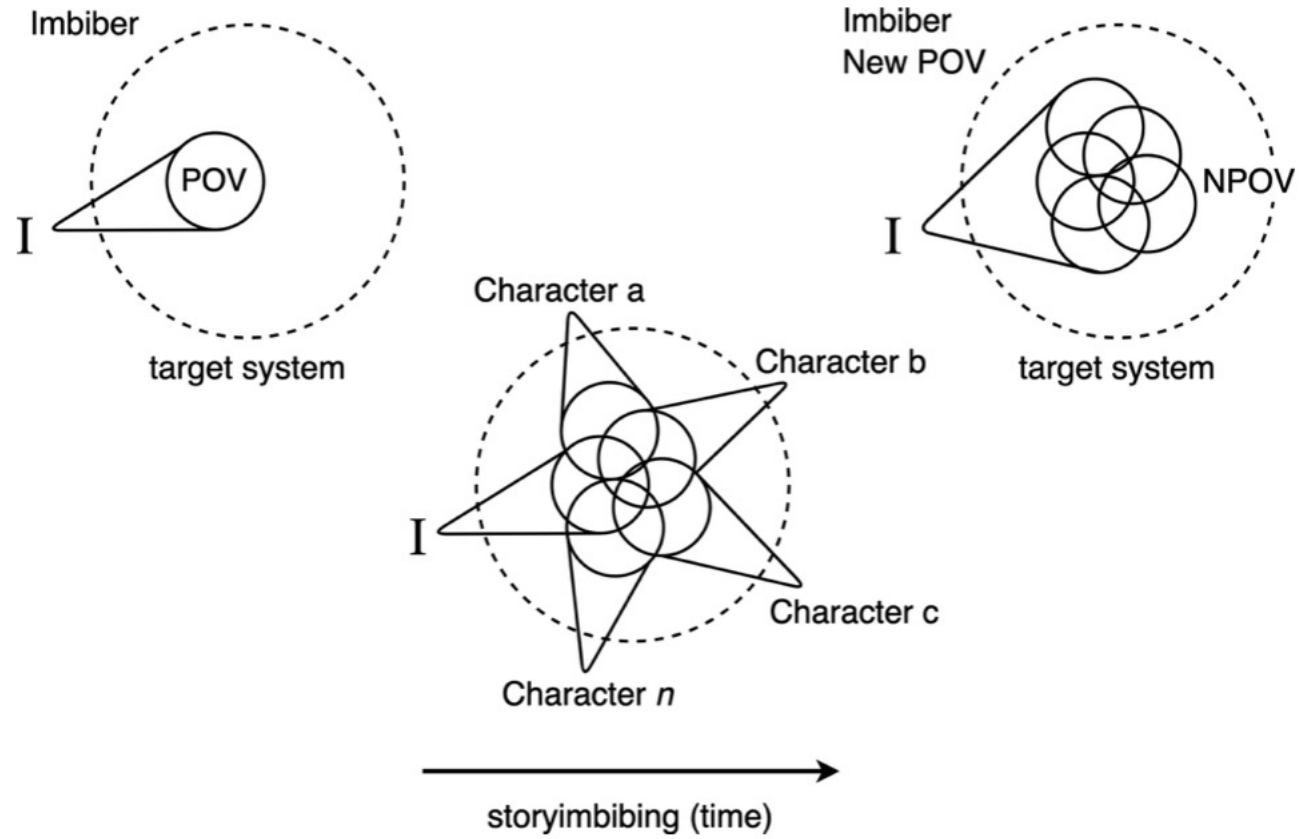
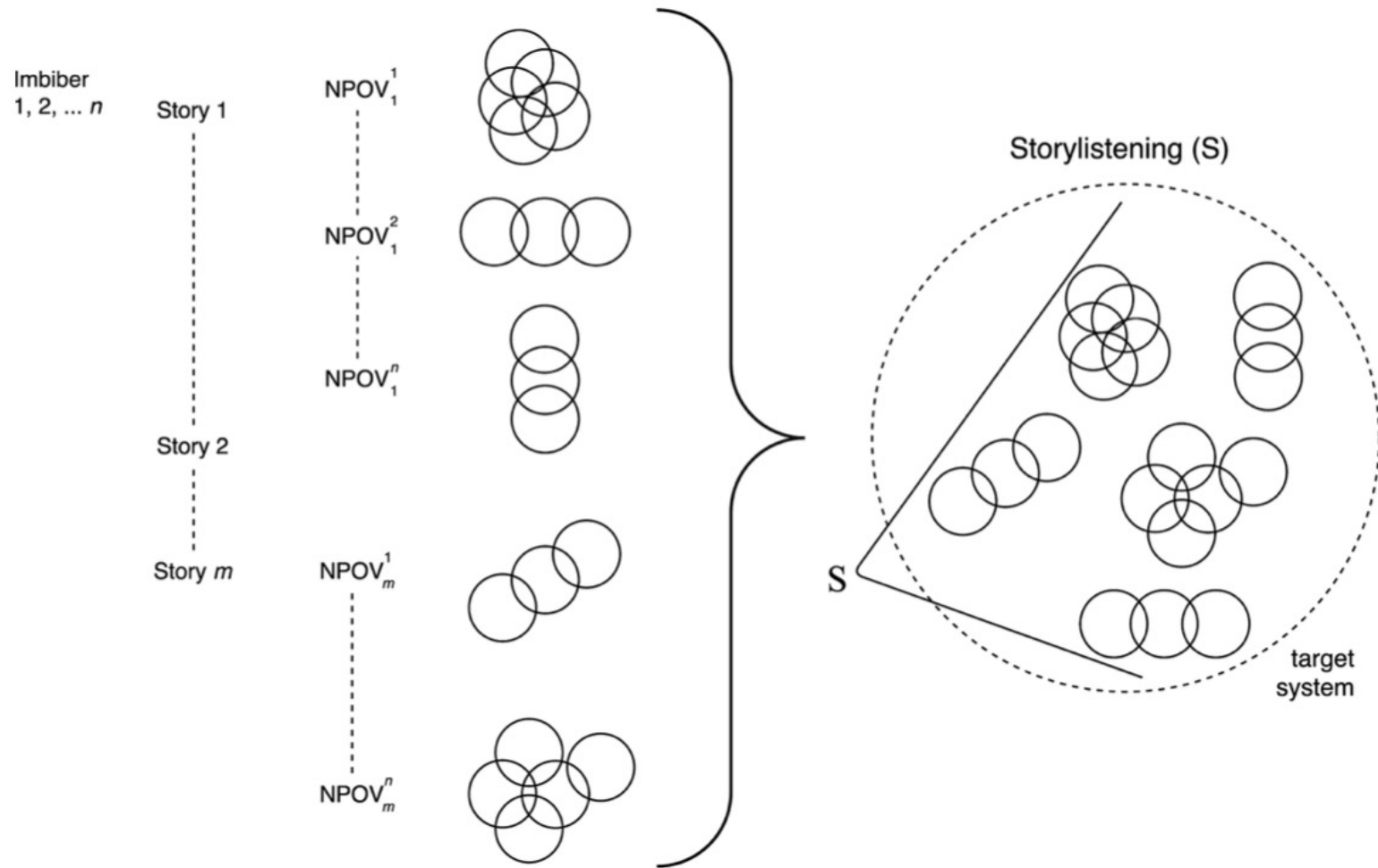


FIGURE 1.2 (a) Representation of Points of View – Part A: Storyimbibing.

**POINTS OF VIEW**



**FIGURE 1.2 (b)** Representation of Points of View – Part B: Storylistening.



**Function 2:**

**Identities**

storysharing – how stories shared within groups convey social norms and other information relevant to group coherence, constituting identities and influencing behaviour

storycontent - stories provide insight into the nature of collective identities, how they are formed and maintained, through their modelling of such identities in the contents of the story

narrative networks – groups whose interactions and hence whose collective identities and behaviours are informed by storyimbibing – storytelling, storysharing, or storycreating

# **Function 3:**

# **Modelling**

**Narrative model** - an idealised description or conception of a target system, through narrative means, which can help perform some cognitive function with respect to that system, yielding knowledge through *surrogate reasoning* (Swoyer, 1991)

**DEKI account of representation:**

denotation, exemplification, keying up, imputation (Frigg and Nguyen, 2020)

A model *denotes* a target system.

The model *exemplifies* certain properties of that system – this is a selective act determined by context.

These properties are *imputed* to the target system by the model designer or the model user – that is, s/he stipulates that the properties exemplified in the model hold in the target system. But an exact correspondence is rarely proposed.

A precise articulation of the relationship between the properties of the model and their imputed correlates in the target system is needed. This precise articulation is a *key*, which explains exactly how the properties of the model relate to the target system.

**Function 4:**

**Anticipation**

### **Narrative futures methods:**

**Incasting** - the story functions as a prompt for speculation on impacts of alternative futures: 'incasting is a simple matter of having participants divide into small groups and read a paragraph that describes a rather extreme version of an alternative future. [...] They are then asked to describe the impacts on a series of domains, such as law, politics, family life, entertainment, education, work, etc'. (Bishop et al., 2007, p. 12)

**Backcasting** - a future state is envisioned and then a story is created about the events that would lead from the present to that future state.

**Future mapping** - uses predefined narrative end-state scenarios, but also includes ideas for events leading up to those states. Participant teams then select and arrange the events, in essence creating a 'full story' but with the assistance of having the story pathway parts provided, although with their ordering and connection to be determined.

**Science fiction prototyping (SFP)** - an 'emerging foresight technique' inspired by 'hard' science fiction. SF prototypes are defined by Brian David Johnson as 'short stories, movies and comics that are created based on real science and technology' (p. v). They have a twofold function: one, commercial and instrumentalist, to help develop new products and technologies; the other, social and ethical, using science fiction to explore the use and implications of those future technologies.

**Collaborative storytelling games** - can function similarly to SFP, with the same benefits, in particular offering an important avenue to further include non-experts in futures work (Avin, 2019; Candy, 2018; Belton and Dillon, 2021).

**Anticipatory narrative models** – existing SF stories (Dillon and Craig, 2021).

## Consequence for Pedagogy

### Aims of literary pedagogy informed by functional criticism

#### - that students should:

- develop narrative literacy
- understand the individual and collective functions of stories
- encounter interdisciplinary theories of narrative
- be taught and encouraged to put into practice a range of literary critical methods as befits the function of the story and the criticism, including close reading, theoretical, historical and contextual approaches, as well as sociological and empirical approaches

#### - that teachers should:

- convey information, train. Pedagogy as 'instruction, discipline, training; a system of introductory training; a means of guidance' (OED)
- stage a (surprising) encounter between teacher, student, and story. Pedagogy as open and generative, avoiding the tautological risk of 'strong theory' which 'can't help or can't stop or can't do anything other than proving the very same assumptions with which it began' (Sedgwick, 1997, p.14).

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