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John Holloway

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Narrative and structure: exploratory essays

JOHN HOLLOWAY

Professor of Modern English in the
University of Cambridge
and Fellow of Queens' College

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PREFACE

The main part of this book comprises five chapters on various aspects of narrative structure, and various works of fiction which have seemed to me to elucidate them. In some of these chapters certain mathematical ideas make an appearance, but I should be the first to hope that others, better qualified than I, may see possibilities of advance far beyond what I have attempted.

The topics or works I have selected have been selected for a particular reason. I do not think it would have been fruitful to confine the book to, say, fiction from a certain historical period, or by some certain author. If that had been the method adopted, the likelihood is that some of the works might readily have lent themselves to the kinds of analysis attempted here, and others much less so. The probable result would have been laboured, artificial and unrewarding. Still less, I believe, would it have been wise to plot out varieties of analysis in the abstract, and then cast about for narratives to subject to them.

Instead of either of these ways of proceeding, I have waited until I found works that, on reflection, looked as if they raised particular problems in the field of a certain kind of analytic approach, or would perhaps make it fruitful in their particular case. The first five chapters, therefore, are a series of fresh starts only superficially. Essentially, they try to explore a large field by opening it up at the points where it most invites exploration, because a way of thinking, and a literary work, seem to come together promisingly.

The concluding chapter tries not so much to draw the threads together (I believe that, again, would have produced something fruitlessly abstract and 'programmatically'), but to assess some of the ways in which these various kinds of analysis bear upon the most central concerns of criticism, the 'nerve and life' of the critic's

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task. The two appendices, one mainly on poetic structures, the other on oratory, are included because their methods of enquiry are clearly analogous to those in the main chapters, on narratives. What is offered to the reader in all, therefore, is a book which does not circumscribe and conclude a discussion, though I hope it opens one.

Chapters 1 and 5 are revised versions of essays that appeared first in *Critical Inquiry* (in 1976 and 1975 respectively); Appendix 1 was published in *Miscellanea Anglo-Americana: Festschrift für Helmut Viebrock*, Munich, 1976; and Appendix 2 in George Levine and William Madden (eds), *The Art of Victorian Prose*, 1968. For all these grateful acknowledgement is made here. A number of colleagues in Cambridge and also Manchester Universities have discussed ideas in this book with me, and I now offer them thanks.

Cambridge, 1979

J.H.