



# The Opacity of Narrative

By Peter Lamarque

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What is narrative? What is distinctive about the great literary narratives? In virtue of what is a narrative fictional or non-fictional? In this important new book Peter Lamarque, one of the leading philosophers of literature at work today, explores these and related questions to bring new clarity and insight to debates about narrative in philosophy, critical theory, and narratology.

He highlights 'opacity' as a feature of literary narratives and examines the implications for our understanding of fictional worlds and fictional characters. Throughout he challenges received views about narrative, questioning the indispensability of narrative in an individual's self-conception and the importance of both truth and emotion as measures of literary greatness. He reflects on the 'non-fiction' novel arguing that it does not weaken the distinction between fiction and no-fiction.

The book offers a compelling and original account of these and other issues, making a critical contribution to topical and wide-ranging debates.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

The central idea of opacity both illuminates some of Lamarque's earlier work and builds on it. Lamarque is, arguably, the leading figure in philosophy of literature, and this book will undoubtedly have a major influence on philosophical discussions for many years to come. It is filled with careful and well-laid out literary examples and subtle arguments, and it continually manifests a curious and wide-ranging intelligence. (*Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*)

This welcome volume collects together eight of Peter Lamarque's published papers on narrative as well as adding two that have not been previously published. They re-express, clarify, and in some places supplement the view expressed in the book he co-wrote with Olsen (1994) .... Having the essays together, as well as being a great convenience, brings out some of the depth and complexity of Lamarque's account .... The laudatory claims on the back cover get it right; this is an important book which is essential reading for anyone working in the area—whether that means in the current narrow debate on literature and narrative or in the debate on narrative more generally. (Derek Matravers, Professor of Philosophy, The Open University *The Philosophical Quarterly*)

In this book, Peter Lamarque brings his distinctive views about fiction and literature to the related but different topic of narrative. Narratives, especially but not only literary ones, are not windows through which we look at the actual or possible worlds, but opaque constructions we must look *into* to discover not just what is represented but the way it is represented. Taking this basic idea and applying it to both longstanding and recent controversies about the nature and value of narratives of many kinds, Lamarque reaches enlightening, new conclusions about these topics. This is essential reading for anyone interested in narrative. (Robert Stecker, Professor of Philosophy, Central Michigan University)

*The Opacity of Narrative* is a must-read for anyone with a serious interest in narrative. Smart, provocative, and urbane, it is Peter Lamarque at his philosophical best. (John Gibson, Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Louisville)

With characteristic acuity, incisiveness, and analytical precision Peter Lamarque shows how what we see in literature is importantly unlike what we see through photography, and he offers a full investigation of the various roles narrative does, and -- equally important -- does not, play in literary experience. Working in concert, this powerful set of essays takes the next major step in understanding the often unobvious relations between narrative, art, and life.

(Garry Hagberg, James H. Ottaway Jr. Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics, Bard College)

Incisively argued and elegantly written, this book provides a compelling and distinctive philosophy of literature from one of the foremost philosophers of art today. Lamarque advances a refreshing skepticism toward many commonly accepted views about narrative and its relation to literature, including whether truth and emotional responses are as important to the value of literature as often claimed. Adapting the concept of opacity from philosophy of language, he endorses the view that the content of the work, its characters and events, are constituted by their modes of presentation. Vivid examples illustrate how, in reading literature, we look *at* it rather than *through* it to fictional worlds.

(Susan Feagin, Research Professor, Temple University and former editor of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*)

The ten essays of this volume address a myriad of interlocking themes in the philosophy of literature, among them: distinguishing fiction from nonfiction, the sources of literary value, truth in fiction, affective response, and narrative models of personal identity. [T]aken together [Lamarque's theoretical interventions] offer a highly rewarding theoretical framework for understanding and evaluating literary narratives: a framework Lamarque calls opacity ... One of the many merits of this book, a volume that anyone interested in the philosophy of literature must contend with, is a strong defense of a conception of literary fiction in which its distinctive values and experiences are made plain. (*Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 73 Issue 3)

Despite the difficulties that the idea of opacity brings with it, [this book] labels a persuasive account of what makes literary narratives special. On this view, literary narratives have distinct, inherent values independently of any actual reader's reaction to them. In order to benefit from the valuable literariness of these narratives, the reader has to attune him- or herself and assume the proper literary attitude that these texts demand. As a book built around this main tenet, *The Opacity of Narrative* is an invaluable collection for anyone interested in how to think about narratives. (*British Journal of Aesthetics*)

Lamarque not only outlines the most important recent debates in the area of aesthetics and philosophy of literature — his reasoning is also conclusive, cogent and ingenious with respect to any topic he brings into focus. Thorough reading of this excellent and elegantly written book will be profitable and enriching for anyone, no matter whether one is already familiar with Lamarque's thinking or not. (*Mind: A Quarterly Review of Philosophy*)

*The Opacity of Narrative* sets out with admirable lucidity the questions and queries and the tricky issues in the fields of epistemology, philosophy and aesthetics that arise when narrative loses any claim to transparency. (*Irish Left Review*)

#### About the Author

**Peter Lamarque** is professor of philosophy at the University of York, UK. His many publications include *Work and Object: Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art* (OUP, 2010), *The Philosophy of Literature* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition* (with Stein Haugem Olsen, Wiley-Blackwell, 2003) and *Fictional Points of View* (Cornell UP, 1996). He was Editor of the *British Journal of Aesthetics* from 1995 to 2008.

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