

WHAT STORIES ARE

Narrative Theory and Interpretation

Thomas M. Leitch

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
University Park and London

1986

Contents

Preface	ix
Part One	
Narrative Ontology	
1 What Stories Aren't	3
Narrative as Drama	4
What Aren't Stories	7
Saving the Story	12
2 Narrative as a Display Mode	18
What Makes Stories Worth Telling?	23
Tellability and Narratology	31
Tellability and Narrativity	33
3 The Teleological Principle	42
Prosaic Closure	43
Action and Knowledge in the Short Story	45
Closure and Teleology in Dickens	50
4 The Discursive Principle	63
Stories without Endings	64
Alternatives to Teleology	69
Digression as a Structural Principle	73
Narration as Supposition	77
5 The Polytypic Principle	83
From Projection to Retrospection	84
What Novels Display	90

<i>Odysseus Polutropos</i>	94
Two Redactions of Homer	98
Part Two	
Narrative Tropes	
6 The Narrative World	107
Just Before the Apocalypse	109
Worlds and Rules	113
No-Frills Narrative	119
7 Plot	130
How Plot Means	131
Acting and Action in Shakespearean Tragedy	135
Plot in the English Sonnet	139
Action and Existence	143
8 Character	148
Before Character	149
What Are Characters Made Of?	154
Characters and People	158
9 Narrative Fiction and Nonfiction	166
The Commitments of Nonfiction	167
The Commitments of Fiction	174
10 Toward Narrative Aesthetics	184
The Documentary Event	184
The Aesthetics of Hollywood Storytelling	193
What Stories Do	198
Notes	203
Index	215