



The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel

Alex Woloch



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Does a novel focus on one life or many? Alex Woloch uses this simple question to develop a powerful new theory of the realist novel, based on how narratives distribute limited attention among a crowded field of characters. His argument has important implications for both literary studies and narrative theory.

Characterization has long been a troubled and neglected problem within literary theory. Through close readings of such novels as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Great Expectations*, and *Le Père Goriot*, Woloch demonstrates that the representation of any character takes place within a shifting field of narrative attention and obscurity. Each individual--whether the central figure or a radically subordinated one--emerges as a character only through his or her distinct and contingent space within the narrative as a whole. The "character-space," as Woloch defines it, marks the dramatic interaction between an implied person and his or her delimited position within a narrative structure. The organization of, and clashes between, many character-spaces within a single narrative totality is essential to the novel's very achievement and concerns, striking at issues central to narrative poetics, the aesthetics of realism, and the dynamics of literary representation.

Woloch's discussion of character-space allows for a different history of the novel and a new definition of characterization itself. By making the implied person indispensable to our understanding of literary form, this book offers a forward-looking avenue for contemporary narrative theory.



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