



*Narrative Concepts in the
Study of Eighteenth-Century
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Narrative Concepts in the Study of Eighteenth-Century Literature was published in 2017 in the scholarly publication series Crossing Boundaries: Turku Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, which, according to the series editor Matti Peikola, welcomes “monographs and edited volumes placed at the intersection of disciplinary boundaries, introducing fresh connections between established fields of study”. Indeed, the purpose of this edited volume, consisting of thirteen contributions, is to address the compatibility of two fundamentally different conceptualizations, that is, “universally valid” narratological concepts and their historical and content-specific counterparts, and to investigate their applicability in the study of eighteenth-century literature. The main aim of the volume is to discuss the intersection of the two approaches on a meta-level, but the historically aware application of narratological concepts has also yielded interesting observations concerning the texts studied and provides new avenues for research.

Liisa Steinby and Aino Mäkikalli’s introduction alone makes this book worth reading and relevant for those disciplines in the humanities that apply modern conceptualizations in the study of historical material (“Introduction: The Place of Narratology in the Historical Study of Eighteenth-Century Literature” pp. 7–37). Steinby and Mäkikalli trace developments in narratology from its structuralist phase to its “postclassical” phase, after which they observe practices on concept formation in the historical study of literature. They observe that narratology has been “following in the footsteps of linguistics” (p. 13), a statement that rings true to many other disciplines in the humanities as well. They point out that the aim of classical narratology was not to interpret individual works but to provide a taxonomy of narrative structures. The zeal with which early narratologists aimed to raise the academic status of literary scholarship meant that those content-related, historical and contextual aspects of narrative that cannot be easily defined but are highly pertinent to the study of literature had to be excluded from narratological analysis. Later narratologists have tried to mend this shortcoming with diachronic, cultural and contextual approaches. Furthermore, contemporary narratologists, such as Alber and Fludernik (2010) have observed that the allegedly ahistorical narratological categories

were mainly derived from the eighteenth- to early twentieth-century novel, which makes their universality questionable. Steinby and Mäkikalli conclude that narratological concepts should be used with caution in historical literary research: “The idea that the compatibility of narratological concepts with literary historical research, and their usefulness in it, consists in narratology’s providing the tools for dealing with the formal traits in narrative discourse, to which historical research adds content and context, turns out to be simplistic and defective” (p. 25). This is because form and content of a narrative (or human communication in general) cannot be separated. Both are historically variable and contextually determined.

Michael McKeon’s lengthy essay, “The Eighteenth-Century Challenge to Narrative Theory” (pp. 39–77), explicitly addresses the questions brought out in Steinby and Mäkikalli’s introduction. McKeon attacks the ahistoricism and universalism in narratological concept formation, pointing out some major divergences in the understanding of basic concepts, such as mimesis and diegesis, in modern realist theory and classical theory of mimesis. McKeon’s main targets are the narratologists Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal, and his criticism is based on a parallel reading of their main texts and fundamental classical texts on literary imitation by Aristotle and Plato as well as on examples taken from 18th-century literature (mainly Richardson’s *Pamela*). McKeon further discusses Genette’s and Bal’s typologies of reported discourse, refuting, especially, their definitions of *free indirect discourse* (FID). This thread of McKeon’s article suffers from a selective reading of recent work on FID, not to mention from textual silence concerning some earlier texts, such as those by Meir Sternberg (1981 and 1982), for instance, that discuss reported discourse in relation to mimesis and diegesis.

In his essay entitled “Formalism and Historicity Reconciled in Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones*” (pp. 79–97), John Richetti tackles the universality of narratological concepts. For Richetti, the “justly-celebrated” plot of *Tom Jones* is “distinct from what we now think of as a ‘plot’” (p. 79). Rather than being an unfolding or exploration of characters’ destinies and developing identities, the plot of Fielding’s masterpiece is “a visible rhetorical artifice” (p. 80). Richetti’s argument is based on his analysis of the nature of Fielding’s characters and their impact on the events. Special attention is paid to the

minor character of Ensign Northerton, who is highly instrumental for the plot of *Tom Jones* but remains “a unique loose end” in the summing up of all the characters at the end of the novel. It is this “unassimilated characterological substance” (p. 96) that separates Fielding’s comic romance from novelistic plots in the current sense.

Monika Fludernik writes about descriptions of interiors in English literature in her article “Perspective and Focalization in Eighteenth-Century Descriptions” (pp. 99–119). Her starting point is Karl Stanzel’s (1984) “(a) perspectivism thesis”, which concerns the imaginative evocation of novelistic space and the reader’s ability to visualize the setting precisely and in empirically validatable terms. According to Stanzel, descriptive passages tended to be aperspectival before the late nineteenth century, as perspectivism asserted itself with the onset of interior focalization. In her article, Fludernik analyzes excerpts from eighteenth-century English fiction and non-fiction. Her conclusions confirm Cynthia Wall’s (2006) claim that descriptions of rooms have a marginal position in eighteenth-century texts, which can be partly explained by the cultural context: before the second half of the eighteenth century, non-aristocratic households did not have a fixed arrangement of furniture. Interestingly, Fludernik’s study also suggests that the relationship between focalization and perspectivism is not as clear-cut as Stanzel’s model indicates.

Aino Mäkikalli questions the universality of the notion of time – one of the premises of the analysis of temporality in classical narratology that has raised controversy among later narratologists – in her “Temporality in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*” (pp. 121–134). Mäkikalli analyzes temporality at the structural level of narrative and from the point of view of characterization in the studied corpus. Her contribution to the narratological discussion on temporality is a study on temporal ordering in the context of the conceptions of time prevalent during the composition of the works in question, since “contemporary concepts of time [...] are embedded in all fiction” (p. 122). Her analysis indicates that temporality remains vague and represents timelessness in *Oroonoko*, whereas in *Robinson Crusoe* the precise time scale marks a new, chronological time.

Liisa Steinby's essay "Temporality, Subjectivity and the Representation of Characters in the Eighteenth-Century Novel: From Defoe's *Moll Flanders* to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*" (pp. 135–160) also raises the question whether the "abstract quasi-physical concepts of time and focalization" (p. 138) of classical narratology are suitable for studying temporality in the eighteenth-century novel. Steinby's focus is on the subjective aspect of time and she examines the temporalization of experience through the main characters in the studied corpus. Her analysis demonstrates that in *Moll Flanders* the protagonist's experience of time is essentially related to her struggle for subsistence. The main character's aging is highly related to her agency, and it also determines the rhythm of the narrative. *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* represents a more complex experience of time and its relation to identity formation. By depicting the main character's fruitless efforts of understanding himself on the basis of his past acts and experiences, Goethe underlines the inherent disparateness of the modern human condition, Steinby concludes.

Dorothee Birke discusses varieties and functions of *authorial narration* – a concept coined by Stanzel, referring to narration where the narrator is highly visible and audible – in her essay "Authorial Narration Reconsidered: Eliza Haywood's *Betsy Thoughtless*, Anonymous *Charlotte Summers*, and the Problem of Authority in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Novel" (pp. 161–176). This type of narration has lately experienced a revival in the works of some British and American authors. Birke argues that its use was more complex than has hitherto been understood already in the mid-eighteenth century. For instance, a careful rereading of the narrator's comments at the beginning of *Betsy Thoughtless* allows a reinterpretation of Haywood's alleged "conventional misogyny" (p. 166). In her analysis, Birke juxtaposes two different types of authorial narration: the restrained commentaries of the narrator in *Betsy Thoughtless* and the "flamboyant" and playful intrusions of the narrator in *Charlotte Summers*. In spite of differences in style, both kinds of narrator's comments seem to serve as rhetorical bids for authority rather than as means of reinforcing authorial control.

Karin Kukkonen's critique toward "structuralist abstraction" (p. 195) takes place through her discussion on the notion of *tellability* from the

eighteenth-century perspective (“Problems of Tellability in German Eighteenth-Century Criticism and Novel-Writing”, pp. 177–198). This notion refers to characteristics that make a narrative worth telling and reading and that can appear on several levels of the narrative or be dependent on the cultural context. Kukkonen writes that, revealingly, this concept was adopted to narratology from sociolinguistics, which had used it for analyzing *why* oral narratives are shared and listened to (p. 177, p. 195). Kukkonen bases her discussion on her analysis of Maria Anna Sagar’s novel *Karolinens Tagebuch; ohne ausserordentliche Handlungen, oder gerade so viel als gar keine* (1774) and on contemporary German-language literary discussions on “the marvelous” and “probability”, the cornerstones of tellability, in fiction. Kukkonen argues that eighteenth-century fiction, where many novels play with “improbable probability” combined with metafictionality, allows us to broaden the modern notion of tellability: “tellability can emerge from surprising, yet fitting plot solutions from foregrounding the very fittedness of a convention metafictionally” (p. 195).

Claudia Nitschke’s all-embracing and not entirely reader-friendly essay “Immediacy: The Function of Embedded Narratives in Wieland’s *Don Sylvio*” (pp. 199–223) concerns the same cultural context as Kukkonen’s: the German language literary scene of the eighteenth century. Nitschke’s methodological point of departure is to combine structural narratological analysis with close analysis of the historical context. Her study concerns embedded narratives on the metadiegetic level in three texts. The main focus is on Wieland’s novel *Don Sylvio* (1764), which is a Don Quixotesque story of the dangers of pathologically immersive reading habits. Nitschke completes this analysis by brief discussions on Lessing’s play *Nathan der Weise* (1779) and Goethe’s *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* (1795) to capture different stages in literary self-perception in the late eighteenth century.

Christine Waldschmidt’s essay “The Tension between Idea and Narrative Form: The Example as a Narrative Structure in Enlightenment Literature” (pp. 225–247) also concerns the eighteenth century in the German-language context. Waldschmidt addresses the questions presented in Steinby and Mäkikalli’s introduction by discussing the relationship between narrative representation and its message, which has never been done in narratological

theory, according to Steinby and Mäkikalli (p. 32). Eighteenth-century literature offers suitable material for an investigation of this kind, since some of its genres, especially the fable, explicitly served a didactic purpose and since narrative form was used as a rhetorical means for persuading readers. Waldschmidt provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between the thought content and its narrative in two very different types of moral tale, a fable of a dying Wolf (1759) by Lessing and a translation (1785) that Schiller made of Diderot's embedded narrative in *Jacques le fataliste*, known as the story of Madame de la Pommeraye. As the analysis does not yield very clear results, the main purpose of this article seems to be "to gently rock the all-too-steady boat of [...] narratological certainty" (p. 244).

Penny Pritchard uses a completely new corpus for narratological analysis in her essay "Speaking Well of the Dead": Characterization in the Early Modern Funeral Sermon" (pp. 249–268). She analyzes characterizations of real people, portrayed by Protestant ministers in published funeral sermons dating from the long eighteenth century. This unusual corpus for narratological analysis is thoroughly and convincingly justified in the essay's introduction. Pritchard refers to cognitive factors related to the "Theory of Mind", on the one hand, and to the fuzziness of textual genres in the eighteenth century, on the other. She writes: "The cross-fertilization of early modern popular print – in literary genre and otherwise – offers far more analytical scope and insight into this cultural period than the later imposition of formalized critical boundaries between them" (p. 253). According to her analysis, the characterization of the deceased in the sermons studied usually extends beyond one order of characterization (e.g. professional identity) and tends to follow a strict pattern. Owing to the didactic function of this genre, the characterizations almost always included praise for the deceased. The wider context of historical and biographical narratives from this period "invites our further scrutiny" (p. 265).

Pat Rogers critically investigates Genette's notion of *paratext* in "The Use of Paratext in Popular Eighteenth-Century Biography: The Case of Edmund Curll" (pp. 269–287). As Rogers points out, this notion *per se* is not universal as it is dependent on the linguistic and cultural context where it is used: in Genette's thinking, paratext is linked to the French word *seuil*, which is not identical to the corresponding term in English, threshold. Furthermore,

paratexts' nature, proportion in relation to "the main text" and functions vary according to context. For instance, what Genette considers paratext might be considered the main text in some scholarly settings (to give an example, in the field of translation studies, Genette's notion of translation as paratext has been strongly criticized, see Tahir Gürçaglar 2002). Rogers' analysis concerns the use of paratexts in the biographies brought out by the rascally publisher Edmund Curll in the late 1720s and early 1730s. The analysis demonstrates that Curll's paratexts, which tended to be more extensive than the main text and seem to belong more to the history of publishing than to the development of the literary text, served "a different function from the purely ancillary of supplementary role described by Genette" (p. 286).

Teemu Ikonen also discusses Genette's concept of paratext in his essay "Peritextual Disposition in French Eighteenth-Century Narratives" (pp. 289–308). Ikonen finds Genette's theory of paratext more suitable than Genette's structural narratology when it comes to studying narratives from the historical perspective. This theory, with all its shortcomings, takes better account of the history of the book and the development of print culture, which need to inform this kind of analysis. Ikonen understands peritextuality as dispositional effects, that is, as effects related to the dynamics of power relations, "across the boundary of text and off-text" (p. 292). He addresses the main question of the volume related to the *rapprochement* of theory and history as well as text and context by analyzing two texts, Diderot's *Les deux amis de Bourbonne* and De Laclos' *Liaisons dangereuses*, whose structure in the original editions and subsequent revisions exemplify the fuzziness between text and off-text. Ikonen's analysis illustrates that in the two texts "peritextual effects emerge as boundary-crossing movements from story to narration and framing texts, in the positioning of authorship, in the interplay of narrative features and other discourses, and in the ambiguous references to textual features and contextual factors" (p. 304). Against this background, Ikonen argues that narratology should also account for textual phenomena that have until now belonged to the domain of textual criticism. **N**

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