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Narratological Concepts across Languages and Cultures

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Foreword

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“Whatever Happened to Narratology?” asks the title of an essay by Christine Brooke-Rose. “*It got swallowed into story* seems the obvious answer: it slid off the slippery methods of a million structures and became the story of its own functioning – like mathematics, which never claimed to speak of anything but itself, or even to speak at all” (1990: 283).

Were Brooke-Rose to pose the same question today, would she answer in the same terms? Clearly not. The lively debates and multifarious developments that have animated narratology over the past quarter-century show that what has happened to narratology is that, far from slipping over the horizon of irrelevancies, it has expanded into areas that could hardly have been imagined a few decades ago. The fifteen contributions to this collection of essays all bear witness to the vitality of ongoing research in the field, but also to the wealth of topics waiting to be explored, examined more deeply or reconsidered, or indeed that are now in the process of being formulated.

“Emerging Vectors of Narratology: Toward Consolidation or Diversification?” Such was the theme of the 3rd conference of the European Narratology Network (ENN), held in Paris on March 29 and 30, 2013, where the contributions to this special issue of the AJCN, now full-length articles, originated. A mere glance at their titles is enough to see to what degree the authors have worked in the spirit of these emerging vectors. The authors’ contributions speak more eloquently for themselves than can be hoped for in the modest comments in these introductory pages. The necessarily incomplete presentations that follow are meant to provide a brief overview of the five areas of inquiry into which the texts have been grouped, but in particular they are intended to encourage readers to explore these contributions for themselves.

I. Toward a reconfiguration of narrative concepts

Arguing in favor of a narratology based on socio-pragmatic linguistics and cultural semiotics, Beatriz Penas-Ibáñez questions the premises of both natural and unnatural narratology. She appeals to Bakhtin, Lotman and the Prague School semiotics and refers, instead, to the notion of standard and non-standard narratives, more pertinent, in her view, from a cultural-semiotic perspective. Standardization, unlike the natural, follows a process of selection, codification, re-elaboration and implementation which is not culture-specific. In order to illustrate these and other principles, Penas-Ibáñez offers an illuminating portrait of Japanese narrative literature. Here, the standard is not nineteenth-century realism and its violations, but rather a haiku-like compression

of narrative meaning achieved through a syncretic treatment of image-word and poetry-prose, a practice which has its roots in intercultural Sino-Japanese relations. Non-standard by western criteria, Japanese narrative standards have nonetheless penetrated western literature through Ezra Pound's and T.E. Hulme's imagism, a process which is further reflected in the process of hybridization in (post)modern fiction.

Reading works from foreign cultures has always posed a wide array challenges and has produced a multitude of methodologies and critical practices. Bohumil Fořt proposes to approach the issues from the standpoint of possible worlds narrative theory. Here, fictional encyclopedias are understood to diverge from the actual-world encyclopedia, requiring readers to make inferences across world boundaries to capture the implicit meaning. But how might fictional encyclopedias influence the actual-world encyclopedia? This question has never really been addressed. Fořt proposes to study the perspectives opened up by this configuration with a case study of Milan Kundera's novel *The Joke*. Written in 1965 and first published in Czech in 1967, the English translation appeared in 1969, one year after the events of the Prague spring. Interpreted by the English-speaking public as an indictment of post-war Stalinist Czechoslovakia, Kundera retorted that *The Joke* is a love story. Fořt concludes that Kundera's strategy is in fact one of provoking misunderstanding by replacing the real-world encyclopedia with fictional encyclopedias while modeling the latter as reading programs.

In yet another study that explores how concepts intersect and combine, Ludmila Comuzzi reconsiders the standard generic opposition between narrative and non-narrative poetry. Genre is conceived, in line with recent Russian scholarship, in analogy with the gene in biology, so that no matter what transformations and dislocations traditional genres might undergo over time, their structures, like organisms, do not fundamentally change but only mutate. What sets poetry off from prose is that the structures of the former are "noticeably measured and rhythmical." Yet, poetry's "fine-textured counterpoint of verse, syntax and narrative," which takes the form of segmentivity, gapping and measurement/ countermeasurement at various textual levels (McHale), carries over, in Comuzzi's proposal, to prose. Narrative texts, she argues, construct metric patterns and countermeasurements to these patterns through the various planes of point of view inscribed in the supra-phrasal units of narrative composition identified by Boris Uspenskij. Comuzzi completes her contribution to transgeneric narratology with a penetrating analysis of a corpus of lyric poems in which narrative scenarios, however discreet, are indissociable from the counterpoint of meter and rhythm.

The question of space in narrative has persistently been framed in terms of the opposition between description and narration. This association has resulted in impoverished notions of narrative space, going so far in some cases as to sever the

spatial order from the logical/causal and temporal orders. Joshua Parker, drawing on a large and varied body of sources ranging from ancient Greek and modern philosophy to sociology, cognitive science and literary theory, proposes to re-examine narrative space by considering space in fields outside literature, but also in relation to the narrative concepts of setting, background, landscape, schemata, causality, temporality and particularly place. If space is an abstract notion, place is where something occurs, a space that determines its own type of actions: from this standpoint, space pertains to description as much as it does to narration and must be seen as “the container of history and the generator of story” (Parker quoting Friedman). Parker concludes: “In imagining what events ‘mean’, might we not only ask ‘what do they lead to in a causal chain?’ but look more closely at where they happen and what this ‘where’ means to those involved, be they readers, characters or narrators?”

II Paratext, metalepsis, caesura

The problem of paratext in narratives that employ various visual and graphic devices, on the one hand, and the resources of the new media technologies, on the other, is taken up by Virginia Pignagnoli. Discussing Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) as a paradigmatic twenty-first century example, Pignagnoli proposes to expand Genette’s model of paratext so as to include issues of media affordances and digital support. She thus introduces what she calls “paratext 2.0” which consists of “material peritexts” (visual, iconic, material elements included in texts) as opposed to “digital epitexts” (authors’ websites, blogs, videos, social networks, etc.). Such a framework, she argues, goes beyond an analytic typology of paratext and at the same time allows for a medium-specific analysis of works employing both printed and digital media.

Metalepsis, now seen as a more widespread and multifarious phenomenon than was thought only a few years ago, has spawned a variety of partially overlapping theories and models. According to Saartje Goby, most typologies are ultimately predicated on the story/discourse dichotomy, a distinction she herself subscribes to. Noting that narratologists largely associate metalepsis with either the narrator or authorial voice, she proposes to enter into the equation the question of the agent of metalepsis: narrator, character, narratee. Also taken up are the structural paradox produced by metalepsis and the disputed issue of so-called horizontal metalepsis, rejected by some theorists in favor of “transfictionality.” Her own proposal is to distinguish between diegetic and extradiegetic metalepsis: those that mark a purely text-internal transition, on the one hand, and those, on the other hand, that affect the entire text, bringing in the author and the extratextual reality of the reader.

Michał Mrugalski discusses an overlooked historical source of modern narratology that dates back to early nineteenth-century German drama theory: caesura. Developed in particular by Hölderlin, caesura, a counter-rhythmical principle of metrics which

also played a role in the formulation of the Russian formalists' principle of "laying bare of the device," and which at the same time contrasts with narratology's reductionist emphasis on endings (stable vs. unstable), forms the basis of an interruptive theory of narrative: a breaking up of the whole. Interruption, in Hölderlin's eyes, is not only a principal of ancient Greek tragedy but also a condition of narrative representation. Commenting on a famous essay by Šklovskij, Mrugalski contends that a novel such as *Tristram Shandy* comes down to the plotting of a series of interruptions. He also enquires into the relations between caesura and its sister devices, metalepsis and *mise-en-abyme*.

III. Narrative and film

It is well-known that the montage technique in modernist fiction was made possible by the cinema, resulting, for example, in the rise of the so-called cinematic novel. Inna Drach proposes to dismantle this "hybrid" notion by demonstrating, with reference to the writings of Sergej Ėjzenštejn and other Russian theoreticians, that while montage in the cinema is a means of connecting fragments, montage in literature serves to dissociate fragments, rendering their relations illogical. Interestingly, Ėjzenštejn found it difficult to reproduce Dos Passos' novelistic use of montage on the screen, reminding us that the transfer of techniques from one medium to another is not accompanied by the same effects.

James V. Catano explores another aspect of cinema in a study devoted to the convergence of voice and image in a particular cinematic subset of the documentary film which combines nonfiction prose and film: the film essay. Drawing on a corpus of ten film extracts, Catano demonstrates how essay (in the Montaignean tradition), film and narration combine in the film essay in ways that complexify the documentary as mimetic representation and at the same time introduce, through voiced narration, a new range of cinematic and narrative possibilities.

IV. Narrative perspectives on music

Music presents a particular challenge for narratological analysis. Program music, of course, has long been a favored object of study, but more recent research has focused on various dimensions of the narrative-music relationship other than story content. One such connection, based on the music-friendly narratological concept of experientiality, is explored by Christian Hauer. The narratological status of the musical narrator or performer, how the listener actualizes music and the interconnected roles of persona and emotion in musical perception are studied, backed up with a wealth of the relevant recent research in the cognitive sciences.

In a case study of Alban Berg's string quartet *Lyric Suite*, Karl Katschthaler, arguing that musical compositions should be regarded as cultural texts, adopts an intertextual

and intermedial perspective in order to study the autobiographical elements in this work as forces of meaning. Berg's quartet does not narrate a story, but it does convey a sense of the well-documented Baudelairean "spleen" of Berg's aesthetics and the ambivalence in his music between the ascetic modernism of Schönberg's twelve-tone system and the feminization of writing during the first half of the twentieth century. In music, instances of the narratological distinction between the narrated and the narrating are hard to come by. According to Knut Holtsträter, the temporality of music is one of presentness, a temporality akin to the here-and-now, the "showing" of theatrical representations. Extending the field of narratological-musicological investigation beyond the sonata form and program music to cover atonal music, Holtsträter discusses how, in this music, it is not atonality that forces the listener to situate sounds in relation to one another, but rather the lack of a clear rhythmic structure. This underscores the fact that temporality forms the nexus of music, binding it to narrative conceived as a temporal structure representing changes of state.

V. Translating narrative theory

One of the distinctive marks of narratology is that from its beginnings it has frequently drawn on concepts and methodologies adopted from different national traditions. Indeed, it has often been the case that translations of theoretical works have given an impulse to narratological research. One prominent example, of course, is Tzvetan Todorov's *Théorie de la littérature* (1965), a collection of essays by the leading Russian formalists whose impact on early French narratology is indisputable.

Translating narrative theory raises two sorts of difficulties that, it must be observed, are unfortunately seldom faced head on in current research: how to adequately translate technical terms from one language to another, and how to transplant concepts and theoretical paradigms from one culture to another.

The first of these difficulties is addressed by Sylvie Patron, who discusses her experience in translating S.-Y. Kuroda's essays from English to French. Among other things, she points out the perils of "the illusion of translative transparency," noting, for example, the conceptual discrepancies between *histoire*, *récit*, *narration* and their standard English equivalents – *story*, *narrative*, *narration* – and what measures can be taken to avoid the misconceptions that result from such translations.

The obstacles faced when translating narrative theory from English into languages far removed from the European languages, notably Japanese and Turkish, are taken up in two very interesting complementary studies offered by IWAMATSU Masahiro and Bahar Dervişcemaloğlu, respectively. In Japanese, whereas the process of word formation is no obstacle to providing satisfactory equivalents for narratological terminology, the lack of theoretical approaches in Japanese scholarship makes it difficult for scholars to assimilate narratological paradigms. The Turkish language, by

contrast, is not well adapted to the process of word formation when it comes to scientific terminology. It is thus difficult in Turkish to find appropriate terms for current narratological concepts. The solution proposed by Dervişcemaloğlu for translating narrative theory into Turkish is to refer to the so-called *belâgat*, the Ottoman Turkish rhetoric derived from Arabic and Persian sources. Recent Turkish scholarship has uncovered a number of fruitful parallels between *belâgat* and, for example, Roman Jakobson's theory of verbal communication, potentially opening the way to a properly Turkish form of narratology.

It will not escape the reader's attention that the authors of these fifteen studies hail from no fewer than twelve countries. This in itself is a sign of the extent to which narratological approaches have come to bear on the study of narrative phenomena. More than that, however, the internationalization of these approaches and their spread to and incorporation of disciplines other than literature attest to the growth of a shared awareness of the issues at stake as narrative scholars continue to both deepen and diversify the objects of their research.

References

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