

Pier, John and José Ángel García Landa, eds. 2008: *Theorizing Narrativity*. Berlin: de Gruyter. 464pp. ISBN: 978-3-11-020244-1

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The publication here reviewed has its origin in the Narratology Seminar convened by John Pier and J.A. García Landa at the ESSE Conference, University of Zaragoza, Spain, in 2004. Apart from the papers read at the Conference, this volume contains contributions by some of the most important researchers on Narratology worldwide. This makes it one of the most challenging and intellectually stimulating publications in the field since the founding parents of narratology presented their new approach to the analysis and understanding of literary works.

The decades of 1970 and 1980 saw the publication of seminal research on the issues that integrate the field of Narratology: Genette (1972), Chatman (1978) Prince (1982), Bal (1977, 1984), Sternberg (1978 and a long etcetera), Stanzel (1979, 1981, 1985), Ryan (1981). The journal *Poetics Today* has since then been the outlet for groundbreaking articles, both in issues that review the state of the art (e.g. *Poetics Today* 2:2 [1981] and 11 [2001], and in issues that contain articles on the cutting edge of Narratology (e.g. *Poetics Today* 24 [2003]). Research in the 1990s and the first decade of the twentyfirst century has widened the scope of both empirical studies and theory of Narratology. References to such research will be given when reviewing the various chapters of *Theorizing Narrativity*. The publication contains contributions related to recent research followed by empirical studies of literary works. However, the relevance of this collection of articles lies mainly in the attention to recent developments in genres such as drama, and in the media (TV series, Internet stories by instalment or with diverging endings, computer games, etc.). This is what makes this volume different from Pier's *The Dynamics of Narrative Form* (2004a), which includes articles by Pier on 'Narrative Configurations' (Pier 2004b: 239-68), Nünning on the narrator (11-57) and García Landa on re-writing and re-reading (191-214).

Pier and García Landa, in their Introduction (7-18), mention the need for reflection on criteria for theorizing narrative. The editors attempt a widening of scope in narratology, introducing accounts of the context of narrative, analyses of production and reception and attention to contemporary modes of publication.

Meir Sternberg (29-107) in 'If-Plots: Narrativity and the Law-code' addresses the narrativity of the legal process. The latter is a successive telling and re-telling of the facts involved in court proceedings. Trials follow certain rules, which are codified, and the stories told by lawyers are based on a "claim to factuality" (33). However, events based on actual fact can give rise to possible futures. The more specified the law-code is, the fewer are the possibilities open for legal story-telling. On the contrary, says Sternberg, the law can have "boundless story-generating power" (42) and produce variants of the master tale. In cases where the code can be specified or extended there is only one way to determine "the reference of the umbrella words to the world, the master tale's

applicability to its imaginable modifications in law and contested manifestations in life” (43), and this is *inference*. *Inference* will show up repeatedly in the following chapters, albeit not always connected with its role in pragmatics research. The law-tale’s most common form, says Sternberg, is that of “if-plotting” (52), and he demonstrates how this works with examples from the Holy Scriptures. Even a commandment in its imperative form contains several stories: prescriptions, prohibitions or contingency. The law may look absolute, but carries with it practically unlimited possibilities for narration (55). For this type of narrative, Sternberg (1998) introduced the term *generative narrative* or *genarrative*. The law as genarrative is connected with the idea of the macroplot, which can give rise to a wide array of stories.

Sternberg, in his work on universals in *Poetics Today* 24 (2003), expressed his dismay with regard to cognitive turns in literary research, on the grounds that many researchers of this bent do not take into account earlier research in narratology. A similar dissatisfaction shows in section 6.2. of Sternberg’s article, on speech-act theory. This is not surprising, as Sternberg takes as his point of departure basically the works of Austin and Searle, and the question is asked whether narrative can be called an extended speech act. Speech-act Theory, as developed by Grice, and also Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 2000) has been more useful in analysing literary works, even though these tools have been applied only to intradiegetic dialogues, i.e. characters’ directly quoted speech and the context of dialogues. This means that such research has more to do with linguistics than with literary theory.

John Pier’s chapter ‘After this, therefore because of this’ (109-40) is based on Ryan’s (2004, 2005) list of basic conditions of narrativity, which includes the condition that a narrative text “must create a world”. This world “must undergo changes of state” (Ryan as cited by Pier [110]). As Pier bases his discussion on these conditions, it is only to be expected that he will find the tenets of Barthes, Greimas and Genette insufficient to account for narrativity and take a stance where notions stemming from pragmatics are given greater importance. Narrativity is for Pier a “dynamic process engaged during the unfolding of a narrative rather than a built-in textual property” (114). Pier emphasizes the use of “trial-and-error inferential reasoning” (114). The emphasis on inference is a sign of the fact that the structural, sentence-based type of analysis of narration has given way to a more cognitive-based analysis. Actually, the peeling off of narrative layers to find the ‘minimal story’, so cherished by researchers of narrativity who use AI seems to have exhausted itself, and the influence of pragmatics, and a more dynamic approach to narrative, now prevails. Pier offers an analysis of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where he establishes causal links between different parts of the novel, showing how lexico-semantic and syntactic patterns are relevant on the narrative level.

Peter Hühn’s chapter ‘Functions and Forms of Eventfulness in Narrative Fiction’ (141-63) deals with tellability (a term coined by Pratt) and point in narrative, making reference to Pratt’s (1977: 208) contention that the author addresses, to a certain audience, a narrative utterance whose point is display and whose relevance is tellability, observing cooperative principles and maxims specified for such utterances. Deviations from the unmarked case occur in the form of flouting of conversational maxims, which are clues directed to the reader that implicatures are to be discovered, and the author is, as Pratt says “seeking out an audience” (Pratt 1977: 391). The ‘floutings’ are called *events*

by Hühn, who links eventfulness and tellability. Hühn also makes use of schema-theory, and contends that close conforming to a schema does not produce a worthwhile story, and, to increase tellability, the events have to depart from an established pattern (147). A similar argument appears in Van Dijk and Kintsch (1978), Cook (1994) and Kearns (1999), who all focus on the complexities on the level of narrative language and reading comprehension. Hühn offers a discussion of Richardson's *Pamela*, and Joyce's short story 'Grace'. Schema theory has here been complemented with semantics in order to produce an interesting analysis.

Werner Wolf (165-210) discusses 'Chance in Fiction as a Privileged Index of Implied World-Views: A Contribution to the Study of the World-modelling Functions of Narrative Fiction'. Wolf takes as his point of departure Ryan's (1991) Possible-Worlds Theory: possible worlds in fiction have their roots in the actual world. Related to this is the problem of implied authors, their implied worldviews, and the problem of unreliable narrators. Wolf refers to Nünning 1993. Of interest here is also Nünning (1998), who offers a new perspective on the topic, and Nünning (2004). Chance, says Wolf, "permits access to the hidden depths of implied worldviews" (167). Chance can appear on the extrafictional, extradiegetic, intradiegetic or hypodiegetic levels. Logically enough, it is on the intradiegetic level that characters experience 'chance'. Chance can mean contingency, accidents or coincidence, it can occur at the beginning or at the end of the novel, and the degree of expectedness and the consequences is also relevant, says Wolf.

At this point I would like to draw attention to the similarity of *chance* to Hühn's *events*: both are highly conducive to the increase in tellability. Events, just like chance – or rather 'chance events' – depend for their existence in literary discourse on the author and for interpretation on the reader's worldview. The case studies are analyses of *Pandosto*, an Elizabethan narrative, where chance events are elements of narrative structure, and of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where chance happenings, and very specially their occurrence at certain times, structure Tess's life. I find the works relevant as an illustration of chance, but chance, in both novels, seems to me something dictated by fate and not random events.

Beatriz Penas Ibáñez (211-51) joins the fields of Narratology and pragmatics. Her approach is reader-centered: for a literary text to work the issues of perspective, point of view and focalization are of great importance as these are the ways an author has to guide the reader towards an interpretation. In narrative discourse, the pragmatic elements of inference and implicature are always present – or they are, as I see it, present in the type of literature that is commonly considered to be quality reading. Too many explicatures and too few implicatures make tedious reading but why this is so is a topic that has not yet been adequately explored. To interpret a literary work of art, readers will have to "read between the lines or, more specifically, to read read intertextually" (214). Penas discusses Hemingway and Nabokov. With regard to Hemingway, Penas says that "[his] non-standard way of writing narrative plays vertically, relying basically on disproportion between surface-to-bottom narrativity", and she insists on the reading on two levels: the surface level and the level that appears when reading between the lines (214). With regard to Nabokov's way of writing, Penas says that his strategy is not omission as he "does not silence significant narrative matter but rather masks it by replacing the most significant tale from the central textual space

to the margins. Retrieval of the real matter requires *inferential intertextual work* on the reader's part" (215, my italics). I believe that the reading between the lines refers to the retrieval of inferences and implicatures, and the reading of the lines to the retrieval of intertextuality, and that the two concepts should not be mixed. It can, evidently, happen that the average reader might not manage to retrieve all inferences and implicatures nor recognise all intertextual quotes. In Penas' chapter the need for an in-depth analysis of the workings of inference and implicature is patent.

David Rudrum's 'Narrativity and Performativity: from Cervantes to Star Trek' (253-75) discusses the nature of narrativity with reference to Sturges and Prince. Looking for "the essence of narrative" is to impose restrictions on it (256). For an illustration of a text lacking narrativity Rudrum uses an embedded narrative from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. He shows that the essentialist approaches to narrative are of very little help when different types of narrative logics coincide in a text (Tyrkkö, in the chapter following Rudrum's, mentions Cervantes as a creator of metanarratives, which invite readers to move backwards and forwards in the text). A similar problem crops up when applying the notion of perlocutionary effects of performatives to an episode of *Star Trek*, but, says Rudrum, "identifying the possible goals of the narrative *qua* speech is a good start" (273).

Jukka Tyrkkö, in "Kaleidoscope' Narrative and the Act of Reading', deals with the narrative fragmentation that occurs in multilinear stories, made possible by the use of hypertext on the internet, which allow for the text taking several directions. As in this type of narratives the reader plays an active role, it is only natural that Tyrkkö should cite Wolfgang Iser (1984), and talk about the potential meanings of the text. However, in my view, when stories diverge two different texts emerge, but not different interpretations of the same text. The reader produces the story by choosing a particular link. As Tyrkkö says, the effect is produced by reader decisions, but the reader cannot foresee the kind of effect (300). A different ending would reflect back on the beginning of a story – this is also a question of how textual coherence has been handled in the diverging texts.

Michael Toolan in 'The Language of Guidance' (307-29) takes a close look at the short story. Toolan (and Penas Ibáñez, see above) mention the narratives that are "devoid of 'padding', a form where every sentence counts" (308). These are the works where implicatures are more important than explicatures, and "even a few lines of text [...] presage numerous continuations" (311). Toolan also mentions the problem of fiction where the narrative text is too obvious (an example of this could be the madly successful *Millenium* series by the Swede Stieg Larsson) and one that is too obscure (this is often the case in poetry, see Dahlgren 2005). Toolan asks himself how a balance is struck between these two extremes. In his text-linguistics and corpus based analysis of Munro's long story 'The Love of a Good Woman' he looks into 'the red box', the red box being both the actual red box mentioned in the Prologue of Munro's story, and 'the red box' as a metaphor for the means used in the development of the story, semantic, pragmatic and those related to narrative technique.

Ansgar Nünning's and Roy Sommer's 'Diegetic and Mimetic Narrativity: Some further Steps towards a Narratology of Drama', and Monica Fludernik's 'Narrative and Drama' are important contributions to the narratological analysis of drama, initiated by

Fludernik (1996), Jahn (2001) and Ryan (2004). Nünning and Sommer start with a review of definitions of narrativity, citing Fludernik and Ryan, to conclude that the normative dichotomies between fiction and drama on the grounds of lack of mediacy should be forgotten in favour of an exploration of diegetic narrative elements in drama (336). In part 3 (337-44), Nünning and Sommer review the notions *mimesis* and *diegesis*. The distinction between showing and telling, admirably discussed by Auerbach (1964), has been blurred by the appearance of new narrative techniques in the novel. This is true, but the call made by the authors for new research is actually now being produced and published.

Fludernik also argues that drama is a narrative genre and proposes a model for its narratological analysis, including setting, which in drama “is a visual ‘given’” (361); summary (which in drama requires ellipsis); voice-over narration (362); and the visual(isation) of elements in drama (363). Narration is present in drama, but performance is also present in narrative discourse, as Fludernik shows by means of analyses of Wilder’s *Our Town*, Stoppard’s *Travesties*, Edgar’s *Entertaining Strangers*, Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby*, Lodge’s *Small World* and the ‘Circe’ episode in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, once again exhibiting her command of literary sources.

Marie-Laure Ryan’s chapter on ‘Transfictionality across Media’ is one of the most interesting in this book. She focuses on practices intensified and transformed in and by the digital age. The basic features of transfictionality are four: it involves a relation between two distinct texts; the worlds projected by the two texts must be distinct, but related; it depends on a textual world familiar to the reader; and it tries to preserve the immersive power of the transfictionalized world. Ryan then reviews the different ages of transfictionality, from the oral age through the age of print to the digital age. The properties of digital media allow for a change in the use of the channel of communication: computer networks “facilitate transfictional activity by opening a public space on-line” (401). Ryan analyses digital works created by the use of frames and window-splitting, and different forms of computer games. Readers familiar with Ryan’s work on possible worlds (1991, 2004, 2006) will enjoy the Appendix (409-15) on the controversy between ‘ludologists’ and ‘narrativists’, and the reticence of the former to accept computer games as stories, such games being “virtual life” and not “representations of life” (410). Ryan argues that the games are more narrative because the virtual world is a designed environment (413) and tellability and eventfulness have been enhanced.

Finally, José Ángel García Landa’s ‘Narrating Narrating: Twisting the Twice-Told Tale’ returns to the phenomenon of intertextuality, in the widest sense, looking into the worlds of hearing and overhearing, telling and retelling, writing and rewriting. Narrative is *always* retelling what has already been told, García Landa says in his first paragraph (420). In the second paragraph he says that narrative is *often* a transformation of a previous narrative, leaving the reader with the doubt whether retelling is compulsory or not. In other publications where García Landa addresses the retrospective dimension of narrative (García Landa 2004:191-214), this question is disambiguated: narrative always tells what already has been told, but it would seem that some stories are more re-tellable than others.

García Landa reviews the classical tenets of Narratology and goes all the way back to

Aristotle to underpin his arguments. As I see it, such an overview of the literature has already been carried out and the new research called for is being produced – new modes of telling require new attitudes to narrativity. García Landa is at his best when he develops his own ideas, as when formulating questions on narrative interaction, for example.

The articles in *Theorizing Narrativity* conform to the description made by Toolan of the best exemplars of narrative form: “devoid of ‘padding’” (307), a book where every chapter counts. Part of the greatness of this contribution to research on narrativity is the fact that, in spite of the individuality of the contributors, the overall impression is one of coherence. The editors of this volume are to be congratulated on their effort in putting together representatives of the cutting edge in the field, organising the different chapters in an order that leads the reader from more classical approaches in (post)Narratology to research on products of recent developments in electronic and internet publications.

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Received 22 April 2009

Accepted 17 July 2009

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