# NARRATIVIST APPROACHES IN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE APPLICATION OF NARRATOLOGICAL CONCEPTS TO HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

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The importance of the historical contextualisation of a narrative in a web of specific events, intentions and functions provides a link between cultural narratology and 'historiographical' narratology and the application of the narratological toolkit to historical narratives. Moreover, cultural and historiographical narratology are geared towards the consideration of a broad range of historical factual as well as fictional or semi-fictional narratives. Nonetheless, as the chapters in the second section of this volume show, cultural narratology is still primarily focused on (more or less) contemporary fictional narratives. The chapters in this section, by contrast, enlarge the scope of sample analyses and interpretations provided in this volume by taking into account narratives that are only rarely considered by cultural narratologists: historical sources, historiographical works or texts such as that by the Puritan theologian Cotton Mather, who includes sermons and letters as well as biographical and historical narratives in his providential history of a North American colony. The chapters in this section therefore take the significance of the historical moment at the time of the production seriously; they look at the specific events which provided the stimulus for the construction of the story, its intended functions, and the key cultural terms of the respective period and culture in order to enhance our understanding of both the narratives in question and their contexts. These chapters therefore shift attention from the combination of cultural theories and narratology to that of narratives and the key cultural concepts and issues of the time.

It is impossible, however, to conceptualise narratological approaches to historiography and historical narratives without taking the rich tradition of narrative research developed in historiography and the theory of history into account. This 'narrativist school of historiography', which includes such luminaries as David Carr, Arthur Danto, Jörn Rüsen and Hayden White, shares a number of assumptions and interests with the approaches to narrative introduced in this volume; it was, however, developed largely independently from narratology. The most influential recent narrativist approaches to historiography are situated in different areas of research, with Danto looking at the writing of history through the lens of analytical philosophy, Louis Mink taking a more cognitivist perspective by regarding history and fiction as modes of comprehension, and White practicing a form of criticism building on the archetypal theory developed by Northrop Frye.

Despite these differences within the narrativist theory of history and historiography, the scholars mentioned above share some central concerns that distinguish

their school from narratological approaches. One of the major questions within the narrativist theory of history, for instance, is whether life itself is storied. While Carr (cf. 1986: 65, 68) insists that narrative is inherent within the structure of human experience and Theodore Sarbin might be understood in this vein, too, when he emphasises "[t]he Narrative Quality of Action" (1990), Mink (1987: 60) famously asserted that "[s]tories are not lived but told. Life has no beginnings, middles, or ends", thereby drawing attention to the importance of narrative as a mode of comprehending – and constructing – the world. Danto and White share Mink's appreciation of the discontinuity between life and (historians') narratives, arguing that coherence is (and should be) an attribute of historiographical stories, but not of events. They recognise the fundamental difference between the structure of life on the one hand, and narrative forms on the other, a difference which, in turn, emphasises the gap between historiographical stories and the past.

This recognition also points towards a topic of vital importance for both historiographers and narrative theorists: the relation between narratives and explanation. There is widespread agreement on the fact that narratives are a way of explaining not only how, but also why things happened. In the words of Paul Ricoeur (1984 [1983]: 152) "narrative answers the question 'Why?' at the same time that it answers the question 'What?' To tell what has happened is to tell why it happened". It is a matter of contention, however, in what way narratives are able to construct causal relations and provide explanation. Mink suggested that the knowledge of the story's ending is of crucial importance to the attribution of meaning. According to him, comprehension implies the connection between the ending and the beginning, consisting in a "grasping together", "a characteristic kind of understanding which consists in thinking together in a single act [...] the complicated relationships of parts which can be experienced only seriatim" (Mink 1987: 50; see also Velleman 2003). Only at the end of a story can we fully grasp its meaning; we have to be aware of the particular outcome in order to understand the origin of the story as well as the steps which led to its ending.

The interest in the power of narratives as a 'tool for thinking' and of comprehension is common to cognitive narratology and theories of historiography; but while cognitivists stress the importance of scripts, frames and preference rules, theorists like Mink and White follow a different approach. While cognitive theorists would subscribe to White's assumption that no narrative can capture the complexity of what has happened, his mode of characterising the process of historiographical narrativisation is based on archetypal criticism. According to White, the four tropes of metaphor, synecdoche, metonomy and irony influence the process of what will be included into a historiographical work. Furthermore, the selected events will be 'emplotted' in corresponding modes of sequencing and shaping the story line. These four modes – comic, romantic, tragic and satirical – in turn correspond to kinds of arguments or patterns of causality: 'organicist' narratives tend to regard particular scenes as part of a larger macrocosm; 'formatist' ones usually highlight the uniqueness of events, 'mechanist' ones typically see actions as effect of external forces; and 'contextualist' ones high-

light the functions (and meanings) of events in a larger web of circumstances. White's model has the advantage of providing clear-cut relations between crucial phases of the processes of producing historiographical narratives by linking modes of selection to those of emplotment as well as to types of explanation. It is, however, also somewhat reductive in that there are only these four modes of organising historical knowledge. In addition, his model tends to disregard and underestimate the differences between historiography and literature, negating the specific qualities of literary texts.

The most significant difference between these narrativist approaches to historiography and the ones that will be presented in this section lies in their different methodology. Complementing approaches germane to historiography by a consideration of key tenets of narrative theory, the contributions in the present volume use the toolkit of classical narratology in order to analyse and interpret historical texts. Moreover, they do not only concern themselves with historiographical works, which have so far been more or less the main focus of interest, but they also take into account historical narratives, that is, historical sources containing narrative parts, or genres with a rather low degree of narrativity, such as a medieval chronicle.

A few pioneering studies have already highlighted the various uses of narratology by applying narratological categories to the analysis of historiographical narratives. The most important early study to concentrate on the discourse level of historiographical works is arguably Ann Rigney's seminal monograph (2001), which interprets a wide range of historical writing at the turn of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Like White, Rigney compares different historiographical books in order to tease out the differences in the narrative processes of making sense of the same events. In her latest book on the subject (cf. ibid.), she focuses on the difficulties or even 'impossibility' of writing history, stressing the tension between those events of the past that historians evaluate as especially important, and their contemporary frames of reference and schemata of explanation. Moreover, Rigney has drawn attention to the close connection between historiography and cultures of remembering, which in turn serve the function of creating and disseminating collective identities.

Since it is impossible to delineate the broad range of innovative work that has been done in narrativist approaches to historiography during the last decade, one might as well refer interested readers to Stephan Jaeger's wide-ranging overview (2002), and to his more recent magisterial analysis of the performative qualities of German historiographical writings of the late 18th and early 19th century (2011). Another landmark contribution that has also served to bridge the gap between narrativist and narratological approaches is Axel Rüth's study (2005), which provides an overview both of narrativist ways of conceptualising historiography and the major features of historiographical narratives. Thus, he shows that there are particular conventions of the historians' mode of writing that significantly reduce the degree of subjectivity and perspectivity inherent in all narratives. Rüth's study also underscores new concerns of narratological approaches to historiography. Among these are the difference between (or conflation of) author and narrator as well as the problem of 'zero-focalisation' and

of achieving a 'neutral' rather than a perspectival vision of past events (see ibid.: 36-43; Cohn 2006: 120).

To date, only a few works have actually applied the narratological toolkit to historiographical narratives. Major categories for the analysis of time and the structure of the plot are employed in a study of German historiographical accounts of the Weimar Republic by Jan Eckel (2010: 28), who "aims to demonstrate that narratological theories can inspire the history of historiography by offering profound insights into how historical texts operate" as well as "develop a model of narratological analysis" suitable for the analysis of historiography. He also rightly questions Dorrit Cohn's assumption that historiographical narratives are strictly constrained as far as the presentation of consciousness or motives is concerned and tries to tease out the different modes in which historians reconstruct the intentions of actors.

As this brief survey of existing scholarship shows, the narratological study of historiographical works constitutes an innovative and fruitful area of research the potential of which has only recently been acknowledged and gauged. The following chapters take up the challenge of applying narratological categories to history books and provide a new perspective to the study of such narratives; they also consider genres with a low degree of narrativity and historical narratives, which were not produced by historians, but by the 'actors' themselves. The chapters that follow illustrate how the application of narratological categories can serve to explore the world-making powers of narratives by shedding light on the functions that historical and historiographical narratives can fulfil as means of persuasion as well as means of constructing collective identities and forming as well as disseminating beliefs concerning morality and exemplary behaviour. Moreover, they show the power of narratives to perpetuate as well as change traditions. The first chapter in this section, by Martin Seidl, provides the link between cultural and 'historiographical' narratology, demonstrating how the cultural narratological analysis of historical narrative forms can be connected to insights of Hayden White as well as to 'New Historicist' assumptions concerning the interplay between text and context. The volume will be rounded off by a chapter by Ilona Pikkanen, who will, in the first part of her contribution, give an overview of the major categories and insights of 'historiographical narratology', and, in the second part, consider the way the narrative discourse of a work of Finnish historiography functions as a means of participating in a discussion on the formation of Finnish identity in the early 20th century.

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