

Ritual and Narrative: An Introduction

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Why bring together two phenomena which, at first sight, seem to be worlds apart? The odds seem to be overwhelming, especially since there is anything but agreement on what exactly “a ritual” is – not to mention the variety of approaches which provide definitions of narrative. And still it seems to be fruitful to bring together these two fields of study, which may turn out to have more in common than meets the eye. During several sessions of the collaborative research centre on “ritual dynamics” at Heidelberg University, it turned out that scholars concerned with the exploration of rituals often not only deal with, but are interested in narratives, just as a few narratologists have succumbed to the fascination of ritual studies. After all, both narratives and rituals provide structure and meaning to our lives, both appeal to the emotions, and both create worlds which have enchanted participants and readers for thousands of years. In spite of the apparent “uselessness” of rituals, which are neither necessary for survival in communities of hunters and gatherers, nor for life in complex modern societies, rituals have not lost their attractiveness. Indeed, in the contemporary world, old and new rituals seem to be more omnipresent than ever before, developing a wide range of forms and instances of “ritual design” even in the virtual world of the internet.¹

¹ For the concept and manifold phenomena of ritual design in present-day religious as well as secular contexts, see the volume *Ritualdesign. Zur kultur- und ritualwissenschaftlichen Analyse ‚neuer‘ Rituale* by Karolewski et al.

Moreover, in recent years, in which the functions and values of everything the humanities are concerned with have become subjected to scrutiny, narratologists have increasingly become aware of the ubiquity of narratives as well as the usefulness of narratological categories. Developed for a better understanding of literary works, the application of the “toolkit” of narratology to non-fictional texts has become one of the concerns of new developments in narratology. In this volume, we want to widen the existing scope of applications by extending it to ritual studies. In contrast to the (as yet rather small) number of books which use narratological categories in order to understand particular texts, such as the Bible, or particular images, we aim to establish a link between narratology and a whole field of studies, which includes the exploration of a wide range of different genres and images. After all, rituals are not only told and transmitted via verbal stories, they are also performed in various media; and the historical and geographical range covered in this volume reaches from rituals depicted in Mesopotamian friezes to those performed by German politicians in military contexts today.

In contrast to many (both productive and fruitful) attempts to use narratological categories as a “tool” in order to better understand non-fictional narratives in different media, in this volume we want to establish a dialogue between ritual studies and narratology. Instead of just extending the scope of applications of narrative theory, we have gathered specialists from various areas in order to explore the link between ritual studies and narratology. The contributions in this volume draw on perspectives from disciplines as varied as classical archaeology, religious studies, biblical hermeneutics and literary studies to scrutinize the nexus between ritual and narrative.

We proceed from the assumption that narrative structures and the telling of stories play an important role in rituals and ritual practice, just as ritual can be an important dimension of narrative. Storytelling often has an explicitly ritualistic character, especially where everyday stories are concerned. We indulge in telling and listening to stories to derive a tried-and-tested sense of meaning and aesthetic pleasure, similar to that which we glean from participating in a ritual. The same holds true for complex literary narratives, which have to refer to and repeat some kind of formula such as a genre even if they seek to subvert that script. As Wolfgang Braungart argues in *Ritual und Literatur*, ritual is a central aspect of literature as a symbolic practice: both ritual and literature can be viewed as forms of self-knowledge and cultural self-interpretation utilized by individuals and com-

munities. This is evidenced in particular by popular literary forms such as occasional poetry, a kind of literature that has a fixed, ritualized place in the production and consumption not only by expert but also by ordinary writers and readers (see Braungart 24).

However, before we can go on to explore the links between rituals and narrative – and the value of exemplary interpretations of rituals in different media – it is necessary to at least briefly clarify what we understand by the terms “ritual” and “narrative,” which, despite their ubiquity in everyday usage, are anything but simple or self-explanatory. Where definitions of ritual are concerned, one might as well start by acknowledging that “[d]efining the term ‘rituals’ is a notoriously problematic task. The number of definitions proposed is endless, and no one seems to like the definitions proposed by anyone else” (Snoek 3). It is not only the long history of debates about ritual, but also a certain scepticism and “general neglect of theory in ritual studies” (Kreinath et al. xv) which has produced a plethora of existing and often incompatible definitions. There is no shortage of “classic” and highly influential concepts of ritual, such as Victor Turner’s formulation that “[b]y ‘ritual’ I mean prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technical routine, having reference to belief in mystical beings and powers” (Turner, *Forest* 19). However, this formulation is also a telling example of the waning currency and measure of disagreement besetting many definitions of ritual. The close connection drawn by Turner between ritual and religion, though true for many (and especially pre-modern) contexts and cultures of ritual, has (rightly) been criticized with a view to the widely mooted “return” of ritual in post-industrial Western societies, where many rituals or “ritual-like activities” (cf. Bell 138ff.) more often than not seem to lack a distinct religious character. Thus, religion is a case in point for the difficulty in deciding what the central characteristics of ritual are.²

This general difficulty (with any definition of anything) is exacerbated by the empirical approach in many projects of ritual studies, in the course of which scholars often have to realize that the “etic” (i.e. observer) perspective which they bring to a particular ritual is likely to be at odds with a

2 See Kreinath et al. xvi: “The scholarly concept of religion [...] came into being roughly simultaneously with the modern term ‘ritual’. On the other hand, the inherently religious character of ritual can no longer be taken for granted, and this posits a challenge for theorizing both religion and ritual.”

heterogeneous set of “emic” (participant) points of view. Some scholars then choose to stop defining their object of study altogether and focus on documenting the wide variety of emic “constructions” of ritual instead. This empirical approach often claims political or ethical motives for not wanting to impose an outside view on the self-understanding and experience of participants, but apart from this political (or politically correct) and sometimes overly self-congratulatory gesture the approach seems to be susceptible to positivistic relativism and conceptual defeatism. It is rather impracticable and academically limiting for anyone who wants to move beyond empirical research and tackle the theoretical work (deductive as much as inductive, normative as much as empirical) required to conceptualize the relationship between ritual and narrative, for example.

To get to grips with the “ritual” part of the equation explored in this volume, therefore, it bears repeating that “[a] theoretical discussion of ritual(s) can hardly avoid the tedious question of the definition of ritual” (Kreinath et al. xvii). Scholars of ritual have recently put forward a number of fruitful answers to this “tedious” question, which all share a belief that rituals cannot be identified by (and reduced to) a common set of essential characteristics. On the contrary, they have argued that rituals constitute a relatively open and flexible class of phenomena held together by Wittgensteinian “family resemblances.” In this way, rituals are not seen as “monothetic,” where a “(set of) characteristic(s) is present in all the members of the class,” but as “polythetic”: “Polythetic characteristics [...] are not present in all members of a polythetic class, but each occurs in a majority of them.” (Snoek 5) Though no longer as a compulsory dimension as suggested by Turner, even religion can be part of such a polythetic definition of ritual again, because a polythetic class allows for rituals which are not defined by religion (though by other characteristics also shared by “religious” rituals).

To flesh out a polythetic definition of ritual which will have many points of contact and convergence with narrative “the task is no longer to search for a *few essential* characteristics of ‘rituals’, which unambiguously distinguish between them and everything else” (7; italics in the original). On the contrary, it is advisable to “sum up *as large as possible* a collection of characteristics which are typical for *most* rituals, or at least for those being considered in a particular project” (ibid.; italics in the original), such as conceptualizing the nexus between ritual and narrative. Such a collection

may consist of a long list of characteristics, including the view of ritual as “culturally constructed,” “marked off from the routine of everyday life,” “structured; patterned; ordered; sequenced; rule-governed,” or “formal(ized)” (11). It is obvious from these characteristics that there are some crucial points of departure here for juxtaposing and comparing ritual with major features of narrative (discussed in more detail below). For example, these points of departure include the cultural specificity or “situatedness” of narrative, or aspects of plot, narrative self-reflexivity, and genre.

While polythetic definitions may well cast their net wide and start by listing a large number of characteristics, it is pragmatic to then narrow down this list in order to arrive at a workable and more succinct definition. Thus, Catherine Bell makes out six key features by which rituals or ritual-like activities are characterized. These are “formalism,” “traditionalism,” “invariance,” “rule-governance,” “sacral symbolism,” and “performance” (cf. Bell 138ff.). More specifically, “formalism” highlights the fact that ritual is different from informal or casual behaviour, and marked off by formalized speech, gestures, and movement. “Traditionalism” refers to the way in which rituals appeal to a long pre-history of ritual practice as a source of legitimization. “Invariance” indicates that rituals are based on an ideal of repetition and faithful re-enactment. “Rule-governance” requires that rituals follow prescribed rules which govern and facilitate interaction. “Sacral symbolism” is a dimension by which rituals use symbols to evoke a higher reality, either connected to religious life or to the sacred in a metaphorical sense, such as the collective, transcendent values of a group or nation. Finally, “performance” as a central element of rituals emphasizes the fact that rituals are based on immediate, bodily enactment or embodiment.

While some of these features are specific to ritual, such as (bodily) performance as opposed to verbal (narrative) representation, other characteristics are no doubt suggestive of similarities with narrative. For example, traditionalism and rule-governance in ritual seem to converge with the generic forms and conventional plot patterns that many narratives follow, even though narratives tend to make a point of deviating from as much as adhering to conventional patterns. In this respect, Bell’s list of characteristics would need to be extended by the sense of transgression or “anti-structure” which scholars like Turner have claimed for ritual, and which aligns ritual with narrative (and its norm-breaking aspects) despite the measure of rule-

governance they otherwise share.³ Another item in Bell's list that is highly conducive to comparing ritual and specifically literary narrative is her emphasis on symbolism. The use of symbols and aesthetic elements more broadly is a central but also sometimes underestimated dimension of ritual.

Another useful definition of ritual has been put forward by Axel Michaels, who lists five key elements by which rituals are to be defined: "performance/embodiment," "formality," "framing," "transformation/efficacy," and "transcendence" (4f.). As can easily be seen, elements one, two and five clearly correspond with items in Bell's list ("transcendence" squaring with Bell's "sacral symbolism"). In addition, Michaels stresses framing as a key feature of ritual, i.e. a clear demarcation or stipulation of beginning and end. Framing in his view also requires an intentional act (a declaration of "*intentio sollemnis*," 5) on the part of the ritual community, designating a given ritual as such. Michaels does not consider the aesthetic or symbolic dimension of ritual, but he in turn gives prominence to aspects of process, transformation, and change, which (though in different ways) are characteristics of narrative, too, both within and outside of the text.⁴ Taken together, Bell and Michaels provide a good working definition and starting point to involve ritual in a dialogue with narrative. As recent perspectives and concepts of ritual dynamics and ritual design⁵ generally make clear, ritual is culturally constructed as much as historically variable, rather like narrative, and far removed from stereotypical and obsolete views of ritual as a petrified and immutable cultural practice.

To explore and conceptualize the connection between ritual and narrative further, accounts of the former as discussed above now need to be complemented with a definition of the latter. Unsurprisingly, and as with

3 For the tripartite model of "structure – anti-structure – structure," which he reveals as the basic scheme of rituals, cf. Turner, *Ritual Process*.

4 For the shift in attention on aspects of "process" in ritual studies, see Kreinath et al. xix: "'process' has become a key-term in ritual theory. [...] Recent theorizing attaches greater importance to ludic elements in rituals and stresses the emergent qualities of rituals."

5 For the concept and definition of ritual design as a type of ritual dynamics characterized by intentional acts of transforming a given ritual and adapting it to a new situation, see Ahn, "Ritualdesign" and "Ritual Design."

ritual, definitions of narrative are much less straightforward than one might wish.

While more or less every child from age three or four is able to understand and construct stories of various forms – including excuses and stories which more or less subtly transfer the blame for the spilled milk to someone or something else – it is anything but easy to arrive at a precise definition of narrative. There is no doubt a wide variety of narratives. Moreover, media conventions frequently serve to heighten differences between a “paradigmatic” or “prototypical” story, like a coherent account of events told by a narrator in verbal form to a listener on the one hand, and “the story” of a drama or the narrative constructed jointly over the course of several weeks by a psychiatrist and his or her patient on the other. In order to cope with this wide variety of existing narratives, it has been suggested to define narrativity by way of “narratemes,” in a term coined by Gerald Prince. Taking a cognitive approach to narrative, Prince views narrative as a macro-schema which is either triggered by the context in which we encounter narrative, e.g., literary works displayed under “fiction” in a bookshop, or by text-internal features (cf. Prince). These text-internal features, which include basic elements such as character or different types of action and chronological sequence, Prince calls narratemes, which can be further systematized into “content narratemes,” “syntactic narratemes” and “qualitative narratemes,” the latter referring to elements of narrative which evoke a certain kind of narrative experientiality (cf. Wolf). Adding up to a “morphology” of narrative, narratemes are the micro-frames which constitute a narrative work of art and which determine its grade of narrativity.⁶

This is certainly an ingenious way to solve the problem of ordering the wide field of narratives, but it is not sufficient in a context in which the relation between narratives and rituals is the focus of attention. We therefore want to suggest a number of features which can serve to define narratives. In the following account, we draw upon and integrate current conceptualizations, but it has to be admitted that there are any number of disagreements between narratologists, especially with regard to the weighting of the different features.⁷

6 See Schwanecke for a summary of the theoretical debate on narratemes.

7 The following brief overview, drawing on a number of narratological and psychological definitions of narrative, is a summary of (and partly quoted from)

First, narratives are characterized by the fact that they are addressed by a human being at a specific point in time with a particular cultural background to someone else.⁸ This does not presuppose that every narrative must be told to someone who is able to personally listen to the teller. Indeed, stories are often used to make sense of situations by telling them to oneself. Moreover, narratives must “communicate something meaningful to the recipient,” which also implies that narratives are placed in specific contexts, in cultures with shared values, beliefs, canons and story schemata, and in particular spatio-temporal settings (Ryan 8).⁹ This situatedness in a cultural context informs the narrative world on many different levels: it influences the selection of what is depicted, the choice of register and style as well as genre conventions and patterns of causality.¹⁰ Situatedness can also be considered a major aspect of ritual practice. Marriage rituals, for example, differ widely depending on the cultural setting in which they are performed, even if the same religious denomination is concerned. Contexts of migration and displacement often make it necessary to adapt the ritual, in a process of “ritual transfer” (cf. Langer, Motika, and Ursinus).

several texts in which Vera Nünning has put forth definitions of narrative; see Nünning, “Making of Fictional Worlds” as well as chapter two of *Fiction and Cognition* (in preparation). There is a host of definitions of narrative, which can be grouped into those which conceptualize it as a feature of texts, a rhetoric act or a cognitive pattern. Narratological definitions can also be distinguished by focus of attention: some concentrate on the plot (story/events), others on narrative transmission (discourse) or “experientiality.”

8 Cf. Herman, “Narrative Ways” 74; McAdams 111.

9 Ryan’s definition of narrative also includes many of the features which will be listed in the following (apart from embedded values, the perspectivization and the levels of narration; Ryan is concerned with narratives in different media). For a discussion of the importance of the addressee and the expectations of (sub)cultures see Nünning, “Erzählen und Identität.”

10 In Bruner’s account, this relation to the context is termed context sensitivity, and discussed together with the concept of negotiability (Bruner, “Narrative Construction” 16f.).

Just like rituals, narratives are cultural ways of world-making; they present a model of a world which changes.¹¹ This seemingly simple characteristic implies a number of aspects, which are often treated separately. On the one hand, readers must be able to construct a relatively coherent mental model of the narrative world; it is often stressed that there have to be characters that resemble human beings acting in a more or less defined space and time; there have to be agents with characteristics, intentions, thoughts and feelings. On the other hand, the occurrence of some kind of event is necessary, since the presence of a "plot" distinguishes narratives from descriptions or other forms of discourse. The transformation may be minimal or only take place in the consciousness of a character, but an event is necessary. Many theorists prefer an emphatic conception of an event, among them Tzvetan Todorov, Jerome Bruner and David Herman.¹² Bruner introduced the concept of "tellability" and the "breach of expectations" raised by a canonical story.¹³

Like stories, rituals also constitute a world of their own. Rituals are set off from the everyday world, often through a particular form of framing such as a ringing of bells, specific gestures or a formal announcement that the ritual begin (see Michaels 4). Like story worlds, ritual worlds are not static, but may change in the course of the ritual action. Importantly, rituals imply change and transformation not least for those participating in the ritual, as in initiation rituals, for example. In this latter sense, transformation has been described as one of the defining features of rituals.

In contrast to rituals, which frequently involve a large number of participants and in which different rites and events can occur in different spaces (for instance in processions, in which the pilgrims perform ritualistic acts in different places at the same time), narratives are linear; even events that happen simultaneously have to be brought into some kind of order.¹⁴ Even

11 For the importance of Nelson Goodman's concept of "ways of world-making" see V. Nünning, A. Nünning, and Neumann, *Cultural Ways of Worldmaking*.

12 See the very good summary of the state of the discussion, which mentions a host of other scholars as well, Herman, *Basic Elements* 132-135.

13 Cf. Bruner, "Narrative Construction" 73f., and "Self-making."

14 In postmodern narratives, this feature of narratives was subjected to parodic plays as well: Bryan Stanley Johnson, in his novel *Albert Angelo* (1964), for in-

though the sequences chosen in most narratives do not conform strictly to the chronology of their story world – there are few stories without at least some flashbacks – this linearity also implies the construction of something only seemingly simple: the choice of a beginning, a middle and an end. These are of overall importance as far as our understanding of the respective event or development is concerned. In western societies, for instance, we tend to see narrative beginnings also as origins, as the “root” of what happened later. As Niels Buch Leander points out in a remarkable essay, “there can be no beginning independent of the particular narrative we bring to it” (Leander 19) – without a story, it remains a random date. We need beginnings as well as endings in order to make sense of our experience. In spite of the simultaneity of events in some rituals, sequentiality is a major concern of ritual studies, too. Because of their iterative character, rituals rely on recognizable sequences of ritual action almost by definition. These typical patterns of ritual action have been described as elementary building blocks of a “grammar” of ritual (see Gladigow).

Stories do not just relate events, but also experiences; they express a sense of “what it’s like” for the characters involved in the events. Narrative representation “also conveys the *experience* of living through this story-world-in-flux, highlighting the pressure of events on real or imagined consciousness affected by the occurrences at issue” (Herman, “Narrative Ways” 73).¹⁵ There are, of course, differences in degree, with modernist novels, for instance, featuring more “experientiality” than history books – but even stories which do not focus on the emotions or the consciousness of the characters imply them. Because of their construction of an alternative, ritual world, rituals have a strong experiential dimension, too. The degree of transformation that many rituals involve is frequently the product of a multi-sensory experience, involving mind and body.

Stories are always told by a narrator embodying a particular perspective; the narrative that is constructed of a particular event is always formed by the narrator’s knowledge or beliefs, his or her values, dispositions, emotions and intentions: in a narrative, objectivity is not an option. Even in lit-

stance, occasionally uses two columns next to each other to indicate simultaneity.

15 The most important publication on the topic is Fludernik’s *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology*.

erary works featuring an “authorial narrator,” who is held to be omniscient and objective, there is no neutral description; the choice of “omniscience” also implies a particular standpoint, even though it often masks itself as “universal” and “neutral.” In addition, narratives usually depict a number of points of view of various characters. These perspectives can converge, but more often they do not: “tellable” stories imply some breach of what is expected, and this is often connected to different points of view and the heterogeneous or even contradictory plans and goals of the characters involved in the event. The concept of the perspective of a story can also apply to a still higher level of abstraction; apart from the “perspectives” of characters and narrators it can refer to the story at large, for even the positioning of the different voices in a narrative implies a particular perspective upon it. In rituals, the concept of perspectivization on the one hand applies to the emic points of view of different participants – ranging from those seeking help to priests or healers. In narratives describing the events, on the other hand, the “etic” perspective of the storyteller or the observer of the ritual becomes important, too.

Like rituals, narratives are characterized by embedded values which are due to, for instance, the selection of what is told and what is left out; the weighting of the events; the establishment of relations between different characters (and their relative distance to the narrator). All of these aspects imply a moral positioning (see Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 43, 234), even apart from the host of evaluative comments uttered by characters and/or narrators, which in everyday communication make up roughly 30% of the story. Narratives create a world with an inherent set of values and beliefs. Quite often, narratives confirm, popularize and disseminate cultural values, sometimes they modify or subvert them. Especially stories that are “tellable” in Bruner’s sense – that is, stories that are interesting in that they do not only repeat well-known schemata – construct their own morality; they establish text-internal norms which supply the reference to which the behaviour of the characters and/or narrators is to be judged.

Values and norms are at the heart of ritual practice, too. Rituals frequently serve to express and legitimize a certain set of beliefs and views of the world (see Michaels 6). Just as communities are constituted as narrative communities (see Müller-Funk 14), informed not least by the values expressed and circulated through stories, the community-building nature of ritual has often been pointed out and frequently seems to rely on a dissemi-

nation of values, too. As public events, rituals are a popular and effective means of making visible and sustaining a given constellation of power.

Moreover, every story is formed not only by the specific situational context in which it is told, but also by the conventions of the genre which it pertains to. It makes a difference whether one tells an experience as an adventure story or as a didactic fable, as an anecdote or as a psychological novel. Many experiences can be expressed in different kinds of genres;¹⁶ but the conventions of the genre which is chosen heavily influence the story: the selection of what is said and how it is said as well as the meaning we attribute to it differ widely according to the genre conventions that are adhered to. If one has chosen the frame of a comedy, for instance, it is very difficult to change it; when the frame of a comedy is chosen it is next to impossible to raise empathy or pity for the plight of those whose malheur has been the butt of the joke. The same journey can – without problems, but with great impact on the meaning of the story – be related as an adventure story, as a pilgrimage, as a *bildungsroman* depicting the development of intellectual and moral maturity of its hero or heroine, as a parable, and so on.¹⁷ The degree of sophistication in producing and recognizing genres differs according to the education and socialization of readers, listeners or viewers. Perhaps there are nowadays more experts in the identification of media formats like “thriller,” “soap,” “costume drama,” fantasy, “talk

16 Like the concept of “species” in biology, the term “genre” is extremely difficult to define; many scholars of literature and literary theory have spent much time on a host of explications of the concept (see, among others, Alastair Fowler, Klaus W. Hempfer, Tzvetan Todorov) or have come to use related terms like “generic frames.” It is controversial, for example, whether genres can be determined on the basis of the features of a given body of texts which belong to a particular genre (which, however, would first of all have to be established) or whether we should base our explication on the concept of “ideal types.” In spite of these difficulties, however, there seems to be widespread agreement that a knowledge of genres (which may be just as intuitive as our knowledge of what constitutes a narrative) is necessary for the production and understanding of texts.

17 It is important to remember, however, that genre conventions are dynamic – they change over time – and that they can be subverted; one can either write “within a genre against a genre” or develop new (sub)genres.

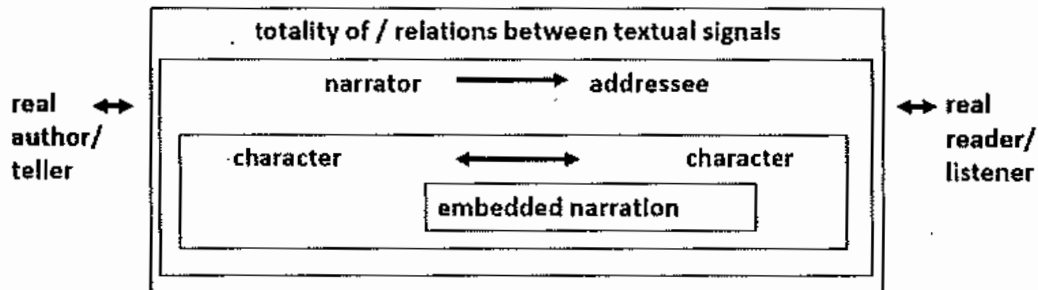
show” and others – which many viewers can recognize while zapping through the programmes – than the narratives which are mediated by language only. The relationship between story and genre is arguably similar to that between sequences of ritual action and the super-structures of larger ritual genres in which they appear. As elementary forms of ritual, typical patterns of ritual action will derive their meaning not least from the respective genre, such as different subtypes of initiation rituals, for example, in which they are employed.

Moreover, there are different levels of narration to be considered whenever a story is told by verbal means. How many levels there are, and which are the most important, however, is dependent on the specific media and genres; it is, moreover, a bone of contention between narratologists who have proposed quite different models for the structure of narratives and designations for the narrative levels they deem to be important.¹⁸ In oral narratives which are told by one (or several) narrator(s) as well as in literary prose, there are arguably up to four layers involved: narrative worlds contain at least two layers or, in narratological terms, levels of existence. In every narration we distinguish between the story world, i.e. the world of the characters, and the level of discourse, i.e. the narrative mediation of the world of the characters, which is ascribed to a particular narrator and/or involves a specific form of mediation and perspectivization. In more complex stories, a third level is made up of the set of relations between those different levels, of the values which can be abstracted from textual features. As far as literary stories are concerned, the communication between the real “sender,” author or teller of the tale, and the recipient who listens to or reads the story is only to be found on the fourth level. The actions and thoughts of characters are therefore embedded in a complex structure, which influences the meanings readers attribute to them.¹⁹

18 Many scholars only differentiate between two levels of “classical” narratives: that of the story and that of the discourse (or way of narration); the emphasis on either of these levels also characterizes different approaches to the study of narrative.

19 In other media and genres, such as plays or films, however, this is different.

Fig. 1: Communication model of different levels of narration



Storytelling in rituals is also characterized by several layers or levels; for the dynamics of rituals, however, the level of “embedded narration” seems to be the most interesting or relevant one. It is on this level that characters who narrate a particular story – ritual experts such as priests, for example – can explain and justify changes within the plot or structure of the ritual. While in fictional and autobiographical stories the performative quality of narrative is situated on the level of the text-internal narrator, in rituals it is most pronounced on the level of characters.

The existence of several levels of narration and the relations between them also allow for self-reflexivity. The same motif, structure or value can be taken up on several levels of narration, allowing for them to be related to each other in multiple ways through mirroring and confirmation as well as through contrast and subversion. Apart from these implicit modes of self-reflexivity, narrators can refer to and reflect upon the attitudes, traits and values of characters as well as on their own characteristics and opinions, and the relations between the statements attributed to characters and narrators provide a web of meanings, allowing for ironic distancing between some elements.²⁰ A similar degree of self-reflexivity can also be achieved by storytelling in rituals, where self-reflexivity may arise from a tension between the level of (ritual) action and the embedded narratives told by those participating in the ritual.

20 The question of self-reflexivity is complex and has been explored by a host of scholars, some of whom focus on the lack of correspondence between events in a narrative and “real life,” others on the importance of the language with which the story is told.

All of the features listed above shape the meaning that is attributed to narratives. Narratives generate meaning; they serve as a means to understand the world. There is no "objectivity" in a story; narrative forms purvey a specific, subjective interpretation of what has happened. An awareness of the features and importance of the form of narrative therefore enables us to understand and specify what Fredric Jameson has famously called the "ideology of form," emphasizing that "form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right" (Jameson 99).²¹

Both narratives and rituals thus create specific worlds; worlds which provide meaning as well as order. In a few studies, it has been argued that rituals and stories share a number of characteristics. For instance, both rituals and narratives can be understood as a complex form of mimesis: they not only represent a certain status quo which exists outside the ritual or narrative, but they envisage and enact what might seem to be possible and ethically desirable in relation to a given situation by engaging in symbolic communication (see Jameson 237ff.). Apart from the actual performance of ritual, there is an additional performative quality to both rituals and narratives, in the sense that they picture possible alternatives to the narrative's or ritual's referential context and thereby develop a transformative potential.

Another well-known debate linking ritual and narrative is the so-called myth and ritual school, and the longstanding question about whether myth developed out of ritual or the other way around (see Ackermann).²² Different answers have been suggested to this question, both with good reasons, but what seems to be more interesting in our context is the close interrelationship between myth or narrative and ritual over time: whichever came first, there are countless instances which show that myths are adapted (and

21 See also Jameson 99: "What must now be stressed is that at this level 'form' is apprehended as content. The study of the ideology of form is no doubt grounded on a technical and formalistic analysis in the narrower sense, even though, unlike much traditional formal analysis, it seeks to reveal the active presence within the text of a number of discontinuous and heterogeneous formal processes. But at the level of analysis in question here, a dialectical reversal has taken place in which it has become possible to grasp such formal processes as sedimented content in their own right, as carrying ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works."

22 For a critical perspective on the myth and ritual school, see Segal.

fulfil important explanatory functions) especially when rituals change. Vice versa, a change in myth will further influence the dynamics of ritual. In the words of Victor Turner, there is “a dynamic relation between social drama and expressive cultural genres” such as ritual and myth (Turner, “Social Dramas” 154). Myths are essentially a type of narrative, of course, and particularly powerful narratives at that. They frequently have a foundational quality similar to rituals, and the telling of myths often follows a ritual or ritualized pattern.

Another feature of the relationship between rituals and narratives has been spelled out by Langdon Elsbree in his *Ritual Passages and Narrative Structures*. Elsbree conceptualizes ritual and narrative from a neurobiological standpoint as activities which are characterized by a similar impulse of ordering and structuring experience. This fits well into the cognitive study of narrative, in which it is stressed that, by segmenting the flux of events into comprehensible units like “character,” “situation,” “action,” and “episode,” and then synthesizing those elements in a particular way narrations attribute meaning to events.²³ Highlighting structural similarities between narrative and ritual and applying concepts from ritual studies such as “social drama” (Turner) and “rites of passage” (van Gennep) to the study of literature, Elsbree and others persuasively identify and discuss these basic structures not only in real-life rituals, but also in the plot structures of fictional narratives. Moreover, ritual, just like narrative, has been described not only as (ritual) action, but also as a communicative act, using symbols as part of its aesthetic-expressive dimension (see Braungart 119).

Notwithstanding these productive and insightful studies, we argue that the nexus between ritual and narrative has not been sufficiently addressed so far. As yet, there is a lack of applications of current narrative and ritual theory in order to explore the similarities and relations between both fields. In responding to this research gap, the contributions in this volume try to shed light on the relationship between “ritual” and “narrative” and ask questions such as: where precisely do rituals and narratives intersect, what do they share? To what extent are rituals shaped by narrative structures? What are the stories that rituals tell, or that are told about them? Who does the story-telling in or about rituals, and to what end? In particular, the role

23 For a cognitive approach to narrative, see Herman, *Narrative Theory and Cognitive Sciences*.

of narrativity remains to be explored. What role does it play in rituals and in representations of ritual? What is the role of narrative strategies in media representations of rituals? To what extent do even non-fictional texts and other historical sources – documents which record and describe rituals – make use of narrative elements and strategies?

These questions constitute a broad thematic focus which accommodates theoretical or methodological reflections as well as in-depth case studies. Drawing on various disciplinary perspectives as well as new approaches in narratology, the present volume seeks to explore the manifold forms and functions of narrativity in (or of) rituals and in media representations of rituals. The first section of the book consists of a number of theoretical explorations of the various similarities and links between narratives and rituals. In the second section, scholars from various disciplines (ranging from classical archaeology, theology and political science to literary and religious studies) apply narratological concepts in order to analyse how rituals are received, experienced and perceived in terms of the senses, as well as how they are represented by narrative and media-specific means. A wide variety of experiential, cognitive, intermedial, transgeneric and other narratological approaches will be drawn on here, in an attempt to help research on rituals open up to a wide spectrum of media and genres in which rituals are represented.

Looking ahead to the individual chapters of this volume in more detail, much of its conceptual and theoretical backbone is provided by two thorough examinations. The chapters by Marie-Laure Ryan and by Vera and Ansgar Nünning bring rigorous narratological expertise to the study of ritual and ritual representations. They start from the observation that ritual and narrative stand to gain a lot from dialogue across disciplinary boundaries, though they have rarely engaged in it as yet. Against this background, Ryan asks in the title of her wide-ranging discussion, “Ritual Studies and Narratology: What Can They Do For Each Other”? This is a deliberately rhetorical question, as Ryan demonstrates a high degree of possible cross-fertilization. Her account is richly illustrated by forays into the history of ideas connecting the two fields, such as the myth and ritual debate. However, Ryan is also concerned not to collapse the two phenomena too easily. While pointing out many similarities she stresses that looking at ritual from a narrative point of view and vice versa will not only result in fruitful collaboration, but will also yield fresh insights into the distinctive (dissimilar)

properties of each object of study and analytical perspective taken by itself. Ryan complements this argument on the disciplinary effects of interdisciplinary dialogue with a case study of the Escalade in Geneva, an annual re-enactment of founding events in the city's history. Based on various accounts and documents, this is an example of a story giving birth to a ritual, but the multiple performances of this story have also altered and "ritualized" it in turn. The various mechanisms of such feedback loops as analysed by Ryan provide ample illustration of the interrelationship between narrative and ritual.

Vera and Ansgar Nünning also explore theoretical territory in their chapter "On the Narrativity of Rituals: Interfaces between Narratives and Rituals and Their Potential for Ritual Studies." Mapping the field constituted by these interfaces, they list similarities and differences between rituals and narratives not only in terms of form but importantly also in terms of function. Moreover, by applying items from the analytical "toolkit" of narratology such as multiperspectivity to the study of ritual, they show which benefits these may have. For example, the extent to which rituals allow for a broad spectrum of agency despite their collectivizing impact can be demonstrated if one dissects the intricate network of individual points of view in rituals and representations of ritual with the help of narratological categories such as perspective structures. As Vera and Ansgar Nünning argue, narratology has a lot to offer when it comes to describing the formal level and indeed the narrativity of many rituals. They also demonstrate that while ritual studies may profit from the form-oriented endeavour of classical structuralist narratology, the social nature of ritual and the role of narrative in this sphere is a highly promising area of narrative study. Rituals and ritual culture here emerge as an expandable field of application in which to explore the manifold text-transcending and cultural (e.g. identity-forming) functions of narratives from the point of view of context-oriented postclassical narratology.

In the last chapter of the theoretical section, "Obama's American Narrative: A Narratological Approach to Complex Rituals," Roy Sommer starts by discussing the theoretical and methodological origins of ritual and narrative theory in structuralism. He identifies some crucial similarities between ritual and narrative; in particular drawing attention to the structuralist concern with "deep structures" and narrative grammar, which matches the ritualist interest in "deep structures" and the "morphology" of rituals. Ac-

knowledging these commonalities bears the potential to explore ritual and narrative as related expressions of a shared cultural "DNA." In his case study, Sommer explores the uses of narrative in United States presidential elections. Analysing four speeches of President Obama from the 2008 election campaign, Sommer identifies five recurrent types of narrative (life stories, biographical stories, personal experience narratives, anecdotes, and micro-stories) that are designed to support political arguments and programmatic statements. Specifically, they tend to display a high level of experientiality in order to elicit an emotional or empathetic response on the part of the audience. Stories are manifestly a key element in the complex rituals of US presidential elections. Demonstrating this, Sommer highlights both the value of a narratological approach to ritual and the value of drawing on concepts from ritual studies when trying to gauge the cultural functions and purposes of storytelling as social practice.

With its rich illustration of theoretical aspects Sommer's analysis looks ahead to the emphasis on case studies in the second part of this volume. The chapters in the second part of our volume take some of the theoretical reflections in the first part as a springboard and explore the interfaces between narrative and ritual from different disciplinary perspectives. Far from already settling the debate over ritual and narrative, the case studies in the second section are meant to exemplify and illustrate the central concerns of this volume. The case studies are arranged in a roughly chronological order as far as their objects of study and related historical concepts of ritual and narrative are concerned. However, this chronological order is cut across by constantly combining historical and systematic concerns, as the various contributors bring "new" analytical categories to bear on "old" materials which often predate the modern development of narratology by far.

The first two case studies, "Depicting Sacrifice in Roman Asia Minor: Narratives of Ritual in Classical Archaeology" by Günther Schörner and "'He had just finished presenting the burnt offering ...': Narrative and Ritual in the Context of Saul's Failure (1 Sam 13-14)" by Joachim Vette, approach the nexus between ritual and narrative from classical archaeology and theology respectively. In combining ancient source materials and modern analytical methods, they both highlight the value and interdisciplinary promise of narratological categories for studying ritual and narrative in different media. Revisiting the Hierapolis Frieze in modern-day Turkey, Schörner draws on postclassical approaches to analysing pictorial narration.

The frieze dates back to Roman Asia minor and is the most detailed visual representation of animal sacrifice from this time. It is not a narrative proper, Schörner points out, but narratological distinctions make it possible to determine quite what degree of narrativity it does possess. They also allow for accommodating the performative, world-making and media-specific aspects of the frieze and the ritual it depicts, while at the same taking stock and extending the range and status quo of narrative analysis in classical archaeology. In a similar vein, Vette builds on the body of narrative scholarship of the Bible to trace the relationship of ritual and narrative in Old Testament Scripture. Vette carries out a close reading of the first book of Samuel 13-14, a text chosen for what he describes as the highest density of ritual action in any biblical narrative. Applying categories of a narrative poetics, he pays particular attention to the narrative function of these ritualized actions. Ritual actions in this text serve to propel forward, interpret and reflect on the narrative action, specifically pushing the ironic, satiric and tragic aspects of the story.

Moving forward in time and adding further disciplinary perspectives of religious and literary studies, the chapters by Dirk Johannsen, Jan Rupp and Scarlett Meyer look at more modern constellations of ritual and narrative in different national, literary and historiographical traditions. In his case study "Two Types of Magic in One Tradition? A Cognitive-Historiographical Case Study on the Interplay of Narratives and Rituals," Johannsen looks at the interaction between ritual forms of magic and narratives from a folk religious tradition in 19th-century Norway. Applying perspectives from narratology and the cognitive science of religion he shows how these rituals and their fictional representations in narrative texts mutually feed into each other as two types of magic sustaining a joint tradition. Contemporary images of magical experts were narratively constructed, Johannsen points out, while the appearance of these experts (and thus the intrusion of ritual) in fictional stories was marked by specific narrative techniques and devices.

In his chapter "Ritual, Narrative and Identity in English Pageant Fictions of the Interwar Years," Rupp looks at the crisis of collective identity and corresponding popularity of ritual in modernist pageant fictions of the 1930s. In the light of imperial decline and looming war, English pageant fictions responded to the early 20th-century boom of public ritual in the form of large-scale historical pageants. They are part of a literary reaction taking up and problematizing the twin phenomena of identity crisis and its

containment through ritual. Rupp highlights the ways in which pageant fictions reflect on and rework narrative mechanisms of their ritual pretexts, developing alternative models to the national "rite of passage" from imperial Britishness to a more domestic Englishness as often staged in historical pageantry. As Meyer argues in her chapter "Rituals, Narrative and the Construction of Identity in the Intercultural British Novel at the Turn of the 21st Century," the intercultural novel in Britain is informed by a similar crisis or change of collective identity. For one thing, this degree of change is indicated by the depiction of immigrant rituals such as Indian marriage ceremonies and burials. Moreover, many intercultural novels use the *bildungsroman* genre, which resonates with the model of rites of passage. Like the fictional staging of intercultural rituals, the *bildungsroman* seems to transform notions of Englishness into a more inclusive sense of Britishness. Meyer points out the social resonance of fictional rites of passage, while also emphasizing the potential of literary narrative for critical engagement and self-reflexivity with regard to this ritual pattern.

The last case study by Stefanie Hammer, "How to Commemorate a Fallen Soldier: Ritual and Narrative in the Bundeswehr," turns to a non-fictional and highly topical context of ritual and narrative, i.e. the commemoration of fallen soldiers of the Bundeswehr in public ceremonies. Looking at the connection between ritual and narrative from the perspective of political science, Hammer analyses how narrative elements in speeches play an important part in the Bundeswehr commemoration services. Over time even slight alterations in the speeches have also transformed the overall ritual. Thus, the very term "fallen soldier" and rival terms conjure up competing historical narratives which configure the rituals discussed in and through narrative. Moreover, Hammer draws attention to changing public and media settings which further shape the relationship between ritual and narrative in the Bundeswehr. This case study gives ample evidence of the usefulness of applying new approaches of narratology in non-fictional contexts of ritual and public storytelling. Like the previous chapters, it casts an important spotlight on the ground to be covered and the connections to be drawn by further debate which we hope to inspire with this volume.

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