

## **Emerging Concepts in Narratological Research: Authenticity and Narrative World-Disruption**

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**Abstract:**

The essay collections edited by Antonius Weixler (*Authentisches Erzählen*, 2012) and Markku Lehtimäki et al. (*Narrative, Interrupted*, 2012) constitute an attempt to establish authenticity and interruption (in the sense of narrative world-disruption) as key concepts of postclassical narratological research. *Authentisches Erzählen* consists of a multifaceted account of authenticity, accounting both for genealogical transformations and discipline-specific permutations of the term. For its part, *Narrative, Interrupted* focuses on potentially disruptive elements of narrative communication, and the contributors seek to analyse such phenomena as anti-causality and narrative world-disruption that structuralist narratology eschewed, while also challenging basic assumptions of contemporary narrative theory. Since interruption is one of the main catalysts of the effect of authenticity, the two volumes productively complement each other and make for an interesting contrapuntal read.

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Weixler, Antonius (Hg.): *Authentisches Erzählen. Produktion, Narration, Rezeption*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2012. 366 S., kartoniert, 99.95 Euro. ISBN: 978-3-11-029125-4

Lehtimäki, Markku; Karttunen, Laura; Mäkelä, Maria (Hgg.): *Narrative, Interrupted. The Plotless, the Disturbing and the Trivial in Literature*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2012. 328 S., kartoniert, 99.95 Euro. ISBN: 978-3-11-025997-1

Although it is likely that some residues remain in postclassical research on narrative, one could argue that contemporary narrative theory has largely freed itself from the fetters of classical, structuralist narratology. The successors to Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, and Tzvetan Todorov are increasingly sensible to such emerging concepts as authenticity and narrative world-disruption, which used to play only an ancillary role in narratological analyses.

For a long time, authenticity was conceptualized primarily as an aesthetic phenomenon rather than as a narratological one. Similarly, narrative world-disruption (sensu David Herman) or interruption hardly figured in prominent theorizations of narrative. In fact, it was not until 2012 that two ground-breaking volumes were published which address these significant concepts through the lens of narratology: *Narrative, Interrupted: The Plotless, the Disturbing and the Trivial in Literature*, edited by Markku Lehtimäki, Laura Karttunen, and Maria Mäkelä and *Authentisches Erzählen. Produktion, Narration, Rezeption*, edited by Antonius Weixler.

The former, *Narrative, Interrupted*, consists of 17 essays and is divided into three parts: Part I explores the boring and the plotless; Part II, the disturbing and the difficult; and Part III, problems of authorship in the works of Vladimir Nabokov. All three parts share the overall theme of the book, which, to put it simply, is concerned with the 'flow-stoppers' and 'frame-breakers' (sensu Per Krogh Hansen) of individual literary narratives. *Authentisches Erzählen* on the other hand is a collection of 14 essays that make a systematic contribution to narratological research on authenticity. Authenticity as a concept plays an important role not only in literature but also, for instance, in historiography, journalism, theology, ethnology, psychology, and politics. It can therefore be conceived of as a travelling concept (sensu Mieke Bal) that can shed new light on disciplinary research and objects of investigation. Since the contributors avoid an overarching, universal notion of authenticity, the understanding thereof as a travelling concept seems all the more pertinent. Drawing on different conceptualizations of authenticity,

the volume demonstrates that authenticity is a key concept in the study of culture that can bring to light commonalities in research projects from different disciplinary fields.

As an inter- and transdisciplinary meta-language of reflection, the concept of authenticity serves as a productive foil for elucidating the notions of narrative world-disruption and interruption, as discussed in *Narrative, Interrupted*. Narratives, Matti Hyvärinen argues in his analysis of W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, "are vitally about trying to understand contingency" (38), i.e. those elements in a narrative that are not causally determined. It is precisely those anti-causal and anti-linear elements that cause "the interruption of the causal-dynamic chain of events" (Lehtimäki et al., xi) and trigger the effect of authenticity (Weixler, 28). Given these conceptual links between authenticity and interruption, the two volumes mutually illuminate each other and make for an interesting contrapuntal read.

Whereas Matti Hyvärinen focuses on the fragmented structure of *The Rings of Saturn*, Michael Hutchins foregrounds the notion of authenticity in *Authentisches Erzählen*. Having found that W. G. Sebald's narrative is essentially anti-immersionist, Hutchins comes to the conclusion that "Sebald wants to forestall this process of enchantment and thus employs a technique of interruption" (90). The link between authenticity and interruption becomes even more apparent in James Phelan's rhetorical account of George V. Higgins's dialogue novel *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*. Phelan shows that "[t]he dialogue is often so arresting" in the crime novel "that it is easy to get stuck on the idea of its 'authenticity'" (8).

Apart from the afore-mentioned connections between the essays in the two de Gruyter volumes, there are also obvious differences such as the scope of disciplines covered and the range of genres and media explored. Whereas *Authentisches Erzählen* is highly interdisciplinary in the sense that the essays tackle the phenomenon of authenticity not only in literary but also political, cultural, and social contexts, *Narrative, Interrupted* is, as the book's subtitle indicates, firmly grounded in literary studies. The contributors are only rarely concerned with hybrid (in terms of genre and medium) texts. However, David Herman's well-written essay on animal comics is an exception to the rule.

All in all, both volumes are highly recommended for anyone interested in authenticity, narrative world-disruption or interruption understood not just as narratological concepts but also literary-critical ones that possess crucial interpretive potential. The collections of essays bring together comprehensive articles by distinguished scholars who create the impression that authenticity is on the one hand a phenomenon that engages to justify aesthetic illusion; on the other hand it is one that problematizes illusion either "by means of the obvious lie" (Hutchins, 81) or by means of narratives that aim to deform and 'defamiliarize' character, plot, time, space, and ways of telling, more generally