

# History of Narratology: A Rejoinder

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**Abstract** The comment takes issue with David Darby's presentation of German narratology, arguing that German contributions to the field of narrative studies are much broader and more varied than argued by Darby in his article in *Poetics Today*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2001).

David Darby's article "Form and Context: An Essay in the History of Narratology" (2001) performs at least three separate tasks. First, Darby presents a detailed history of German<sup>1</sup> narrative theory before the rise of its most famous exponents, Käthe Hamburger, Franz Karl Stanzel, and Eberhard Lämmert. Second, he compares German narratological studies (*Erzähltheorie*) with structuralist narratology, arguing that structuralist narratology and German *Erzähltheorie* have remained separate schools of thought. Third, Darby (2001: 829) argues his preference for the structuralist tradition to the detriment of German achievements in narrative studies on the presumption that only structuralist narratology, particularly in its American versions, reflects the key importance of reception—instanced by the "controversial narratological abstraction of implied authorship"—whereas German narrative studies, as he argues, concentrate "on rhetoric and voice" to the exclusion of a receptive point of view (leaving reception issues to the

1. In this response, as in Darby's original piece, *German* is equivalent to *from German-speaking areas*. In other words, *German* narrative theory refers to work published in German by German, Austrian, and Swiss-German scholars.

*Rezeptionstheorie* of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss). The advantages of the implied author as a “theorization,” according to Darby (*ibid.*), can best be illustrated on the example of feminist narratology, which Darby sees as a “test case” for the reception of narratives, even though—at least in the abstract of the article—he calls it a “much-disputed project.”

Darby’s article on German narratological study is timely. As he points out at the very beginning of this article, German *Erzähltheorie* took off around 1955 with articles by F. K. Stanzel and Eberhard Lämmert and with three key volumes: Stanzel’s *Die typischen Erzählsituationen im Roman* (1955), Lämmert’s *Bauformen des Erzählens* (1955), and Käte Hamburger’s *Die Logik der Dichtung* (1957). Darby gives generous tribute to Stanzel’s work, pointing out that Stanzel’s 1979 study *Theorie des Erzählens* was a “substantially revise[d]” version of his theory from the 1950s and acknowledging that Stanzel is an internationally reputed scholar (*ibid.*: 830–31). (He does not point out, though, that these revisions are specifically geared toward incorporating a more structuralist format in response to the work of Gérard Genette.)

The most useful sections of Darby’s essay consist in a summary of the German tradition of narrative study in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He points out that German narrative theory first arose from a comparison of the novel with the epic and drama (in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s and Friedrich Schiller’s 1797 joint essay “On Epic and Dramatic Poetry”)—a line of argument that can be shown to impinge directly on Stanzel’s fundamental opposition between dramatic and narrative mimesis. Darby summarizes a large number of proto-narratological works before Stanzel—names that still serve as reference points in Stanzel’s early studies but are now deemed obsolete by most German narratologists.

Darby also acknowledges that German criticism—even Stanzel’s work in English translation—is rarely cited in American narratological work. Thus he finds only two authors, Brian McHale and Dorrit Cohn, who quote Stanzel in *Poetics Today*’s special issues on narratology in 1980 and 1981, and only five essays referencing Stanzel’s work in the ten-year-anniversary issues in 1990. Meanwhile, however, this situation has much improved. Besides Dorrit Cohn, Uri Margolin regularly refers to German narratological work; Stanzel is also cited in other key studies in narratology: Ann Banfield’s *Unspeakable Sentences* (1982); Wayne C. Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983 [1961]); Wallace Chafe’s *Discourse, Consciousness and Time* (1994); Ann Fehn, Ingeborg Hoesterey, and Maria Tatar’s *Neverending Stories* (1992; in the introduction and in essays by Paul Lützel, Gail Finney, and Dorrit Cohn); Maurice Couturier’s *La figure de l’auteur* (1995); Lubomír Doležel’s *Heterocosmica* (1998); Suzanne Fleishman’s *Tense and Narrativity* (1990); exten-

sively in Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck's *Vertelduivels* (2001; this handbook of narratology is forthcoming in English translation); Susan Lanser's *Fictions of Authority* (1992); in the introduction to Susana Onega and José García Landa's critical reader *Narratology* (1996), which also contains an essay on Stanzel's work; in Gerald Prince's *Narratology* (1982) and in *A Dictionary of Narratology* (1987); Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2 (1985); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction* (1983; rev. ed., 2002); Meir Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (1987); Michael Toolan's *Narrative* (2001 [1988]). There is a substantial article on Stanzel also in the *Encyclopedia of the Novel* (Schellinger 1998), and Stanzel will figure prominently in the forthcoming *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (edited by David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan).

Having acknowledged Darby's laudable achievement in putting Stanzel squarely on the map of narratology, it needs to be pointed out, however, that Darby's thesis (2001: 835) regarding a "general resistance of German *Erzähltheorie* to the issues of narrative context" does not hold water. Actually, Stanzel, in *A Theory of Narrative* (1979; English version 1984), was acutely aware of the work of Roman Ingarden, Jauss, and Iser, and his remarks about the concretization of narrative lacunae by the reader point in the direction that Darby holds to be the correct one. Quoting Patrick O'Neill's (1994: 159) dictum that German narratology had "no place" in its conceptual repertoire for what he calls "extratextual discourse," Darby (2001: 839) generalizes from this specific analysis to argue that German narratology *tout court* has resisted the influx of reception-oriented models and concerns. Unfortunately he does here two things: he sees Stanzel as representative of contemporary German narratology, and he equates an openness to extratextual concerns with the presence of an "implied author."

Stanzel's *œuvre* is, of course, still the key narratological touchstone in German-speaking university curricula, but as recent German introductions to narrative theory demonstrate, Genette is increasingly given extensive coverage (see, especially, the excellent *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie* [1999] by Matias Martinez and Michael Scheffel). This equally applies to the work of the most prominent younger narratologist in Germany, Ansgar Nünning, whose typological fervor and love of neologisms easily outdo the Genettean performance. And it is, of course, true of my own work, which Darby kindly discusses at length. Stanzel's essays from the 1990s, on which Darby bases his generalizations, are typically retrospects, summaries, and extensions of his main narratological work from the 1950s to the late 1980s, and it is therefore unfair to criticize Stanzel for not following the latest critical fashions.

I do not want to engage here with the question whether the acceptance of an implied author directly makes possible the contextualization of narra-

tology or is even essential for it. Like Rimmon-Kenan, who briefly answers Darby in her revised *Narrative Fiction* (2002: 147), I myself find the “implied author” construct a useful fiction in certain contexts but one that the narratologist should, if possible, avoid. It is astounding that Darby, who after all reads German, should have completely failed to engage with Nünning’s (1993, 1997, 1998) incisive critique of the implied author, which has become a classic in German narratological criticism.

What Darby is really after, however, is not the implied author per se but the possibility of linking structuralist analysis and interpretative contextualization. Here, too, his charge that German Erzähltheorie fails to consider these issues is unjust. As recent surveys of narratology by Brian Richardson, Ansgar Nünning, and Monika Fludernik show, German narratology is pushing forward into media studies (film, Internet), into cognitivist and constructivist narratology, into possible worlds approaches, and into cultural studies.<sup>2</sup> What lies at the bottom of German narratology’s reluctance to engage with “context” is really German academia’s resolute resistance to ideology whether in the form of feminism or the New Historicism, and this resistance has also disappeared in the last decade. Recently, in the wake of a huge enthusiasm for cultural studies, German scholars, especially in English departments, have been very active in performing just the sort of work that Darby misses on the German scene—namely the combination of structuralist analysis and interpretative contextualization. It is especially odd that Darby takes no account of Nünning’s recent work, which fully satisfies his criteria of successful legitimate enquiry. As for feminist theory, I find it ironic that it should be Ansgar Nünning, the archenemy of the implied author concept, who has most successfully tried to integrate feminist approaches with narrative theory, thereby clearly undermining Darby’s strictures on German Erzähltheorie.

My main bone of contention with Darby’s article is, therefore, Darby’s one-sided presentation of the rather variegated field of German narratology, which includes a number of very respectable older and younger scholars publishing mainly in German and of whose existence Darby seems to be blithely unaware. This list includes, besides Ansgar Nünning, major figures like Wilhelm Füger, Werner Wolf, Wolf Schmid (a Slavist), Dietrich Meindl, and Peter Hühn as well as a considerable number of world-class narratologists mainly writing in English (Helmut Bonheim, Manfred Jahn, Richard Aczel, Barbara Korte, Hilary Dannenberg). Several other

2. See Fludernik 2000, Nünning 2000, and Richardson 2000 as well as Nünning and Nünning 2002a, 2002b and work by Jahn and Dannenberg (e.g., Jahn 1997, 1999, forthcoming; Dannenberg forthcoming a, forthcoming b) and Fludernik forthcoming.

narratologists in Romance and German departments, like Andreas Solbach, Fotis Janidis, Matias Martinez, and Michael Scheffel, could additionally be mentioned. And there is a new generation of German narratologists in the making, some of whom, already at their Ph.D. stage, are leaving their mark in international journals: Bruno Zerweck, Jan Alber, Ralph Schneider, or Greta Olson. Most of these are associated with the two narratological centers of Cologne (the Bonheim school), now transferred to Giessen under Ansgar Nünning; and the Graz school (Stanzel's school), with a direct continuation under Werner Wolf in Graz and an exiled component under myself at Freiburg, which recently has merged with Barbara Korte (formerly Cologne) and her contingent. Darby also fails to take note of some of the leading American narratologists, such as James Phelan (the editor of *Narrative*), David Herman, Brian Richardson, or M. L. Ryan.

It is my hope that these extensions of Darby's picture of German (and American) narratology will have a salutary effect on the image of present-day German-language criticism held in the United States and elsewhere. Pace Darby, German narratologists do regularly read and take into account English-language narratological publications. Unfortunately their own reactions to this work, if published in German, and even when published in English in Europe, are rarely acknowledged in the United States. This will, I hope, change for the better.<sup>3</sup>

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3. In order to help this development along, Uri Margolin and I currently are editing a special issue of *Style* (winter 2004) on German narratology which collects work by leading German narratologists in English translation.

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