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Response

Behind the phrase ›literary theory‹ there lies what we might call a general concept with heterogeneous content and fluid boundaries. For example, in the *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft* (›Encyclopedia of German Literary Studies‹), a major reference work of German studies, Peter Zima and Friedmann Harzer describe *Literaturtheorie* (›literary theory‹) as a »collective term for theoretical models that are concerned with the construction, constitution, and function of literature and that also – as metatheories – examine the place of such models with respect to history and system« (›Sammelbegriff für Theoriemodelle, die sich mit der Produktion, Beschaffenheit, Rezeption und Funktion von Literatur befassen sowie – als Metatheorien – den historischen und systematischen Stellenwert solcher Modelle untersuchen‹). If we unravel the somewhat cryptic syntax of this attempt at a definition, it is clear that Zima and Harzer mean to say that literary theory consists of two components. On the one hand, there are various theories of ›literature‹ and its contexts, to be distinguished in terms of their frames of historical reference and the questions that interest them; on the other hand, there are what we might call theories about the theories. Detailed demarcation of ›literary theory (or theories)‹ and ›literary theory (or theories) theory (or theories)‹ is problematic, which is presumably why the *Metzler-Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie* (›Metzler Dictionary of Literary and Cultural Theory‹), edited by Ansgar Nünning, does not even attempt to define one of the two terms in its title. Instead of discussing literary theory as a headword in its own right, the dictionary provides cross-references to a series of entries concerning particular periods in the form ›literary theories of period x‹. We have, for example, references to entries on classical literary theories, Renaissance literary theories, literary theories of romanticism, and finally, at the end of an apparently more or less random array of periods and movements, literary theories of surrealism.

If nothing else, the above examples show that asking about the evolution of literary theory assumes a concept of literary theory that must first be described as such and, for example, placed in relation to the field of ›general literary studies‹. I am not in a position to provide such a description here and will therefore restrict myself to considering what is (apparently at any rate) a smaller and more specific field of study, one that I consider my speciality and whose scope touches on at least some general issues of literary theory: the ›study of narrative‹,

or ›narratology‹, understood as a ›science of narrative‹. What is the relationship between ›narratology‹ and ›literary theory‹ (or ›the study of literature‹ in the general sense)? I will outline an answer to this question with reference to the development and theoretical problems of various issues with which narratology is concerned; I believe that they are closely related to current developments and problems in the field of literary theory in general.

If the study of narrative in relation to folklore is disregarded, it can be said that narratology came into existence under the sign of structuralism and developed as part of the study of literature. The phenomenon of narration was treated accordingly in early standard works of narratological research in Germany, from Eberhard Lämmert's *Bauformen des Erzählens* (1955 ff.; ›Forms of Narration‹) to Jochen Vogt's *Aspekte erzählender Prosa* (1972 ff., revised edition 1990 ff.; ›Aspects of Narrative Prose‹), Franz Stanzel's *Theorie des Erzählens* (1979 ff.; translated as *A Theory of Narrative*), and finally Jürgen Petersen's *Erzählssysteme* (1993; ›Narrative Systems‹). Such works associate narration with literary texts almost as a matter of course and frequently discuss problems of narrative theory in direct conjunction with poetological issues (in particular ones concerning the theory of the novel). This fixation on literary narratives was taken more or less for granted, but it has since been abandoned in the wake of the cultural turn in the humanities and the emergence of a general openness towards the concerns of cultural studies. More recent works illustrate the new approach that has emerged as a result. In *Towards a ›Natural‹ Narratology* (1996), for example, Monika Fludernik, one of Stanzel's pupils, brings the ›natural‹ model of everyday, generally oral narration to the fore, moving beyond the boundaries of literary art and what is not art to search for the basic structures of narration as what Hayden White calls a ›panglobal fact of culture‹. This is representative of a general tendency to be found in many recent ›post-structuralist‹ studies: where there was before a narrow interest in the structure of literary narrative texts, we now find attention being given to a much wider range of issues relating to narration in general – its interaction with media, cognitive psychology, and sociocultural factors; its forms and their contexts; its functions and relation to reality. Such are the interests of a narratology operating in an increasingly ›interdisciplinary‹, ›transgeneric‹, and ›intermedial‹ fashion. What are the benefits of this development – and where do its potential problems lie?

There can be no doubt that what is gained is a ›richer‹ and more comprehensive point of view from which to approach narration (understood as one of the basic forms of human cultural action). Welcome as this widening of perspective may be, it still has, at least in the form in which it is currently being pursued, its problematic side, and that in several respects. For a start, it lacks a substantial empirical foundation. Narratologists – who typically have an academic background in literary studies, even the study of a single national literature alone – repeatedly call for empirically grounded studies of the production and reception of

narratives, their forms, and their functions. There is (almost) no one, though, who carries out such studies, and cooperative efforts between literary scholars and linguists, for example, or psychologists or neurologists, are an exceptional occurrence at best. Thus, there has been considerable talk of cognitive psychology, ›frames‹, and ›scripts‹ for some time, but in actual fact this has brought with it neither the pursuit of an interdisciplinarity worthy of the name in practice, nor the use of corresponding approaches in empirical studies, nor the evaluation of the heuristic value of such approaches. In other words, narratological research is leaving the field of literary theory or the study of literature in the strict sense without being particularly well equipped for such ›excursions‹. It does not, that is to say, have access to appropriate corpora of non-literary narration (from the field of everyday oral narration, for example) or an investigative toolkit that has been empirically tested and methodologically evaluated in the context of interdisciplinary research.

Does this mean we should call for a return to literary narration, ultimately a ›return to the text‹? That need not, in my view, be seen as an either-or alternative to the wider perspective that has been attained. Why not take one option without abandoning the other? There are, after all, many areas of interest within the specific scope of narratology that deserve closer consideration. I will close in this spirit by outlining three such lines of enquiry (also the fields we are currently seeking to describe at the University of Wuppertal's Centre for Narrative Studies).

1. Instead of simply continuing to pursue a ›work-internak‹ or ›structuralist‹ line, we should use the cultural studies-based approaches of recent years to inform a renewed interest in the specific features of literary narration and its possible functions in comparison to those of non-literary narration.
2. We should carry out studies of a comparative nature on the history and historical evolution of narrative forms and their cultural semantics.
3. We should carry out empirical studies and fundamental theoretical research on the relationship between ›text‹ and ›context‹ in the case of literary and non-literary narratives; in general, that is, we should seek to develop a ›context-based narratology‹ that is both methodologically aware and capable of entering into interdisciplinary connections.

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