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### Narratology of multiple differences

In *Narrative* 26:3, Greger Andersson and Tommy Sandberg argue powerfully against what they call “sameness narratology,” which, the authors claim, is perhaps the dominant trend in narratology. Sameness in this context indicates the intention to read fictional narratives in the same way as non-fictional, everyday narratives. It is true that during the heyday of cognitive narratology, an emphasis was often placed on finding similarities in how one could construe, receive, and understand narratives. For this reason, we warmly welcome voices that critically reinvestigate the obvious differences between different narrative genres.

However, we are unsure about the fruitfulness of the polarizing rhetorical strategy chosen by Anderson and Sandberg. Their argument is most problematic in shaping and describing the dominant “sameness narratology.” For one thing, most of the known narratological tools and approaches – the Greimasian approach excluded – have been developed in and for the study of fictional narratives. The accused “sameness narratology,” instead, suffers from a lack of nuanced tools for analyzing everyday narratives. Furthermore, the authors fail to document the existence of the sameness narratology. How can we imagine a dominant school of thought without any explicit proponent or program text? For example, knowing how explicit and thorough a writer David Herman is, and how strictly he outlines his (changing) positions in different debates, why does he never claim that fiction and non-fiction should be read the very same way?

Perhaps because of a shortage of hard evidence, Andersson and Sandberg have turned to the volume *The Travelling Concepts of Narrative* we edited together with Lars-Christer Hydén, in particular its introduction. This is somewhat confusing, because we did not set out to answer the question of how to read fiction at all. The purpose of the volume and its introduction was to study, historically and conceptually, the numerous uses of the concept of “narrative” in various disciplinary contexts. In other words, our purpose never was to write a normative theory of reading – or of anything else, for that matter.

Andersson and Sandberg quote our sentence “We read and understand our everyday life and interaction the same way we read and understand stories” as evidence of the sameness argument by the editors who wrote the introduction. Any careful reader should notice that the quotation is from a part of our introduction in which we explain and assess the cognitive approach to narrative. In the following paragraph, the authors of the introduction move on to the problems and limitations of the cognitive approach. While we recognize the benefits brought about by cognitive narratology in building bridges between social, psychological, and literary studies on narrative, we also express the need for caution in terms of the move it makes from the text to the interpreter.

What is more, in the passage quoted by Andersson and Sandberg, we do not address the question of how to read fiction. The issue rather concerns the old Bruneian argument, which maintains that storytelling and narrative are such powerful evolutionary achievements that they influence how we receive and observe the plurality of the world in the first place. The tools of telling are not neatly separated from the tools of observing. A more particular version of this argument would claim that the history of reading novels and other fictional narratives has equally had an impact on the way people see the world.

In short, we do not think that fiction and everyday stories should or could be read in the *same* way. This stated, we neither subscribe to such a categorical distinction that forbids, a priori, all investigation to resources that might be relevant in the study of both fictional and non-fictional stories. To arrive at a more nuanced understanding of our thinking in *The Travelling Concepts*, the reader might notice the way Hyvärinen criticizes Hayden White’s pan-fictional theory, which indeed presents all narratives (e.g. fiction and historiography) as participants of one and the same genre – “narrative” – and how Hatavara remarks that reading any minds – in the sense cognitive theorists talk about reading – in literary fiction is necessarily preceded by reading the text first. From a methodological point of view, Hatavara emphasizes the distinction between interpreting real-life situations and literary texts: “[r]eal and fictional minds undoubtedly share many features and differ in many ways, but the distinction between our interacting face-to-face and reading a literary text is undeniable” (p. 173).

While rejecting naïve theories of sameness, we emphasize the need to avoid the categorical, all-or-nothing approach Anderson and Sandberg seem to suggest. There is no verified law of

difference discriminating against all possible continuities and similarities between narrative fiction and everyday storytelling. All linguistic categories, including language games, are after all fuzzy (Virtanen 1992). For example, as Hatavara and Jarmila Mildorf (2017) have demonstrated, narrative modes of mind representation do travel between fictional and non-fictional narrative environments, and methods originating from the study of fictional narratives can be applied to materials like oral history interviews. For this reason, we believe further studies into such travels and crossovers would be more beneficial than efforts to isolate fiction and its study from other narratives.

#### Works cited

Hatavara, Mari, Matti Hyvärinen, and Lars-Christer Hydén. 2013. "Introduction, or another story of narrative." In *The Travelling Concepts of Narrative*, edited by Matti Hyvärinen, Mari Hatavara and Lars-Christer Hydén, 1–9. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

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