The Difference Approach to Narrative Fiction
A Recurring Critique of Narratology and Its Implications for the Study of Novels and Short Stories

av

Tommy Sandberg

Akademisk avhandling

Avhandling för filosofi doktorsexamen i litteraturvetenskap, som kommer att föras på offentligt fredagen den 18 oktober 2019 kl. 13.15, Hörsal F, Forumhuset, Örebro universitet

Opponent: Professor Karin Kukkonen
Universitetet i Oslo (UiO)
Oslo, Norge
Abstract


The aim of this thesis is to advance the critical examination of narratology, or the study of storytelling. I analyze four versions of a critique of the dominant theory of narrative fiction in narratology and discuss this critique’s methodological implications. The critics, Sylvie Patron, Lars-Åke Skalin, Richard Walsh, and the proponents of unnatural narratology have, I suggest, similar understandings of narratology’s handling of works like novels and short stories as well as similar alternative approaches. I situate the critique among relevant theories of fiction and salient aspects of narratology, and conclude that the most radical critics have a difference approach to narrative fiction. This means treating this literary practice as following another rule system for creating meaning than other kinds of storytelling. These critics seem to base their reasoning on their readerly intuitions about how novels and short stories function; yet their approach also lends itself to, for instance, discussions on how such works afford life visions or worldviews. In contrast to this approach, I describe narratology, in the critics’ view, as having a sameness approach that treats narrative fiction as a subtype of “narrative” in the sense of the communication of events by a narrator.

The three opening articles of the thesis comprise a metadiscussion of the critique. I here describe, in part with Greger Andersson, the critics’ ideas, characterize the critique as a whole, and speculate about why it has had no apparent effect on narratology. The two latter articles utilize the difference approach in analyses of Angela Carter’s “The Loves of Lady Purple” and Sara Stridsberg’s Drömfakulteten (The Faculty of Dreams) while discussing narratological concepts and issues. Future studies might continue this discussion or inquire further about, for example, the relations between different narrative practices or what role different intuitions about narrative fiction play in descriptions and analyses.

Keywords: Angela Carter, narrative fiction, narrative theory, narratology, Sylvie Patron, Lars-Åke Skalin, Sara Stridsberg, unnatural narratology, Richard Walsh

Tommy Sandberg, School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences Örebro University, SE-701 82 Örebro, Sweden, tommy.sandberg@oru.se