

Nora Berning

# Towards a Critical Ethical Narratology

Analyzing Value Construction  
in Literary Non-Fiction across Media

WVT-HANDBÜCHER UND STUDIEN  
ZUR  
MEDIENKULTURWISSENSCHAFT

Herausgegeben von  
Knut Hickethier, Ansgar Nünning und Martin Zierold

Band 9

Nora Berning

# Towards a Critical Ethical Narratology

Analyzing Value Construction  
in Literary Non-Fiction across Media

 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

**Berning, Nora: Towards a Critical Ethical Narratology.  
Analyzing Value Construction in Literary Non-Fiction  
across Media / Nora Berning. -**

Trier : WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2013

Zugl. Diss., JLU Gießen, FB 05, 2012

(WVT-Handbücher und Studien  
zur Medienkulturwissenschaft; Bd. 9)

ISBN 978-3-86821-455-0

Cover illustration: Wall painting in New York City (unknown artist)

Cover design: Brigitta Disseldorf

© WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2013

ISBN 978-3-86821-455-0

All rights reserved.

No part of this book, covered by the copyright hereon,  
may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means  
without prior permission of the publisher.

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier

Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier

Tel.: (0651) 41503 / 9943344, Fax: 41504

Internet: <http://www.wvttrier.de>

E-Mail: [wvt@wvttrier.de](mailto:wvt@wvttrier.de)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study has been submitted to Justus Liebig University (Faculty 05) in November 2012 and was accepted as a dissertation. To my first supervisor, Prof Dr Ansgar Nünning, I am most grateful for providing great optimism, willing support and guidance that manifestly contributed to the development of this dissertation; for engaging in intellectual discussion and offering invaluable constructive criticism; for always being there and for his unrestricted readiness to share his thoughts with me. To my second supervisor, Prof Dr Per Krogh Hansen, I am heartily thankful for imparting an insightful view of my work; for giving helpful advice and suggestions during conference breaks; for being an anchor during the final spurt of my dissertation and for whose positive, informed, and encouraging nature has been an inspiration throughout. Many thanks go to the members of my committee: Prof Dr Andreas Langenohl and Prof Dr Wolfgang Hallet. I greatly appreciate their critical insights and comments from their respective perspectives on the topic of my dissertation. Special thanks go to the faculty members of the Media Studies Department at Western University (Canada) where the idea for this study was born.

Marie-Luise and Johannes, thank you for your unconditional love; for being a source of strength to me since the beginning of my studies; for helping me to find my vocation.



## CONTENTS

<b>I. Introduction and Outline</b> .....	1
I.1. The Self- and World-Making Functions of Narrative.....	1
I.2. Genre-Specific Structures of Literary Non-Fiction.....	4
I.3. The Narrative Fabric of Literary Non-Fiction .....	5
I.4. Media-Specific Structures of Literary Non-Fiction .....	8
I.5. Desiderata of Research .....	9
I.6. Towards a Critical Ethical Narratology (CEN).....	10
<b>II. Theoretical Framework</b> .....	12
II.1. Applying Contemporary Genre Theory to Literary Non-Fiction.....	12
II.1.1. Hybridization and Medialisation as Catalysts of Generic Development.....	13
II.1.2. Literary Non-Fiction's Overlaps with Fictional and Factual Genres .....	14
II.1.3. The Cultural and Historical Antecedents of Literary Non-Fiction .....	22
II.2. Emerging Vectors of Narratology.....	25
II.2.1. CEN and Cultural Extensions of Classical Narratology .....	28
II.2.2. CEN and Ethical Narratology .....	28
II.2.3. CEN and Transmedial Narratology.....	31
II.3. The Complex Web of Relationships between Literature and Ethics ...	33
II.3.1. Literature and Ethics from the Perspective of Ethical Criticism.....	35
II.3.2. Literature and Ethics from the Perspective of Rhetorical Narratology .....	38
II.4. Core Categories of Value Construction in Literary Non-Fiction.....	41
<b>III. Methodological Framework</b> .....	47
III.1. The Textual Corpus .....	47
III.1.1. Alexandra Fuller's <i>Scribbling the Cat</i> (2004).....	48
III.1.2. The 2011 World Press Photo Narratives.....	50
III.1.3. Joe Sacco's <i>Safe Area Goražde</i> (2000).....	52
III.1.4. Mark Bowden's <i>Blackhawk Down</i> (1997).....	53
III.2. The Method of Analysis.....	55
III.2.1. Narrative Situation.....	57

III.2.2. Narrative Time.....	59
III.2.3. Character-spaces.....	61
III.2.4. Narrative Bodies.....	62
<b>IV. Value Construction in Fuller’s <i>Scribbling the Cat</i> (2004)</b> .....	63
IV.1. Narrative Situation.....	64
IV.2. Narrative Time.....	72
IV.3. Character-spaces.....	75
IV.4. Narrative Bodies.....	78
<b>V. Value Construction in the 2011 World Press Photo Narratives</b> .....	82
V.1. Narrative Situation.....	84
V.2. Narrative Time.....	90
V.3. Character-spaces.....	94
V.4. Narrative Bodies.....	97
<b>VI. Value Construction in Sacco’s <i>Safe Area Goražde</i> (2000)</b> .....	103
VI.1. Narrative Situation.....	106
VI.2. Narrative Time.....	111
VI.3. Character-spaces.....	114
VI.4. Narrative Bodies.....	115
<b>VII. Value Construction in Bowden’s <i>Blackhawk Down</i> (1997)</b> .....	118
VII.1. Narrative Situation.....	121
VII.2. Narrative Time.....	123
VII.3. Character-spaces.....	126
VII.4. Narrative Bodies.....	128
<b>VIII. Conclusion and Outlook</b> .....	131
VIII.1. A Summary of the Findings.....	131
VIII.2. CEN’s Added Value and Avenues for Future Research.....	137
VIII.3. Towards a Code of Ethics for Authors of Literary Non-Fiction.....	140
References.....	143



## I. INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

### I.1. The Self- and World-Making Functions of Narrative

Storytelling is a basic human activity. Insights from the realm of cognitive psychology and cognitive narratology, that is, a branch of narratology concerned with the nexus between mind and narrative (Herman 2011), underline the importance of storytelling for the formation of our identities. “Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narratives, with the stories we tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves” (Brooks 1984: 3; Prado 1984).<sup>1</sup> The immersion in a storyworld can serve as a basis for thinking, knowing, and understanding, for seeking the self and encountering the ‘Other’ (Bruner 1991). In a nutshell, narratives fulfill important cognitive functions in that they help us to make sense of an increasingly complex, globalized world.

Besides the reality-constituting, identity-making, and sense-making qualities that narrative psychologists like Bruner (1987, 1991) and Eakin (1999) ascribe to narrative, the power of narration lies, moreover, in the fact that it can serve as an interface between self-making and the making of communities (Nünning & Nünning 2010a). Stories can make us members of a narrative community (Müller-Funk 2008; Rosenstad 2005). In so doing, they proactively contribute to the formation of collective identities and to the negotiation of cultural memory (Neumann 2010). Hence, they are best understood as vehicles for cultural world-construction and literary worldmaking (Østenstad 2010).

Following Nelson Goodman’s (1992) analytical philosophy of world-making, literary non-fiction can be conceived of as something that constructs worlds in the same way as prose fiction does and as a plethora of other symbol systems do. Narrative, be it fictional, factual, or generically hybrid, is “a

---

1 Scholars associated with the narrative constructivist position are Ricœur (1990, 1991a), White (1980, 1991), Bruner (1991), Mink (1970), MacIntyre (1981), and Arendt (1958). On narrative constructivism see Sparkes and Smith (2008) and Fay (1996). For a commentary on Ricœur’s work see Vanhoozer (1991) and Kemp (1989, 1995). For a commentary on Arendt’s work see Benhabib (1994), Kristeva (2001), and Speight (2011).

metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted” (White 1980: 6). Consequently, narratives are not only essential for the formation of individual identities, but they are also crucial for a shared human reality or what the German philosopher Immanuel Kant meant by communal sense (*sensus communis*).

For Kant, the *sensus communis* represents the *sine qua non* of humanity. It is a sense grounded in reflective judgment. In the *Critique of Judgment* (1957), Kant argued that a shared reality presupposes shared ways of perceiving and imparting meaning onto the world. This dissertation argues that narratives can open up such a shared sensorium among the members of an aesthetic-political community. Storytelling is what nourishes and delimits the contours of the *sensus communis*. Narratives make it possible for human beings to communicate objects of concern, because the aesthetically condensed worlds synthesize the particular and the general in a particularly effective way (Antor 1996; McGinn 1997). Precisely because stories can trigger reflection upon ethical issues, literary worldmaking can enable the experience of a shared ethical and political reality.

Since its first publication in 1790, Kant’s ‘third Critique’ has led many moral philosophers, among them Hannah Arendt, to establish a link between the aesthetic and the political via the notion of judgment. In her reading of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, Arendt (1992) embeds the concept of *sensus communis* in a discursive framework and grounds it in a sort of intersubjectivity or communicability of which imagination is the basis. This intersubjectivity makes the ethics of narrative an inherently universal subject (Booth 1988). What we are dealing with here, then, is a disciplinary triangle that consists of narrative understood as cultural imaginary (*sensu* Claviez 2008), ethics (in particular, moral philosophy), and politics.

In Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, ethics and politics complement each other because norms and values only become concrete and take on meaning in a political community.<sup>2</sup> Literary worldmaking is one domain of and the aes-

---

2 Value will be defined as a “*critère qui fonde une préférence*, qui fait que quelque chose est désirable, souhaitable, bon, etc. [criterion that establishes a preference; that renders something desirable, preferable, good, etc.]”, whereas norm refers to “*la forme prescriptive de la valeur* [the prescriptive form of value]” (Korthals Altes 1992: 10; my translation).

thetic experience (*sensu* Dewey 2005) an integral part of every political community. Put differently, the aesthetic experience is one of the main catalysts of ethical life (Locatelli 2008). As a tool for weighing alternative conceptions of identity (Kraus 1996; Meuter 1995; Kerby 1991; Henke 2003) and as “a medium for representing, disseminating and constructing norms and values” (Baumbach, Grabes & Nünning 2009: 1), literary worldmaking fulfills important normative functions that have “not yet been duly acknowledged and submitted to scrutiny” (Grabes 2008: 3).

If one accepts the idea that narratives are an important building block of a shared ethical, political, and aesthetic reality, then one should also pay close attention to the ethics of narrative implicated in literary worldmaking. The analysis of value construction in a narrative is a fundamentally self-reflexive exercise, because it illuminates the process of evaluation itself (Neumann 2008). The sharing, reading, contemplating, and judging of narratives ideally engages us in an open process of meaning- and value-making that consists in “evaluating values themselves” (Connor 1992: 3). It is a critical project, because it stipulates that we scrutinize our own ways of meaning making and the norms that guide our cultural world-models (Locatelli 2009).

In the context of a Critical Ethical Narratology (CEN), the term ‘critical’ signifies careful analytical evaluation, that is, critical scrutiny of form, genre, and mediality as constitutive elements of worldmaking. The formal features of a narrative are the edifice upon which the cognitive, cultural, instrumental, and normative functions of a particular work are built. Narrative techniques are the spine of a narrative (Barthes 1975); they have an ethical import insofar as they support the root function of narrative as a powerful vehicle of knowledge, values, and beliefs. There is no such thing as a narrative that is not in one way or another infused with what Jameson (1981: 141) has called an ethics or “ideology of form”. Hence, the research question that guides this dissertation is “how – through what devices – narrative texts, written and read in specific contexts, thematise, problematise, or consolidate specific moral values and norms” (Korthals Altes 2005: 145).

Building on Ansgar Nünning’s (2010) claim that classical narratological categories can contribute to an understanding of cultural world-construction in narrative contexts, it will be shown that not only categories that have emerged out of classical, structuralist narratology (e.g. narrative situation, narrative time) but also postclassical narratological categories, like character-

spaces (*sensu* Woloch 2003) and narrative bodies (*sensu* Punday 2003), can give important insights into value construction in literary non-fiction across media. Analyses of value construction should be equally concerned with narrative techniques and genre- and media-specific strategies for telling stories (Phelan & Martin 1999; Foley 1986).

## I.2. Genre-Specific Structures of Literary Non-Fiction

For the purpose of this dissertation, literary non-fiction is defined as a hybrid genre whose distinctive quality is the merging of fact and fiction. The trans-generic nature of literary non-fiction is independent of the medium through which the narrative is transmitted. Literary non-fiction can take on the form of a non-fiction novel, a photo narrative, a graphic novel, or a hypertext (Quart 2009). While media other than the afore-mentioned ones are beyond the scope of this dissertation, they are not beyond the boundaries of CEN more generally.

Literary non-fiction manifests itself not only in different types of media, but it is also a stylistically diverse genre. It can be self-interrogative, meditative, reflective, analytical, exploratory, lyrical, and sometimes even whimsical. Kramer's (1995: n.p.) claim that "there is something intrinsically political – and strongly democratic – about literary journalism, something pluralistic, pro-individual, anti-cant, and anti-elite" is equally true of the different forms of literary non-fiction listed above (Goudsblom 2000). Literary non-fiction's "fictual" (Zavarzadeh 1976: 56) mode of address makes the genre an attractive object of research whose main value resides in the capacity to mount a counter-narrative to the crisis of representation (which is also a crisis of values) provoked by and attributed to postmodernity (Harvey 1989; Antor 1996; Grabes 2008).

Inasmuch as literary non-fiction discards the modernist notion of truth as objective and universal, it can be seen as a distinctively postmodern genre. However, the self-reflexive and critical stance characteristic of literary non-fiction subverts, at least to a certain degree, Harvey's claim that postmodern cultural artifacts are depoliticized, follow a logic of consumption and are part of a culture of irreverent pastiche. The authors of the works analyzed in this study are aware of the problems involved in representation. The unique approach they take to the representation of moral issues and political problems