

## NARRATION: ON THE POSSIBILITY OF HISTORIOGRAPHICAL COMMUNICATION

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An interesting aspect of the narratological character of Slovene historiography<sup>1</sup> derives from the supposedly unique sense in which historians unsentimentally and unimaginatively relate to the past (Simoniti 1995). On this view, a historian equipped with complete material evidence becomes a narrator who, as wordsmith, combines analysis and narration (Gay 1988). This view is not surprising, since past events, arranged on a time line, have an extra-literary basis that lends credibility to narration and analysis.

If we understand historical source<sup>2</sup> as metonymic transfer of meanings, and the source as something which reflects above all on a state outside itself, then a source is nothing but a reduced record of, or reference to events, states, and processes which not only must be discerned and correctly arranged on a narrative time line, but also logically combined into structures (social, political, cultural, economic, etc.). Thorough reading of a source (Štuhec 1995) is, in fact, only preparatory (Cohen 1995), pre-narrative work,<sup>3</sup> in which the imaginary and the real approach one another and diverge in a unique way, and fiction and fact enter into a special relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the work of the Slovene historians Janez Cvirn, Igor Grdina, Andrej Studen, Marko Štuhec, and Aleksander Žižek, as well contributors to the journal *Zgodovina za vse*.

<sup>2</sup> Among historical sources there are those that include a narrative great-structure. A historiographer thus uses them as material for organizing the narrative strategy of a historiographical text. Such sources, acting as historical references in a supervised environment, enable direct contact between the reader and the historical event or situation. Historical sources co-shape the narrative and discourse levels of a many contemporary Slovene historiographical texts.

<sup>3</sup> The act of narration or storytelling is here understood as a process of forming linguistic material into a verbal message, as well as reporting events in their natural sequence, and yet also as a creative procedure with attendant stylistic characteristics. If, on the theoretical level, by narration we mean a framework combining important narrative functions in their syntactic connectedness, in a web, arranging key, inseparable components of narrative prose, then narration means arraying those components into a story-web.

If historiography is to become narrative and thus mediate historical discourse,<sup>4</sup> the fundamental categories that distinguish narrative from non-narrative texts have to be taken into consideration. Among them are categories that exist outside the text itself and are therefore independent, as well as those that are tied to a restricted area of the text and are dependent. Among extra-literary categories, the so-called extra-literary basis occupies the central position. The special formation of extra-literary reality anticipates a problem (obviously worth researching) as a central point around which the main questions are arranged. A problem is the essence of a historical phenomenon, which attracts the historian as researcher and narrator. We could say that the problem is actually the possibility of the narrative itself—namely, the theme that arises from it directs the narrator's selection of material, kind of narrative, motifs, and stylistic methods. Consequently, we have to understand the problem as a fundamental structure, which is fully compatible with all levels of the narration. Guided by the problem, the narrator selects material and sorts it into the extra-literary basis, which the problem will later transform into a text according to available procedures.

Historiographical narration forms its meaning on two levels, on the level of the story (Russian *fabula*) and plot (Russian *siuzhet*), and on the level of historical discourse. The dichotomous relationship between the story and the plot is of lesser import for the present discussion. If we take the question of time into consideration, we ascertain that it is multidirectional and multi-tiered, yet the basic story evolves linearly, from beginning to end. Historical discourse is the higher stage of the narration, where an awareness forms that the narrative is not a purpose unto itself, that the meanings do not return to the sources, but are directed at something exterior to itself, and that the narration is a reconstruction of otherwise irreversible events arranged on a time line—the direct connection between *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*. Narration<sup>5</sup> is thus a secondary stage

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<sup>4</sup> Noun discourse (historical discourse) is a notion that in Foucault's sense calls attention to the fact that the individual components of the historical text as an institutionalised statement (*énoncé*) are logically connected into a coherent text so as to discuss a (historical) problem.

<sup>5</sup> Reinhart Koselleck (1973) advanced a new point of view on presenting historical facts when in the paper "Geschichte, Geschichten und formale Zeitstrukturen" he made a distinction between narration and description. He bound the first means to historical events (occurrences) and the second to historical structures. Through the perspective of time or natural chronology by which occurrences are arranged into a series of events, he thereby exposed the diachronic and, as concerns the permanence or constancy of structures, synchronic apprehension of history. Arthur Danto (1968) also reflected on how historiographic reconstruction of history can function. In "Analytical Philosophy of History," he vindicated the crucial view that, first, the historiographer creates the conditions for the narrative course of events by

in the process of the forming and functioning of a historiographical text. It is the means-model of formation and mediation of historical discourse.

The distinction between research and narration exposes a necessary dichotomy: historical investigation unfolds according to a suitable method and necessary scholarly evidence, while historical discourse moves according to the rules of narration, which include style and linguistic point of view. Correspondence between the extra-literary historical fact and intra-literary historical fact depends, of course, above all on the former.

This model of historiographical narratology also presupposes a phase of collecting material (Cohen 1995), which is by nature extra-literary but tied to the text by its role. A functional connection between the so-called extra-literary basis and the narrative is especially important because it draws attention to the fact that historical narration is not narration *sui generis* but arises from an extra-literary reality, which must be (because of the categorical connection to the rules of the field) formed into an image that accords with something outside itself.

The connection between historical fact, the narrator, and the reader places the researcher and narrator-historian as well as the reader in a special situation. The contents of the historical facts largely define their proper representational form (Luthar 1993), which means that the narrator is bound by them; similarly, the reader is defined in the writer's imagination, since the historiographical text is so organized that on the level of discourse it does not permit alternatives, subordinating reception to a special and systematized narrative strategy. This means that the reader and the narrator are bound in a relationship stemming from the extra-literary base and from the poetics of the historiographical narrative. The narrator's task is not only to relate historical facts but also constantly to verify how their course in a narrative accords with the actual course of events, insofar as they can be extracted from the sources. The historian-narrator thus performs the roles of investigator and correspondent. How this role is realized on the extra-literary level is unimportant here; on the intra-literary level it is reflected in references to the professional literature, authorities, sources, and so forth.

1. Referring to sources so that they become component parts of the text's narrative structure means change in the focalization code<sup>6</sup> and,

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reporting the natural course of events and, second, by considering the temporal perspective and basic demands of the narration, the historiographer integrates selected historical material from beginning to end. With the necessary data in hand, he at the same time explains the narrative process.

<sup>6</sup> Gerard Genette introduced the concept of focalization to distinguish between the criterion of voice and the criterion of modus. He differentiated between null or external and internal focalization. But a cursory survey reveals the unusual inconsequence that results from mistaking the subject of the viewing for its object. Mieke Bal wrote about this in 1988, five years after Genette's

consequently, the narrative situation. For the creative formation of the text's narrative structure we refer to sources, which then, in the form of, for example, letters, sketches, maps, invitations, souvenirs, and archival extracts appear in their appointed positions in the text and assume the role of narremes. By narremes I mean those interventions which are included in the narrative without disturbing its uniformity and whose role is not necessarily the formation of historical discourse, but which also perceptibly variegate the reception and thus historical fact in an attractive way to the reader. If we take into a consideration that the historian is only interested in concrete situations and people and that no event can be detached from its time and place (Grafenauer 1952), then such direct targeting of reception is not unusual. The sources, which are the narrator-historian's so-called extra-literary base and enable the investigation of past facts, also appear directly in the text and assume an important dual role. But the somewhat restricted condition of the narrator-historiographer has to be considered, so that, for example, "An invitation to the Celje townsmen's ball" cannot lead to self-willed construction of the event. However pleasing, it would be problematic on the level of historical discourse. The narrator who wishes to relate the history is thus in a creatively exacting position: he constantly has to vary fact with fiction and at the same time follow appropriate linguistic, stylistic, and narrative procedures.

2. The historian occupies a critical stance when collecting, critically evaluating, and analyzing the material in the discovery process. This is the epistemological phase and it parallels the focalization angle, which is a part of the narrative strategy. Diegesis<sup>7</sup> and the focalization code of the historiographical narrative spring from the contents or the nature of the critical standpoint; they form not only a vision of reality but also recreate

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disquisition, and in her critique of the concept she proposed a distinction between external and internal focalization, the external including the narrator and the internal with the redoubled subject. I joined the discussion about focalization with the paper "Das Problem der Fokalisation" (1999). In it, I modelled the typology of the external, the internal, the superficial, and depth focalization, which may be adapted to the demands of historiographical narration.

Code (focalization code) is used in the sense of Luhmann's understanding of the notion and means the basic principle according to which the system (in our case the focalization) operates as a finished structure.

<sup>7</sup> The theory of narration assumed the concepts of diegesis and mimesis from the poetics of Antiquity: Plato distinguishes between mimesis (direct speech or dramatic mimesis) and diegesis (the narrator's speech or epic diegesis); Aristotle, in contrast, claims that all of art is mimetic and at the same time not only mimicry but also a creation (poiesis). He thus essentially differs from Plato's "imitation of imitation," by which nature is a representation of ideas and art the representation of nature. Here both notions are used in a sense adapted from Plato.

the actual past. The exact nature of the critical standpoint and the focalization code connected to it are the essence of a special situation in which both protagonists of the narrative act enter a relationship. According to Benvenisto (1988), in this relationship language is realized as speech and takes over the essential function of illustrating something that “has not existed until now.” Here we can agree that mimesis in the historiographical narrative becomes diegesis because the narrator predominantly speaks in his own name. The historian is choosing ways, as it were, directly to transfer the extra-literary reality into the text, and in so doing also reckoning, of course, with the linear arrangement of events.

2.1 Although the narrative phase depends upon the epistemological phase, the historian to some extent is already considering the principles of the narrative procedure in the process of treating the material. If possible, he chooses material that can be used as narreme—for example, a caricature from the German humoristic paper *Kikeriki*.<sup>8</sup> Authentic visual material is effective accompaniment to narration of a historical event.

The fact that the historiographer purposefully chooses the material that comprises the so-called governing narrative structure is demonstrated in Maja Žvanut’s (1989) “composition” of her article about the correspondence between two sixteenth-century nobles. The article’s text is interrupted by three photographs. The first two, “An audience with the emperor” (380) and “A ball at the Viennese Hofburg in year 1568” (482), address the theme of the article outside its semantic field and are as such not included in the narrative strategy she employs; the third one, “Jošt Gallenberg’s seal,” is an indispensable part of the verbal narrative, since Gallenberg is one of the “main characters” in the article.

This assertion, which may be problematic for some, can be corroborated with quotations from Paolo Santonino’s *Travel Diary*, which are rounded up in a witty narrative segment with suitable narrative commentary interspersed. The quotations’ inclusion in a co-text (about a bathtub and its possible use) distracts from the main theme and thus thoughtfully alludes to frivolity:

But were Carniolian noblemen really such dirty fellows? There is certainly something to that. A visitor to a seventeenth-century Carniolan castle could not have experienced the kind of service that Paolo Santonino did at the Carinthian castle of Prižank in the autumn of 1485. It would have been unheard of [i.e., in Carniola —M.S.] for the landlord’s young and moreover pretty wife, at her husband’s behest, in a bathtub “quite gently to scrub him all over his body, down to his belly *exclusive* with her soft, white hands,”

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<sup>8</sup> For an example, see Studen (1995: 138).

and afterwards “generously to pour water over him... cleansing his limbs from the belly to his toes,” and then finally to thank him, “for being so kind as patiently to bear the service rendered.” (Štuhec 1995: 138)

This quotation from the *Travel Diary* is a creative way to deepen and broaden the main theme of the Carniolan nobility’s customs and form historical discourse, but its essential function is above all seen in the organization of the narrative and of the story’s structure as well.

The selection and preparation of extra-literary material for texts whose ambition is not only to analyze history but to narrate it is difficult work, since the narrator has to bear in mind that the historiographical text will have to operate on a level of historical discourse as well as on a narrative level, where not only appropriate stylistic choices are important but also the focalization code employed. This, however, does not simply mean that good historiographical narrative is necessarily proportional only to the author’s originally stated intentions for narrative presentation. Individual historical topics certainly differ according to their “narrativity,” and different ways of telling suggest themselves in the course of narration.

The epistemological phase directly influences the part of the focalization code that guarantees authenticity and competence; the narrative phase, on the other hand, directly influences the part that must, according to the characteristics of the narration and the rules of the story, enable the threading of events, the relationship of the historical figures to the different situations, and also the temporal and spatial definitions of the individual segments of the narrative. Nonetheless, the focalization code also has a direct influence on the style and the rhetorical level.

2.2 A narrative strategy based on an extra-diegetic<sup>9</sup> narrator and external and internal focalization is characteristic of historiographical narrative. External focalization expands the narrator’s perspective to all the segments of the narrative, while the internal narrows his perception to one of its segments. External focalization thus refers to the segments that the focalizing historiographer handles; the internal, however, are only those which are focalized by means of the source as medium.

The special narrative situation—namely, the narrative situation of controlled directness with a characteristic focalization code—resides in the historiographical narrative. It exists because of the special narrator-historiographer role, which is directed in categorical accordance with the rules of the field because of the special demands of the epistemological phase, and because of the demands of historical discourse. Basically, reception

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<sup>9</sup> The expression is translated from the term *extradiégétique*, which was introduced by the French theoretician Genette.

passes through a double lens, whereby it is possible for the narrator to abandon systematic presentation and give the decisive role in his narrative strategy, at least seemingly, to the source directly. However, it is well to point out again that the narrator is also the authority and the reference who has to maintain his role throughout, and therefore he is not allowed to conceal his extra-diegetical position, which stems from the epistemological phase and guarantees him purview over the whole.

The narrative situation is thus constituted by the extra-diegetical narrator and a complex focalization code which must enable external focalization and the three types of internal, indirect focalization (constant, repeating, and changeable), as well as internal direct and constant focalization. Internal indirect focalization, in practice expressed in its three variants, denotes focalization with a doubled subject or circumstances where the narrator is extra-diegetic and the focalizer intra-diegetic.<sup>10</sup> All three cases pertain to the interpretation of the sources. The difference is in the sources' relation to the object to which the source is directed. Internal constant and indirect focalization denote interpretation of a single source; internal repeating and indirect denote interpretation of sources referring to the same object; and internal changeable and indirect—the interpretation of sources which refer to different objects.

The type of source the historiographer uses is important to the narrative since, besides its historical-discursive value, the source must function as narreme. This means that it is not only an element of authenticity but also an element that, with its governing narrative structure, co-shapes the narrative density, the internal rhythm, and compositional firmness. The source is also important because of its possible inherent rhetorical value—the potential energy that can be organized in the process of narrative creation.

In some segments the narrator leaves “the talking” to the source (the internal, the constant, and the direct focalization type). Such full inclusion of the historical reference is as much a function of the needs of historical discourse as of the demands of historiographical narration. It implies a change in the narrative situation. The narrative situation of controlled directness, which controls such segments, guarantees needed objectivity, which can be understood as a philosophical category or as a fundamental demand of historical discourse. It is the remnant-evidence of the otherwise irretrievable past included in its re-construction. This change in the narrative situation orients the reader itself directly to the photocopy of an invitation, a piece of correspondence, a map, a photograph, and so forth.

Despite the quality of directness, reception is still controlled. The narrator-historiographer forms the semantic field inside of which the reader

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<sup>10</sup> *Intradiégétique.*

is located. Because the narrator-historiographer is never fully excluded, direct inclusion of a historical reference is just a step into the narrative controlled situation of directness. The neutralization of all the procedures typical of an omniscient narrator therefore proceeds in a limited way to the point where the angle of focalization changes and the narrative perspective belongs to a directly or indirectly narrated personage but not beyond the established, already formed situation. I have in mind the situation where the reader is deprived of the right of understanding, which is a function of the scholarly demands of the text. Nevertheless, the reader's position in the narrative situation of controlled directness changes—that is to say, he is actually close to the event. Because of internal focalization he fictively attains the same level as the narrator, and they both become dependent on the source.

Because of the specific positioning, which also creates the narrative situation of controlled directness, the extra-diegetic narrator has a requisite degree of reliability (Stanzel 1995), something he preserves and strengthens by using relevant scholarly evidence (Cohn 1995). The narrator could adjust his narrative point of departure to the point where probability would become so unreliable it would disturb reception, which could then change the relationship between the narrator and the reader. Such narrative strategy could mean an interesting structuring of the narrative, but to the detriment of historical discourse. We can draw two conclusions from this: first, the relationship between narrative quality and the discursivity of a historiographical text expresses their opposite characters, which affords the narrator with some ambition and literary talent the possibility of their reciprocal harmony. Second, the extra-diegetical narrator-historiographer is bound in the position assigned to him by extra-literary categories—competence, reference, authenticity, and adherence to the rules of the profession.

In these theoretical considerations of the historiographer's narrative strategy, surely we cannot neglect the fact that historical sources differ in their surveyability. My conclusions apply only to those sources that are accessible to the uninformed reader (because their inclusion into the narrative is properly prepared).

A source with a strong governing narrative structure is, for example, a piece of correspondence like the one between Jošt Gallenberg and Janez Jožef Egkom from the middle of the sixteenth century. It has a dialogical structure and it is an autochthonous document, on account of which it possesses a strong mimetic quality. The correspondence is an example of the inclusion of a historical reference; it not only reveals the nature of the information (Žvanut 1988)—for instance, that Egk was often ill and that Gallenberg made an application for the position of Carniolian prince's deputy—but also evokes the ethos and cultural context of the time.

In the case of correspondence, we must also consider the change of the focalization angle. At the same time its full inclusion indicates that the reality that is evoked is divided into several sections on the temporal axis and into multiple temporal contexts running “simultaneously” with the process of wording. This causes a critical reduction of epic distance between the subject and the object. The dialogical structure’s special point of view points to the fact that the fragmentary unit of a slice of life is not formed from a single vantage point, but that the narrator’s position essentially slides on a time line.

Interesting cases of sources with an expressed narrative governing narrative structure are the epic poems in Aleksander Žižko’s text “Sirota jaz v zaporu živim” (An orphan in a jail I live), one hundred and seven lines of the “Pesem o teharskem taborišču” (Poem about a Tehar’s P.O.W. camp), seven lines of “Restantska” (The prisoner’s), and nineteen of “O Piskru (About the pot),<sup>11</sup> which feature full inclusion of historical references or a narrative situation of controlled directness giving the reader “direct” contact with those who were charged with treason after WW II. The description of Johann Gottfried Seume’s meeting with a Slovene innkeeper in the historian Anton Šepetavc’s work, “Pridiga o prijaznih, gostoljubnih, dobrih Slovenceh, ki niso vedno (bili) taki” (A sermon about pleasant, hospitable, good Slovenes, who were not always so”), also falls into that category (Šepetavc 1994: 20).

3. Characteristic of narrative texts from the corpus of historical works under consideration is that the narrator-historiographer, with at least some literary gesture and seeming indifference to professional rules, masters a given space and time, and the characters and objects in them. The structure of the external and internal indirect focalization urges his narrative perspective towards panoramic and scenic qualities and, most importantly, towards a spontaneous relationship between historical narrative and event—towards a synthesis with the intention of building historical discourse. Cases of varying fact and fiction, interesting definitions and valuing, variegated interpretations of the sources, analytical modifications of different focalization angles, thoughtful and ironic narrative interventions, but also the necessary material evidence and serious and responsible scientific approach are noticeable and refreshing phenomena in Slovene historiography. Examples of such texts are “Sapralot! To bo pa močan strel” (Oh, bother! That’ll be a strong shot) (Cvirn 1990) and “Krajnska suita za zrcalo, vilico, nož, žlico, kavno ročko, čajnik in njuhalni robec” (Carniolian suite for the mirror, fork, knife, spoon, coffee jug, teakettle, and snuff handkerchief) (Štuhec 1994), as well as “Turki so v deželi že” (Turks are in the land already) (Simoniti 1990) and “Sirota jaz v zaporu živim” (An orphan in a jail I live) (Žižko 1995), as well several texts from the

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<sup>11</sup> All found in the article “Sirota jaz v zaporu živim” (Žižko 1995).

contributors to a Celje newspaper *History for All*, whose common characteristic is new (old) comprehension of historiography, which is not a torment of concentrated knowledge, but a cheerful work of people who permit and remit all—except dullness (Grdina 1994), and who by doing so blur the line between *l'écrivain* and *l'écrivain*.

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## POVZETEK

### NARACIJA—MOŽNOST ZGODOVINOPISNE KOMUNIKACIJE

*Naratološka raziskava sodobnega slovenskega zgodovinopisja, ki je bila oprta na nekatere v slovenski teoriji aktualne izsledke evropskih in ameriških teoretikov, je pokazala zanimivo situacijo. Del slovenskih zgodovinopiscev srednje generacije, med njimi je treba posebej opozoriti na sodelavce revije Zgodovina za vse, je sledil v tujini sicer že uveljavljenim praksam, ki so združevale historično konciznost s postopki pripovednih besedil. Na ta način je nastala posrečena sinteza znanstvene verodostojnosti in umetniške privlačnosti. Zgodovinopisec se je tako z ubeseditvenega stališča močno približal avtorju pripovedne proze oziroma je prevzel principe, katerih namen je na podlagi preverljivih dejstev in upoštevajoč celovit znanstveno-raziskovalni instrumentarij tvoriti zanimivo zgodbo. Notranji slog takšnih besedil je zato združevanje razpravljalnosti, narativnosti in esejističnosti. Z naratološkega vidika ima v takih besedilih ključno mesto pripovedovalec. Ta upoštevajoč poseben fokalizacijski kod ter ustrezne stilistične, jezikovne in notranjeslogovne modele zagotavlja svoji »zgodbi« o zgodovinskem dogodku verodostojnost ter hkrati nazornost, živost, pestrost itd. Ta, morda na prvi pogled poljuben ustvarjalni način je v resnici nadzorovan ubeseditveni postopek, ki ves čas variira analitičnost in sintetičnost (v epistemološki fazi) s skrbno izbranimi narativnimi, retoričnimi in kompozicijskimi možnostmi (v ubeseditveni fazi).*