REVIEW

Alojzija Zupan Sosič. *A Theory of Narrative*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022. 285 pp. 69£ (hardcover) ISBN 1-5275-8778-9.

The author points to the genesis of the book in part of the front matter called a "reading guide"—courses she has taught at the University of Ljubljana, such as "The Narrative Text," "The Contemporary Slovenian Novel," "Literary Interpretation," and "Gender and Slovenian Literature." The book is thus an answer to student questions and a response to their ideas as much as it is an expert perspective on what readers should know to better understand works of literature. This in turn suggests a potential audience for the book or its parts—university students or faculty who want a compact overview of narrative theory. I say "compact" because the author explains that this English translation is something of over half of the original Slovene *Teorija pripovedi* (2017). Left out are parts on novel genres, author and reader, reading and interpreting, and narrative emotions.

The first of the book's three parts helpfully reviews what the author terms Classical and Post-Classical theory of narrative, the former running through deconstruction, in just ten pages. Post-Classical narratology is dated to the 1990s and includes, for instance, cognitive and rhetorical narratology. Zupan Sosič's presentation of material is very efficient. For example, when describing cognitive narratology, she indicates its origins in classical narratology, underlines the importance of story and how it migrated to non-humanities fields, and reminds us of its empirical shortcoming—all on one page.

The titles of parts II and III also reveal the chapters they subsume: "Modes of Wording: Narration, Description, and Speech Representation"; and "Narrative Elements: Story and Narrative, Beginnings and Endings of

Narratives, Narrator, Focalisation, Literary Character, Literary Events, Time and Space." Each of the chapters concludes with a comparative section; for example, the chapter "Beginnings and Endings of Narratives" compares Ivan Tavčar's short story "Šarevčeva sliva" (Šareveč's plum tree) with Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. The comparisons as well as numerous references to literary works from many lands are a refreshing aspect of the book. And the author includes not only examples from Slovene literature; they also come from Brazilian, Croatian, Czech, Japanese, Scottish, and other literatures. Examples from works by Dickens, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Joyce, and Nabokov are wonderfully balanced with examples from less well-known writers, such as Berta Bojetu-Boeta (Slovene), Clarise Lispector (Brazilian), and Suzana Tratnik (Slovene).

The critical sources Zupan Sosič draws on are also wide-ranging. They include Russian Formalists, Roland Barthes, Wayne Booth, Jonathan Culler, and E.M. Forster—names most English-speaking readers will recognize—but also the Slovenes Vladimir Biti, Marijan Dović, Maša Grdešić, Meta Grosman, and Alenka Koron. This is but a small sampling of sources. Along the way, the author interestingly notes how Slovene critical theory resembles or diverges from schools of thought in other countries; for instance, there is a discussion of literary character (part III, chapter 5) and how it figures in Slovene literary scholarship and elsewhere.

Incidentally, the references compiled in the back matter might have been segregated into a fiction section and a critical theory section. Multiple works by a single author could have been arranged chronologically. (There are also some inconsistencies and omissions: Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse* is cited in the text [115] as 1986 but in the bibliography as 1980; it was published in 1978. Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* is referenced (242) but missing from the bibliography. Novels by J.D. Salinger, Gunther Grass, and Suzana Tratnik are cited in one sentence (243) but only the latter two are included in the bibliography.)

Individual readers will value different parts of the book to different degrees. For an appreciation of how Zupan Sosič presents the material, let us consider the first chapter in part III, on story and narrative. After establishing the growing attention to narrative in the twentieth century, the author explains three meanings of narration—the telling of events, narrative discourse, and presentation in story form. There follows a brief discussion of the story-narrative binary, a nod to the Russian Formalists' *fabula* and *siuzhet*, Structuralism's adoption of the Russian dualistic perspective, and the way story and narrative discourse relate in recent criticism. A four-page section on narrative discourse reminds us of how the term is applied in different fields and returns to the idea that story and narrative are inseparable. Sections on narrative text and intertextuality take us from Structuralism's expansion of text to Post-Structuralism's denial of its bounds. In the latter part of the

chapter, the author introduces reader considerations. Throughout the chapter, there are ample references to other literary critics. The entire chapter is only fourteen pages long (112–26). At the conclusion, thanks to the lucid presentation, the reader has the sense of having a good grasp of the subject—that is, a concise introduction or a quality review.

Reading *A Theory of Narrative,* I was reminded of George Saunders's *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain*, in which he details how fiction works based on seven Russian short stories. Saunders teaches creative writing at Syracuse University. Zupan Sosič accomplishes a similar task by offering a clear scholarly excursus into the building blocks of narrative based on examples from a wide variety of fiction at every step.

One of the best illustrations of this is the interpretation of Don Quixote (197–98) in the chapter on character. Uri Margolin's three perspectives—character as literary invention, as an individual inhabiting a possible world, and as reader construct—is used. The first and third perspective belong to author and reader, respectively. According to the second, Don Quixote is situated in a time and place and appears, acts, and thinks in accordance with the associated possible world. Zupan Sosič helpfully calls a literary character an amphibian—at once a literary construct and an imitation of a real person, an individual who is often the most memorable part of a piece of fiction. Some, like Don Quixote, are so memorable that they become part of cultural discourse (199).

The parts of the book deal with the basics of narrative but there are some sections that introduce what may be new material to experienced readers and scholars; for example, chapter 4, on focalization, sorts out possible differences with perspective or point of view, containing helpful allusions to film. Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal's theories of focalization are discussed. Zupan Sosič finds focalization helpful in understanding works like the Slovene Lojze Kovačič's *Prišleki* (*The Newcomers*), where child and adult perspectives are mixed (191). Part III, chapter 7, on literary time and space, might be another part of the book that deals with aspects of narrative less familiar to experts.

The origins of this book—in the author's rich teaching experience and numerous publications on topics directly related to the book's components—highly recommend it as either introductory material or review. The literary illustrations are enjoyable, and the many references to Slovene scholarship are a bonus to those interested in Slovene studies.

Timothy Pogačar (pogacar@bgsu.edu), Bowling Green State University