

FOREWORD

The School of English, Drama and American & Canadian Studies has one of the largest communities of doctoral researchers in the University, and it is appropriate that these researchers have seized the opportunity to develop this ground-breaking journal. *The Birmingham Journal of Literature and Language* is an exciting venture that brings together writers who address a common theme from a number of disciplinary perspectives. The theme of this issue – narrative – lends itself to a multi-faceted approach, from technical analysis to interpretative readings and beyond.

Increasingly, university-based researchers are required to look past the boundaries of their own research practices in order to address questions of broader interest and relevance. Such a journal facilitates the kind of engagement that encourages this interaction and the broader vision that comes with it.

In addition, the journal allows doctoral researchers to take part in all aspects of journal production, including peer reviewing, editorial decision, and negotiations over deadlines, as well as writing articles, reviews and shorter ‘work in progress’ pieces. A key feature of this journal is the inclusion of reviews of conferences, exhibitions and performances, where contributors share their experiences with a wider audience. This ‘participant’s eye view’ of significant events in the life of the research community is both informative and entertaining.

Doctoral researchers are key to the research activity in the university as a whole. This excellent journal is a fitting showcase for their work.

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INTRODUCTION

This issue of *The Birmingham Journal of Literature and Language* takes narrative as its theme. The five articles question and explore narration, narrators, narrative constructions, narrative expectations and symbolism. The volume aims to build upon the foundations of earlier issues. It unites and promotes dialogue between postgraduate students across departments of the University of Birmingham and includes external submissions, emphasising the importance of multidisciplinary and postgraduate networking.

Laura Perna discusses the function of the uncanny in readers' experience in Charles Burns's *Black Hole*. Narratives of gender, gender construction, and transgression form the basis for Stephanie Schnabel's examination of *The Winter's Tale*. Louise Denyer examines the concepts of "domesticating" and "foreignising" texts as a product of translation. Sanner Garofalo addresses the power of narrative both to define and to undercut Shakespearean gender constructs and their characteristic language. Holly Prescott reflects upon the ways in which knowledge itself is shaped by narrative in two prominent novels of the twenty-first century: Pat Barker's *Double Vision* and Jon McGregor's *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*. The articles presented in this issue are complemented by Emilie Vince's "Salthouse" collection, a meditation on the nature of narrative experience through art and poetry.

Accompanying these articles and artwork are seven reviews of conferences, exhibitions, and performances. Natalie Harrigan discusses The Barber Institute's exhibition of Jack Kerouac's epic journey, *On the Road*. Continuing the theme of gender and Shakespeare, John Hudson reviews The Dark Lady Players' innovative production of Shakespeare's Virgin Mary allegories. Heather Jeffrey addresses theatre in multicultural Britain. Tara Windsor's work, on the other hand, celebrates this year's Graduate Centre for Europe conference; whereas, Anna Gottschall details the events of a Symposium on the Vernon Manuscript project, and Wang Fang and Xiaocong Huang report on two internationally renowned linguistics conferences.

These diverse contributions are complemented by an introduction to current debate in the field of narrative studies provided by Professor Dick Ellis, Head of the Department of American & Canadian Studies and co-organiser of the 2009 International Society for the Study of Narrative conference. Finally, a Foreword by Professor Susan Hunston, Head of the School of English, Drama and American & Canadian Studies, is testament to her ongoing support for postgraduate initiatives within the School.

Cristina Ivanovici and Sarah Macmillan

WELCOMING NARRATIVE THEORY TO THE FUNHOUSE:
THE 2009 INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF
NARRATIVE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

By PROFESSOR R. J. ELLIS

For some time now, anti-essentialism has been gaining ground in the arts and humanities, perhaps buoyed up by such key theorists as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty and Judith Butler. Advocating a mistrust of essential or foundational constructions, such as those that propose that men and women's gender or ethnic ('racial') differences have any fixed definitional status, anti-essentialism has necessarily impacted also upon our understanding of universal theories of narrative. In addition, in Lyotard's phrase, the postmodern condition demands an incredulity towards the narrative, by both asserting and questioning metanarratives. 'All of the above' are instead considered as historically-constructed ideological and social processes and practices. In the place of any such essentialism, more context-bound analyses have come to the fore, recognising the contingency and interpretability of theoretical concepts. Think here only of the classic, quite early formulations advanced by Foucault: in *Discipline and Punish*, *The History of Sexuality*, and in *The Order of Things*, where he advocates the erasing of modernity's anthropomorphic 'invention' of the subject. Instead, Foucault urged that the humanists' 'man' should be recognised as "a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea" (385), vulnerable to incoming tides.

Narrative theories of the cast offered by Aristotle, Propp or Labov have necessarily had to respond to this, as have the foci of any procedurally-based narrative theorisations. Let us call this subsequent shift an adventuring around the funhouse of narrative. This revolution is well evidenced by the broadly-formulated aspirations of the *Journal of Narrative Theory (JNT)*, for example, which adopted a 'new focus,' calling for the submission of "theoretically sophisticated essays that examine narrative in a host of critical, interdisciplinary, or cross-cultural contexts." The list of interests that results is also breathtakingly broad: "Of particular interest are history and narrative; cultural studies and popular culture; discourses of class, gender, sexuality, race, nationality, subalternity, and ethnicity; film theory, queer theory, and media studies; new historical, poststructural, or global approaches to narrative forms (literary or otherwise); along with essays that span or subvert epistemic and disciplinary boundaries. *JNT* is multi-genre, multi-period, multi-national."

When the University of Birmingham's Department of American and Canadian Studies, in conjunction with the Department of English, hosted the 2009 International

Society for the Study of Narrative annual conference, I found out just what this meant. The ISSN was already just as inclusive. A kaleidoscopic roller-coaster of papers was unveiled, lurching somewhat unsteadily at times between foundationalist, ‘strategic essentialist’ and anti-essentialist *chemin de fer*, but more usually proving to be a joyful riot. It was an exhilarating ride, and this issue of *The Birmingham Journal of Literature and Language* further provides some idea of narrative’s rickety bends and curves.

Works Cited

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 Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
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 —. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage, 1995.
Journal of Narrative Theory homepage. <<http://www.emich.edu/english/jnt/>>.
 Lyotard, Jean François. *The Postmodern Condition*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984.

“SALTHOUSE”

There's no one in this poem.
There's no consciousness in this poem,
Just the waves against the shingle, the overpowering air.
Just air and water and stone – three elements.
Sterile place.

Empty beach. Enmeshed.

The beach is empty, there's no one there but I'm there.
Empty footprints.
Wind.
Breeze.
Overpowering air.

Consciousness unrolls,
Mind wide open skies
Sliding skies
Sliding scale of blues.

The roof of the sky a big mind
Cogitating in blue a secret smile.

Sunclenched teeth
The beach smiles its miles of sand
To wander.
What wakes here?
Just swell.

Emilie Vince