

**Narratives Reconsidered**  
**Gaál-Szabó Péter, ed. *Intertextuality, Intersubjectivity and***  
***Narrative Identity*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars**  
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According to the title, the common ground for the essays of the volume is provided by concepts linked by the prefix “inter-.” This claim is also supported by the central themes of many of the essays: in addition to *intertextuality* and *intersubjectivity*, these texts also feature *intermediality*, *intercultural* experiences and present *interdisciplinary* explorations of narratives that reside in between, that is, “inter” the constraints of multiple genres. Interdisciplinary observations also play a special role in many of the essays, which may be due partly to the diverse interests of most of the contributors including the editor, Péter Gaál-Szabó (affiliated with the Debrecen Reformed Theological University), whose research focuses primarily on the *intersection* of various cultures in terms of space, religion and communication. However, one may also find that many of the essays go beyond the study of in-betweenness and, with a rather radical gesture, propose an examination that (to use another prefix that originates in the Latin language) *transcends* everyday notions of culture, genres, criticism and narratives (just to mention a few).

The idea of *transcending* and, let me venture, *transgressing* temporal and spatial boundaries lies also at the core of the complex and informative Introduction, in which Gaál-Szabó asserts that the volume “takes the reader across time and space, from the times of slavery, through modernist and postmodern realms, and from the cultural spaces of Hungary to those of Britain, Ireland, and America, offering different perspectives of and entailing *intertextuality* and *intersubjectivity*” (1). One may also venture to add that the wide range of temporal and spatial perspectives represented in the volume is supplemented by manifold themes: from female Künstlerdramas and women’s war testimonies to the problematics of intersubjectivity and an interdisciplinary exploration into the unconventionalities of an early slave narrative, the reader encounters such a great variety of genres under scrutiny that almost exceeds the limitations of a thematic volume. At least this would be the impression of the reader, were this not a compilation with the rather unconventional aim at its core to make its audience question, reconsider and even re-evaluate their traditional conceptions regarding the thematic coherence of

a volume of academic essays. But Gaál-Szabó does not fail to assure the reasonably somewhat puzzled readership that this is indeed the case: as he asserts, “despite the difference between the analytical foci, there always proves to be an overlapping of theories that cuts across disciplinary boundaries; and angles that amount to the complexity of the subject matter, thus contributing to the interrelatedness of the parts” (1).

In addition to the plethora of theories represented in the volume, some of the essays also present a multidisciplinary approach by themselves via crossing disciplinary boundaries. Such “transdisciplinary” texts of the volume, however, are far from being self-contained: they are rather “contributing to the mapping of the field by opening vistas and offering possibilities of theorizing [...], while [also] constructing a space [...] for a creative scholarly dialogue and inviting further exploration” (1). Furthermore, the manifold theoretical and disciplinary approaches provided by the contributors may initiate a fruitful dialogue between the various texts and thus, can generate new interpretations that would remain hidden without those theoretical points of intersection that, as the editor argues, presumably “make the reader conscious of the inherent interrelatedness of the chapters” (1). This, however, does not mean that the editor’s aim is to unnerve those who, either due to the lack of time or because of special scholarly interests, intend to immerse themselves only in one or two of the chapters. On the contrary, Gaál-Szabó reassuringly (and also convincingly) claims that the “individual chapters” of the volume “stand in their own right: the particular foci and the close reading of texts grant the reader involved in literary and cultural studies the possibility to benefit from the diverse analyses both intellectually and regarding their professional interest” (1).

Not surprisingly, the primacy of the theoretical approaches over the thematic foci of the texts also serves as an underlying principle behind the arrangement of the various chapters of the volume. Therefore, rather uniquely (and, let me add, creatively), the editor chose not to consider “chronological or thematic concordance as organizing concepts,” instead, “the theoretical topoi” of the texts “are meant to determine the structure of the volume” (1). However, I would also add that *transcending* disciplinary boundaries is present not only on the level of the theoretical approaches taken by the contributors, but that the theoretical, literary and political texts that are analyzed and interpreted are, in one way or other, also *transgressing* limitations of genre, textuality and identity.

Interrogating the boundaries between formal logic, philosophy and politics provides the central point of investigation of János V. Barcsák’s “Formalization, Politics, Creativity,” in which the author provides an insightful analysis of Paul Livingston’s *The Politics of Logic*, practically the only purely theoretical text in

focus. Conversely, László Sári B. aptly demonstrates how one can alienate from others as well as from his/her own self in his essay on contemporary American Minimalist writer Craig Cleverger's two "traumatic stories of loss" (21). As Sári B. argues, these novels show either "the radical impossibility [...] of romance [...] or the disintegration of one's own self and the decisive instability of narrative itself posited thereupon" (21). Similarly, in her "Corporeality and Mediality in Vladimir Nabokov's *The Original of Laura*," Lilla Farmasi draws a parallel between the unfinished novel's "fragmented text and misshaped narrative" (33) and its treatment of *intermedial* and *transmodal* corporeality.

Other essays widen the interpretative horizon via problematizing "the individual, the nation" and "culture" (2). Mária Kurdi, for instance, focuses on "selected post-2000 criticism" of J. M. Synge's works to demonstrate "that the resonance with other dramatic texts and the creative incorporation and rewriting of traditions, cultural icons and myths are significant aspects of the playwright's art" (60). Conversely, Zsuzsanna Nagy-Szalóki highlights the problematics of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century English suburban existence through analyzing how the performative spatial dynamics present in Kate Atkinson's 1997 novel, *The Human Croquet*, undermine the cultural and social "intelligibility of the English suburb" (75).

Discourses of intertextuality and interculturality are central in two further chapters as well, both of which examine narrative (re)constructions of sites – of reality and of memory. The editor-contributor Péter Gaál-Szabó's essay presents a rather innovative re-evaluation of the series of sermons performed by Martin Luther King, Jr. from the perspective of Cultural Memory Studies. According to him, King's sermons not only "represent and mediate memory but also project a new cultural consciousness that constitutes a revitalizing counter-history" via "establishing a new historical consciousness that counters official versions of history" (77). Therefore, Gaál-Szabó suggests that one should *transcend* their traditional conceptions that regard King "as a moderate political thinker" (77). Along the same line, Péter Kristóf Makai's highly engaging and masterfully penned essay investigates how the narrative world of Jasper Fforde's *Thursday Next* series reconstructs reality by fictionalizing it.

Topoi of gender, which one could already discover in Nagy-Szalóki's interpretation, are revisited in two essays that – although taking the reader to temporally, spatially, as well as subject matter-wise distinctively different realms – are still engaged in a much more intimate scholarly dialogue than any of the "pairs" mentioned above. It is the shared theoretical background of Gender Studies that connects Lenke Németh's essay on the reconceptualization of spectatorship in contemporary American female *Künstlerdrama* with Eszter Edit Balogh's text on women's marginalized testimonies of their experiences during the First World

War – both a pleasure to read. Personally, this “pair” of studies, although both standing in their own right, presented the best examples of the “collaboration of established scholars as well as junior researchers from different disciplines” that the editor’s Introduction proposed together with the aim to construct “a space [...] for a creative scholarly dialogue” (1).

The volume concludes with two essays that, although again deal with temporally and spatially distant realms, are thematically connected by problematizing narrations of traumatic experiences. Problematic cases of intersubjectivity constitute the main theme of Ottilia Veres’s essay that provides a parallel analysis of J. M. Coetzee’s *The Life and Times of Michael K* and Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy*, also investigating the act (or the lack) of storytelling in both works. Conversely, András Tarnóc provides a historical and cultural overview of the slave narrative before narrowing down the subject of his inquiry to Briton Hammon’s 1760 *Narrative*, “the first black autobiographical writing in African-American literary culture” (151). Tarnóc offers a detailed account of the autobiographical narrative and also conducts an interdisciplinary inquiry before arriving at the well-grounded conclusion that Hammon’s work, due to its controversial nature: “the text is suspended between two genres, so is the author stranded between ports of call and pulpits of consultation” (160), deserves a radical reconceptualization.

The examples above have aptly demonstrated that the ambitious attempt to launch an *inter-* and *transdisciplinary* discussion about the apparently fluid boundaries of textuality, subjectivity and narrative identity has resulted in a compilation that is worthy of the initiative. A helpful Index and a Works Cited section following each essay may serve as useful reference tools for those interested. The only shortcoming of the book might be that despite the meticulous editing work all of the chapters show evidence that (though some of them more than others), there are still uncertainties of following the rules of British or American punctuation (sometimes within the same essay). Despite this, one cannot but agree with the editor and hope that this collection of essays reaches “diverse audiences” (3) who will then reconsider or even reconceptualize further intertextual or intersubjective narratives. The accessible but scholarly language, as well as the impressive variety of themes will certainly be of a great help in this.