

## **“No learned rhetorical figures!” An analysis of the interaction of narrative and stylistic processes in Raabe’s ‘Celtic Bones’**

The two aims of my paper are 1) to show the effectiveness and necessity of the integration of rhetorical analysis into narratology exemplified by the analysis of Wilhelm Raabe’s story ‘Celtic Bones’ (1865) and 2) to provide a better insight into this rather unknown text. My paper therefore consists of two parts, 1) an elaboration and situation of the theoretical question and a preparation to, 2) the rhetorical-narratological analysis of Raabe’s text.

### **1. Introduction: Theory, methodology, situation of the paper within the research project**

Traditionally, figures of style have been associated with a specifically literary or aesthetic dimension of language. They have been considered as formal characteristics without any real interference with the thematic aspects of the texts in which they occur. During the previous decades this situation has changed thoroughly. Cognitive theorists and linguists overruled the traditional ornamental stance and have shown that figurative expressions such as metaphors are in ordinary speech as well as in literature the linguistic expressions of underlying cognitive structures (Lakoff & Turner 1989). For the specific case of literature, however, the cognitive approach entails difficulties as it pays little attention to the embedding of figural forms. Conceptual metaphors (e.g. “politics is war”, Lakoff & Johnson 1980) are perceived as static and thus context-independent, they can be investigated in isolation. It is typical of literary texts, however, that forms of figurativeness interact with co-textual and contextual agents, that they function within a specific rhetorical and narrative network, dynamically changing its configuration during the reading process.

The structuralist “founding fathers and mothers” of narratology paid only little attention to tropes (Herman/Vervaeck 2009) Stanzel, e.g. regarding it as a non-subject. In the research project I am carrying out together with Benjamin Biebuyck and Gunther Martens we try to show that the distribution of rhetorical figures is in fact very relevant to narratological issues of power implied in the relations between tellers and characters, and therefore cannot be disregarded.

We investigate to what extent figures of style interfere with narrative settings in eventful narratives, i.e. narratives that do not devote attention to elaborate explicit self-reflexion but primarily to count a series of events, actions. In contrast to verbose, overt narrators that talk more about

themselves than tell an emplotted story, the corpus of prose texts we investigate in our project displays different types of less present narrators that function as mediators of eventful narratives.

In my paper I focus on Raabe's 'Keltische Knochen' or 'Celtic Bones' (1865). Wilhelm Raabe (1831-1910) is a late 19th century German author, generally considered an exponent of poetic realism. Scholarly attention to German realistic prose is mainly being attracted by its social criticism and the dialogue with the historical context. This interaction with the extraliterary context is regarded as its literary-historical and generic point of interest. One could expect that in realistic prose the narrated world outweighs the narration. The narrative setting of Raabe's early, scarcely investigated story 'Keltische Knochen' seems at first sight, to be indeed a quite traditional one. An anonymous I-as-witness-narrator tells us the story of his trip to Hallstatt in Austria. His three coincidental travel companions take up for the salient part of the story. The detailed, satirical descriptions of these caricatures highly contrast with the scarce information we receive about the anonymous first-person-narrator himself. The absence of decisive markers of narratorial presence – explicit metanarrative comment, direct addresses to the narratee and the frequency of the occurrence of the first-person-pronoun – makes it likely that the story's narrator is a mostly covert one (Fludernik 1993:143). I will show how Raabe's text goes against this expectation and by consequence demonstrates how the analysis of the mostly neglected narratological and rhetorical facets of realistic texts is in fact very insightful.

## **2. Rhetorical-Narratological Analysis of Raabe**

Before I get to the actual analysis I provide a very short situation of Raabe's text. A 'young man' narrates the story his trip to Hallstatt with three incidental travel companions: (1) a sensitive poet trying to 'give birth' to a new poem, (2) his counterpart, a rude anatomist, and (3) a double of the anatomist, a short-tempered archaeology professor. The hypochondriac poet is writing a poem on a courtly love story in Linz, while the two academics are fighting over the Celtic or Germanic origin of the bones in the excavated prehistoric burial ground near Hallstatt. They do agree on taking something home from the graves to enrich their pseudoscientific collections. Together with the narrator they go out to the burial ground; but because of their egocentric quick-temperedness the mission of the two collectors fails. After a short persecution locals do not only retrieve the stolen archaeological findings but they also 'collect' gadgets (glasses, a wig) the two adventurers lost during the struggle.

During the whole Hallstat-narrative the rain doesn't stop pouring. The rain is the story's *leitmotiv*, introduced in the next paragraph in which the narrator is on the boat direction Hallstatt and the poet and the anatomist are introduced:

[...] die allerschönste, aber auch allereigensinnigste Dame Natur [zog] den Nebelschleier über das Gesicht, und als wir auf dem See schifften, wurde dieser Schleier und unsere Hoffnung auf einen schönen Tag vollständig zu Wasser. [...] Wir waren unserer drei, und trotz allem war der Dichter der edelste von uns; er hieß leider Krautworst und war aus Hannover, sagte natürlich beides nicht gern, sondern stellte sich meistens als den Verfasser der „Lebensblüten“ vor und dar ; sonst nannte er sich auch wohl, glänzenden, aber ebenfalls von der Prosa ihres Namens oder Geburtsortes erdrückten Beispielen folgend, Roderich von der Leine[...]. [Der] dritte war [...] ebenso verschlossen, wie der Poet offenherzig und mitteilungswütig war. [...] Er hieß [...] Zuckriegel, ohne sich dessen zu schämen, und war Prosektor an einer kleinen norddeutschen Universität, hatte jedoch in seinem Äußeren sowohl als in seinem Innern sehr viel vom Scharfrichter. Nur ein schlechter Charakter gleich dem seinigen konnte es über sich gewinnen, einen so guten Menschen wie den Dichter durch ein ewig wiederholtes Auftischen des gehäßten Familiennamens Krautworst an allen Nervenenden zu zupfen und zu kitzeln.

Zuckriegels Reisezweck war, die Knochen des unbekanntes Volkes am Rudolfsturm über Hallstatt zu besuchen und womöglich einen Schädel und einige sonst überflüssige Gebeine für seine osteologische Sammlung zu stehlen oder, wie er sich euphemistisch auszudrücken beliebte, an sich zu nehmen. (KK 201-202)

In this fragment the first overlaps between the narrator and the characters come to the fore. Not only Zuckriegel, but also the narrator himself likes 'to express himself euphemistically', e.g. describing the fact that it is overcasting as 'Lady Nature covering her face with a veil of mist'. Moreover the narrator seems to be as 'outspoken and fanatically expressive' as the 'the pious poet' (*antonomasia*). Later in the story the narrator himself seems to have 'as badly the character to be able to dish up repeatedly the hated name Krautworst'. Furthermore this fragment introduces a very frequent figure of style in the idiom of the characters and of the narrator, namely zeugma ("stellte sich meistens als der Verfasser der Lebensblüten vor und dar") and the related syllepses ("wurde dieser Schleier und unsere Hoffnung [...] vollständig zu Wasser").

The narrator's positive appreciation of the poet - 'despite everything the noblest of the three' - and his negative appreciation of the anatomist described as 'hangman' is contested by the ironic exaggeration. The narrator ridiculizes the poet as much as Zuckriegel does. This is also illustrated in the elaborated simile of the boat trip as a trip to the underworld and its dead waiting for a new Dante, which could be Krautworst:

Der Name des Menschen, Krautworst, konnte dabei nicht hinderlich sein; denn Dante bedeutet in deutscher Zunge auch nichts weiter als „Hirschleder“; aber Krautworst selber war hinderlich, denn die wunderlich ergreifende Szenerie machte nicht den geringsten Eindruck auf ihn; ihn froh, er sprach vom Wechseln der Strümpfe, von rheumatischem Zahnschmerz und jammerte nach einer Tasse Tee.

Zuckriegel war schon ein anderer Mann: die Nähe der keltischen oder sonstigen Gebeine und der Sitz hinter dem walfischhaften Rücken unseres weiblichen Charons stimmten ihn milde [...]. (KK 204)

The narrator here shows off his classical Bildung. The characters also juggle grandiloquently with literary references and erudite terms as becomes clear in the next fragment.

This fragment relates the reaction of Krautworst and Zuckriegel to the comforting words of a 'native' concerning the fact that they were not the first tourists to arrive and surely also not to leave Hallstatt in such a bad weather:

Den Faust kannte der Eingeborene nicht und wunderte sich deshalb zum drittenmal über den karierten Dichter, welcher hohläugig und mit hohler Stimme rezitierte:

„Jammer! Jammer! von keiner Menschenseele zu fassen, daß mehr als ein Geschöpf in die Tiefe dieses Elendes versank, daß nicht das erste genügtat für die Schuld aller übrigen!“

Frech setzte der Prosektor das Geschäft fort und fragte mit den Worten Mephistos:

„Warum machst du Gemeinschaft mit uns, wenn du sie nicht durchführen kannst? ... Drängen wir uns dir auf oder du dich uns? Fahren Sie fort, Herr Krautworst, und sehen Sie nicht so mürrisch aus! Ich habe Sie doch nicht *contrecariert*?“ (KK 206)

The last word “contrecariert” wavers between a neologism and a loan word, the peculiarity of which is marked graphically by italics. The word mixes up the French ‘contrecarrer’ or ‘thwart’ and the German ‘kariert’ or ‘checked’, referring to the suit of the poet. It becomes more and more clear that the discussion between the characters takes on the form of a rhetorical battle in which the most eloquent one wins. While the narrator is playing the peacekeeper between the two sides and explains how over dinner he succeeds to establish “einen mit Messer und Gabel bewaffneten Frieden zwischen dem Mann der Wissenschaft und dem Mann der Poesie” (KK 206), he is actually fighting along for the title of best orator. The narrator ridicules the suit as eloquently and wittily as Zuckriegel. He compares the suit to that of a tightrope walker and hyperbolically depicts the stir it causes among the other guests and the personnel of the hotel. In the description of their surprise “er [...] setzte die Gaststube zum zweitenmal dadurch in Verwunderung, dass er seine Kraftbrühe wie jeder andere, gewöhnliche, nicht karierte Mensch trank” (KK 205) he picks up the wordplay of Zuckriegel and tries to excel it punning on ‘kleinkariert’ or ‘narrowminded’.

The discussion between Krautwurst and Zuckriegel is mirrored in the fight between Zuckriegel and his double the archaeology professor Steinbüchse. The two academic ‘fighting cocks’ argue on the fact whether it are ‘Keltische Knochen’ or ‘Germanisches Gebein’, two rivalling alliterations, and almost attack each other physically. They are interrupted by the narrator playing the neutral reconciler: “lassen Sie mich den Friedenskongress eröffnen” (KK 213). His next intervention is very striking: “Keinen neuen Friedensbruch! Keine unnötigen Anzüglichkeiten! Keine gelehrten Redeblumen! [...]” (KK 213). This last imperative is extremely ironical, as neither he himself nor the characters do anything else but juggle around with learned rhetorical figures. On a first, thematic level the narrator neutrally negotiates and tries to conciliate the two parties in the discussion on the origin of the skeletons. On a stylistic level however the triple anaphorical enumeration already ironically marks the artificiality of the enunciation. In descriptions of the travel companions the sheer frequency of rhetorical devices introduces on the one hand a detached ironic perspective from a superior position, assuming that the characters would not consider themselves in such terms. On the other hand the narrator reveals to be not that superior but to be indeed as narrowminded as his characters. Adopting the lofty, ponderous discourse and the learned rhetorical figures in which the characters excel, he isn’t neutral nor searching for peace in the clashes between the characters. In a vacillation on the borders of the narrated world he is on the contrary fighting along in the rhetorical battle. This rhetorical battle drawing attention to the stylistic configuration and artificiality of the

story provokes an alienation effect on the sides of the reader. A dynamic network of figurativeness is being formed throughout the reading of the text by figures of style constantly varying and surpassing each other. This network constitutes a second degree reflexive narrative with the characters and the narrator fighting over the title of the best rhetor and storyteller. This second degree narrative reflects the very act of narration as a changing power relation negotiated between narrator and characters.

## **Conclusions**

Stylistic and narrative processes do interfere in eventful texts and the investigation of these interferences can provide a better insight into the analyzed texts. The interferences take the shape of 1) stylistic overttness. The analysis of Raabe's 'Keltische Knochen' showed how the narratorial voice did not primarily mark its agency over the frequency of the first person-pronoun, over explicit metanarrative comment and direct reader addresses but he did mark his presence over stylistic expressivity. This stylistic expressivity turned out to be particularly interesting regarding the metaleptic mingling of the speech of the characters and the idiom of the narrator, creating a network of figures of style. The accumulation of 'learned rhetorical figures' in the text effectuates a reflexiveness drawing attention to the text's rhetorical constructedness. In this foregrounding of the narrator as a manifest stylist, negotiating his narrating power with the characters, the lack of explicit elaborate reflection in the eventful narrative is compensated on the stylistic level. The interaction between narrative and stylistic processes thus takes 2) the shape of a second degree self-reflexive narrative. While the travel companions in Raabe's text are trapped in the rain, visiting Hallstatt, climbing to the burial ground, stealing bones, reciting poems, fighting with each other over the origin of the bones and while the narrator is apparently a rather neutral witness only interfering but to bring peace among the other characters, he appears in a second degree narrative to be fighting along with them in a rhetorical battle. This other narrative can only be discovered when we analyze the distribution of figurativeness.

In developing and exemplifying stylistic overttness and its development of a second degree reflexive narrative, my paper hopefully illustrates the necessity of integrating the rhetorical and narratological frameworks when we work with stories, in theory, analysis and practice.