

# My Narratology

## An Interview with Peter Hühn

*DIEGESIS*: How would you describe your recent and current research projects?

*Hühn*: One major narratological interest of mine has been, and still is, the trans-generic application of narratology to the analysis of (lyric) poetry. This application is based on the premise that narration, as the communication of a change of state, is a universal semiotic practice used to structure experience and the constitution of meaning, which underlies also the performative presentation of a speaker's utterance in a lyric poem. The universal relevance of this practice is predicated on the fact that *change* – as the manifestation of *time* – is a fundamental feature of life, living, feeling, and acting, and that the operation of narration is a powerful tool for dealing with this feature, applied also pervasively in poetry. One particular aspect of my project is elucidating and defending this approach against criticism from narrow genre-specific concepts of lyric poetry.

*DIEGESIS*: Which narrative would you like to take with you on a lonely island?

*Hühn*: I would like to take two texts with me: William Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*. Although both works are commonly considered to be purely poetic texts, I would like to contend that at the same time they also have a basic – covert – narrative structure which informs the sequence of the individual poems and the development of the poetic utterance in each text, and I would enjoy pursuing and puzzling out the continuous struggle and interaction between poetic and narrative devices.

*DIEGESIS*: What is your all-time favourite narratological study?

*Hühn*: I would name three older titles: Jurij Lotman's *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (1977 [1971]), Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980 [1972]), and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction* (1983), not because they were ultimate and conclusive narratological studies but because they first stimulated my interest in narratology and were the source and basis for my growing and lasting interest in narratology proper. They posed the decisive questions and pointed to possible strategies of answering them.

*DIEGESIS*: Why narratology?

*Hühn*: Because narratology offers a clarifying and fruitful approach to and analysis of texts, of fictional and factual representations of happenings dealing with

one universal and fundamental feature of life: *change* – as the context for the basis of human existence: *acting*.

*DIEGESIS*: Which recent narratological trends are of particular interest to you?

*Hühn*: New approaches to the analysis of narrative communication, inter-subjectivity, and the sharing of experiential content as developed in several publications by María-Ángeles Martínez and others.

Peter Hühn is Professor of English Literature at Hamburg University (retired since 2005). He has published books and articles on the theory of poetry and the history of British poetry, narratology, the application of narratology to poetry analysis, detective and crime fiction. He is author of *Geschichte der englischen Lyrik* (Francke, 1995), *Eventfulness in British Fiction* (De Gruyter, 2010), co-author of *Der Entwicklungsroman in Europa und Übersee* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001), *Die europäische Lyrik seit der Antike* (Hamburg University Press, 2005), *The Narratological Analysis of Lyric Poetry. Studies in English Poetry* (De Gruyter, 2005), *Lyrik und Narratologie. Textanalysen zu deutschsprachigen Gedichten* (De Gruyter, 2007), co-editor of the *Handbook of Narratology* (De Gruyter, 2009), editor-in-chief of the online edition of the *Living Handbook of Narratology* (since 2010) and of the second print edition of the *Handbook of Narratology* (De Gruyter, 2014), and co-editor of the *Handbook of Diachronic Narratology* (De Gruyter, 2023).

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