



Book review

Narrative as Social Practice: Anglo-Western and Australian Aboriginal Oral Traditions
Danièle M. Klapproth, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin and New York, 2004, xiii & 456 pp.,
paperback, €32.95

On page 335 of her monograph Danièle Klapproth reports that members of the Mutitjulu Community near Ayers Rock have published a leaflet in which they contrast the stories of their own oral tradition with traditional stories of Western culture—this is exactly what the author does in her book, too—however, in a different format! Klapproth points out in the introduction (pp. 1–30) that her “principal aim” with this book “is to explore and discuss narrative as social practice in two widely divergent cultures” (p. 4), namely in the ‘Anglo-Western’ culture and in the Australian Aboriginal culture of Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara speakers in the Western Desert. After providing the theoretical background of her study within the Western narratological research tradition Klapproth describes the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara dialects of the Western Desert Language and the culture of their speakers who refer to themselves as “Anangu” and informs the reader about the data to be examined. Her Anangu story corpus encompasses 62 narratives which Klapproth collected between February 1994 and November 1995. The stories were produced and recorded between 1973 and 1992 and come from a variety of sources. The Anglo-Western story corpus consists of the 13 “most popular Western fairy tales originating in the oral tradition” (p. 26).

The book consists of two parts and a concluding chapter. Part One (pp. 31–162) offers “a theoretical discussion of the forms and functions of narrative discourse, and of traditional oral storytelling in particular, and . . . examine[s] these concerns” (p. 10). The first chapter in this part (pp. 33–85) discusses social constructivism, especially Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) theory, emphasizing the role of narrative discourse in the process of reality construction. Then the roles narrative discourse plays in Anglo-Western and in Anangu culture are compared—‘culture’ is defined as “a web of discourses” (p. 35). The comparison elaborates on the relationship between genres of traditional oral storytelling and other forms of discourse used in the construction of social and personal identity and in the transmission of knowledge. Storytelling is understood as a socio-cultural practice. The author provides pertinent socio-cultural contexts of such narrative practice emphasizing that the proper understanding of stories must be based on the contexts of their occurrence.

Chapter 3 (pp. 87–136) examines the “cognitive, social, and communicative processes that are involved when people tell and share narratives” (p. 87). The author provides working definitions of what a story is; they serve the basis for the discussion of the problem in Part Two of the book. Klapproth addresses Bauman’s (1986) notions of “text”, “narrated event” and “narrative event” and introduces the notion of “narrated world” as an additional component to

complement Bauman's storytelling model. This term "refers to the cognitive world that narrator and narratee jointly construct in the storytelling act out of the totality of the narrated events, characters and settings" (p. 106). Klapproth proposes a communication-oriented model of storytelling to describe different levels of interaction during the act of storytelling. The considerations presented are sometimes speculative; it is not always easy to follow the logic of the author's arguments (e.g., Klapproth does not justify why she maintains that "all narrative texts are of a fictive nature" (p. 132); indeed, sometimes I could not escape the impression that I was reading an essay of a literary scholar).

Chapter 4 (pp. 137–162) introduces "schema theory" (Bartlett, 1932) and the concept "story schema". Klapproth points out that "schemata underlying stories from the oral tradition are culture-specific rather than universal" (p. 138) and presents the two main directions of schema-oriented narratological research, namely the approach in which stories are seen as problem-solving episodes and the story grammar approach proposed by Johnson and Mandler (1980) with the "concept of the one-protagonist/one goal episode as the basic unit of story organisation" (p. 154). Klapproth suggests a description of the canonical Anglo-Western story schema (p. 160) and formulates two main research questions to be pursued in the second part of her book (p. 162):

- Is the 'stories as problem-solving episodes' approach applicable to both the Anglo-Western and the Anangu stories?
- Is the concept of the one-protagonist/one goal episode as the basic unit of story organization applicable for all the stories under investigation?

Part Two (pp. 163–378) also consists of three chapters. Chapter 5 (pp. 165–218) analyses the fairy tale 'Beauty and the Beast'. This analysis is based on a audio-recorded version of the fairy tale told by Katherine Hepburn (n.d.). The author classifies this text "as an oral performance narrative, told by a person renowned within her own . . . culture for her storytelling skills" and considers "these performance data comparable in kind to the audio-tapes produced in the Aboriginal community of Fregon" (p. 165). After a few comments on the literary tradition in which this fairy tale has to be seen, the tale is presented in a specific transcript that takes formal structural, prosodic and semantic features into account—the transcription conventions are explained at the end of the book (p. 408f.). The analysis describes the text building conventions of the story, identifies the matrix episode of the fairy tale and its core problematic and elaborates on how the tale is organized around this matrix episode. The chapter ends with a summary of the criteria that make this fairy tale a "good story in Anglo-Western culture" (p. 211). Klapproth distinguishes the following key conceptions prototypical for Anglo-Western narratives (p. 217f):

- The world is conceptualized as fundamentally individualistic.
- Individuals pursue their own goal-oriented activities.
- The narrative is conceptualized around a main protagonist who faces a conflict and applies adequate problem-solving methods to overcome it.
- The solution of the problem entails narrative closure.

These conventions are culture specific principles of narrative aesthetics. Intricately intertwined with a particular worldview they contribute to create cultural identity.

Chapter 6 (pp. 219–307) introduces the corpus of Anangu stories. Klapproth presents the version of the story "Titji Maluringanyi" (A Child Transforms Into a Kangaroo) that Ypati Brown told in an Aboriginal community in South Australia (pp. 222–235). With the help of Cliff

Goddard, Paul Eckert and Lizzie Ellis the author transcribed and translated the story. The translation sticks closely to the wording of the original and follows Klapproth's transcription conventions. The story presents a journey of two brothers towards their family camp, lexicalizing the question who is leading whom, a core concept of the Anungu culture. This question is closely connected with the cultural code to do things "the straight way" and "also ... pertains to questions of the human being's proper relationship with his/her entire environment ... " (p. 265). The story reports on an uninitiated brother who leads his older initiated brother; it represents a reversal of the culturally sanctioned order and thus inevitably leads to the catastrophe, the younger brother's death. The story does not end with the catastrophe. A final retelling of crucial episodes allows the retracing of the narrated events making it possible to understand what happened and why it happened. The fact that the narrator focuses on different story characters and takes different viewpoints leads to a process of understanding that includes all the members of the family depicted in this story. This 'reconstruction' is another important principle of structural organization.

The employment of these structural devices and the shifting character foci "result in the narrative's flat ... structural organisation" (p. 283). The narrative mediations train the listeners of these narratives to avoid problems that may jeopardize the equilibrium of their cultural system.

This story is representative for the author's corpus. Klapproth suggests a thematic grouping of the 62 stories into seven categories and identifies "three main patterns of story organisation" (p. 304):

- the "DISCOVERY STORY" focusing "on a process of 'coming to see'" (p. 301),
- the "REVENGE STORY" focusing "on people who are wronged ... and later succeed in taking revenge" (p. 301),
- the "RETRIEVAL STORY" focusing on family members that are lost, found and "reintegrated into the family group" (p. 302).

These analyses demonstrate that these narratives follow two culture specific story schemata:

- "Story Schema 1 conceptualises stories as *nexus-oriented cause and effect chains*", the stories "focus on a set of characters in their reciprocal relationships, whose actions affect each other", explore "questions of mutual responsibilities and interdependence", and "recognise the transpersonal character of events and situations, as well as the systematic nature of human collectivities" (p. 305f.).
- "Story Schema 2 conceptualises stories as *family- and land-oriented retrieval sequences*. This story schema underlies all RETRIEVAL STORIES" (p. 306).

Chapter 7 (pp. 309–378) presents the cross-cultural comparison of the narratives presented so far. Klapproth relates the culture specific narrative aesthetics of the Anglo-Western and the Anungu cultures to the functions the stories fulfil in these cultures. With respect to the Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara stories the author points out that

- these stories represent meaningful and purposeful activities in themselves;
- they are consistent with the wider socio-cultural contexts of their culture;
- the culture specific ways of narrating are interlinked with specific cultural practices and represent the worldview of their narrators and narratees;

- the storytelling tradition serves a bonding function that is intensified by the process of granting gradual admission to shared cultural knowledge by narrating more and more complete versions of the various stories to listeners that are socialized into the ethnical group;
- the narrative practice and the stories emphasize that the world is replete with meaning and that surviving in it requires the individual's continuous efforts to observe and interpret;
- the stories convey values about social behaviour, especially the interrelatedness among family members, and thus fulfil important functions in socialization processes;
- the stories root the present in the past because they are linked to the creation period of "The Dreaming"—the "Tjukurpa".

The most popular Anglo-Western fairy tales are grouped into three thematic categories (see p. 356f.):

- In stories of group A (Jack and the Beanstalk, etc.) a young male protagonist sets out on adventures, outwits powerful opponents and is finally rewarded for his bravery.
- In stories of group B (Beauty and the Beast, etc.) a female protagonist has to live through difficulties and dangers and finally finds happiness in marrying a prince or a king.
- And in stories of group C (Hänsel and Gretel, etc.) children live through situations of danger before returning to a state of safety.

All stories have one central common motif: they "deal with the struggles . . . lived through by forsaken offspring" (p. 358). Klapproth points out the following:

- Anglo-Western fairy tales are stories about the psychological development of individual protagonists (see p. 354).
- They focus "on the fate of the individual and on his or her final attainment of happiness" (p. 358f.).
- To attain this state of happiness the protagonist has to solve one or more problems (see p. 360).
- A male protagonist is adventurous, self confident and cunning and attains happiness through marriage or material wealth securing his freedom and independence; a female protagonist is "strong yet powerless, courageous yet experiencing great anguish, autonomous, yet bound, capable of living her own life yet ultimately dependent on being rescued from this life by a prince that will marry her" (p. 364).
- The central concepts topicalized are "freedom of the individual" and "romantic love".

The empirical analyses of this study reveal that the two research questions asked at the end of the first part of the book have to be answered with "no"! Universalist theories like the one proposed by Campbell (1993) are rejected.

Chapter 8 (pp. 379–407) summarizes the results of the study and reformulates the formal and semantic story definition (p. 391) and the functional definition of storytelling (p. 395) given in chapter 3. Klapproth claims that these definitions are valid cross-culturally. The chapter ends with a discussion of methodological implications this study may have for future cross-cultural story research and with a final appraisal of the interrelationship between 'story', 'social practice' and 'culture' culminating in the insight: "To have a story is to have a world" (p. 404 and p. 406).

After the endnotes (pp. 411–422) and the list of references (pp. 423–450), the book ends with a useful index (pp. 451–456). The monograph is very well edited and offers many insights into the

theory and practice of cross-cultural story research, although arguments are sometimes presented in a verbose and highly repetitive way.

Despite its merits, the book has certain weaknesses, some are minor, others more fundamental. For one, it is somewhat daring to compare a fairy tale narrated by an American Hollywood film star and the storytelling situation in a sound studio without listeners in front of a microphone with a traditional Aboriginal story narrated by an Aboriginal story teller in front of a tape recorder and microphone in an Aboriginal community with the story collector (and probably other listeners) present. I think that data collection in the field and the production of professional audio-recordings in a sound-studio are incompatible. Moreover, given the fact that the “Beauty and the beast” fairy tale was recorded as a part of a fairy tale collection on audio-tapes produced to be sold in America it is no wonder that this version of the fairy tale does not strongly allude to an incestuous theme present in the story (see p. 196). This fairy tale represents a version controlled, if not expurgated, for business reasons.

Second, the analyses of the Anungu stories are all done from the author’s *etic* point of view. Klapproth does not provide any information with respect to whether the Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara speakers agree with her analyses. Do the Anungu metalinguistically differentiate the 62 stories? Do they have a metalinguistic term for “story”? Do they have metalinguistic labels with which they differentiate genres of narratives? Is there a kind of *emic* Anungu typology of narratives?

Moreover, Klapproth does not provide the reader with a proper morpheme-interlinear transcription. She claims that her study has demonstrated that “it is only through the very meticulous and close textual analysis of narrative texts in their original language (sic), form and contexts that we may start to explore their meaning” (p. 376). I absolutely agree, but unfortunately the author has not done this. Her analysis of the “Titji Maluringanyi” story refers to a few central core concepts and their lexicalized forms in the original Aboriginal text, but otherwise she always argues on the basis of the English translation (this also holds for her analyses of the other Aboriginal stories). Although her analyses result in interesting insights, I have a slight fear that some so-called “translationese” effects may have interfered here and there, where the interpretation may be much more based on the English translation than on the original Aboriginal story. A proper morpheme-interlinear transcription would have enabled the reader to control the analyses presented and it would have safeguarded the author from such a critical objection.

Finally, Klapproth compares Anglo-Western fairy tales that constitute a well defined and researched narrative genre with Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara stories. These Western fairy tales and Anungu stories are subsumed under the general label “(oral) narratives”. However, on page 348 (also, on page 352), for example, Klapproth links some of these stories to “the sacred myths”; on page 353 she states that the open versions of the Tjukurpa stories, some of which are represented in her corpus, “resemble the genre of folktales in many ways, such as it is known for instance, in the Anglo-Western tradition”; and on page 355 she quotes Zipes (1994) who claims that ‘classic’ Western fairy tales “are contemporary myths”. Now, with what text genres are we dealing in this study? They all are certainly narratives, but are they “tales”, or “folktales”, or “myths”? Unfortunately, the author does not solve this problem—because she cannot provide the relevant information with respect to what she calls the Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara stories. Thus, the central critical question is: Does this monograph compare narratives that are actually comparable because they represent and belong to one and the same genre? Or, to phrase this question differently, would the Anungu agree that their stories are comparable to Anglo-Western fairy tales? The answer to this question seems to be crucial for a final and proper assessment of Klapproth’s interesting and stimulating monograph.

It seems that the members of the Mutitjulu Community near Ayers Rock who contrasted “the stories of their own oral tradition with traditional stories of Western culture” do not want to compare their stories with collections “of enchanting stories, like . . . Grimms’ fairy tales” but as something completely different, namely as “an explanation of existence” and an expression of ‘the Law which governs behaviour’ (quoted in Kavanagh, 1990:35 and 335).

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