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## On Postcolonial Narratology and Reading Postcolonial Literature Narratologically

The article discusses this special issue's leading question 'Why narratology?' with regard to a specific group of texts, for which a separate version of narratological inquiry has been proposed as part of the diversification of narratologies: postcolonial literature. Previous outlines of a postcolonial narratology are reviewed and the fate of the project of postcolonial narratology is assessed, before an alternative take on reading postcolonial literatures narratologically is suggested.

### 1. Introduction

From the perspective of narratology, the answer to the question 'Why narratology?' is almost self-evident. John Pier's outline of the project of narratology in a conference paper which tackles the issue explicitly might illustrate such a point of view: According to Pier (2014, 5), narratology's main selling point is that it is "an approach to the study of narrative that provides us with concepts and analytical procedures" which make it possible "to apprehend, describe, organize and explain the workings of narratives in ways and with degrees of system and rigor seldom achieved by previous approaches." While narratology's aim is to shed light on the 'workings of narrative,' for Pier and others its core value lies in its methodology, its "terminological precision and theoretical rigour," which sets it "apart from less scientific approaches in literary studies" (Sommer 2007b, 67).

Yet what constitutes an approach's main attraction for some can become a matter of dispute for others. The claim to universality and the focus on form are two characteristics of structuralist approaches to literature, such as narratology, that have encountered resistance within the field of postcolonial studies. Postcolonial literature, goes one of the arguments, differs significantly from mainstream Western literature, and should therefore be looked at through a different lens. The idea that any theory can transcend the culture from which it emerged and claim universal applicability stands at odds with a core idea of postcolonial studies, a discipline which understands itself as programmatically opening up alternatives to Western patterns of thought.<sup>1</sup> More particularly: Approaches focusing on literary form are suspected of backgrounding the most relevant and most characteristic aspect of postcolonial texts, namely their political stance; formalism and ideological critique are thus frequently "regarded as antithetical" (Dwivedi et al. 2018b, 1). It is therefore hardly surprising that Elleke Boehmer (2010) observes a "general avoidance of aesthetics in postcolonial criticism" (176), because aesthetics – which implies a focus on literary form – is frequently deprecated as "a western, middle-class indulgence" (170).

In recent decades a number of proposals of a postcolonial narratology have attempted to bridge the gap between formal analysis and ideological criticism and advocated a narratological analysis of texts emerging from contexts outside of narratology's original breeding ground, definable as mainstream white Western culture. In accord with these proposals of a postcolonial narratology, I argue that there are dividends to be gained from the application of narratological tools in the study of postcolonial literatures.<sup>2</sup> However, the benefits I conceive go beyond those so far identified in the proposals of a postcolonial narratology. In order to contextualise my argument, section 2 will briefly outline the main contours of the programmes promoted as postcolonial or intercultural narratology before I suggest, in section 3, an alternative focus for narratological readings of postcolonial texts, which I believe to have additional advantages.

## **2. Where Politics Meets Aesthetics: Postcolonial Narratology as an Interdisciplinary Project**

Next to 'feminist narratology,' 'postcolonial narratology' is one of the most prominent of the 'contextual,' 'thematic,' or 'corpus-based' narratologies, which have been proposed to redress a perceived shortcoming of classical structuralist narratology: its lack of concern for the social context from which a text emerges and to which it remains politically tied.<sup>3</sup> Postcolonial narratology programmatically aims to build a bridge between the approaches of narratology and postcolonial studies by exploring the "relationships between narrative structures and those questions, themes, and categories, which are of central importance to Postcolonial Studies" (Gymnich 2002, 62).<sup>4</sup> Although Gerald Prince (2011, 373) explicitly positions his conception of a postcolonial narratology as "contrary to Marion Gymnich's version," the distinction he claims to make is hard to discern in his definition of postcolonial narratology as an approach interested in "possible narratological correspondents" to "matters commonly, if not uncontroversially, associated with the postcolonial (e.g., hybridity, migrancy, otherness, fragmentation, diversity, power relations)."<sup>5</sup>

Both definitions suggest that narratological means should be employed to pursue the ends defined by postcolonial literary criticism, thus assigning narratology to the status more or less of an auxiliary discipline in the service of the broader project of postcolonial studies.<sup>6</sup> In this conceptualisation, the application of narratological tools to postcolonial narratives in no way changes the general objectives of studying these, but simply broadens the means and methods of analysis and allows for more complex and (narratologically) more precise descriptions, both of individual texts and postcolonial literature as a field.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the answer to the question 'Why postcolonial narratology?' could be exactly the same as the one put forward by Pier in response to the more general version of the question. If narratology "provides us with concepts and analytical procedures" which make it possible "to apprehend, describe, organize and

explain the workings of narratives in ways and with degrees of system and rigor seldom achieved by previous approaches,” then there is no good reason why postcolonial literature should not be read narratologically if the interest in form does not distract from the texts’ politics. The attribute ‘postcolonial’ in postcolonial narratology in this understanding serves mainly to “identify the kind of research questions [this] particular approach to narrative is interested in and the corpus of texts it intends to explore” (Sommer 2007b, 68). This would make postcolonial narratology one of the ‘applied’ narratologies, which use narratological tools in a range of research contexts which, though not intrinsically linked to narratology, might nevertheless profit from a narratological perspective.

It has been argued that postcolonial narratology conceived of in this way is, along with other contextual narratologies, not ‘narratology proper’ since it is no ‘theory of narrative,’ but rather a form of literary criticism which brings forth “narratologically informed interpretations” of texts by applying narratological tools to a specific set of texts (Kindt 2009, 39). Others have countered that such interpretations might start as applications but have the potential to generate new insights into the workings of narrative so that the combination of narratology and postcolonial studies becomes a reciprocal dynamic. Brian Richardson (2011, 3), for example, stresses that narratologically informed readings of postcolonial texts are not unlikely to have “larger implications [...] for narrative theory as a whole” as “some of the most fascinating narrative experiments have been conducted by postcolonial authors.” Sommer (2007b, 69) also sees a significant potential for general narratological insights: “By putting theory to the test [...] future contributions to postcolonial narratology may [...] reveal blind spots, insufficient distinctions and a lack of precision in some areas of narratological systematics.”

Such observations could back up the project of ‘decolonizing narrative theory’, i.e. “the reconsideration of narratology in relation to ethnic and postcolonial studies” (Kim 2012, 234), as suggested in a special issue of the *Journal of Narrative Theory* in 2012.<sup>8</sup> Even Prince, who in his 2005 chapter “On a Postcolonial Narratology” only went so far as to consider the application of structuralist narratology’s tools to postcolonial fiction as a means “to test the validity and rigor of narratological categories and distinctions” (372–373), acknowledges that there may be a mutual benefit in the exchange between narratology and postcolonial studies. In his 2011 contribution to a volume dedicated to narratological readings of world fiction, he at least hypothetically entertains the possibility that postcolonial narratives might have features that potentially “resist, perplex, or confound the categories and tools of even the most classical narratology” (38) – even though he does not come across any such feature in his own case study.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, this focus on potential revisions of narratological categories has implications for the relationship between narratology and postcolonial studies. In the outlines, narratology is no longer an auxiliary science of postcolonial literary criticism, but at least an equal partner, if the roles are not altogether reversed.<sup>10</sup>

Counting among the narrative phenomena in postcolonial fiction that according to Richardson (2011, 3, 4) might lead to an adjustment of basic narratological

categories are “innovative kinds of narrators” or a “postcolonial deployment of voice”; Sommer (2007b, 69) points to “reader constructs, the ethnicity of narratees or the concept of intended audiences” as “obvious targets for postcolonial revisions of narrative theory.”<sup>11</sup> In reference to Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* Greta Olson (2018, 158) has recently argued in favour of a critical reconsideration of “universalist assumptions about the existence of reliable and unreliable narrators, which are based on an assumed commonality between the reader and the author or her text.”

The suggested modifications of narratological categories point to blind spots of previous conceptions, but they are hardly radical. So far, some postcolonial narratological readings have led to a refinement of existing concepts, but these concepts have not been fundamentally challenged, nor have completely new ones been introduced.<sup>12</sup> And the applications of narratological concepts leading to even such modest revisions are few and far between. The overwhelming majority of narratological readings of postcolonial texts ‘only’ use narratology to gain a better understanding of the postcolonial texts under study, not of the narratological categories applied. Thus the notion of a potentially fundamental revision of narratology brought about by a decentring of Western literature as its main object of study, politically attractive as it might be, has yet to come to fruition.

One reason for the absence of observations that might permanently unsettle basic narratological categories might be that, to date, not enough systematic narratological research of postcolonial narratives has been conducted. In the course of the last decade, a number of individual articles, a couple of essay collections as well as a special issue of the *Journal of Narrative Theory* have appeared which programmatically address the potential benefits of a postcolonial narratology. Although these studies undoubtedly constitute valuable contributions to the debate, a good deal more sustained scholarship will be necessary to systematically test the validity of narratological categories.<sup>13</sup>

It might also be the case that the kind of narratives selected are not the best choice if the aim is to discover alternative forms of story-telling: most texts studied under the banner of postcolonial fiction are works written in a European language by authors familiar with European narrative traditions, who address an international rather than a local audience (cf. Huggan 2001). Consequently, even if the assumption was accurate that narrative forms are culture-specific and that for this reason narratological categories derived from Western literature do not necessarily apply to non-Western texts, postcolonial classics such as Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935), Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) or Rohinton Mistry’s *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) might not be the best place to look for evidence.<sup>14</sup> Texts like these might deviate from dominant modes of narrating in the West, but they do so within a framework of familiar forms.

Monika Fludernik (2018, 201–202) and others have suggested that more dissimilar narrative forms, which would “require a modification of narratology,” might be found in “*native* narrative traditions” located outside the influence of Western models of storytelling. That “postcolonial critics and narratologists

have so far failed” (ibid.) to look at these traditions is, of course, not a case of careless oversight but rather due to the native traditions’ limited accessibility for anyone who is neither a participant nor an expert in them – and thus for many scholars primarily interested in the theory of narrative. An article that looks at a non-Western narrative tradition in a non-European language from a narratological point of view is Dan Shen’s study of Chinese narrative practices. And Shen (2011) indeed identifies “narrative modes not found in Western narratives” (17), which “defy accommodation to a [...] universal narrative poetics” (32). However, it is no coincidence that Shen’s chapter appeared in a volume dedicated to ‘world’ rather than ‘postcolonial fiction’ since the epithet ‘postcolonial’ is not commonly applied to China.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to China, postcolonial cultures in the narrow sense are defined by their having been in intensive though asymmetrical exchange with Western cultures for an extended period of time. In such postcolonial cultures narrative practices truly independent of European models would have to predate colonialism, whilst ‘postcolonial’ literature is widely understood to be a literary form affected and effected by colonialism.<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that narratological studies of postcolonial narratives cannot come across phenomena that challenge established narratological concepts and categories, but only that this might be less likely to happen than hoped for by some, and that the challenges are likely to be less fundamental than imagined.

To return to the initial question: proponents of a postcolonial narratology have thus offered two different answers to the question ‘Why narratology?’. On the one hand, narratology can enrich postcolonial literary criticism by augmenting its inventory of heuristic tools so that the politically oriented concepts and research questions discussed by postcolonial literary criticism gain additional scaffolding through a narratological lens. Other proponents of a postcolonial narratology have laid the focus elsewhere. For them the question is not so much ‘Why narratology?’ (since the relevance of narratology is taken for granted and needs no further justification), but: ‘Why a postcolonial narratology as a separate field of research?’. For most proponents of this approach “reciprocal insights for both theory and criticism” (Dwivedi et al. 2018b, 8) vindicate the dialogue between narratology and postcolonial literary criticism.

### **3. Shifting the Focus: Thinking Beyond Postcolonial Narratology**

Proposals of a postcolonial narratology in both guises have generally followed the lead of postcolonial literary studies in presupposing that postcolonial literature stands apart from other writing and therefore warrants specific forms of inquiry. After the publication of the influential study *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft et al. 1989), postcolonial literature was for decades read primarily as a means to counter or undermine colonial and neo-colonial discourses. Even after such readings were increasingly considered to be “rather mechanical” (McLeod

2010, 30) and therefore “beginning to sound rather repetitive” (Sommer 2007a, 179), identity politics has remained central to postcolonial criticism and accordingly was made a central concern of postcolonial narratology, too. Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik (2010, 8) also remark that “postcolonial narratologists centrally address the question of how the narrative text is imbued with colonial or neocolonial discourse that correlates with the oppression of native populations and how the discourse simultaneously manages to undermine this very ideology,” an observation that is still valid today.

The focus on a recurring set of research questions has a political as well as a theoretical foundation; it has also institutional advantages (visibility, recognizability) and has helped to establish postcolonial studies as an interdisciplinary research field, and postcolonial literary criticism as a significant subdomain of literary studies. Since the new millennium, however, “a sense of exhaustion” (Jennifer Wenzel in Yaeger 2007, 634) has become manifest in the field, prompting scholars to look increasingly for new avenues of inquiry. In fact, the project of postcolonial narratology itself probably has to be considered one of them,<sup>17</sup> and the turn from postcolonial to transnational literature another. More recently, conjunctions with refugee studies, ecocriticism, and animal studies among other research fields have brought new impulses. Yet, despite these expansions the field is still held together, first and foremost, by its political orientation, which finds expression in the critique of exploitation and suppression in their various forms.

While such a focus brings a degree of unity to the field, it is also a limiting force: literature from formerly colonized countries is chiefly discussed *as* postcolonial literature in the narrower sense, i.e. as in some way responding to the experience of (neo-)colonialism; and the better a text fits the research questions foregrounded by postcolonial studies, the more likely it is to be selected for critical analysis. However, while some writers from postcolonial contexts embrace the postcolonial paradigm, there are others who do not. Naturally, not all fiction from the Global South negotiates the impact of colonialism nor even “wider questions of postcolonial identities in today’s globalizing world” (Fasselt 2016, 156). This is true especially for the younger generation of postcolonial authors (or rather: post-postcolonial authors), born several decades after their country’s independence, who may not lead cosmopolitan or transnational lives, and for whom other issues are often closer to home.<sup>18</sup> Whether they opt to write about the specific worlds they live in or choose to transcend them in their writing, as soon as they depart from the thematic frame set by postcolonial studies, such writers stand in danger of being largely ignored by international literary criticism. So the fact that thematic narratological approaches “rely more heavily than others on specific corpora of texts” (Sommer 2012, 152) can become a drawback when a text either falls into such a text corpus (in this case: of postcolonial writing) or not. The link, upheld by postcolonial studies and postcolonial narratology alike, between text corpus and a specific approach to the texts can then function like blinders: texts outside the targeted field of vision become invisible. Besides, the preference for topics such as the politics of representation, notions of

identity and alterity or discursive hegemony and counter-discursivity in the discussion of texts that do come into view can overshadow other aspects of these texts.

This is why I would like to argue in favour of narratological readings of postcolonial texts in ways that differ from those suggested by proponents of a postcolonial narratology. I believe much can be gained by opening up the spectrum of research questions which address postcolonial writing, a task for which a narratological approach seems ideally suited, because narratology is so very adaptable. My answer to the question ‘Why narratology?’ would therefore be: narratology may have blind spots, and while it certainly cannot account for all literary phenomena, one of its major advantages is that it is not bound to one topic or issue. Narratological tools can and should of course be productively employed in the service of postcolonial studies or other types of thematic criticism, but they do not have to be. Narratology in its postclassical version(s) can address a wide range of textual and contextual phenomena and is – as manifest in the ever growing number of ‘narratologies’ specialising in different aspects of culture – compatible with a wide range of research interests, be they formal, theoretical or political. Postcolonial literary criticism on the one hand and the testing and refinement of narratology as a theory on the other, the projects outlined and conducted under the header of ‘postcolonial narratology,’ are only two of the many possibilities in which narratology can be brought into dialogue with narrative texts – whether they are labelled as ‘postcolonial’ or not.

A more flexible application of narratological tools might also solve a second problem: postcolonial criticism evaluates literary narratives in relation to their politics, which means that literary texts are valued highly if they fulfil a sociocultural function in accordance with the goals of postcolonial studies, that is if they are critical of hegemonic ideologies and point to alternative models of being in the world.<sup>19</sup> The value ascribed to them is context-specific as well as time-bound and thus stands in contrast to the value ascribed to texts which are appreciated as works of art. Postcolonial fiction is therefore never seen as simply fiction, but as a specific genre set and seen as standing apart from ‘regular’ fiction. As Sommer (2007a, 177) has argued with regard to intercultural fiction, an approach focussing on formal aspects, such as narratologically informed readings, might be an effective means to move ethnic fiction away from its marginal position “as an exotic footnote to the literary mainstream” and help texts to achieve recognition as works of art, on an equal footing with other works of literature.<sup>20</sup> Ruth Gilligan (2016, 108) argues along the same lines that “by devising and applying a narratological lens to contemporary transcultural fiction the focus may be shifted away from the field’s preoccupation with ideological questions” so that “formal ingenuities enacted by certain transcultural writers, the majority of which have been heretofore overlooked,” come into view. Naturally, such an interest in form and appreciation of literariness does not imply a lack of concern for politics, neither on the part of the writers nor on the side of criticism.

To illustrate this with reference to an example: Altaf Tyrewala’s *No God in Sight* is an Indian English novel, which was published in 2006 but has received

little critical attention to date,<sup>21</sup> presumably because it is very slim, a literary debut and not concerned with migration, interculturality, nor the impact of colonialism or neo-colonialism. It deals instead with religious conflict, which could be – but in the novel is not – considered in the context of colonialism. While the book is therefore of little interest to scholars tracing the British role in the emergence of communal violence on the Indian subcontinent, it is certainly very interesting from a narratological point of view: *No God in Sight* consists of 46 chapters, the length of each ranging from one and a half lines to ten pages. Each chapter foregrounds the perspective of a different character, who is in most cases also the narrator, yet in some cases the focalizer. One chapter deviates from this pattern by telling us about developments in a rural community from the point of view of an “Omniscient Villager” (Tyrewala 2006, 45). The chapters are mainly held together by connections on the story level – a son mentions his father, who then becomes the next narrator, and so on to the next. These connections are frequently underlined when two successive narrators refer to one and the same aspect of the storyworld, often even in similar words. The text thus features a large number of different perspectives, which taken together present a panoramic cosmos of (mostly) Muslim life in contemporary India in the face of a resurgence of Hindu nationalism. Additional aspects which appeal to the reader interested in the text’s literary qualities are its temporal structure – the novel is cyclical in that it ends with a scene which also stands at its beginning – and its use of both past- and present-tense narration in a way which repeatedly prompts readerly immersion in spite of the limited amount of space assigned to each of the characters.<sup>22</sup>

Without a doubt, a text such as Tyrewala’s would be an interesting object in narratological studies of, say, perspective structure or tense usage in fiction. Yet, in proposing that postcolonial texts be read narratologically, I do not have in mind studies whose main aim is to gain narratological insights. From a narratological point of view, the goal is much humbler: narratologically informed readings of postcolonial novels such as *No God in Sight*, which link textual strategies to the topics negotiated in the novels. Such readings, unrestricted by a preference for certain themes over others, can bring more texts and topics into view, and enable us to appraise the literary narratives as works of art; – narratives, which are works of art, not because they leave politics aside, but because they use complex literary means to give expression to a large variety of topics. Of course, narratology is not the only available tool; but it is in its various manifestations an extremely versatile one. Therefore narratology.

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<sup>1</sup> This is, for example, an argument to be found in *The Empire Writes Back*, one of the foundational texts of postcolonial literary studies, and has been repeated frequently since: “The idea of ‘post-colonial literary theory’ emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing. European theories themselves emerge from particular cultural traditions which are hidden by false notions of ‘the universal.’” (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 11)

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of convenience I will use the much disputed, yet still most commonly encountered label ‘postcolonial literature’ whenever I refer generally to literary texts that are not part of this white Western literary mainstream, although for all the various subgroups more appropriate labels can be found. ‘Postcolonial literature’ in this widest sense includes literature emerging from formerly colonized countries (i.e. postcolonial literature in the more narrow sense) as well as multicultural (such as Black British fiction) and transcultural literature (which is no longer rooted in one particular cultural context). The text I refer to in order to illustrate my point could more narrowly be labelled ‘South Asian’ or ‘Indian English’ fiction, depending on whether a regional or national lens is foregrounded. One of the contentious aspects of the term postcolonial is that “it continues to tether cultural activities especially in the once-colonised world to an earlier paradigm (colonialism)” (McLeod 2001, 88). As I hope to make clear in section 3, I oppose such a tie. Nevertheless, I use the term because it is still frequent within postcolonial studies and prevalent in narratological discussions of a ‘postcolonial narratology.’ For a discussion of the term see also Aldama (2009, 4–8).

<sup>3</sup> Other examples of thematic narratologies are ‘intercultural narratology,’ which is closely related to postcolonial narratology but focusses on intercultural fiction (Orosz 2004, Sommer 2007a, 2007b), ‘econarratology,’ which combines narratological analysis and ecocriticism (James 2015, Rupp 2019), the ‘narratology beyond the human’ proposed by Herman (2018), which is situated at the intersection of narratology and animal studies; and the narratology for the Anthropocene considered by Neumann (2019) and Caracciolo (2021).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also Birk and Neumann (2002), who make the same argument.

<sup>5</sup> Gymnich’s examples of concepts central to postcolonial studies are not identical to, but certainly compatible with Prince’s list. The one obvious difference is that Gymnich also includes in her enumeration the categories ‘class’ and ‘gender,’ which are arguably less specific to postcolonial studies.

<sup>6</sup> It should be added that this interpretation of Prince’s (2011, 379) definition does not quite align with his insistence, later in the same text, that postcolonial narratology should be distinguished from postcolonial literary criticism.

<sup>7</sup> The claim that narratology increases analytical and descriptive precision can, for example, be found in Fludernik (1999, 87). The identification of features characteristic of postcolonial writing as a group of texts has always been important in postcolonial literary criticism and has been adopted in narratological readings of postcolonial texts. See e.g. Ashcroft et al. (1989), Fludernik (2007), Boehmer (2010), Richardson (2011), and Fasselt (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Shang (2017, 52) argues along the same lines when he proposes an approach, whose task it is “to decolonize and to subvert the hegemony of European and Anglo-American narrative theory.”

<sup>9</sup> This interest in testing and, where necessary, revising narratological categories and concepts is not unique to postcolonial narratology, but also expressed by proponents of other ‘new narratologies.’ See e.g. Neumann’s (2019, 105) consideration of “a narratology specifically for the Anthropocene” and Herman (2018, 9), who remarks in his *Narratology beyond the Human*: “the present study considers how engaging with issues raised by stories that cross the species boundary may necessitate a reconceptualization of some of the most basic concepts in the domain of narrative theory.”

<sup>10</sup> Most scholars working in the field of ‘postcolonial narratology’ regard “dialogic reciprocity” (Dwivedi et al. 2018b, 8) as a defining feature of their endeavours. Prince (2005), however, would like to reserve the label ‘postcolonial narratology’ for projects in which (general) narratological insights are the main aim. For a more detailed discussion of Prince’s position see Sommer (2007b).

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<sup>11</sup> An example of a revision of reader constructs is given by Sommer (2007a), who traces the construction of a cosmopolitan readership in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*, and thus introduces 'cultural background' as a relevant aspect of the concept of the implied reader.

<sup>12</sup> Most significant among the refinements effected by postcolonial narratology was "establishing language as one of its prime parameters of analysis" (Gymnich 2002, 63). See also Fludernik (1999, 80–86), and Gymnich's in-depth study (2007).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Sommer (2007b, 66), Kim (2012) and Dwivedi et al. (2018b, 2), who all lament that there is "little theoretically and methodologically sustained engagement" (Kim 2012, 233).

<sup>14</sup> These are some of the texts analysed in the essay collection *Narratology and Ideology*, edited by Divya Dwivedi, Henrik Skov Nielsen, and Richard Walsh (2018a).

<sup>15</sup> The application is possible, yet controversial (cf. Zhang 2018). For a discussion of revisions of narratology based on readings of Chinese literature see also Shang (2017).

<sup>16</sup> See for example the much-quoted (though not uncontested) definition by Ashcroft et al. (1989, 9), who use the term 'postcolonial' to "cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day."

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Sommer, who suggests a narratological approach to Black British fiction as an alternative to critical writing foregrounding only questions of identity and representation.

<sup>18</sup> Yenjela (2021) has recently documented such a shift in interest in Kenyan fiction of the new millennium.

<sup>19</sup> On this point see for example Kim (2011), who criticises that many readings of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* "are still based on the assumption that the texts must be evaluated in terms of literary and political representation" (2011, 93–94) and insists that texts such as *The Woman Warrior* be read as "literary productions."

<sup>20</sup> Cf. also Aldama (2009, 15), who turns to narrative theory "to avoid slipping into an 'identity politics' approach as well as to sidestep that move that judges literary merit based on discussions of felicitous or infelicitous representation of race, ethnicity, gender, and so on, in the so-identified postcolonial [...] experience."

<sup>21</sup> I am only aware of Egbert's (2008) short discussion of the text as suitable teaching material in German schools.

<sup>22</sup> On the immersive function of present-tense narration, as well as present-tense narration in general see Gebauer (2021).