INTRODUCTION

NARRATOLOGICAL THEORY ON SPACE

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Introduction

The first volumes of the Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative discussed two central and heavily theorised aspects of narrative texts: the narrator and time. This third volume will deal with an aspect that—until very recently—has received far less theoretical attention and is yet of prime importance too: space. Space is here understood in the wide sense of the setting of the action of a story, other localities that are referred to, e.g. in memories or dreams, and objects ('props').

The relative neglect of space in narratological theory, compared to the wealth of models for analysing narrators, perspective, or time, is acknowledged by narratologists themselves, and is plausibly explained by Buchholz and Jahn as due to two reasons: ‘One was that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s characterisation of narrative literature as ‘temporal’ art (as opposed to ‘spatial’ arts like painting and sculpture) seemed too evident to be seriously interrogated. The second reason was that space in narratives—especially pre-nineteenth century ones—often seemed to have no other function than to supply a general background setting, something to be taken for granted rather than requiring attention, far less

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1 Cf. Bal [1985] 1997: 135: ‘The filling in of space is determined by the objects that can be found in that space. Objects have spatial status.’
essential than the temporal directedness (...) of the plot. This theoretical neglect is not justified, however, considering the central place which space takes in the construction of stories, and is also belied by the practice of novelists, who, to mention but one thing, often choose places for their titles: *Iliad*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Northanger Abbey*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *A Room with a View*, *Manhattan Transfer*, *Berlin-Alexanderplatz*, etc.

Recently, however, narratology has joined in with the ‘spatial turn’ that, perhaps under the influence of the globalisation, which accentuated the significance of locations, has become manifest across disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, geography, and cultural studies since the nineties of the twentieth century. In this introductory chapter I have brought together those theoretical concepts that I consider most useful for an analysis of space in ancient narrative texts.

**The Place of Space**

There are huge differences in the attention paid to space: some narratives are full of detailed descriptions or semantically loaded settings, e.g. Dickens’ *Great Expectations*; others, e.g. Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, focus on the plot or characters while their environments are largely left unspecified. Whether it is provided for in abundance or more sparingly, narratologists agree that space can never be presented in a narrative text in its totality: the narratees are offered a mere selection of details. Just as we distinguish between fabula-time and story-time, i.e. between the (theoretically) complete time of the reconstructed fabula versus the restricted timespan as it is actually presented in the story, we may distinguish between fabula-space and story-space: the fabula-space would be a (theoretically) complete depiction of the location(s) of a

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5 When writing this introduction, which also served as a guide for the authors of the chapters, in 2008, the only comprehensive discussions were Hillebrand 1971: 5–36 (German novels); Hoffmann 1978 (English novels); and van Baak 1983 (Russian novels). Since then Hallet and Neumann 2009 and Dennerlein 2009 have appeared. For the spatial turn, see e.g. Warf and Arias 2009 and Weigel 2009.

6 See SAGN 2: 10.