

Editorial

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Introduction: counter-narratives: a concept for narratology and the study of fiction?

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Since the publication of the seminal book coedited by Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews, *Considering Counter-Narratives: Narrating, Resisting, Making Sense* (2004), the concept of counter-narrative has given rise to an increasing number of individual and collective papers, books and articles, sometimes referred to as *counter-narrative research*. Although the concept has been used previously in different fields of analysis, this book provides the most often cited definition of counter-narratives as “the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives” (Andrews 2004: 1). Accordingly, “[c]ounter-narratives only make sense in relation to something else, that what which they are countering. The very name identifies it as a positional category, in tension with another category,” the authors write. They name this oppositional category “master narrative,” and they add that “what is dominant and what is resistant are not, of course, static questions, but rather are forever shifting placements” (Bamberg and Andrews 2004: x).

More recently, the publication of the *Routledge Handbook of Counter-Narratives* in the series “Routledge International Handbooks” (Lueg and Lundholt 2021), has, by the very force of its numerous theoretical and analytical contributions, demonstrated the existence of an autonomous and coherent research program within narrative research. It was preceded by a book specifically devoted to counter-narratives in organizations (Frandsen et al. 2017), which had already contributed to advancing theoretical reflection on master and counter-narratives, and offered analyses based on the observation of empirical cases in organizational contexts.

In contrast to a general assumption, however, the terms master and counter-narrative do not have entirely shared histories or origins. While the term “master

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narrative” is an English translation of Jean-François Lyotard’s (1984 [1979]) *grand récit*, the term “counter-narrative” has been occasionally used at least since 17th century. The publication of Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (1984 [1979]) launched the popular use of the term “master narrative” in various postmodernist cultural and political discussions. However, the first known case when the terms appear together is in a literary essay by the narratologist David Herman (1991). Even after Herman’s essay, it took about ten years before the terms were used systematically as dependent counter-concepts as in Bamberg and Andrews (2004). Counter-narratives have thus been part of the history of narratology, but without receiving much attention until now. This might be related to the fact that narratology “proper” typically centers less on everyday life narratives than on literary narratives and, more recently, on narrative artifacts in different media.

While it is difficult to generalize based on an absence, a notable example of this omission is the *Living handbook of narratology*, which lacks an entry on counter-narratives. When a group of (senior) researchers submitted a suggestion for an entry on “counter-narrative” for the handbook in 2015, it was rejected by the editors: “The term ‘narrative’ is employed here in a rather broad sense and it is not specifically based on a strictly narratological definition,” they stated in their rejection letter. “‘Counternarrative’ appears to be a rhetorical, hermeneutical or ideological rather than a narratological category. And the oppositional constellation of ‘master narrative’ and ‘counter narrative’ seems to be more a question of content than of form or structure.” This understanding of the concept – and of narratology – might explain its residual presence in the *Narrative Conferences* organized by the International Society for the Study of Narrative, which mostly gather specialists in narratology, whereas it has received wide attention in the *Narrative Matters* conferences, which mostly gather narrative researchers in social sciences.

In this special issue, we explore the possibility of operationalizing the concepts of master and counter-narrative in the theory and analysis of fictional literary narratives. Ordered in reverse chronology with respect to the primary texts being analyzed in the articles, the collection raise both theoretical, methodological, and analytical questions, and explore whether the existing concepts of master- and counter narratives can be used in the analysis of fictional narratives or whether adjustments are necessary. In some articles, the authors consider what the dimension of fiction can bring to counter-narrativity as it is defined in the narrative analysis in social sciences. More generally, we ask whether and how deeply the theory of counter-narratives can be integrated into the theory of narratology and the study of fiction, the word “fiction” being understood here both in the sense of generic fiction (such as the novel, the short story, the fiction film) and in the sense of the theoretical concept of fiction.

A note on the variations in the typography: When Andrews and Bamberg introduced the concepts of “master narrative” and “counter-narrative,” they did it as written here. “Master narrative” without a hyphen, and “counter-narrative” with. In the years that have passed, different versions have been used, e.g., “master-narrative” (with hyphen) and “counternarrative” in one word. We have decided to leave it to the authors to decide which version they would use.

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