

GEORGAKOPOULOU, ALEXANDRA. *Narrative Performances: A Study of Modern Greek Storytelling*. Pragmatics and Beyond, New Series 46. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997. xvii + 282 pages. Tables, appendices of samples, references, author index, subject index. Hardcover, G 170.00; ISBN 90-272-5059-6 (Europe); ISBN 1-55619-808-6 (US).

Narrative Performances is based on the Ph.D. dissertation that the author submitted to the University of Edinburgh in 1983 and on several articles she has published since then. The monograph is a textual, anthropological, and sociological analysis of personal narratives as told by middle class adults and children about their lives in Athens and Peloponnesus. The author also examines the structures, strategies, and performances of the narratives. The volume belongs, therefore, to a long line of research on autobiographic and anecdotal storytelling. As far as the Greek material is concerned, this line of research began with the monograph by G. Gizelis (1974), which surprisingly is missing from the extensive bibliography.

For a few decades now, contemporary storytelling has been among the favorite topics of research in communication science, sociology, anthropology, and folklore where text strategies (discourse analysis) and questions of performance have been amply discussed. In the voluminous literature by cultural anthropologists related to the topic, the coffee house has become the place where men verbally present themselves, whereas for women the neighborhood fountain, the courtyard, the balcony, and the doorway are the places where they gossip and exchange vital information that forms public opinions. Here converge the various channels of communication in the village community. In view of this situation, the statements made in the "Preface" about storytelling as a factor in constituting reality, about the mechanism of interaction, about the form of playing a social role, and about the consolidation of a group's we-identity, all appear to be quite self-evident. The author's refusal to apply formal theories one-dimensionally is liberating; however, one wishes that more precise information had been given about the criteria used for selecting the texts. The texts are personal narratives as they occur in conversations among middle-class people; however, lest they are simply intended to represent a random sample, the criteria for selecting the texts remain undisclosed.

Nevertheless, these oral narratives provide sufficient material for the analysis, and are a pleasure to read. (Unfortunately, Latin letters are used for the phonetic transcription of the oral texts. This does not help to make the texts more readable, and is even quite problematic in some cases. For written texts Greek letters are used, instead.) The analysis begins in the first chapter, "Narrative in Discourse Analysis." Here criteria for the definition of narrative expressivity, its historical types, and its schemata are expounded. In this chapter the author also identifies "Binding-Unfolding-Evaluating" as the basic strategy for the structuring of narratives, but the storytelling by children is taken up separately. This general section is far too demanding for anyone who is not a specialist in textual analysis. The general reader will be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of controversial technical literature introduced.

Beginning with chapter two, "Stories in Everyday Conversations: Data and Methods," the subject matter of the volume is directly addressed. About the method applied for choosing the narrators the author says,

The tellers of this study's stories are native Greek speakers, either Athenians or residents of towns near Athens (in Peloponnesus, south Greece) who have spent a fair amount of their lives in Athens studying or working. In addition, they share roughly the same social and educational background: middle-class university or college (vocational train-

ing) degree holders. The sample has almost equal representation from each gender. Their ages range from 24 to 58 (young-middle aged). None of the subjects has a formal training in linguistics, which might make them conscious of the verbal output. The stories are arguably stories from Greeks who would probably identify themselves as members of the mainstream or the silent majority. (35)

The children were about eight years old and came from families of a similar background. Concerning the statistical method of sampling, one may ask why members of the lower strata (e.g., farmers) were omitted.

Forty stories were analyzed, twenty of them were given by adults and another twenty by children. These stories belong to the type called "Personal story about a past trouble," and are about sensational as well as humorous episodes. During her fieldwork between 1990 and 1993, the author collected about five hundred stories (120 of which were children's stories). The tape recordings of these stories is roughly thirty hours in length. From these stories she chose sixty for a quantitative analysis while the rest is reflected in her qualitative analysis. As a result, this material offers a sufficient empirical base for the author's observations. In the remaining part of the chapter she characterizes the situation of the storytelling, which can be described with such terms as "participation structure," stories told by males, "gendered themes," children's stories, and "patterns of structural sophistication" (climax, repetition, high points, end).

Chapter three, "The Stories' Formal Structure," where the author investigates the rhythmic division in three parts, is particularly informative. As in *märchen* and some folk-songs (here Romaios 1963 should have been mentioned), the number three plays an extremely important role in oral storytelling for the structuring and the rhythm (repetition, parallelism, paraphrase, segmentation, etc.) of the story. This is true, however, to a far lesser degree in written stories and children's stories. Chapter four, "Narrative Organization," considers the "dramaturgy" of storytelling: space, time, and the persons "on stage." In order to situate the scenes in the present, discourse markers (such as "by the way" and "anyway," in English) play a very important role in Greek as do rhetorical questions and other types of insertions that help to intensify communication with the listeners. Making use of numerous tables and statistical analyses, the author examines the use of discourse markers in children's stories. These discourse markers, casually used in the process of storytelling, organize the material of the narrative into units and provide tactical markers by which the listener is involved in the story and the story's content is enlivened.

In chapter five, "Encoding Subjectivity," the author considers the performative aspect of the storyteller's presentation of himself, where the historical present tense and the "constructed dialogue" play a special role. Greek offers more possibilities for presenting the teller in the story told than does the English language. During a narrative performance, what is narrated is transposed into a *hic et nunc* situation. As a result, the narrative performance creates a proximity between the story and the situation of conversation (by using such deictic strategies as "now," "here") and produces "evidence": people believe the storyteller because they had been made to feel that they were there as spectators. More important than the truth of the story is the convincing manner in which it is told. As the author says, "Performance ensures that the verbal ways of reconstructing and imparting in that type of knowledge are more important than the explicit negotiations of its accuracy and faculty" (145). Anybody who has ever listened to a conversation in a Greek coffee house knows this. In written or children's stories this kind of "theatricality" is less prominent.

In chapter six, "Narrative Functions and Identities in Greek Contexts," the author discusses the contexts of storytelling: conversation, consolidation of the storyteller's position,

forming of opinion, presentation of self, the telling of paradigmatic stories about *filotimo* (generosity) and hospitality, group stabilization, gender display, and the didactic of children's stories.

In two appendices, about twenty stories or fragments of stories are introduced in phonetic transcription and in English translation. The references list only English language titles except for one German and three Greek titles.

The stories are generally unique, full of life, and well told. They accurately reflect the reality of Greek storytelling. For the phonetic transcription of the orally told stories, the author uses special signs to indicate accents, pauses, lengthenings, and emphases, and also to render some Greek letters in English for which a corresponding letter in English does not exist. Although the result is a quite accurate representation of the dramaturgy of storytelling that is useful for recreating stories, a "native speaker" will find it difficult to decipher the system. The system is partially flawed and as a whole it is superfluous because the texts are not recorded in some dialect but in Standard Modern Greek. The special signs could have been rendered with Greek letters. For the reproduction of printed texts, however, Greek letters are used. Those not familiar with the Greek language will not be able to read any of these texts (they will have to rely exclusively on the English translations). Greek readers, or scholars of Greek, will be disappointed by the nonaesthetic presentation of the texts. In fact, one may rightly ask for what kind of readership these transcriptions were prepared.

Sociologists, cultural anthropologists, folklorists, and scholars of modern Greek will welcome this book and no doubt find parts of it useful. In order to clearly show the dramatic and theatrical manner Greek storytelling can assume and how important it is in the most variegated conversation situations (e.g., political debates, coffee house discussions, neighborhood gossip), it would have been necessary to contrast different types of contemporary Greek storytelling with traditional and folkloristic material, or with relevant sociological material. In conclusion, it can be said that the author has addressed a wide field for research that cannot be exhaustively treated in a single case study, but it is hoped that this study will encourage others to follow the path the author has shown us.

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GILET, PETER. *Vladimir Propp and the Universal Folktale: Recommissioning an Old Paradigm—Story as Initiation*. Middlebury Studies in Russian Language and Literature, volume 17. Bern: Peter Lang, 1998. 170 pages. Bibliography. Cloth FR. 58.00; ISBN 0-8204-3847-2.

This concise work is a carefully-crafted, comprehensive assessment of Propp's theory and its impact on the study of folk narratives. The author introduces his book by pointing out that the impetus for his study was a half-remembered "archetypal tale" about an abandoned child and an ogre that he had learned as a child, and his long-held feeling that behind all the permutations and combinations of that tale's elements, it remained one story and not many (1, 131, 148; cf. the Kabyle and Hausa tales below). Gilet's objective is to simplify Propp's (textual) structure based on Russian tales, and to adapt it to a more general form of the "Wonder Tale" (Aa-Th Types 300–749), and to relate that form to its context, thus uniting in one theory both textual and contextual positions (3). In order to test the viability of the modified form, it was applied to a "body of" (i.e., several) tales selected from either end of the Eurasian land mass and, at a later stage, from other places (10).

A broad survey of "past theories" follows. It begins with notions of ideal structures