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978-0-521-29592-5 - Narration in the German Novelle: Theory and Interpretation

John M. Ellis

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NOVELLE

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NOVELLE

THEORY AND INTERPRETATION

JOHN M. ELLIS

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University of California, Santa Cruz*

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PREFACE

The main body of this study is devoted to interpretative essays on individual Novellen. In one sense, the chapters are self-contained; each is devoted to the interpretation of a particular story. But in another sense, they all involve one central problem: the relation of the narrator to his story, and the importance of this relationship for its interpretation. My study is thus equally concerned with the interpretation of eight well-known German stories, and with the general theoretical question of the role of the narrator. The eight stories chosen are not a representative sample of the field, nor do I justify the choice as a historical survey: I have, for example, omitted Stifter, Gotthelf and Meyer, while including Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert*, a story not normally discussed within the framework of German Novellen. My choice is mainly dictated by my central concern: I have chosen stories in which an adequate account of the narrator's relation to his story is unusually important for an interpretation. But another factor was a desire for variety and contrast; these eight stories use the narrator in very different ways for different purposes. Tieck's story, for example, is included because it provides an example of a narrative convention unlike that of any of the other stories chosen.

My introductory chapter is concerned with the general theory of this undertaking; and since the general frameworks within which a series of texts is discussed are always to some extent in competition, I have first of all considered the usefulness of the two most commonly employed for most of these texts: that of the genre 'Novelle', on the one hand, and that of nineteenth century Realism, on the other. The rest of the introductory chapter is then devoted to a general discussion of narration, covering both the theoretical distinctions which need to be made, and the practical range of possible uses of the narrator. Here I draw on the results of the eight interpretations to contrast the different ways in which the narrative schemes achieve thematic importance.

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PREFACE

I must acknowledge many different kinds of debts to people and organisations who have been helpful to me. The John Simon Guggenheim Foundation very generously made it possible for me to complete this work by awarding me a Fellowship for the year 1970–1. The University of California also, in granting me sabbatical leave, has helped to provide time for my research. I am indebted to the English Goethe Society, and to the Editors of the *Germanic Review*, for permission to use again the material which largely forms the basis of my second and seventh chapters, and which originally appeared as ‘Kleist’s *Das Erdbeben in Chili*’, *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, XXXIII (1963), 10–55, and ‘Narration in Storm’s *Der Schimmelreiter*’, *Germanic Review*, XLIV (1969), 21–30.

It is not possible to say how much I have been helped by conversations over the years with teachers, friends and students concerning the theory and the texts discussed in this book, but I must especially thank Brian Rowley, Siegfried Puknat, and above all William Lillyman and Colin Russ, who read the manuscript and gave me many suggestions for its improvement. I cannot begin to describe the ways in which Carol Ellis helped my work to its conclusion.

J.M.E.

October 1971

Santa Cruz, California