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(Literary) Narrative fiction as negotiation of values

I will raise some questions about how the connection between ethics and narrative has been taken to set out various kinds of agenda's for studies of narrative, more specifically for narratology. I will argue that theories about this connection between ethics and literature need to be placed within the framework of a general theory of culture, and that they should take into account, as also Herman 2003 argued, cognitive as well as 'contextual' aspects of the individual and social processing and functioning of such fictions.

I will argue the following points:

- a theory of culture that foregrounds the 'social construction of reality' – or in cognitivist terms, the sharing of cognitions – highlights the importance of the negotiation of meanings, values, or 'ways of world-making';
- as others (Fludernik, Herman a.o.) have pointed out, insights in the social and cognitive mechanisms of meaning processing (the role of memory, stored in schemata, scripts..., and of inference, etc.) have consequences for narratology: it should open up to the analysis of how readers select and construct textual 'clues', and to factors (a.o. various sorts of competence/experience, framings) that inflect interpretations, especially regarding ethical matters.
- This requires more, rather than less, attention for historical and contemporary (genre and other) conventions and value regimes that play a 'framing' role in determining the value of value positions and meaning conveyed and negotiated through narratives;
- an *ethical narratology* may be argued to be 'core business' for any (descriptive) theory of narrative concentrating on the negotiation of values and ways of world-making through narrative texts -although I would hesitate to choose such a label, since it suggests that this is all narratology would have to focus on; or it may be argued to belong to the level of (normative) *engaged* criticism, itself important as a practice of value negotiation in culture. I plead for a separation of the two kinds of approaches, which both have an important (self)reflective role to play in culture (in education for instance), but at different levels of reflexiveness, and according to different argumentational rules.