



**Book Review: *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories*,
Gregory Currie. Oxford University Press, 2010. 244 pages.**

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In *Narratives and Narrators*, Gregory Currie offers a sophisticated philosophical investigation into the nature of narrative and narration, challenging existing theories while constructing his own comprehensive framework for understanding how stories work. This ambitious project succeeds in bringing analytical clarity to several contentious issues in narrative theory, though some of its conclusions may prove controversial.

In his preface, Currie states that he aims to write an account to the approach of narrative he favors, which is philosophical—avoiding history or narrative structures. His central thesis is that narrative should be understood philosophically, as a cognitive activity rather than merely a textual feature. He argues, rather convincingly I might add, that narratives are fundamentally about agency and mental states, suggesting that our ability to engage with stories draws upon the same cognitive mechanisms we use to understand human behavior in everyday life. This is a bold claim. The typical psychological/cognitive approach seems evident. But Currie's is more of an epistemological claim, since it deals with how we acquire and process knowledge/understanding through cognitive mechanisms. To that end, this perspective allows him to sidestep some traditional problems in narrative theory while opening up productive new lines of inquiry.

Methodologically, Currie's approach is impressive. Each chapter builds carefully on previous arguments, and potential

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objections are anticipated and addressed thoughtfully. The use of examples from both high literature and popular culture helps ground the theoretical discussions in concrete cases. Perhaps the book's strongest contribution lies in its rigorous analysis of unreliability in narration. Currie develops a sophisticated account that treats unreliability not as a binary property but as existing along multiple dimensions. Drawing on examples from literature and film, he demonstrates how unreliability can manifest in a narrator's facts, interpretations, or evaluations. Calling these "narration from an ironic point of view," he highlights examples through text and film, notable Hitchcock's *The Birds*. His discussion of how readers detect and process unreliability is particularly illuminating, incorporating insights from cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind.

Currie's treatment of the relationship between authors, characters, and narrators is another highlight. He argues against the common view that all narratives necessarily have narrators, instead proposing a more nuanced account that distinguishes between different types of narrative presentation. This leads to a compelling discussion of free indirect discourse and its implications for our understanding of narrative perspective. Currie posits what he calls a new way of looking at the character-narrative binary. This is where his project becomes a bit controversial. Though I hinted at the outset of this review his analysis relies less on psychology than on philosophy, it is here where Currie's reliance on the former arises. He's not as confident in this realm, however. Warily drawing from cognitive psychology, he claims Character is simply a cognitive illusion. Thus, according to this claim, there exist strong, independent reasons to believe in Character; Currie suggests that we do not. And if there is some reason to doubt the existence of Character, or, if as he says to doubt well-entrenched assumptions about Character's role in our lives, then the problem arises as to whether our belief in it is not founded on evidence but has something to do with the fit between narrative and Character.

The book's engagement with empirical research in psychology and cognitive science is both a strength and a potential weakness. While this interdisciplinary approach yields valuable insights, some of the experimental evidence Currie cites feels preliminary, and one wonders how well it will stand the test of time. Also, some readers may find Currie's dismissal of poststructuralist approaches to narrative too swift. While his commitment to analytical clarity is admirable, there are moments when his framework seems ill-equipped to handle the full complexity of experimental narratives that deliberately resist traditional notions of agency and reliability.

The implications of Currie's account extend beyond literary theory into broader questions about human cognition and social understanding. His suggestion that narrative comprehension relies on the same mental mechanisms we use for real-world social understanding has interesting

implications for both cognitive science and literary studies. One notable omission is sustained engagement with non-Western narrative traditions, which might have provided valuable test cases for Currie's theoretical framework. Additionally, while his account of narrative understanding is sophisticated, it sometimes seems to presuppose a rather idealized rational agent as its reader.

Despite these limitations, *Narratives and Narrators* represents a major contribution to our understanding of how stories work and how we engage with them. Currie's lucid prose and careful argumentation make complex ideas accessible without sacrificing rigor. The book succeeds in its ambitious goal of developing a comprehensive philosophical account of narrative and narration, even if some of its conclusions remain debatable. It sets a high standard for work in this field and will likely influence discussions of narrative theory for years to come. Currie's work will be attractive to philosophers of literature and narrative theorists, while also offering some (perhaps more limited) insights to cognitive scientists interested in story comprehension and social understanding.