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Narrative Motivation

Abstract

This paper offers a brief passage through the history of concepts from Aristotle to Russian formalists, thus tracing powerful conceptions about motivation. Some fundamental distinctions are made such as the one between the motivation of the work (motivation A, *motivirovka, Motivierung*) and the motivation of a character's actions (motivation B, *motivacija, Motivation*). Concepts relevant for the analysis of the work are offered – the final motivation; the motivation from behind; the dichotomies of causal and artistic motivation. Russian formalists did not seek motivation B, and they were not particularly interested in causal motivation A. In contrast to the provocatively "formalistic" concepts of Školvskij (according to which content motivates form, which is considered to be the essential object of aesthetic perception), and the widespread conception of Tomaševskij, which is oriented toward the thematic, the most convincing approach is that of Jurij Tynjanov, who has renounced the fixed assignment of motivating and motivated to content and form, instead assuming an historical dynamic of the assignments.

Keywords

Casual and artistic motivation; motivation from behind; final motivation; Aristotle; Russian formalists

1 Introduction

The concept of motivation is an odd one in literary studies. On the one hand, there are universal judgments as to whether something in a literary opus is or is not motivated. On the other hand, there seems to be a great deal of uncertainty about what motivation really means. The greatest certainties about motivation can be found in statements about its deficiencies.

A successful work of art fulfils the desire for meaning and for a meaningful connection to things, processes and actions.

A lack of motivation triggers disappointment in the recipient – a feeling of emptiness and a lack of meaning. This effect leads to the anthropological function of motivation. A consistently motivated work compensates for the experienced contingency of world affairs and the perceived randomness of individual lives. A successful work of art fulfils the desire for meaning and for a meaningful connection to things, processes and actions.

The meaning of motivations, the components which they cover and the relations of which they consist have rarely been discussed in the relevant literature and in dictionaries, even though indies show that the term is used quite frequently.

Any reflection on the sources of the concept of motivation inevitably leads back to Aristotle, who was the father of narratology. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle reflects upon the "depiction of the action" as "mythos," which is a term that can best be rendered as a "[narrated] story." Myty is defined as a "composition (σύνθεσις) or a "joining together" (σύστασις) of "events" (πράγματα). Aristotle argued that the act of creation places special demands on a poet: "Beginners in poetry are more likely to produce something appropriate in language and character than to put the events together" (*Poetics*, 1450a).

Aristotle presented a rationalist picture of poets and poetry. Poiēsis is not guided by Platonic enthusi-asm or divine inspiration. It is led by a calculating and conscious production of models of the possible, in which the guiding principles are the principles of the *probable* (τὸ ἐικός), the *necessary* (τὸ ἀναγκαῖον), as well as the *appropriate* (τὸ πρέπον or τὸ ἁρμόττον). All of the components of these models must be coordinated with one another. The inner coherence and conclusiveness are a higher value than referential similarity or probability in the real world. Artificial probability can exist in the life-worldly improbable and even impossible, as well as in the absurd and peculiar, provided that this is credible and promotes an artistic effect. Aristotle formulated this as a beautiful paradox: "It is probably that some things will even happen against probability" (εἰκὸς γὰρ καὶ παρὰ τὸ εἰκὸς γίνεσθαι; 1456a and 1461b). Aristotle provided an example of this by offering his basic definition of tragedy and its function:

> "In dramatic mimesis, the action is to evoke horror (φόβος) and emotion (ἔλεος). These effects occur above all when the events occur against expectation (παρὰ τὴν δόξαν) and in interaction (δι᾽ ἄλληλα].). Thus they have more the character of the astonishing (θαυμαστόν) than if they had occurred in mutual independence and by chance (ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου καὶ τῆς τύχης). (For even the random events which seem to have taken place according to an intention seem to be the most astonishing ones. This was the case with the statue of Mitys in Argos. It killed Mitys' murderer by collapsing on him when he was looking at it. Such things do not seem to occur at random. It follows, then, that stories of this kind are the better ones.)" (Poetics, 1452a)

Aristotle argues that everything in a work must serve the expression of a plausible story (μῦθος) which evokes the intended effect in the recipient. From this perspective, the Greek philos-

opher had a functionalist concept of the work. All acts of selecting and combing thematic or linguistic materials are subjected to the primary function which shapes the basic motivation of the work of art.

In modern times, the idea of narrative motivation is based on the idea of a coherent, conclusive and plausible depiction. As noted above, a coherent work fulfils the desire for meaning and coherence in the face of the contingencies of world events and individual lives. The conclusiveness which guarantees meaning requires a corresponding selection of thematic units. This faces the problem of occurrences and a story. Original historiographical dichotomy dates back to the philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918), whose work can be usefully applied to the structure of fictional narrative works.

In his treaties "The Problem of Historical Time," Simmel argued that a historiographer must "draw" an "ideal line" (*ideelle Linie*) through the infinitely decomposable elements of a portion of worldwide occurrences so as to arrive at a historiographical "unit" such as the Seven Years' War or the Battle of Zorndorf [1, pp. 139-140]. The tracing of this "idea line" presupposes that the relevant unit has a "concept" which determine which "atoms" do or do not belong to it. Occurrences are distinguished by an absolute and gapless "continuity," while history that records them is necessarily "discontinuous."

Historians write their own stories about events by bringing together various elements from a continuous reality, using a general term such as "Seven Year's War." Similarly, narrators create their own individual stories under a single title in which the fictive happenings are to be narrated.

Historiographers and literary authors select not just elements from occurrences, but also certain properties related to same. Like all objects in reality, elements of happenings are "determined" by an infinite number of properties in the sense of Roman Ingarden's (1931) category of determinacy [2]. Historians and authors must decide upon which of the properties that belong to the chosen element in the occurrences are relevant to the story that is to be told and should thus be chosen.[1]

No matter how many characteristics a narrator may name, the elements of happenings in the relevant story will inevitably retain great indeterminacy. Only through the reader's concretisation can this incongruity be removed to a greater or lesser degree. Ingarden refers to the elaborations related to the "concretisation of the represented objects" in his seminal treatise *O poznawaniu dzieła literackiego* (1937) (German: *Vom Erkennen des literarischen Kunstwerks*, 1968) [4]. Ingarden's work shows that indeterminacy is not a special literary phenomenon, as Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser argued. Instead, it is the inevitable characteristic of any representation of reality, whether factual or fictional, quite simply because the objects in reality have so many properties that they cannot be reproduced in any linguistic representation.

Let us conduct a thought experiment, assuming that on the morning of August 25, 1758, when the Battle of Zondorf was to be waged as a decisive element in the Seven Year's War, the flute of Frederic the Great was damaged. This idea would not be included in general historical discussions of the Seven Years' War, but a historian could come up with the idea that a commander might be grouchy because the flute was damaged and then conclude that this had a significant influence on the course of the battle. Then the damaged flute would not be an undecisive event in the history of the war, as told by the relevant historian. Even if an historian is not expected to present the damaged flute specifically, it remains undeniable that there are many different possible narrativizations in the form of historiographic stories about events which relate to the term "Seven Years' War." These stories by no means contain the same elements of the happenings. Each historian

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Cinematic narration involves a different task. Faced with the all-around determinacy of the elements that are shown in external properties, screenwriters must use certain techniques to define the properties that are to be seen on screen because they are relevant to their narrative as well as those which do not belong to the story as such [3].

draws an ideal line through the event atoms in a slightly different way. Accentuation and interpretation happen in stories to a considerable extent and through the individual selection of elements of occurrences and the characteristics thereof. An infinite number of historiographical stories can be told about one and the same part of world history, as described by the term "Seven Years' War." Historians will choose different approaches to the various events, and the diversity of stories that are told is the engine behind the movement of historiography.

It is also true in fictional narratives that every detail and property that is chosen from the happenings must or at least should be of certain relevant. If the reader is to find that a book is well-written, then he will have to assume that there was reason to choose certain story elements and properties and not others.

One often refers to Russian theories in the 1920s which relate to the manifold uses of the concept of motivation. The relevant authors systematically reflected this phenomenon. It was discussed most extensively, but not particularly plausibly, in the textbook *Theory of Literature* by Boris Tomaševskij (1925) [5]. An introduction to the book was written by Viktor Školvskij.

Tomaševskij defined motivation as "the system of devices that justify the introduction of individual motifs." The point here is to justify the inclusion of thematic units into a narrated story.

Vladimir Propp took a different approach. In his *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928), he provided this definition: "Motivations are both the motives and the goals of characters that cause them to perform certain actions." [6]

We see the difference here. Tomaševskij's "motivation" applies to the author's artistic activity. The author is concerned about the conclusiveness of the actions that are to be portrayed, as well as the aesthetic coherence of his work. Propp, by contrast, uses the same term to refer to a character in the narrative, describing the reasons which motivate the character to do or not do specific things. It seems sensible to distinguish between these two intentions. There is a linguistic problem here. While English has only the word "motivation," German and Russian do not. In German, *Motivierung*, and in Russian, *motivirovka* (A) refer to the activity of an author who, by means of certain devices, seeks to provide his work with coherence and artistic unity. The words Motivation and motivacija (B), in turn, refer to the character, his motives and his psychological and emotional activity.

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To be sure, *Motivierung*, which is motivation A, may require a certain motivation II of the character that is portrayed. Thus, for instance, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* features Raskolnikov, whose motivation B for the murder of an old pawnbroker plays a certain role in shaping the novel's Motivierung (motivation A). The two concepts nevertheless do not coincide. The genesis of the novel shows that Dostoyevsky was seeking a coherent Motivierung for the novel, and thus he has imputed various motives to his hero. Raskolnikov has all kinds of problems, and in a confession before Sonja Marmeladova, he names his motives truthfully and conclusively for the author's Motivierung (motivation A) for the action that is seen in *Crime and Punishment*.

The author will also have had a motivation B in creating his work but it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss it further. After lifting a prohibition against speaking about the author,

however, one may legitimately ask about his motivation B. What could have induced Dostoevsky to provide his hero with the finally chosen motivation B, thus turning over the entire plot of the novel to motivation A, as is seen in the final version of the text? This is not an uninteresting question, and it leads deep into the inner biography and psycho-physical state of the specific author. The relevant issues cannot be addressed with-out psychological speculations, and we will refrain from such in this paper.

In addition to the stated distinction between motivation A and motivation B, I would like to propose a second dichotomy. Motivation A can be both *causal* and *artistic*. Because there are numerous typologies of motivation can be problematic in terms of their systematics. The simple distinction between causal and artistic motivation seems to be sufficient. While artistic motivation encompasses the entire work, and the causal motivation refers to the world that is represented in the work, and this world is mainly part of the narrative world.

The dichotomy of causal and artistic motivation is found in the works of Aristotle. Causal motivation becomes explicit whenever the issue is justification of the action. Causal motivation is meant implicitly wherever "probability" and "necessity" are mentioned a guiding criteria for the "assembling of events into stores." Artistic motivation manifests itself in the "appropriate" (τὸ πρέπον; 1455a) or "adequate" (τὸ πρέπον; 1450b) and the choice of means of expression.

The concept of the "probable" has two facets in the work of Aristotle. On the one hand, it denotes that which is probably in the life-world. On the other hand, it denotes what is demanded by the artistic whole. This means that the demand of the artistically probably is preferable to life-worldly probable that is understood in this way. Aristotle draws a picture of the poet as a "creator" (τὸ πρέπον) of models of the possible. Their inner coherence has a higher value than the life-worldly probability.

Causal motivation also includes particular types of motivation which have been defined for narratives in the pre-modern and mythical mental structure. In his influential approach in 1932, Clemes Lugowski coined the term "motivation from behind." This is about a "motivational gap" that is filled at the end of the story. Events are not motivated "from the front," instead being determined by a goal toward which the events are inexorably moving. Only at the end is the operation of a work that is motivated "from behind" so that it can be understood as being coherent. Those who refuse to adopt this perspective can only recognise "incoherence" or "randomness."

Causal motivation also includes particular types of motivation which have been defined for narratives in the pre-modern and mythical mental structure.

Influenced by Lugowski, the German narratologist Matias Martinez coined another term for pre-modern motivation: "final motivation." The "final motivation" exists when the activities are motivated by the rule of a numinous instance, a deity or a power such as fate [7].

A final motivation is characteristic of cultures that are influenced by mythical thinking and ideas about the history of salvation. This includes not just ancient and religiously influenced cultures such as those which existed in the Christian Middle Ages, but also ideologically founded formations that were established later with secular eschatology such as so-called Socialist realism. The action of the model works in this socio-pedagogical literary formation. It is clearly teleological and motivated by the expected end of a "bright future."

Final motivations also occur in modern narrative works that are far removed from the social pedagogy of Socialist realism. M. Martínez and M. Scheffel demonstrate this as the example of Thomas Mann's novella "Death in Venice." It contains numinous explanation of the events, i.e., the final motivation. This competes in a manner that is difficult to determine with an empirical explanation or a realistic and causal motivation [8, pp.113-114].

An example of this special form of motivation (A) in Russian literature relates to neo-mythological modernism in Evgeny Zamyatin's story "The Flood" (*Navodnenie*) (1930). Here we find an interference between realistic-causal and mythical-final motivation. This is characteristic of modern remythisation, in the heroine's motivation B and motivation. The killing of the rival is, at the realistic level, a crime which the police are investigating. On the mythical level, however, it is a commandment, and its execution makes the murderess' womb fertile [9].

This example demonstrates that the final motivation can definitely coexist with the causal one. Competing coherence formations then occur, and these are typical of the poetics of modernism, which questions realism at the end of the 19th and in early 20th century.

Cultural epochs in which the final motivation dominates have a natural affinity for low levels of event-fulness. In worlds in which the course of stories is determined by the future salvation of the world, no open eventfulness can unfold. Full eventfulness presupposes free thinking, speaking and acting among autonomous subjects. There is also the risk of uncertainty. The "crossing of a semantic boundary," as argued by Jurij Lotman (1970) shapes the model of the event [10]. It must not be predetermined by mythical patterns, metaphysical ideas or political visions. A violation of the norms which the crossing of the boundary implies must not be demanded by religious commandments or expectations of salvation. Freedom from sacred or secular eschatology is necessary for open eventfulness, and that is why problems of eventfulness and motivation only began to emerge with the Renaissance. Global teleological concepts and thinking about terms of the history of salvation begin to fade, and the theocentric model of the work is gradually replaced by the anthropocentric one.

"Motivation from behind" and the "final motivation" are not categorically different than the causal motivation. Although the narrative worlds in which they occur have a different ontology than the worlds which are motivated "from the front," there is no categorical difference between the final and causal motivation in the structure of the work as there is one between causal and artistic motivation. "Motivation from behind" and "final motivation" are to be seen as ideologically, mentally and historically shaped special forms of causal motivation, in which the direction of justification is reversed and which are based in a non-secular and pre-anthropocentric model of the world.

Let us now look at Russian formalists. They were unconcealed Aristotelians. This is evident in the fact that Viktor Školvskij refers the question of motivation to the Greek philosopher who had clarified the way in which an artist could motivate the crime that was needed for the story so as to create the de-sired effects of horror and emotion [11, p. 44]. Aristotle's conception of mimesis as "making" (πόιησις) underlies the formalist view of art as "making (деланье).

Russian formalists developed rather different ideas about the direction of motivation, and they understood that this exclusively relates to meaning A. In essays about Sterne and Cervantes, Školvskij [11] was the most radical and creative one, formulating the provocative idea that artistic devices are the actual object of perception. According to the author, the plot, thus, is not the final purpose of a work of art. Instead, it only serves to motivate certain devices of plot construction. Boris Ejxenbaum agrees in principle with such rigid theses, but he explained these in a relativising way. The formalists directed their efforts during years of struggle so as to demonstrate the importance of "constructive devices" and to push everything else aside as "material." According to Ejxenbaum, the paradoxical honing of these findings made it possible for formalists to reawaken interest in the construction and made-ness of the

works which had been neglected in traditionally content-oriented studies [12, pp. 115-122].

In relation to his *Theory of Literature* (1925), Tomaševskij was considered by international literary scholars to be the most authoritative representative of the formalist theory of motivation. This was not a genuinely formalist contribution which, by his own admission, he did not aim to do. Neither was it convincingly dividing the phenomenon into motivation into types. Numerous systematic objections have rightly been raised against this triad of motivations [14, pp. 21-25]. Tomaševskij's conception of motivation is rather conventional and assumed that devices motivate the thematic material. If it is motivated, then that is the most important part of the work and not vice versa. Šklovskij envisaged his provocation – the material motivates the devices that are to be perceived.

> then other elements, which are obligatorily connected with it, appear as its motivations. By the same token, one can claim that some word in a verse was chosen "to rhyme" – but also the opposite: that the rhyme was made so that the word in question could be introduced." [15, p. 129]

The second argument is that an element which has no intrinsic meaning itself requires a motivation:

> "The concept of motivation is organically foreign to the nature of the object of investigation and the artistic construction. [...] Everything which the formalists attribute to the material has an unconditional constructive meaning. That which they call a device turns out to be an empty scheme, deprived of any content" [15, p. 130].

The artistic motivation which interests us serves as the foundation for aesthetic perception, and it responds to the fact that an artistic organisation integrates all work com-ponents into a cross-layered relationship in terms of what is "adequate" and "appropriate" in the Aristote-lian sense.

A sharp and fundamental criticism of the formalist concept of motivation in the rigid form of Škovskij and the more conventional version of Tomaševskij was formulated by Mikhail Baxtin in his book *The Formal Method in Literary Studies*, published under the name of Pavel Medvedev [15]. Two objections are raised against the formalist concept of motivation. The first one states that there are no criteria in terms of what is motivating and what is motivated in a work. Any element can be regarded as an end to itself, i.e., as the goal of motivation:

> "In the work there are no criteria for distinguishing between what is an end in itself and what is only the motivation for the introduction of a certain element. It is quite possible to consider any element as an end in itself:

This is undoubtedly the sharpest and most fundamental critique of the formalist basic positions that were created in the 1920s and later.

In his critique of the formalist concept of motivation, Baxtin does not take into account the version that Jurij Tynjanov attributed to the motivation phenomenon. His conception of the work of art is characterised by the idea of the dynamical system [16]. He is the most systematic theorist about the formalist movement, and this marks the beginning of structural thinking. The literary evolution, whose principle [16, p. 258] sees in "struggle and replacement (*борьба и смена*). This is made up of a constant recasting and refunctionalisation of the elements of the system. This means that neither a statistic definition of what is literature, nor a fixed idea

of what a genre could be possible. "All fixed static definitions of literature are swept away by the fact of evolution" [16, p. 257].

The one-sided and exaggerated of the early formalist concept of motivation are overcome in Jurij Tynjanov's dynamic and function-based model. Citing Šklovskij and Ejxenbaum, Tynjanov defines motivation as "justification of some factor on the part of all others and its co-ordination with all others" (*оправдание одного какого-либо фактора со стороны всех остальных, его согласованность со всеми остальными*) [17, p. 29]. Tjnanov opposes the uni-directional relationship between device and material provided by the definition of his predecessors, Šklovskij and Ejxenbaum, with a dynamic conception which rejects fixation on form and content, instead working with the categories of "constructive factor" and "material" that can be manifested both in form and content.

Tynjanov did not develop any explicit theory of literary motivation, but some principles an be derived from his basic dynamic model of the evolutionary literal fact. Tynjanov is not interested in the causal motivation of plot, and his functionalist and evolutionary considerations are exclusively in the sphere of what we have called artistic motivation.

1. The roles of motivating and motivated cannot be split into formal or thematic. Themotivated can be something formal ("style"), and the motivating thematic ("fable"):

> "If the so-called prose of plot is "worn out," then the fable has other functions where the prose of plot is not "worn out" in the literary system. A fable can merely be a motivation or style or the way of material unfolding." [18, p. 274].

2. Motivating and motivated can exchange roles in the evolution of a genre. The attribution of dominance and subordination depends on the literary system in which the attribution is made:

> "Roughly speaking, if we move in a certain literary system, we would be inclined to reduce the descriptions of nature in old novels to a serving role and to the role of a connecting or retarding element (i.e., almost passing them over). If we move toward another literary system, we would consider the descriptions of nature to be a decisive and domineering element, because a situation is possible in which the fable is only a motivation or a pretext of unfolding "static descriptions"." [18, p. 274].

3. Motivating leads to a "uniform deformation" of factors. Tjanjanov understands a transformation, smooths out the specific properties of the factors, leads to the equilibrium in the work, and makes art "light and acceptable: "Motivated art is deceptive (мотивированное искусство обманчиво) – Tjnjanov [17, p. 29]. It is precisely this which considerably complicates the study of the function or a factor in art that is made "easy" by motivation.

4. The study of functions of factors succeeds more easily in works in which a particular factor is "high-lighted" and not motivated.

5. Motivating helps to "tune" the harmony of the factors of a work, balancing the inherent weight of factors, bringing about an equilibrium, and homogenising the heterogeneous.

Tynjanov's concept of motivation boils down to a "coordination" of all of the factors that are contained in the work. The ideals of motivated work include conclusiveness, coordination of all parts, as well as plausibility.

If the motivation is to compensate for a lack of meaning in life, as was stated at the outset, then the im-pression of coherence in the whole work that is conveyed by the convincing motivation must be based on a relationship among all formal and thematic components. All of the layers of the work must be captured cognitively and sensually. This holistic perception unifies the heterogeneous layers of a work, and it is characteristic of aesthetic perceptions. The artistic motivation which interests us serves as the foundation for aesthetic perception, and it responds to the fact that an artistic organization integrates all work com-ponents into a cross-layered relationship in terms of what is "adequate" and "appropriate" in the Aristotelian sense.

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