

Mark Currie. *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise*. Edinburgh University Press 2013. 192 pp. £70.00 (Hardcover ISBN 9780748676293); £24.99 (Paperback ISBN 9781474402354).

Mark Currie's book 'The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise' is a clear continuation of his earlier work 'About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time', both being part of Edinburgh University Press' series 'The Frontiers of Theory'. In this follow-up work, Currie sets out to defend his claim that narrative temporality, contrary to common assumptions, is subject to the future perfect tense—the space where things *will have happened*, not where they *will happen*. In its discussion of narrative surprise and temporality, it draws on a variety of philosophical and hermeneutical sources. A highlight is Currie's discussion of Derrida in terms of the strictly philosophical, while with regards to the hermeneutic, his outline and use of Ricoeur, particularly his hermeneutic circle, could hardly be ignored. Overall, the book makes for an exciting and informed read. The sources used are numerous, and the style is accessible. The reasoning and ideas behind the work are also not to be underestimated.

As mentioned, Currie makes his starting point with the future perfect tense. It is a foundation that is explicitly established on Genette's view that narrative discourse should be explored from the perspective of the grammar of verbs (1). This way, Currie sets out to explore the topic of surprise, and narrative temporality in general, from a novel perspective. The book is divided in four parts, each of which deals with different arguments about the nature of narrative time.

The first part of the book begins with an account of the unforeseeable and the unexpected. Currie draws on a variety of sources, in order to make sense of what time holds in its future, still incomplete form. For one, he begins with an exploration of Oedipus Rex and the confrontation between Oedipus and the blind seer Tiresias. Both characters are introduced as metaphorical stand-points for two different perspectives, or experiences, of narrative. Oedipus stands for the 'proximity of identification, of imagining how it feels not to know' (14), while the blind seer represents the 'godlike distance that comes with knowing the future' (14). This intriguing doubling serves as a key understanding that Currie revisits throughout the book (mostly in relation to Ricoeur's notion of threefold mimesis). Borrowing from Lakoff's and Johnson's metaphorical concepts (such as 'time is writing' (22) and structural concepts (23)), Currie establishes the spatial representation of the foreseeable and the unexpected. All foreseeable events are 'up', such as in the phrases 'upcoming events', 'up ahead' and 'coming up' (23). This, according to *The Unexpected*, follows because of the general spatial conceptualization of the future as something linear and moving in a forward direction. Such expressions, Currie argues, are not only metaphors, or figures of speech, but rather exemplary of structural metaphors. Our spatial understanding impacts our temporal understanding. It would even be erroneous to distinguish between the two, since they are interwoven to the point that our understanding of each is structured by the other.

An interesting development of this spatial understanding of time is the discussion of Derrida that follows in the second chapter. Through an insightful analysis of Derrida, Currie sets out to determine that the unexpected does not, in fact, lie 'ahead' or 'in front'. It does not belong to any horizon at all, but rather belongs to the 'above', in Derrida's words (36). The unforeseeable, taking the shape of the *event*, is completely outside the spatial metaphor of foreseeability. In other words, Currie determines, following Derrida, that it is chance that determines the unexpected—not that a thing is not expected, but that a thing could not have been expected is what determines the notion of

the unexpected. Following this, Currie goes on to highlight the various narratological approaches to the phenomenon. While Derrida determines chance as the key characteristic, Bakhtin is invoked to claim for the superiority of free will. Considering the comprehensiveness of the research and the high level of reasoning, it is somewhat surprising that there is no discussion of Wittgenstein's ideas on the matter. It would have been an interesting addition to introduce Wittgenstein's understanding of metaphors and perhaps supplement the analysis of Derrida with Wittgenstein's notion of the mystical. Another key lack that seems somewhat necessary is the complete omission of the work of Walter Benjamin. It is notably absent in the section of the book where a considerable amount of space is dedicated to Derrida's discussion of the messianic. Besides the aspect of messianic time, Benjamin's work on allegory, language, and the dialectical image's temporality and ambiguity could have proven insightful.

Another interesting aspect of Currie's current work is his discussion of modality in relation to narrative temporality. By drawing on a lot of sources that seemingly determine the role of fiction, or narrative in general, to be that of reporting, and therefore suggest that it should remain limited to only the indicative and descriptive, Currie consistently rejects such claims and demonstrates the modal nature of fictional time (112). As noted before, it should be emphasized that Currie makes Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle of threefold mimesis one of the cornerstones of his argument. He continuously returns to Ricoeur's insight, and just as insightfully applies the circle to the nature of the unforeseen and the unexpected.

By following in the hermeneutic steps of Ricoeur, Currie demonstrates that narrative does, in fact, have an impact on lived experience. It is not simply the case that narrative temporality is determined as the human experience of past time and its recollection or retelling. Rather, narrative temporality is equally eloquent on the matter of the future. Currie defends this claim well with his conceptualization of 'the distribution of knowledge' (114). This is clearly evident in Currie's argument for a doubling of knowledge concerning narrative as seen in the example of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. The distribution of knowledge in a narrative depends largely on the temporal experience of said narrative. In other words, since the reader is experiencing the events narrated simultaneously with the development of the narrative, there is a continuous rearrangement of the distribution of knowledge. At certain points, things are foreseeable or unforeseeable, but one is limited to the horizon of the work. It is only at the very end of the work, once totality has been established, that the distribution of knowledge is made explicit and evident. However, Currie problematizes this view in relation to Derrida's philosophy of futurity and the phenomenological emphasis of presence so central to the work of thinkers such as Heidegger and Husserl. In place of this, Currie advocates for 'an expanded notion of the future tense which also joins retrospect to anticipation' (124). He further elaborates that 'an analysis that hopes to account for time flow in discourse... must project on to this temporal axis the question of perspective, and to understand flow in this expanded sense, as the distribution of knowledge across time' (124).

In the final part of the book Currie applies his expanded concept of future temporality to fictional narrative. Particularly insightful is his discussion of Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith*. He demonstrates that the unexpected events in the novel are organized by the structure of the novel and by the following from it distribution of knowledge across time and between the characters. One character, the narrator, is operating under a certain knowledge, and, considering the contemporaneous nature of reading, the reader works only with a certain form of this particular knowledge that the narrating character provides. However, the second character of the book with her respective distributed knowledge is absent from the reader's perspective until a particular point in time. This revelation of

the true distribution of knowledge demonstrates the complex nature of the unforeseeable. Currie insightfully demonstrates that the unexpected, while belonging to futurity in one sense, in other senses has an effect on both past and present. This proves for an interesting ‘collision between time and truth’ (137), where a present event restructures both the past and the future. In other words, the surprise does not have a strictly speaking forward direction. It is just as likely to project backwards.

Interestingly, Currie reaches several points in his argument where it appears that he is dealing with a dialectical understanding of the topic, but this never seems to become explicit. I was particularly reminded of Benjamin’s reflections on time at several points. This omission, however, should not be seen as a detriment to the text. Currie has written an insightful, informed, and in-depth work; his position is clear and innovative. The breadth of sources he uses is a clear testament to his ambition and the scope of the work. It is clear that his goal has been reached. One finds it hard to imagine a reader not convinced of the necessity of an expanded notion of temporality and a more intricate understanding of the unexpected.

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