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Travelling Metaphors, Transforming Concepts

This volume discusses the travelling concepts of narrative. But what do we understand by “travelling concepts”? I address this issue by reading Mieke Bal, who originally suggested the term, and by scrutinizing the metaphor of travel itself. Do we assume that the concept of narrative has remained the same over the course of its travels? The chapter suggests that there are many levels to consider in using the term travellers: the abstract idea and metaphor of narrative, the concept, the narrative theory. Instead of mere travel, the concept of narrative itself has changed, often covertly, but with substantial consequences. The chapter discusses the difference between top-down and bottom-up approaches to narrativity in social research. The metaphorical discourse on narrative has enlarged the concept’s range of reference substantially and too far afield for many commentators, while keeping the criteria of the concept formal and conventional. The end of the chapter examines these narrative metaphors of life critically, finally by discussing the manner in which Ian McEwan’s novel *On Chesil Beach* thematizes and contests ubiquity and portability of narrative as a concept and metaphor.

This chapter is the third part of my recent interventions into the study of the narrative turns. Instead of a single narrative turn, I suggest the relevance of at least *four distinct turns* to narrative with different research agendas, narrative languages and appraisals of narrative (Hyvärinen, 2010). The narrative turn in literature, with its structuralist programme and scientific rhetoric, took place from the 1960s to the 1970s and consolidated its position as the mainstream of literary scholarship. The narrativist turn in historiography in the 1970s focused on the critique of the narrative form of representing the historical past. The third turn, in social sciences, education and psychology, began in the early 1980s. In contrast to the two earlier turns, the dominant tone of this third turn was both anti-positivistic and hermeneutical. Parallel to this third turn, one can also

detect a broader cultural turn to narrative in media and politics. Building on this scheme, Hyvärinen (2012a) explores further the historical relevance of certain *narrative prototypes* (Proppian, Aristotelian) in narrative thought. Since Roland Barthes' (1977) famous lines on the ubiquitous nature of narrative, a contrast has prevailed between the abstract and universal promise of the concept and the particularly narrow genres (e.g. Russian wonder tales) that have functioned as prototypes of narrative.

This chapter shifts the focus to the metaphor of travel itself. Is it the term (word), concept, theory or metaphor of narrative that travels most efficiently? In contrast to the term, the concept endures fundamental change and diversification during these travels. In comparison with the two earlier articles focusing on the historical aspect of the turns, the orientation of this chapter is more prescriptive and uses the history of concepts approach as its method of critique, particularly while discussing the metaphoric discourse.

The chapter proceeds by first discussing the relevance of its conceptual approach. Next it turns towards concrete examples and documents important conceptual changes since the first narrative turn in literature. After discussing the particularly narrow concept of Hayden White, the chapter portrays one postmodernist attempt at conceptual purification. Then the focus turns towards the powerful metaphorical discourse in social research, which is re-evaluated from the perspective of the 'postclassical' understanding of narrative. The last section finally tests the relevance of the metaphorical discourse by reading Ian McEwan's novel *On Chesil Beach*.

Travelling with Mieke Bal

The title of this volume owes a great deal to Mieke Bal's book *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*. Therefore it is more than appropriate to commence with discussing some of her ideas (Bal, 2002). In introducing her term 'travelling concepts', Bal is foremost concerned with the phenomenon of widespread transdisciplinary work in the humanities – a parallel issue we are dealing with in this book. While working increasingly within interdisciplinary settings and projects, we face the genuine problem of academic costs.

However, Bal continues, by “cost I do not mean anything economic. I mean the high costs involved in such obvious endeavours as getting the basics, reading the classics, and working through one’s own methodological toolbox” (p. 3). This is a sobering remark during times of easy interdisciplinary hype and should be remembered on every occasion that we advertise narrative travels or the celebrated interdisciplinary field of narrative studies.

How, then, to reduce the necessary costs? Differing from cultural anthropology, Bal’s ‘cultural analysis’ does not presume such a preset ‘field’ as the culture of a distant village to be charted but, firstly, almost always needs to be construed and negotiated. Cultural analysis is a term Bal prefers to cultural studies. For reasons of convenience, I presume that outside the study of one particular text, novel, short story or drama, narrative scholars regularly face similar problems of outlining first the field of the study.¹ If the field of the study is indefinite, methods will not provide much alleviation from the problem:

Nor are its *methods* sitting in a toolbox waiting to be applied; they, too, are part of the exploration. You don’t apply one method; you conduct a meeting between several, a meeting in which the object participates, so that, together, object and methods can become a new, not firmly delineated, field. (p. 4)

To further this dilemma and to emphasize its relevance, I suggest that we probably never just ‘apply’ a method without its local customization to the problems and materials at hand. With narrative studies in social sciences, the *fallacy of method* regularly appears in formulations such as “I study X by asking people to tell narratives about X and then conduct narrative analyses on the material.” The quandary of this formula is its way to reduce narrative merely into a representation of the world ‘out there.’ Instead, I propose that narratives, if interesting at all, are always already in the world, constituting the very

¹ For example, there is far more literature about narrative and narrative studies than I will ever be able to read, not to mention study carefully. There are too many languages, too many genres of literature. Yet I should keep the field of my “conceptual history of narrative” somehow compact, relevant and communicable.

world, and we should rather be interested in existing ‘narrative environments’ and ongoing local ‘narrative practices’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). It is easy to agree with Bal, methods indeed do not solve the problem.

Having expressed her hesitation with methods, Bal arrives at her “extremely simple” conclusion by proposing that “interdisciplinarity in the humanities, necessary, exciting, serious, must seek its heuristic and methodological basis in *concepts* rather than *methods*” (p. 5). It is noteworthy that Bal does not suggest, as her primary recommendation, for example, going back to ‘theory’ or ‘philosophical backgrounds’, both being legitimate and fundamental elements of study. Reducing costs, Bal seems to think, will be best realized with a systematic focus on key concepts. What she recommends, however, is not just abstract conceptual analysis but “[r]ethinking the use and meaning of concepts as a methodological principle” (p. 10). She emphasizes that she is not interested in concepts “as firmly established univocal terms but as dynamic in themselves.” And specifically: “Not because they mean the same thing for everyone, but because they don’t” (p. 11).

So far, I have travelled happily with Bal. Bal’s discussion quite obviously supports the conceptual focus of this volume. She equally encourages registering the conceptual variety and the actual uses of the concept. Nevertheless, I have some places yet to visit, new travels yet to make. Quentin Skinner, one of the most distinguished contemporary historians of political thought, has for a long time investigated the historical change of political and intellectual concepts (Skinner, 1988 offers a short summary of his ideas). Skinner explicitly rejects the general idea of focusing on the “meaning” of a concept. Three entirely different aspects of meaning may change when a concept is changed: firstly, and most obviously, the *criteria* of a concept may change. This aspect is activated concerning divergent definitions of a concept. We may discuss, for example, whether narratives always portray a clear sequence of events, from a beginning to an end, or whether it is enough that they “cue” the receiver to make inferences on particular events. Secondly, Skinner suggests the changed *range of references*. Before the first narrative turn in the 1960s, ‘narrative’ was employed only in a limited and particular sense. Roland Barthes famously suggested its broader applicability in his celebrated 1966 article

(Barthes, 1977), but the most radical move from the level of representation to the ontological aspects of living took place in the 1980s, after the narrative turn in social sciences and psychology (Hyvärinen, 2010, 2012a). Narrative was attached to living, personality and social relationships. Jerome Bruner, for example, has never challenged the definitions of narrative; nevertheless he was one of those who thoroughly changed what can now be legitimately called ‘narrative’ (Bruner, 1987, 1990).

Skinner takes one further step away from the abstract ‘meaning’ of concepts. He suggests that the range of possible *appraisals* of a concept can also change over time. For the narrativist school of historiography and many critics of narrative research, narratives as such are ideologically worrisome (White, 1981; Hyvärinen, 2010, 2012a, 2012b). Indeed, it is frequently presumed that we should, instead, advance storytelling, that one necessary part of narrative research itself consists of a researcher’s own personal storytelling (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This aspect of changing appraisals is intimately connected to the imagined context and community of narrative theory and research. Galen Strawson, in his full-scale attack on narrative studies, suggested the useful term of “narrative camp” (Strawson, 2004). Instead of bolstering up the narrative camp (as a movement inspired by the narrative turns) and fighting its fights against diverse enemies, I argue for a slightly different attitude of moderately de-camping narrative studies. One aspect of this attitude of de-camping is a resistance to conventional redemption and quest narratives told about narrative turns and theory, and a readiness for a reflective re-assessment of the tradition of narrative research itself (as Brian Schiff, for example, is doing in terms of narrative psychology in this volume, as is Olivia Guaraldo in terms of the storytelling practices of Italian feminism).

After visiting Skinner, in any case, I now have some concerns about the metaphor of travel. Who is the traveller, to begin with? Narrative theories themselves have characteristically been relatively slow to travel. For example, the conceptual distinction between ‘narrative discourse’ and ‘story’, so fundamental for structuralist narratology, never completely arrived on the side of social sciences. In case we think that concepts travel, do we, by the same token, presume that it is the very same and solid concept of

narrative which, having departed from literary narratology, finally arrived, firstly at historiography and then at social and psychological research in the 1980s? This is most certainly not true. I have earlier discussed these travels in terms of powerful (Aristotelian, Proppian, Labovian) narrative *prototypes* (Hyvärinen, 2012a) and in terms of narrative as a *metaphor or 'empty signifier'* (Hyvärinen, 2006). 'Travel', as Kai Mikkonen (2007, p. 286) reminds us, is itself a conventional narrative metaphor. With all this talk about travel, it is better not to be enchanted by romantic quest stories or indeed to think that there has been, all along, one distinct if not distinguished traveller with one story to be told.

Tasting the difference

At this point, many a reader may think with exhaustion: "All this is nothing but airy speculation. We all know what 'story' and 'narrative' mean, and I don't have any problems in understanding what writers meant by these terms a hundred, and why not, several hundred years ago. I suspect you cannot give us any examples of changes that really matter!"

The same *word*, to begin with, does not indicate the same *concept* or the same content in different times and different contexts.² Anachronism – the attribution of a contemporary set of ideas to old terms – is exactly what such scholars as Skinner and Reinhart Koselleck (2004) have criticized through their history of concepts approach. Yet, the question about relevant conceptual changes cries out for more concrete answers, and I will next try to provide some.

Louis Mink (1921 – 1983) was a historian and philosopher of history who pioneered the introduction of narrative thought into historiography in the 1970s. Yet my discussion is not primarily based on the assumption of his particularly seminal position in theory building in his time, I rather consider him as a representative figure that condensed and

² Concepts travel, of course, between philosophical traditions, superficially looking the same, but often having profoundly different connotations and connections. Hanna Meretoja, in this volume, discusses many such travels.

expressed many important ideas of his time. In one of his essays, first published in 1970, Mink explores critical answers to a challenge posed earlier by the literary scholar Barbara Hardy (1968). Hardy might well be understood as one of the early predecessors of the later programme of ‘natural narratology’ (Fludernik, 1996). She writes, in a somewhat poetic style, that “we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative” (Hardy, 1968, p. 5). Perhaps, there is a good deal of exaggeration built into her formulations. Nevertheless, at the core of her argument, there is the simple claim that narrative and narrativity are very ordinary phenomena, embedded in the fabric of everyday existence, thought and communication. For the sake of debate and clarity, I will call this idea ‘bottom-up-narrativity’.³

Hardy did not *define* narrative in a new way. She does not claim that people live narratives. She rather attaches narrativity to all kinds of mental processes. She extends the *range of reference* only moderately further than Barthes (1977) had already done. Hardy was able to provoke the heated discussion by simply changing the appraisal of narrative, by making it *an ordinary phenomenon*. Because of this change of horizon, her essay may be one of the most radical and innovative proposals of narrative theory over the last forty years. What can be portrayed as her radicality becomes perfectly visible in Mink’s response to her. Mink is ready to accept narrative’s “primary and irreducible” role in the human mind and explanation (Mink, 1987, p. 59). What turns him against Hardy is something entirely different:

The comprehension at which narratives aim is a primary act of mind, although it is a capacity which can be indefinitely developed in range, clarity, and subtlety. But to say that the qualities of narrative are transferred to art from life seems *a hysteron proteron* [a figure which changes temporal and/or causal order - MH]. Stories are

³ I am using the terms in a slightly different but related way than Nünning (2003) does. The bottom-up analyses in social research are drawing heavily from the sociolinguistic tradition of William Labov (1972). The metaphorical discourse, instead, has privileged such top-down operations as categorizing whole narratives with the help of the Neo-Classical genre theory. According to Nünning, classical narratology favoured the bottom-up approach, while the post-classical narratology rather uses the top-down approaches. I am not totally convinced of the latter part of the argument, though I would say that many poststructuralist approaches may indeed privilege the top-down perspective.

not lived but told. Life has no beginnings, middles, or ends; there are meetings, but the start of an affair belongs to the story we tell ourselves later, and there are partings, but final parting only in story. (1987, p. 60)

I leave the – equally interesting – latter part of the quote for a moment and ask you to reflect on the two first sentences for a while. With reasonable reservations, one can find distant resemblances with the much more recent debate between natural (Fludernik, 1996; Herman, 2009a) and unnatural narratology (Iversen, this volume). In Mink's words, narrative comprehension "can be indefinitely developed in range, clarity, and subtlety". This subtlety is something that Hardy's natural and everyday narrative minding cannot genuinely reach. It is not difficult to fully endorse the sense and relevance of the warnings against the naïve narrative historiography that Mink portrays. Stories do not exist for him out there before the actual, constructive telling. However, his methodological advice at the end of the essay is worth further critical attention:

So it seems truer to say that *narrative qualities are transferred from art to life*. We could learn to tell stories of our lives from nursery rhymes, or from culture-myths if we had any, but *it is from history and fiction that we can learn how to tell* and to understand complex stories, and how it is that stories answer questions. (p. 60, emphasis added)

The changing range of "clarity and subtlety" dictates that genuine narrative qualities flow from art and historiography to everyday life. The open elitism of this claim is breathtaking. Is it Great Men, the Greek Classics or Tradition that, in the beginning of time, allocated these qualities to the arts and to historians? The logic of Mink's argument cannot but appear as flawed, as far as the arts are considered to be an integral part of life. There is no one-directional narrative traffic from the arts to everyday life, as little as there can be any simple one-directional causality from everyday life narratives to the most unnatural and complex literary stories (Mildorf, 2006, 2008; and this volume, discusses such effects of everyday narration). However, what is the most astonishing feature within this short exchange is Mink's almost total rejection of the autonomous

significance and relatively autonomous qualities of everyday narrativity, that is, our specific human capacity to use narrative.

In other words, Mink is generous enough to accept most of the *extended range* of narrative's reference but only at the price of introducing a strict *hierarchy of appraisal*. Mink ridicules the idea that dreams could be narratives (they can, of course, for several reasons) and suggests that children can possibly learn narratives "from nursery rhymes, or from culture-myths if we had any" (p. 60). Note that neither of these narrative sources even distantly resembles the ordinary small stories that Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Jarmila Mildorf investigate in this volume. Mink's everyday narrative blueprints belong to such pseudo-oral, mythical stories that Vladimir Propp (1968) had made popular and Monika Fludernik (1996, p. 14) later criticizes. For some reason, it seems to be almost unbearable to recognize the particular characteristics and functions of oral stories (I will return to these functions more specifically while discussing narrative metaphors). If not directly from the arts, narrative capacities flow from myths and deep conventionality.

In a later essay, Mink continues his reflections on narrative structures and explores the relationship between fiction and history. In this context, he suggests an important new idiom by writing about "the *very idea of narrative form itself*" (Mink, 1987, p. 186, emphasis added). "The narrative form itself" seems to embody the core of the previous "narrative qualities [...] transferred from art to life" (p. 60). This observation leads Mink to think that

Aristotle's comment that every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end is not merely a truism. *It commands universal assent* while failing to tell us anything new, simply because it makes explicit part of the conceptual framework underlying the capacity to tell and hear stories of any sort. And in making a presupposition explicit it has implications that are far from banal; it makes clear that our experience of life does not necessarily have the form of narrative, except as we give it that form by making it the subject of stories. (p. 186, emphasis added)

At the end of the day we have a narrative that is *a form* which commands *universal* assent (possibly excluding Barbara Hardy and her ilk) and which is most elegantly written down by Aristotle. Narrative as a form, resorting to the Saussurean *langue*, cannot but flow from above (the arts and historiography) and from the distant past (from Aristotle and myths) to the ordinary users. This idea of narrative as a fixed form is almost unanimously rejected later in postclassical narratology (Alber & Fludernik, 2010) as well as in most social research on narrative. However, in a guest lecture in Helsinki, Finland, on 9 May 2012, Hayden White confirmed the same narrativist orientation by saying that

... modern narratological theory holds that narrative (like any discursive genre or mode) is itself a “content” in the same way that the proverbial bottle meant to contain new wine is already possessed of a content or substance even prior to its filling. (2012, p. 23)

A naïve test question: why should anyone who shares this vision of the “modern narratological theory” bother reading novels, well knowing that the “new wine is already possessed of a content” of the form? The practitioners of this theory themselves cannot but be deeply masochistic, tasting the “possessed” content day in, day out and even by making a living out of eternally returning to the same rancid content.⁴ White’s image of the structuralist narratology as mere research of the content of the form is curiously narrow. It is not difficult to decipher two almost opposite research orientations towards ‘structure’ within structuralist narratology: research into the narrative structures and research into the structure of narrative. Quite unanimously, the project was interested in the various narrative *structures* (in contrast to interpretation or content, for example). A different and more particular agenda entirely was based on the Proppian analyses of Russian wonder tales and the consequent aspiration to map and describe the unmovable ‘*narrative grammar*’ on the deep level of ‘*langue*’ (see Ronen, 1990). Had structuralist narratology focused solely on the study of narrative form, it would have remained a

⁴ White might possibly respond by saying: “This is a total misunderstanding. Modern and postmodern literature is not narrative.” I leave the dispute to be solved by my literary colleagues working within *The International Society for the Study of Narrative (ISSN)*, previously referred to as the *International Society for the Study of Narrative Literature*.

relatively marginal project in the study of literature. Mink and White are characteristically fixated on this later way of thinking and theorize exclusively in terms of the consequences for a singular “narrative form”,⁵ without any thorough analysis of the varieties of narrative forms and, thus, of the innumerable ways that narratives can and do vary.

LaCapra’s astonishment

My second intervention regarding a potential conceptual change is triggered by a passage from Dominick LaCapra’s *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (LaCapra, 2001). As the title already reveals, LaCapra explores in his essays the possibilities and limits of writing ethically about such traumatic experiences as Shoah. For many years, I have primarily read this passage as a critique of Hayden White and as a corroboration of my own disposition to understand narrative differently. However, should we rather take LaCapra’s astonishment seriously, as a true question, as a sign of confusing discrepancy? LaCapra’s question is this:

As noted earlier, not all narratives are conventional, and the history of significant modern literature is in good part that of largely nonconventional narratives – narratives that may well explore problems of absence and loss. *It is curious that theorists who know much better* nonetheless seem to assume the most conventional form of narrative (particularly nineteenth-century realism read in a rather limited manner) when they generalize about the nature of narrative, often to criticize its conventionalizing or ideological nature. (LaCapra, 2001, p. 63, emphasis added)

LaCapra opens his question by a matter-of-fact empirical observation about the differences between narratives. Why is it that some authors do not recognize unconventional narratives at all? One author who indeed should have known better is the

⁵ Note also that White, in the quote above, considers narrative as a “discursive genre”. Barthes (1977, 79) already saw it differently in terms of a “prodigious variety of genres.” The difference is vast and sets in motion consequences of a very different nature.

philosopher Galen Strawson (2004). Strawson, who rigorously divides persons into two categories, ‘narrative’ (diachronic) and ‘episodic’ characters, finds his prototypes of narrative persons from among philosophers (Plato, Heidegger), whereas his *episodic* persons are amazingly found from among the ranks of novelists (Murdoch, Woolf). In other words, Strawson finds more narrative personalities from philosophy than from the modernist literature. In a similar way, White (2012) regularly finds his privileged allies against the miseries of (narrative) historiography from among the cohorts of modernist writers. In contrast to LaCapra, who has the option of unconventional narratives, White portrays modernist writers as anti-narrative:

The rejection (diminution, avoidance, abandonment) of narrative, narration, and narrativization, which is characteristic of literary modernism, then appears as a response in the domain of the symbolic to such fantasies and an index of a will to realism rather than that “irrationalism” which modernism is conventionally supposed to incarnate. (2012, p. 24, italics changed)

The problems of understanding White (and equally Strawson), I argue, result largely from his very particular way of conceptualizing narrative. To begin with, White completely shares Mink’s top-down vision of narrativity. In so far as he continues criticizing historicity and historical narratives, he continues to rely as a matter of belief on the everlasting dominance of the trans-historical categories drawn from Neo-Classical genre theory (see Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 15), and simply thinks that the historian who “narrativizes” past events has to do so by choosing “a plot-structure” from the inherited and context-free list of tragedy, comedy, romance and irony/satire (White, 1978, p. 67). In short, while he criticizes historians and narratives for “temporalizing” past events, his own understanding of narrative form is largely based on the quasi-eternal effects of past literary genres and conventions. But the conceptual particularities reach even deeper.⁶

⁶ In the following section, I draw heavily (and directly) from my discussion in an earlier article on W.G. Sebald’s novel *Rings of Saturn* (Hyvärinen 2012b).

One source of these confusions may be located in the way the structuralists Emile Benveniste (1971), Gérard Genette (1976) and White (1981) have both distinguished and opposed 'narrative' and 'discourse' linguistically. By taking his examples from the nineteenth-century realist novel and the historiography of the same period, Benveniste outlined a conception of *purely chronological narrative* of the past world, *told in third person*. He argued that a whole array of linguistic forms such as 'I', 'you', and other deictic references to the writing moment were strictly excluded from the 'narrative' mode, whereas the French form of the aorist was typical for this narrative 'in the strict sense'. "The tenses of a French verb are not employed as members of a single system; they are distributed in two systems which are distinct and complementary", Benveniste (p. 206) argues. The "historical utterance" that narrates the past has a particular form:

It is sufficient and necessary that the author remain faithful to his historical purpose and that he proscribe everything that is alien to the narration of events (*discourse, reflections, comparisons*). As a matter of fact, *there is then no longer even a narrator*. The events are set forth *chronologically*, as they occurred. No one speaks here; the *events seem to narrate themselves*. The fundamental tense is the aorist, which is the tense of the event outside the person of a narrator. (p. 208, emphasis added)

Genette remarks that Benveniste includes "in the category of discourse all that Aristotle calls direct imitation" (1976, p. 8). The examples Benveniste and Genette offer come from the historian Glotz and from Balzac. "In discourse, someone speaks and his situation in the very act of speaking is the focus of the most important signification. In narrative, as Benveniste insists, no one speaks, in the sense that at no moment do we have to ask 'Who is speaking?' 'Where?' 'When?' etc., in order to receive fully the meaning of the text," argues Genette (p. 10). All kinds of first-person narration, of course, falls into this language within 'discourse,' but also such third-person forms that foreground the narrator. What is currently, after Labov and Waletzky (1967/97), discussed in terms of oral storytelling could only be understood in terms of discourse in the terminology of Benveniste. Genette even suggests a difference of "naturalness" between these modes:

Actually, discourse has no purity to preserve because it is *the natural mode of language*, the broadest and most universal mode, by definition open to all forms. On the contrary, *narrative is a particular mode*, marked and defined by a certain number of exclusions and restrictive conditions (no present tense, no first person, etc.) Discourse can “narrate” without ceasing to be discourse. Narrative can’t “discourse” without betraying itself. (Genette, 1976, p. 11, emphasis added)

As a matter of fact, Genette says here that oral, every-day narration (‘discourse’) is indeed a ‘natural’ form of language use while ‘narrative’ is not. In his *Narrative Discourse*, Genette has already rejected the artificial idea of dividing texts categorically into discourse and narrative (or story). As he says, “the level of *narrative discourse* is the only one directly available to textual analysis” (Genette, 1980, p. 27, emphasis added), meaning that the earlier distinction no longer applies. The mere title of the English translation blends these earlier separate worlds. *Story* now refers to “the succession of events...that are the subjects of the discourse,” not to a purified and particular linguistic form (p. 25). However, White builds his criticism of narrative and “narrativization” precisely on the earlier distinction between discourse and narrative and never openly replaces it with the newer Genettian model (White, 1981).

Ever since Plato and Aristotle, literary theorists have made the important distinction between *mimesis* (imitation) and *diegesis* (narration in past tense) or, in more contemporary terms, between the modes of *showing* and *telling* (Rabinowitz, 2005). Most narrative theorists take for granted that what they call ‘narratives’ may include both of these modes, whereas White clearly includes only the mode of telling within his narrative. Modernist literature is famous for its privilege of showing, a fact that White reads exclusively as a sign of criticism of narrative. Similarly, the extended passages of showing and staying inside a moment in modernist literature convince Strawson about the authors’ episodicality. The distinction between showing and telling is both useful and productive in several ways, yet my claim is that White and Strawson make too much of it conceptually by using it as a means to purify narrative from the mode of showing.

If we take one more step and consider narrative thought in social sciences and psychology, the narrow conception of narrative (as opposite to that of discourse) becomes even harder to understand. The pure mode of telling in third person and past tense appears indeed as a rather unnatural form of discourse as Genette suggested (1967, p. 11). The every-day, bottom-up stories are not primarily constructed by following the mythical models or Russian wonder tales, neither do they exhibit long sections in the style of nineteenth-century history writing. Instead, imitation, personal pronouns 'I' and 'you' and other deictic expressions are a constant and constitutive element of conversational story-telling. Because of his strictly oppositional and purified concepts of narrative and discourse, White is able to ignore this whole sphere of bottom-up narrativity. Of course, it would be a tough project to demonstrate how children, in telling their stories for example, are narrativizing their experiences with the help of plot structures flowing down from comedy, tragedy, romance and irony.

Confusions of a traveller

Thus far, I hope to have demonstrated that 'narrative' has not travelled around in the form of an intact, unchanging concept. Even during the era of structuralist narratology, there were already significant differences and shifts in the conceptualizing of narrative. The narrative that was inscribed as a part of the 'narrativist' project in historiography, was already something other than the dominant thread within narratology. On its travels to the social sciences and psychology, the borderlines of the concept seem to collapse for three parallel reasons. Not so infrequently, scholars have straightforwardly resorted to everyday concepts and claimed that everybody already knows story and narrative, which now were typically used interchangeably. This liberal way of using the terms indicates, secondly, a broken contact from literary narratology, which in turn has been excessively fascinated with defining the terms 'story' and 'narrative' and in making a clear distinction between them (see, for example, Abbott, 2002; Richardson, 2000; Tammi, 2006). The third reason for the disappearing conceptual borderlines can be found in the metaphorical discourse on narrative, and the concomitant (and huge) broadening of the

range of reference of the concept. I return to this dilemma later, while testing this discourse with the help of postclassical narratology.

The narrative turn in social sciences, in other words, has not generated a sustained theoretical tradition by discussing its key concepts. The ideal edification of such discourse would neither be in a forthcoming orthodoxy nor consensus, rather such discourse might help to reflect the narrative heritage. The shortage of such conceptual discourse becomes evident with my next example of the postmodernist approach. David Boje, in opening his book on narrative methods in organizational research, offers new conceptual innovations:

Traditionally story has been viewed as less than narrative. Narrative requires plot, as well as coherence. To narrative theory, story is folksy, without emplotment, a simple telling of chronology. I propose ‘antenarrative.’ Ante narrative is the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted and pre-narrative speculation, a bet. To traditional narrative methods antenarrative is an improper storytelling, a wager that a proper narrative can be constituted. *Narrative tries to stand elite, to be above story.* (Boje, 2001, p. 1, emphasis added)

In the literary tradition, ‘story’ has generally been understood as the sequence of events the receiver can infer by reading the narrative ‘discourse’ or text. It has been ‘less’ than narrative only in an extremely technical sense; the accurate expression might rather be ‘a fundamental element of narrative.’ As mentioned earlier, most social scientists have used the terms as synonyms. No tradition at all thus seems to support Boje’s bold claim.

Boje locates ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ on the same epistemological level (e.g. not seeing ‘story’ as a result of mental processing of the existing narrative discourse) but understands them as different parts of the process. ‘Narrative’ requires plot and coherence (hence, is suspicious), while ‘story’, this traditionally inferred sequence of events, is now “without emplotment, a simple telling of chronology.” Boje’s hectic process of re-defining concepts foregrounds the third Skinnerian level, the range of

possible appraisal of concepts. Boje follows White in his conceptual purification by attesting that narratives cannot be either coherent or fragmented, no, what is needed for Boje's postmodern theory is a *purified concept* of 'antenarrative' for those discursive units which do not embody the questionable element of emplotment (a term coming from White, and referring ultimately to the choice of one of the neoclassical 'plot-structures').

Possibly the most risible element of the quote resides in the obvious *narrativization* (to employ a Whitean term) of the conceptual setting by claiming that narrative "tries to stand elite, to be above story." Mieke Bal indeed suggested that we should understand concepts as dynamic; nevertheless, she hardly considered transforming the mental and discursive tools as living characters, *actants*, or attributing to them devious and despicable attitudes towards our favourite folksy terms. Amazingly, Boje activates some of the most questionable features of 'narrativized' thought (e.g. renders concepts as actants), in order to use them in the fight against narrative.

To conclude, concepts have indeed travelled to new fields of study but they have hardly remained intact. The terms, in contrast, travel more swiftly than their conceptual contents. This supports the birth of different local theories using the same terms with entirely different conceptual contents. I next turn to a theme which exhibits a vast extension of the range of reference of the concept.

Narrative as a metaphor

The profusion of narrative metaphors is one of the characteristic features of the whole narrative turn in social sciences and psychology. Such metaphors as "living out narratives" (MacIntyre, 1984) and "life as narrative" (Bruner, 1987) were crucial for the progress of the narrative turn in psychology and social sciences. Partly replacing the vocabulary of experiment or survey study, for example, 'narrative' offered a plethora of new terms. Along these lines, Bruner (1987, p. 17) suggests the Burkean pentad of agent, agency, scene, purpose and instrument (Burke, 1945). From the very beginning, this metaphorical discourse also promised to explain personal continuity and coherence with

the help of narrative. “There is no way of founding my identity – or lack of it – on the psychological continuity or discontinuity of the self. The self inhabits a character whose unity is given as the unity of a character” (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 217). Closely related with this figural approach has been the massive extension of narrative’s possible range of reference. After this explosion, it has become usual and helpful to make a distinction between narrative in a “narrow” and “broad” sense (Rimmon-Kenan, 2006; Ryan, 2005). The debates concern such substantial issues as narratives as representations versus ontological narrativity, and the whole relationship between life and narratives.

The reasons for the metaphorical extension of narrative are easy to understand. The structuralist narratology had radically elevated the hierarchical status of narrative, moved it from the province to the centre of the capital. Barthes’ words made it ubiquitous: “All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (Barthes, 1977, p. 79). *Like life itself*, indeed, the invitation for metaphors of life is already in place. It was much easier to connect narrative with this abstract promise than to the partly exhaustive theoretical constructions that narratologists worked with. Richard Rorty (1989) has aptly seen the relevance of new *vocabularies* for scholarly revolutions. New terms in new contexts enable new thoughts to appear and they did. Thus the travel of narrative vocabulary as such, before and without deeper conceptual considerations, encouraged new thinking. Theories travel only with some difficulty and hard work (Bal’s ‘costs’ enter the game here), while the terms fly more fluently as ‘empty signifiers’. Narrative and story became the kind of terms that scholars, journalists, politicians and business people equally started to retrofit for all kinds of uses.⁷ Rimmon-Kenan (2006) has discussed a number of such perplexing uses. When authors became tired of writing about Marx’s *theories*, they nevertheless were able to

⁷ Jennifer Egan, in her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Visit from the Goon Squad*, suggests a possible end of the attraction. One of the younger characters writes a dissertation on words that can only be used within quotation marks: “English was full of empty words – ‘friend’ and ‘real’ and ‘story’ and ‘change’ – words that had been shucked of their meanings and reduced to husks” (Egan 2010, p. 324).

discuss his *narrative* of exploitation. There is no shortage of theory books talking about narratives of this and that without ever revealing any explicit narrative representation.

In what follows, my focus will be on the particular metaphorical connection between life and narrative. How helpful is the metaphorical language for current narrative theory? Did the metaphorical extension of narrative language thematize new issues that the old, strictly representational theory did not exactly discuss? Finally, is it possible or fruitful to refresh the “life as narrative” metaphor with the help of a postclassical understanding of narrative? These are big questions to address in one chapter. Rather than solving them, I suggest a series of conceptual clarifications and distinctions in order to help grasp the obvious tension between narrow and broad meanings of narrative. As a point of departure, I claim that there is a significant difference between the argument that narrative is a vital and irrefutable element of human existence, as for example Hardy (1968), MacIntyre (1984), Bruner (1990) and Mark Freeman and Jens Brockmeier (this volume) have suggested; and the position which takes narrative as a metaphor of life – as MacIntyre (1984), David Carr (1986), Theodore Sarbin (1986) and Jerome Bruner (1987) have proposed. My claim is that the first position is possible and even easier to warrant without the metaphorical obliteration of the distinction between life and narrative.

Let us return to Louis Mink, and his famous dictum “Stories are not lived but told” (Mink, 1987, p. 60). Mink, as a historian who is primarily preoccupied with the issue of how to write historical prose, cannot but understand narrative from the perspective of historical representation. He is emphatically saying that stories do not exist in the world, before and independent of their telling. Thanks to the debate, he nevertheless happens to invent a new metaphor. More than ten years later, Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) turns his idiom upside down and starts theorizing about “living out narratives.” His claim is by no means more modest than what Mink suggested: “It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told – except in the case of fiction” (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 212).

However, what does it mean to live (out) narratives? Before answering any such question we should firstly reflect upon the language games we are about to engage in. If we think, following Mink (and White), that life is empty of narrativity and that stories are told strictly after the event, as distinct representations, then we are quite effectively foreclosing the whole issue of life and narrative. If ‘living narratives’ means that humans *use narratives* in orienting themselves in life and action, the idiom makes a bit more sense. By inviting a theme that Jens Brockmeier and Mark Freeman discuss further in this volume, I endeavour to say something about *the temporal fabric* of life. For Mink, stories seem to be a kind of armchair issue. In the morning, he goes out into the world, without a trace of narrativity, acts among and with other people, and comes home in the evening. Having sat down, he can now tell stories about how life was out there. We do not need to exert much effort to see the impossibility of such a frigid temporal partitioning. Our hypothetical person has most likely told and, in turn, received a plethora of stories during the day. A report on a fiercely spreading influenza may have changed his plans for the day entirely. Before attending an important public event he has possibly envisioned himself encountering a number of infected people and considered his chances of getting ill and how his living through the illness would annoy and harm him. Telling and listening to stories thus has the capacity of constituting the core of a whole event or an experience. In other words, *narrative processing* of the event and the world occurs in tandem with living and experiencing. If we move from this example of old-fashioned life to the living and telling with new social media, as Alexandra Georgakopoulou does in this volume, the co-existence of living and telling becomes even more tangible. Mari Hatavara, in this volume, equally explores the ways in which narrative organization moves and lingers between the experiencing and the telling ‘I’ in autobiographical discourse.

Yet, seen from his original perspective, Mink is still absolutely right. The story he tells from his armchair in the evening is not the moment-by-moment ‘life’ he had lived earlier in the day, not to speak about whole lives or complex historical processes. People may differ radically on how much they employ narrative processing in planning their lives, but literally no one simply enacts a pre-written life narrative. As I later argue, the idea of

living out narratives contradicts fundamental narrative pragmatics. Telling stories about life acquires its perspective, power and motivation from knowing more (and differently) than at the moment of living it. The two modes cannot be merged the way MacIntyre suggests, that is, without reducing telling to a pointless tautology. Narratives as narrative representations always come afterwards, differ from the narrative plans, and are selective as regards the details, perspectives and voices, including the perspective of Mark Freeman's (2010) hindsight. Even at the very moment of experience – of an event taking place – the narrative processing, narrative interpretation and narrative speculations are to some degree active. But the immediate narrative images and interpretations during this processing are still a long way from the finalized, stylised and situated narrative representations. At this point, we need new terms and some conceptual clarity.

Ryan's distinction

“But where is the narrative text?” is a regular remark by those exhausted literary scholars who have tried to follow these new, extended connotations of narrative (Tammi, 2006). We seem to be at an acute risk of cutting either narrative *processing* or the *genuine narratives* out of the picture. After juggling between these ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ senses of narrative, Marie-Laure Ryan (2005) suggests a useful and powerful distinction.⁸ What Ryan maintains is this:

The narrative potential of life can be accounted for by making a distinction between ‘being a narrative’, and ‘possessing narrativity’. The property of ‘being’ a narrative can be predicated off any semiotic object, whatever the medium, produced with the intent to create a response involving the construction of a story. More precisely, it is the receiver's recognition of this intent that leads to the judgment that a given semiotic object is a narrative [...], even though we can never be sure if sender and receiver have the same story in mind. ‘Possessing narrativity’, on the other hand,

⁸ Perhaps, for the sake of debate, and in order to enhance its rhetorical power and visibility, we should borrow the famously violent metaphor from the history of social sciences and re-name the distinction ‘Ryan's guillotine’.

means being able to inspire a narrative response, whether or not in the text, if there is one, and whether or not an author designs the stimuli. (2005, p. 347)

Even this clear distinction starts to waver when Ryan comes to the more ephemeral part of ‘possessing narrativity.’ Nevertheless, the idea is clear: it is not helpful to refer to all the phenomena that have a narrative aspect *as narratives*. ‘Life’ is not a semiotic object, thus it cannot be ‘a narrative’, whatever the amount of narrativity involved in our everyday lives]. Similarly, such idioms as “having a narrative” (Schechtman, 1996, pp. 105–119) should, accordingly, and before testing their accuracy, be translated into the more specific form of “having narrative as a semiotic object.” The distinction also obviously suggests that such idioms as ‘living out narratives’ need to be reformulated. Every single use of the term narrative, as a noun, should be tested by the question: “But where’s the narrative text (semiotic object)?”

If we now accept that narratives are indeed semiotic objects and obviously representations, one further question arises. Does this choice entirely exclude the aspect of narrative ontology (Somers, 1994)? Not at all. Even if every single narrative could be called a semiotic object and, as such, constitute representations of something else, these very same narratives have the potential of constituting both minds and social realities. Narratives are real in their consequences, whether they try to capture fictional or lived experience. Equally, narrative processing, the ‘hermeneutical imperative’, can still be understood to constitute an essential part of human existence (see Brockmeier and Freeman, this volume).

Life as postclassical narrative?

Several powerful metaphors have been launched since the outset of the narrative turn in social research. “Living out narratives” (MacIntyre, 1984) was followed by “life as narrative” and “becoming a narrative” (Bruner, 1987), “storied lives” (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992), “inner narrative” (Hänninen, 2004) and “having a narrative” (Schechtman, 1996, 2007).

These metaphors need to be reconsidered for the simple reason that they are metaphors. “Metaphor is a device for seeing something *in terms of* something else”, says Kenneth Burke (1945, p. 503). Metaphor is a cognitive and discursive figure which offers a perspective to something that is usually difficult to grasp and conceptualize, something which is ephemeral or ambiguous – as for example life, love, trauma and death. The problem for this chapter resides precisely here. The first term, narrative, is automatically presumed to be known, conventional and familiar. In other words, all the narrative metaphors presume *narrative as being known* and shift the whole attention to the second term, be it ‘life’, ‘memory’, or ‘organization’. This orientation has brought fruitful results, but it is simultaneously a trap. What if we still did not know what we mean by ‘narrative’?

Because attention within the metaphorical genre was directed primarily to things other than narrative, the shared conventionality as regards narrative has remained powerful. Mink (1987), MacIntyre (1984), Carr (1986) and Bruner (1987) do not differ substantially from each other when it comes to understanding narrative. The vision is principally top-down, from art to the everyday, from myths and Neo-classical genres down to individual life stories. The dominant view is *textual* in the sense that a person’s narratives are not presumed to change considerably from situation to situation (I return to this variation with my fictional example, below). Narrative is thus predominantly understood as an inherited form which is capable of transmitting the cultural heritage to acting individuals.

My thought experiment builds, firstly, on turning the direction of attention back to narrative and, secondly, on updating the way narrative is understood, and of looking at some of the metaphors again after this conceptual reshaping. I use the term ‘postclassical narrative’ as a relatively broad term and freely derived from the discussions of contemporary, ‘postclassical narratology’, a term that David Herman (1999, pp. 2–3) suggested, and which has since then been taken up by several authors (e.g. Nünning, 2003; Alber & Fludernik, 2010). Even while defining his term, Herman suggests that the

“result is a host of new perspectives on the forms and functions of narrative itself” (p. 3). Two words are of particular significance here: “forms” and “functions”. Contemporary narrative theory does not, according to this programme, find its mere objective in the study of “the narrative form itself,” as Mink (1987, p. 186), has suggested, in his role as a representative of his period.

The theme of narrative functions came to the social research of narratives with William Labov and Joshua Walezky’s (1967/87; Labov, 1972) model of oral narratives. The authors tried and were successful in construing a structural model; nevertheless, they also had a keen interest in the narrative functions, in the way narratives accounted for lived experience. Moreover, they already thematized the narrative dialectic between expectations and experience. Complete narratives, for Labov, are no sheer *records* of what happened, they actively *comment* on what did not happen and what could have happened. It is this “subjunctive” element that Bruner (1990, pp. 53–54) later elevates as one necessary part of “good stories”. Bruner theorizes further the sphere of the socially expected, and calls it “folk psychology” (pp. 14–15). Based on this sphere of “canonicity”, Bruner can now redefine *the function* of narrative, and he does this emphatically several times in the book: “Note that it is only when constituent beliefs in folk psychology are violated that narratives are constructed” (p. 39); “Stories achieve their meanings by *explicating deviations from the ordinary* in a comprehensible form – by providing the ‘impossible logic’ discussed in the preceding section” (p. 47, emphasis added). This element of breaking up canonicity or world-disruption is equally built into Herman’s recent model of prototypical narrativity (Herman, 2009a). I am afraid that this major proposal by Bruner (1990) has largely been dismissed by his followers who, instead, have preferred to replicate the dictums from his earlier, heavily metaphorical essay (Bruner, 1987; see Hyvärinen, 2008).

This *functional* perspective on narrativity creates (severe) new problems for the metaphors. The first is the helpful distinction between folk psychological expectations and narratives. Bruner is not entirely systematic in using this new language of folk psychology, since he also writes about folk psychological narratives. Using Ryan’s

distinction, it would however be possible to say that the folk psychological knowing incorporates narrativity, by way of condensing the knowledge about the canonical and culturally expected sequences of events in different contexts, but is not as such articulated as narratives. Narratives make visible this canonicity by using it systematically as the shadow or point of comparison, as the background against which the narrative is made relevant and tellable. For lack of better terms, I suggest here a distinction between folk-psychological scripts and narratives proper. Folk psychology is certainly used and lived out, but narratives are told when the expected plans have eventually failed.

From a functional point of view, narratives are *comments*, comments on life and social expectations. As comments, narratives may be reflective, recuperative, belittling or reclaiming. But they are, at any rate, *doing* something as regards living and its terms. This functional reading resonates strongly with Kuisma Korhonen's analysis of what really matters in narrative therapies, which, as he has it, is more the *telling of the story* than any particular kind of narrative or narrative form as such (Korhonen, in this volume). To say the least: proper narratives necessarily need the *analytic* distinction between living and telling to be able to perform their function as comments. For this pragmatic reason I also reject the metaphor of 'having a narrative' as a fundamental building block of personality. For one thing, I do not fully understand what the idiom means, since I do not personally 'have' a narrative. Narratives are, from the suggested functional perspective, always *doing* something; they are told and received in situations. As Walsh (2010, p. 36) has it, "stories, of whatever kind, do not merely appear, but are told."

One of the largest, climatic changes, taking place during the move from classical to postclassical narratology concerns the shift from "text-centredness" to "post-classical context orientation" (Nünning, 2003, p. 243). This is foregrounded in the work of the rhetorical school (Smith, 1981; Phelan, 2005, 2007), and it is equally a key element within Herman's new narrative prototype (2009a). Most of the narrative metaphors, however, build on a heavily textual image of relatively permanent, inner and context-unrelated narratives. Within this imagery, people are 'living out' and 'having' some

vague version of *Bildungsroman* in their mind, whereas the context-orientation opens up the field for different narratives in different contexts and for different purposes.⁹ If, in contrast, the telling of a life story is used for the purpose of radical self-reflection and investigation, such phenomena as fragmentation and lack of coherence may serve the purpose even without having – at the moment of telling – any second-degree coherence awaiting the interpreter.

Life On Chesil Beach

To achieve a firmer understanding of the complexities of life and narrative, I turn to discuss Ian McEwan's (2007) novel *On Chesil Beach*. This novel tells the story of the ten-hour marriage of two young people, Edward and Florence, in the England of 1962. But why use fictional material to discuss a problem which mostly concerns narrative studies focusing on non-fiction? My primary reason for using fiction is to use it as a laboratory of human minds in context. Fictional material has the capacity to be highly sensitive and public at the same time, giving better chances to elaborate ideas about living narratives. My reading will focus on the way the characters make sense of their lives with the help of narrative scripts, and how these scripts fail. David Herman (2009b) suggests an apposite idiom of "storied minds" while discussing McEwan's novel. Edward and Florence have indeed storied their minds through and through; they have memories of their own coming to mind during the evening, they have jointly scripted their future, their jobs and careers, children and family; yet they subscribe to drastically contrasting scripts about the wedding night itself. The final quarrel on the beach can also be read as a failed attempt at negotiating between their diverting scripted futures after the joint failure in the bedroom.¹⁰

⁹ "...it is justified in speaking of life as a story in its nascent state, and so of life as *an activity and passion in search of a narrative*," writes Paul Ricoeur (1991, p. 29). I am afraid that the image of one (and covering) *Bildungsroman* is unwarranted even here. Why talk about narrative in the singular?

¹⁰ This reading focuses on Florence and her story. My purpose is by no means to mark her 'guilty' of the break up or anything else. In her case, the contradiction between the storied mind and bodily memory and body-based action is exceptionally telling for the purposes of this chapter. If my ethical criticism indeed has a target, it is the trauma and the perpetrator.

For Herman, narratological work on temporality “suggests how texts like McEwan’s allow the motivations, structure, and consequences of actions to be from multiple positions of time. Stories, this research suggests, are a primary technology for making sense of how things unfold in time” (p. 56). Herman also points out another important feature of novels such as McEwan’s, “the two-layered environment for modeling action” (p. 60). During their encounter and discussion on Chesil Beach on their wedding night, both Edward and Florence go back and forth to their own singular memories. Quite clearly, both of them are using stories as a “primary technology for making sense of how things unfold in time” (p. 56). What makes the novel particularly interesting for my purposes is the second level of the third-person narration which informs the reader of aspects that the characters themselves are unaware of, at least at the moment of the event itself. The narrator allows us to know more than would realistically be possible in a non-fictional context, yet leaving such huge gaps that the reader cannot but face the same insecurity as the open world tends to exhibit.

It is this ‘two-layered environment’ which enables a nuanced discussion about the persistent theme of life and narrative. One of the fine paradoxes of narrative fiction resides exactly here: one level of narrative (the narratorial/authorial) enables the reader to see limits of narrative and the storied ‘technology for making sense’ (on the character-level narration).

The beginning of the novel is thickly populated with the plans and stories Florence and Edward tell and process. “Their plan was to change into rough shoes after supper and walk on the shingle between the sea and the lagoon...” (p. 5); “And they had so many plans, giddy plans, heaped up before them in the misty future...Where and how they would live, who their close friends would be, his job in her father’s firm, her musical career and what to do with the money her father had given them” (pp. 5–6). Experienced readers of McEwan’s work already know that these plans will not be realized. As readers, we may also be tempted to think that the characters possibly use this dense scripting as a method of overcoming their existential uncertainty in the new life situation. Of course the characters also story their backgrounds. “One of their favorite topics was

their childhoods, not so much the pleasures as the fog of comical misconceptions from which they had emerged, and the various parental errors and outdated practices they could now forgive” (p. 6). And so on and on.

The whole course of the wedding night is structured by the drastically opposite expectations Florence and Edward nurture. They have both drafted a script for the evening; unfortunately the scripts do not meet or become communicable. Nevertheless, there is one joint element in their plans, and it is worry. The existence of the worry renders them even more vulnerable, less communicative and even more likely to drift out of their scripts. Florence is totally frightened about the forthcoming sexual intercourse; for Edward, it signifies the absolute fulfilment of his dreams about Florence. In her mind, Florence thought that “there was something profoundly wrong with her” (pp. 8–9), nevertheless there is a passing moment during which she almost finds Edward’s intimate touch intriguingly pleasurable (p. 87). This passing moment is not an option that is a part of her script, nor does it profile afterwards, that is, in her new story on the beach. The characters have thickly storied minds, yet there is this strong unstoried, non-narrated residue of life intervening occasionally as the narrator’s story proceeds. There is also a constant, perplexing flow of powerful sensual perceptions, odours, voices, touches, going on in Florence’s mind, speaking often about a traumatized mind. By following Lars-Christer Hydén’s idea of the relevance of bodily presence, I try to read out the discrepancies between the characters’ bodily presence and their storied minds (see Hydén, this volume).

Florence’s difficult balancing act between her dread and her wish to please Edward in the bedroom collapses totally after Edward’s premature ejaculation. “But now she was incapable of repressing her primal disgust, her visceral horror at being doused in fluid, in slime from another body. In seconds it had turned icy on her skin in the sea breeze, and yet, just as she knew it would, it seemed to scald her” (p. 105). It is her body sensing (“primal disgust”, “visceral horror,” “scalding her”), talking and knowing (“just as she knew it would”), and not her delicately storied mind that is doing the talking here. Earlier on, she had heard additional voices, as if musical instruments, but now the odour

of sperm is familiar in spite of her sexual inexperience “...it’s intimate starchy odour, which dragged with it the stench of a shameful secret” (p. 106). Florence panics and rushes out of the bedroom, leaving a totally shamed Edward behind to develop his fury. Immediately prior to her escape, there are the important words of the narrator: “She was two selves – the one who flung the pillow down in exasperation, the other who looked on and hated herself for it. [...] She could hate him for what he was witnessing now and would never forget” (p. 106). This confusing two-fold reality of hers is later edited away, as she re-stories her experience before and during the quarrel.

The final crash of different life scripts takes place during the angry exchange on the beach. Again, it is not merely a clash between two contrasting life narratives; instead we have two hormonally excited young bodies on the beach, furious Edward and bodily withdrawing, terrified Florence. In a sense, their excited bodies are what control their last attempt at conversing. They have just shared a huge mutual failure and Florence’s violent escape from the bedroom. It is remarkable that both Edward and Florence are incapable and reluctant to unpack the moment of failure and to give relevant accounts of what was exactly so hurtful in it. Florence even seems to misdirect Edward’s interpretations, to guide him towards a much more (folk psychological and) conventional reading of the event:

‘Look, this is ridiculous. It was unfair of you to run like that.’ [says Edward]

‘Was it?’

‘In fact, it was bloody unpleasant.’

‘Oh really? Well, it was bloody unpleasant, what you did.’

‘Meaning what?’

She had her eyes shut as she said it. ‘You know exactly what I mean.’ She would torture herself with the memory of her part in this exchange, but now she added, ‘It was absolutely revolting.’

“She heard herself say smoothly. ‘I know failure when I see it’” (p. 144).

This passage is not only a prime example of failed mind-reading which goes on more or less throughout the quarrel; it is also an example of tactical play with this misreading. Florence and Edward were in love with each other and had talked hours and hours together, yet they were almost completely unable to read the other’s mind on the beach. What was so deeply “unpleasant” in what Edward had done? Just a while ago, Florence had abhorred the whole idea of sexual intercourse, now she leads Edward to believe that his “absolutely revolting” gesture was indeed his premature ejaculation: ‘You know exactly what I mean.’ Florence, unlike the reader, does not even know how embarrassing and humiliating the issue of ejaculation was for Edward, but she is quick to resort to folk psychological resources. At the same time, she is obviously pushing away the memory of the almost remembered instance of abuse, the disturbance her body was just about to reveal. A genuine transference takes place when the “intimate starchy odour, which dragged with it the stench of a shameful secret” now marks Edward, makes his ejaculation responsible for “a shameful secret”. This bodily drama simply exceeds the frames of ‘life as narrative’.

A moment later, when they both have calmed down to a degree, Florence makes her proposal of marriage of love without sex, offering Edward the full freedom to have sexual relationships with other women (pp. 153–157). My students¹¹ tend to find Florence an unconventional person in contrast to the conventionality of Edward’s traditional family values. On my reading, both Florence and Edward are merely returning to their original scripts about their marriage, love, and sex and find them now entirely incommensurable. Edward is not primarily interested in maintaining conventionality but in having sex, and he would probably have been happy with an open relationship with the option of having sex with the woman he still adored (and who, at the

¹¹ I have twice co-convened a course on family research in the University of Tampere. Students read the novel and write their first essay before the series of lectures, another after the course. We had to repeat the course due to its popularity.

moment of the quarrel, was practically the only visible partner). This is how Florence begins her talk:

‘That I’m pretty hopeless, absolutely hopeless at sex. Not only am I no good at it, I don’t seem to need it like other people, like you do. It just isn’t something that is part of me. (p. 153)

This is indeed a sadly storied mind. She is effectively telling the quality of being “hopeless in sex” as an integral part of her self and identity, rather than as temporary or something imposed on her. The recent memory of the passing moment of pleasure is already edited away, as is the bodily memory of what really revolted her in the bedroom failure. Florence insists on living out her projected narrative of marriage without sex, and just because of being so fixed – identified – with this narrative she is unable to achieve the love of the person she most wanted to have, and thus to live out her narrative. The enraged Edward, similarly, is so fixed on his script and his disappointment that it takes several decades for him to fully see his loss. Only in hindsight, drastically too late to change anything, is he able to see some of the effects of his un-restrained rage.

As a fine tribute and direct reference to Sigmund Freud’s (1905/2002) classic text *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, the only visible rupture in Florence’s evasion of the true reasons for her revulsion of the bedroom failure is articulated in the form of an intended joke: “Perhaps I should be psychoanalysed. Perhaps what I really need to do is kill my mother and marry my father” (p. 153). *Trauma* speaks here, but neither she nor Edward is sensitive or discursively¹² competent enough to hear the message. And who would, at the age of 22?

McEwan’s novel portrays two young people who insist on storying their minds and lives. Using metaphorical language, both of them *try* to live out their narratives. Equally, they share the attitude of ‘having a narrative’ and sticking to it despite it having become

¹² McEwan is particularly interested in and careful with the (non)existence and use of different discourses in the early 1960s. Therapeutic and psychoanalytic languages were foreign to people coming from the lower middle class, as Edward was.

obviously unrealizable. Because of the incommensurability of the stories, the two scripts collide in the bedroom, and later on the beach. The course of the life does not follow these scripts, and both individuals must face a devastating disappointment. The narrator expertly opens up a chasm between the intended, ‘storied life’, and the whole rush of mental and bodily life, leaving the life narratives and scripted futures helpless before the contingencies of actual life. Life exceeds the narratives which the characters try so hard to live out, and the bodily realities surpass these conscious storied minds. Disregarding the chasm between life and narratives, the narrative processing has no end. Nowhere in the novel is the necessity of narrative processing expressed as compellingly as in the short comment on Florence’s future thoughts: “She would torture herself with the memory of her part in this exchange...” (p. 144). However perplexing and painful the life experience, the narrative processing keeps trying to capture it.

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