Rethinking Narrativity: A Return to Aristotle and Some Consequences

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When does a flow of information become a narrative? Intuitively, the answer is obvious, albeit circular: it becomes a narrative when it tells a story, and we know a story when we meet one, a satisfactory story being—let us say—a presentation of some more-or-less connected or connectable sequence of events, involving human or human-like agents, that occur in the story's own posited world, usually but not always different from the one in which communication of the story happens. A flow of information that satisfies all or most of such "story" criteria may be considered to pass a tipping point beyond which we classify it as narrative. This answer and others developed along similar lines are assuredly not foolish, for the simple reason that we do indeed know how to produce and receive stories; hence the appeal to folk knowledge concerning "story" produces solid reassurance.

Intuitive security about the nature of "story" yields in turn one of modern narratology's familiar implements, the story-discourse distinction, often critiqued

but still widely deployed in varying degrees of refinement[1]: if "story" is some presentation of connected or connectable events, then "discourse" can name everything that is *done to* story in the presenting of it, as for example in the recounting of posited events nonchronologically. But setting up and making use of the story-discourse distinction does nothing, of course, to clarify the nature of story itself, or to make story's recognition less of an intuitive, aconceptual business. In reasoning of this kind folk knowledge supplies the idea of story, which then yields the idea of discourse as its counterpart and complement. We remain in the position of fish trying to discuss the nature of water, a medium with which lived experience makes us thoroughly acquainted while at the same time withholding the conditions under which we can separate off our intuitive registration of it and determine its objective properties. But fish are, one feels, the more to be excused for their lack of objectivity concerning water, since they are obliged to live in it continuously, whereas human beings know with folk certainty that not all the relayings of information that they receive are stories, and that they are not immersed in the story medium all the time.

The aim of the discussion that follows is to identify key distinguishing properties of narrative discourse. "Discourse" here is not being opposed to "story," but, rather, certain inflections of discourse are treated as giving rise to the effect of "story." It is useful to begin by examining Monika Fludernik's recent, influential theoretical attempt to supersede the story-discourse distinction by identifying the basic material, distinct from story, out of which narrative discourse is made. Fludernik very interestingly treats this basic material as occurring naturally rather than arising purposely or through artful arrangement. A critique of Fludernik's approach, followed by a rereading of Aristotle's discussion of tragic narrative, highlights how narrative's appearance of being fashioned from a basic and natural material is an effect that certain inflections of discourse produce. My concluding section further develops the approach by identifying characteristic tropes of narrative-delivering discourse.

Fludernik's Natural Narratology and the Foundations of Narrativity

Fludernik's *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* (1996), along with a follow-up essay from 2003, famously and controversially attempted to

transfer story's widely assumed role in the minimum constitution of narrative to what is termed "experientiality." "There can," Fludernik writes, "be narratives without plot [with one acceptation of that term corresponding to "story"], but there cannot be any narratives without a human (anthropomorphic) experience of some sort at some narrative level" (1996: 13). The later essay explains that the concept of experientiality was introduced out of a concern "to characterize the purpose and function of the storytelling as a process that captures the narrator's past experience, reproduces it in a vivid manner, and then evaluates and resolves it in terms of the protagonist's reactions and of the narrator's often explicit linking of the meaning of this experience with the current discourse context" (2003: 245). For Fludernik, in other words, narratives are made out of virtual experiences and are also *about* them. I wish to consider what might be at stake in attempting to place the human (anthropomorphic) experiencer, not the making/receiving of stories, at the center of the phenomenon of narrativity, as well as the associated claim that this move establishes a *natural* basis for narrative study.

Recent discussion of narrative has opened up several perspectives in which the making of stories might be considered to be a natural activity. To identify the most conspicuous of these perspectives, and roughly following the shape of Fludernik's argument: (A) Stories arise spontaneously and pervasively in the telling of jokes, anecdotes, reports of owned or vicarious experience, and the like. In William Labov's (1972) well-known account, spontaneous oral narratives possess certain shared formal characteristics; in particular the narrator must show that the narrative is coming to a point, making for meaningful evaluation. (B) The making of stories appeals to the "natural attitude" of a society or culture, systematically unrecognized by it as convention and text, deploying a discourse that, as Jonathan Culler (1975) puts it, "requires no explanation because it seems to derive directly from the structure of the world. We speak of people as having minds and bodies, as thinking, imagining, remembering, feeling pain, loving and hating, etc., and do not have to justify such discourse by adducing philosophical arguments. It is simply the text of the natural attitude, at least in Western culture, and hence *vraisemblable*" (140–41). Culler goes on to explain that the recovery/assertion of what a culture takes to be natural commonly occurs

in readerly reception of narrative: "When a text uses such discourse it is to that extent inherently intelligible, and when it deviates from such discourse the reader's tendency is to translate its 'metaphors' back into this natural language" (141). Drawing on the ideas of Russian formalist criticism, Culler calls the second of these activities "naturalization" (137). (C) Fludernik's emphasis on experientiality over plot derives some of its authority from (A) and develops on (B): narrativity as a phenomenon of narrative production and reception "is constituted by [. . .] experientiality, namely the quasi-mimetic evocation of 'real-life' experience," reflecting "a cognitive schema of embodiedness that relates to human existence and human concerns" and making for "emotional involvement, evaluative or empathetic" (1996: 12–13, 318). In this account the human life-related cognitive schema that narrative's evocations of experience reflect plainly does not derive from narrative performance but logically precedes it and makes it possible.

A question suggests itself here, however: what exactly is the natural being distinguished from or opposed to in these characterizations of narrativity? As Fludernik very pertinently comments, common-sense opposition of the natural to the artificial requires deconstruction: since "the human is both *part* of nature and *constitutive* of civilisation [. . .] [a]nything concerning man in his civilized habitat and his living-acting-working conditions [. . .] inevitably discredits the nature-culture dichotomy and the very artificial distinction between the natural and the contrived" (1996: 19).[2] The last phrase seems to concede the principle that every human culture proposes its own distinctions, typically on a shifting basis, between what is respectively attributed to "culture" and to "nature."[3] Nevertheless, discussion of narrative in the manner of A and C, above, seems to require a dichotomization of nature and culture, where nature is the privileged category, to do important work. In Culler's exposition of B, "naturalization" as the recuperation of discourse for a going "natural attitude" will occur in every cultural setting, but differently, in the service of particular constructions of the natural. By contrast, the "natural" in "natural narrative" is on the side of universality, whereas the "non-natural" is on the side of the differentiated as found in local contexts, and thus of what has been inferrably constructed in order to achieve particular ends.

As I go on to discuss below, the distinction between the natural and the non-natural has a large Western cultural substratum, most visible in classical discussion of what occurs differently in the spheres of *techne*, human craft and contrivance, and of *physis*, the activity of nature. Within the framework of A, in Fludernik's interpretation of it, if spontaneous conversational storytelling is to be treated as the "principal and originary narrative schema" (1996: 323), it has to be set apart from any "more literary (i.e. institutionalized) form of storytelling [such as oral poetry] that cannot lay a claim to being 'natural' in the same manner or to the same extent as conversational narration" (14). In Fludernik's C, which transposes "naturalization" into "narrativization" and bids to transcend the perspective of cultural difference, "the natural [. . .] corresponds to the human," and finds its practical-*cum*-conceptual anchoring in "human everyday experience" (19), presumably in universal everyday experience. What is based in the experiential, so understood, can therefore be opposed to more extrinsic and contrived features of storytelling, such as the elaboration of plot, which Fludernik terms "storification" (34). "Experience" is usually offered as the English translation of German *Erfahrung*. We may note in this connection that *Erfahrung*, cognate with *fahren*, "to travel," carries a rather different semantic weighting from the English word and implies a synthesis of what practical activity or experimentation has uncovered; connotatively this is a journey completed or known. An *Erfahrung* that *already does* some of the same things as narrative might plausibly be treated as narrativity's naturally occurring *ur*-material. But this is a large phenomenological claim and not one that natural narratology has offered to substantiate.

The identification of what is natural within narrative, because it is founded in experience, as distinct from the supplementary provisions of storification, differs from the identification of narrative as a primary resource for the *organization* of experience, in the interests, say, of constructing memory, of making time a matter of conscious perception, or of arriving at a sense of personal or group identity. As Werner Wolf (2003) observes, "the importance of narrativity for the experience of reality is by now a well-established idea; opinions are, however, divided concerning the origins and truth value of narrativity" (195n92). Many would broadly accept Jerome Bruner's (1990) contention that if "fram-

ing provides a means of 'constructing' a world, of characterizing its flow, of segmenting events within that world, and so on, [. . .] [t]he typical form of framing experience (and our memory of it) is in narrative form" (56). Paul Ricoeur's (1984) philosophically ambitious argument proposes that "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative" (1: 17).[4] In statements like these concerning the major importance of narrativity as a schema for the ordering of experience, the governing distinction is not between the natural and the artificial, but between the intelligible-because-orderly and the contingent or chaotic—with this distinction applying both to the socially embedded actions of human beings and to processes in the natural world. Seen in this aspect, narrativity is one of human culture's most characteristic products, an ordering of experience in the interests of conceptual stability, achieved at the cost of filtering out or suppressing or rearranging some of the data that experience provides.[5] Viewed in this light it undoubtedly possesses some of the properties of an artifact.

Fludernik's entirely admirable purpose is, as Andrew Gibson (1997) puts it, to repudiate "the old, procrustean, binary categories so favoured by a bullish, pseudo-scientific narratology from the sixties through to the eighties" (234), which depended on unchallenged operational distinctions such as those between story and discourse, or character and narrator. In these couplings the first item is assigned more to the sphere of nature and the second more to that of art and contrivance, with the consequence that the relatively technical activity can be understood as mediating the relatively natural phenomenon. We find, however, that whatever its declared intentions, natural narratology as currently constituted has reinstated the *physis*/*techne* distinction at a different level, in opposing the authentically experiential to the noncore, secondary procedures of storification. In summary, it has transferred storymaking (along with mimesis, of which it is taken to be a key component[6]) from the category of *physis* to that of *techne*, leaving behind what should be the natural ore of *Erfahrung*.

Rethinking Narrativity: Aristotelian Perspectives

It may, however, be possible to conceive of a narratology that uses issues raised by the *physis*/*techne* distinction in order to re-engage with the

formation of narrative experience. Western narratology's founding text offers considerable assistance in doing this. The argument of Aristotle's *Poetics* (1995) is substantially underwritten by the distinction of *techne* and *physis*. As in other Aristotelian texts, however, these two forms of activity, though posited as distinct, are set in a thought-provoking, counterpoised relationship that allows them to bear differently on the phenomenon of narrative *mimesis*. Narrativity as the *Poetics* conceives it has, I argue, determinants that are considerably more complex than has been generally allowed.

Aristotle offers no definition of *mimesis*—in its primary sense, a miming of something—and "imitation" will have to do as a working equivalent. Aristotle sees *mimesis* as being natural to human beings,[7] a spontaneously occurring activity that is found everywhere and that *techne* (craft, know-how, artistry) can shape into something that is accomplished, creating an object that is appropriate for and worthy of intellectual appraisal. For Aristotle, one of the most impressive instances of such a shaping of *mimesis* by *techne* has occurred in the development of a tragic drama at Athens, the *Poetics*' main focus of attention. Aristotle's examination of tragedy as a perfected mimetic art forms part of a larger philosophical enquiry into *techne*, *physis*, and the relationship between them. Here, *techne* as such has no special affinity with *mimesis* (there are plenty of crafts whose products do not imitate objects in nature), but it does have a special affinity with *physis*, nature as grasped in its characteristic mode of activity.

Briefly, in Aristotle's philosophy the activity of things in nature moves purposefully toward the achievement of an end, a *telos*. And in the same way, the making of things by means of *techne* moves purposefully toward an end, in this case arrival at a product: the *techne* of medicine produces health; the *techne* of building, houses; and so on. But whereas natural things contain the principle of movement toward an end within themselves (an acorn has it in itself to become an oak), technical operations are directed from outside, by the agency of the technician or artist and by the purpose of producing a specified product (a piece of wood doesn't have it in itself to become a table, a representative technical product). This assumedly radical similarity and dissimilarity between *physis* and *techne* play a very important role in Aristo-

telian thought: if art or craft makes things in the same way as nature does—that is, in purposive movement toward a *telos*, an end[8]—then art or craft and nature become extremely valuable explicative models of one another (see Wolff 2007: 54). At the same time, however, we stand in no danger of confusing the *techne* that makes a table with the *physis* that makes a tree, since *physis* as such is not subject to human control, and human product-making is not a natural phenomenon. In view of this distinctive configuring of thought, it is necessary to read Aristotle's discussion of tragic performances in two different ways: (1) as an account of a highly achieved biomimesis, where a product of *techne* takes over many of the characteristics of a living thing; and (2), as an account of specifically technical procedures that does not form part of a philosophical envisioning of organic life.

In viewpoint (1) Aristotle sees the tragic drama known to him as a highly sophisticated, near-definitive technical achievement. It is therefore fitting that the *Poetics* should present it as possessing to an unusual degree the characteristics of a natural organism. The text's use of biological analogy is also shaped by a tradition of Greek thought according to which the accomplished artist or craftsman, a kind of Daedalus, is capable of producing artifacts that present a convincing semblance of life, often in the form of a capacity for motion (see Morris 1992). (A classic instance is Hephaestus's manufacture of self-moving tripods that serve the assembled gods, as described in the *Iliad* 18.372–79.) For Aristotle the accomplished dramatist's apparently living creatures, in this conception, are not the characters who figure in tragedies but the tragedies themselves: although tragedies are not, in the ordinary sense, alive like animals, they can be understood to possess in full a number of their characteristics. Individual tragedies are members of the species tragedy that, we are told, "ceased to evolve [once] it had achieved its own nature" (*Poetics*, chap. 4; 43) in the hands of Aeschylus and Sophocles.[9] A properly formed tragedy, like an animal of a given species, possesses a recognizable structure of parts, in this case a beginning, a middle, and an end standing in orderly connection (see chap. 7; 55; I discuss this passage in more detail below).[10] Moreover, like other beautiful objects, including those that are alive, a tragedy should be available to the mind for contemplation as a whole at one moment (via *theoria*, the condition

of making proper intellectual appraisal). This condition in turn places constraints on the size of its plot:

> Besides, a beautiful object, whether an animal or anything else with a structure of parts, should have not only its parts ordered but also an appropriate magnitude: beauty consists in magnitude and order, which is why there could not be a beautiful animal which was either minuscule (as contemplation of it, occurring in an almost imperceptible moment, has no distinctness) or gigantic (as contemplation of it has no cohesion, but those who contemplate it lose a sense of unity and wholeness), say an animal a thousand miles long. So just as with our bodies and with animals beauty requires magnitude, but magnitude that allows coherent perception, likewise plots require length, but length that can be coherently remembered. (chap. 7; 55–57)

Most crucially a tragedy possesses something akin to a soul, described in Aristotle's *De Anima* as "a substance which corresponds to the account [or principle] (*arche*) of a thing" (1984, 1: 657; 412b) which animates it: "Plot (*muthos*), then, is the [. . .] principle and, as it were, soul (*psuche*) of tragedy, while character (*ethos*, form) is secondary" (chap. 6; 53). Plot has been defined as "the mimesis of the action" (chap. 6; 49), and tragedy's mimesis as being "not of persons but of action and life" (*praxeos kai biou*; chap. 6; 51). It is in the virtual life principle of plot, a made thing that operates as the soul does in animals, that life as such is convincingly mimed. Small wonder, then, that the plot is treated as the dramatist's masterwork: "the poet [*poietes*, 'maker'] should be more a maker of plots than of verses, in so far as he is a poet by virtue of mimesis" (chap. 9; 61); even a tragic plot recited without stage performance produces, we are told, the emotions of tragedy in the hearer (see chap. 14; 73–74).

Aristotle's treatment of tragedies as having a soul is, then, a thought-provoking way of characterizing the structure—as it were, the engineering—of tragedies considered *from the standpoint of physis* as life-imitating fabricated creatures. Talos, the bronze man who guarded Crete (and in some accounts an artifact made by Hephaestus), was animated by a liquor called *ichor* that ran through his veins; when the blood-like *ichor* drained out of him he died—or rather, "died," since he was never alive

in the usual sense. *Muthos*, considered as tragedy's indwelling principle or soul, is, however, better than *ichor*, since in Aristotle's account even a small part of it cannot be taken away or altered without compromising the integrity of the whole. The *psuche* for Aristotle (1984) is not a divisible substance but the indivisible principle by which a given animal is what it is, namely, alive, and in a particular way: "Suppose that the eye were an animal—sight would have been its soul" (1.657; 412b). *Muthos* should therefore be, on the "soul" analogy, entirely resistant to local tampering. As the *Poetics* has it, "the plot, since it is the mimesis of an action, should be of a unitary and indeed whole action; and the component events should be so structured that if any is displaced or removed, the [. . .] whole is disturbed and dislocated" (chap. 9; 59). One notices that in this last statement the unitary nature of *muthos* is also treated as a characteristic of the action imitated: *muthos* becomes a place of imagined convergence and correspondence between what is done by "people in action (*prattontas*)" (chap. 2; 33), the object of imitation that forms part of a scene of life, and what is made present in a dramatic action possessed of nature-simulating life because, courtesy of metaphor, it is endowed with a soul.

Nevertheless, as Aristotle's viewpoint (2) suggests, organicist modeling in the *Poetics* is not the whole of the story when it comes to plot or *muthos*. There is another kind of statement that fully complements it in that it is elaborated as an account of tragedy's *techne* or engineering in those respects in which it does *not* replicate the living unity of an animal. The clearest instance is the account of recognition (*anagnorisis*): "Recognition, as the very name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, leading to friendship or to enmity, and involving matters which bear on prosperity or adversity. The finest recognition is that which occurs simultaneously with reversal (*peripeteia*) ['a change to the opposite direction of events'], as with the one in the *Oedipus*" (chap. 11; 65). This statement flatly abandons the principle that the plot should be conceived only as a whole, as the object of "coherent perception," and instead suggests that plotting involves a continuous (re)establishment of what there is to be perceived. Aristotle's *anagnorisis* is a central figure's abrupt coming to awareness of some previously hidden aspect of her or his real situation, giving up or drastically revising what appeared

to be valid knowledge of the same. And by implication it is the audience's undergoing of a similar cognitive transition: what has looked entirely like *that* now looks entirely like *this*. "Recognition" is not a wholly adequate translation of *anagnorisis* since Aristotle writes of a narrative transition that involves not only an enlightening discovery of knowledge but, with equal consequence, a discrediting and loss of the knowledge that has, up to this moment, seemed entirely secure. As Terence Cave (1988) notes, *anagnorisis* "makes the world and the text intelligible. Yet it is also a shift *into* the implausible: the secret unfolded lies beyond the realm of common experience. [. . .] *Anagnorisis* links the recovery of knowledge with a disquieting sense, when the trap is sprung, that the commonly accepted co-ordinates of knowledge have gone awry" (1–2). The effect of *anagnorisis* arises through the shaping of a story's telling in such a way as to throw open to question what has been told, along with the assumed value for narrative comprehension of narrative-produced experience itself. The concept of *anagnorisis* certainly jars against its own text's neighboring account of a unitary *muthos* whose "soul" corresponds to a single, through-running, indivisible encoding for comprehension.

Putting these two complementary accounts (1 and 2) together, as the argument of the *Poetics* invites us to do, we arrive at two different conceptions of narrative experience, of the experience that is likely to be offered by any competent narrative performance. By "experience" we now mean, of course, what happens *in* the production and reception of narrative, as distinct from the reflection of a pre-existing cognitive schema that is mediated in the production and reception of narrative. On the one hand, as the *Poetics* has it, narrative performance in the instance of tragedy presents an experience that can be envisaged, by analogy with a living creature, as unified and interconnected. Aristotle accordingly identifies plot (*muthos*, also translatable as "story"), qua perceptible unity, as a play's dominant life-simulating component: a whole living thing, the metaphorical animal whose soul is *muthos*, mimes another whole thing, a temporal-spatial scene of actions that human or human-like beings perform. The construction of *muthos*, a technical product that ideally bears the stamp of the natural, needs to be overseen by vigilant concern for internal connectivity and continuity. The *Poetics* pro-

poses, in a formulation that has profoundly influenced Western theoretical understanding of narrative,

> that tragedy is mimesis of an action that is complete, whole, and
> of magnitude [that is, neither too large nor too minuscule]. [. . .] A
> whole is that which has a beginning, middle, and end. A beginning
> is that which does not of itself follow from something else, but after
> which a further event or process naturally occurs. An end, by contrast,
> is that which itself naturally occurs, whether necessarily or usually,
> after a preceding event, but need not be followed by anything else. A
> middle is that which both follows a preceding event and has further
> consequences. Well-constructed plots, therefore, should neither begin
> nor end at an arbitrary point, but should make use of the patterns
> stated. (chap. 7; 55)

Such is plot's ideal articulation of narrative experience in the interests of imitating whole actions as wholes. But on the other hand, and at the same time, the narrative experience of tragedy as the *Poetics* conceives it also encompasses a certain fracturing of wholeness. Its engineering is cleverly biomimetic, as distinct from biological, and possesses features that are best considered as *techne*'s own distinctive contribution to a tragic play's unfolding design. *Anagnorisis* in particular very conspicuously challenges the apparent security of knowledge gathered through narrative experience and disrupts the unfolding of narrative experience insofar as this is taken to possess self-continuity.

Extrapolating from these Aristotelian insights, in what follows I go on to suggest that this duality and complementarity of narrative experiences—their combination of gestalt wholeness with whole-resisting particularity—is not only pervasive in stories but in fact constitutive of narrativity as such. Indeed, both of these two aspects of narrative experiences may be understood as being "like life" and "about life," though in different senses. Storymaking as pseudo-physis is a means of encountering and conceptually grasping a sequence of actions considered holistically. By virtue of some of the features of its construction it is also a means of encountering sequences of human (anthropomorphic) actions that resist holistic conceptualization, given stories' capacity to produce experiences of disorientation for the observer or participant. Both

are, however, aspects of narrative-mimetic *techne*, mediations of what it is possible to know on narrative's terms. Neither stands in a closer relationship than the other to nature, the real, or whatever else one might wish to call the culturally unmediated. In the remainder of the present account I consider in situ modes of interplay between these two forms of narrative experience, drawing on a number of textual examples.

Varieties of Narrative Experience, Tropes of Narrativity, and the Role of Metanarrative Awareness

Experiences of narratives as things produced or received are established for us through the processes of storymaking, maneuvers that draw us a little apart from the other practical concerns of living. Storymaking inescapably occurs or is encountered as one object in the world among others: stories are projected in packets of speech, written texts, sequences of images, performed actions, and the like. "Storied" objects necessarily possess temporal-spatial boundaries; moreover, internal registration of this boundedness helps to define them generically. Here the obvious contrast is with performances that are classified as lyrical. Lyrics clearly have beginnings, may have a predetermined quantitative organization (as in the instance of the Petrarchan sonnet), and may exhibit high levels of self-referentiality. But they are not pervaded by acknowledgment of a given beginning and inferable end, yielding in its turn the possibility of "middling," which structures presentation and response to the thing presented over a span of time. The refrain of Spenser's *Prothalamion*, "Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song," might be seen as being characteristic of lyric utterance in that it refers to the necessity of the performance's having an ending without explaining how this might come about, and while emphasizing its present deferment. Narrative experience, on the other hand, accrues in the encounter with a given object, across time, where this object is understood to possess fixed boundaries, and where the boundedness implies that the way toward comprehension must lie through some discernment of relationship among the object's component elements. I would suggest that this founding situation yields the template for narrative as contract, implying a set of recognizable procedures for investing form with significance. Life as such,

as Michael Bell (1990) observes, "has no contract" (175). By contrast, the acknowledged boundedness of narrative as performance-object leads to the definition of an *other* domain, a "world," which can be conceived as existing in space and time, whose constituent elements can be expected to possess a significant correlation with one another.

Narrative is naturalized (in Culler's sense of the term) insofar as discursive performance and reception in any given setting is naturalized—that is, produced in some degree of conformity to prevalent cultural beliefs, expectations, and constructions of knowledge. The nature recuperated here may be that given to experience considered as unitary; the performance thus becomes a thing offered up to be understood as a whole, where such imputedly holistic understanding stands as the means by which another whole thing is to be known; call this Experience (i). Or, the nature recuperated may be that of experience considered as fragmentary, unstable, perforated, syncopated, or otherwise resistant to uniform conceptualization; call this Experience (ii). A flow of information that has been organized as narrative simultaneously engages both of these "natural" polarities of experience. Narrative Experience (i) as received is entirely mimetic in character: attending to narrative performance in this aspect evokes the phenomenal experience of inhabiting or observing a spatial-temporal world that is incrementally known. Narrative Experience (ii) on the other hand is both mimetic and, inescapably, metatextual: it evokes the phenomenal experience of inhabiting a spatial-temporal world that is not available to knowledge on wholly consistent terms; *and* it acknowledges the spatiality, boundedness, and fabrication of narrative performance, the fact that it is an object encountered in the world and at the same time an artifact that offers to construct knowledge under the conditions that *it* specifically produces. Experience (ii) holds open the virtual space of narrative, and so makes Experience (i) available to those who are caught up in a particular narrative performance; but the thorough accessing of Experience (i) also involves a deflection of attention from Experience (ii), which confirms Experience (ii) in its character of disruption.

I focus on discursive formations that yield Experience (ii). As David Herman (2002) observes, a good deal of recent research has drawn attention to the deictic shift that occurs in narrative: "storytelling in-

volves a shift of deictic centers, whereby narrators prompt their inter-
locutors to relocate from the HERE and NOW of the act of narration to
other space-time coordinates—namely, those defining the perspective
from which the events of the story are recounted" (271). From infancy
we learn how to make transitions from living as such to a kind of vi-
carious or virtual living, as we do whenever we gain access to the world
of a narrative and temporarily withdraw some interest from the world
of the here and now, entering a different terrain and allowing the fig-
ures of the story, the narrative agents, to take over for the time being the
business of thinking, feeling, and doing, as it were on our behalf. The
transferring of attention to another world is, as Herman notes, obvious
in the case of fictional narratives, whose "worlds" may possess highly
individual and non-familiar-world-like characteristics; but any narra-
tive irrespective of genre bids to shift its audience's framing of knowl-
edge away from the given spatial-temporal parameters of performance-
audience interaction: "even such minimal narratives [. . .] as *John ate;
then he slept* require a deictic shift to the world in which the eating and
sleeping occur" (271–72).

Deploying a metaphor that captures some of the paradoxicality of
the relationship between Experience (i) and Experience (ii), David Zu-
bin and Lynne Hewitt (1995), discussing the phenomenon of the deictic
shift, characterize narrative as "open[ing] a conceptual window through
which the story world can be glimpsed" (131). If a storyworld is only
glimpsed through or by means of a narrative, qua "open[ed] concep-
tual window," does that imply that coming to terms with a narrative's
framing forms somehow part of our ability to see through it, gazing in
the direction of its world? The paragraph that precedes the present one
has spoken of narrative worlds and the capacity of narratives to afford
us access to them, very much Experience (i) phenomena. "Gain access
to" and "world" here are, however, loaded ways of speaking, and per-
haps misleading ones. Story seems to promise access to an "inside" of
itself, an "other" space into which we can proceed, leaving our ordinary
surroundings behind. At issue here is what might be termed the Narnia
effect: the *promise* of narrative commonly looks like that of a C. S. Lew-
is wardrobe, functioning as a conduit between the world in which the
narrative communication takes place and another one that the narrative

itself defines. Drama offers visual markers of the difference, establishing a demarcation between costumed performers and mere spectators, or between the performing space and the spectators' assigned space. As becomes clear, however, when we examine the actual procedures of storymaking, this other space is never fully or finally accessed. Rather, and as the example of drama suggests, the presenting to thought of such an other space goes on being performed as part of the disclosure of narrative. Recitals of events do not feel like stories unless they take us, recurrently or continuously, to incidences of Experience (ii), which take the form of a questioning or readjustment of our seeing, and purport to offer renewed or better access to that spectacle of another reality that is story's lure. Narratives are organized, I am trying to suggest, around tropes that reinstate the promise of narrative itself. A trope in the root sense is a turn or turning (Greek *tropos*). I conclude by identifying, with a few examples, the sort of thing that a trope of narrativity is. I cannot give an exhaustive account of this field of inquiry, of course; instead, my aim is to demonstrate that such a field exists and is worth exploring.[11]

The problematization of Experience (i) in its putative wholeness seems to take two broad generic forms. The first (X), metaleptic in character, involves infraction of the communication world / storyworld boundary. The second (Y) disturbs holistic conceptions of self and world that are characteristic of narrative Experience (i), exploiting forms of cognitive dissonance. Each has a further subdivision.

As Marie-Laure Ryan (2006) points out, "every language-based fictional narrative involves at least two levels: a real-world level, on which an author communicates with a reader, and a primary fictional level, on which a narrator communicates with a narratee within an imaginary world" (204). Ryan terms this fundamental differentiation of levels "ontological" (205): in principle, the disjoined worlds exist for us as entirely different entities. The metaleptic narrative tropes, however, violate this disjunction by recalling the author's and reader's simultaneous habitation / virtual habitation of both worlds.

(X.1) Metaleptic tropes of the first general sort, which may be termed tropes of transition, produce boundaries that evoke and resemble the communication world / storyworld boundary *within* the diegetic spacetime of a narrative. Among these it is possible to distinguish three pre-

dominant varieties. (X.1.a) The first kind of trope of transition involves the marking out of a threshold, in crossing which the narrative agent moves from one kind of space of possibility into another. In highly explicit cases, like that of the Narnia wardrobe, this transition takes the form of a portal leading from one posited narrative reality to another. But in less explicit cases features of more or less realistically conceived landscapes or geographies can function as narrative thresholds; one thinks, for example, of the characteristically frequent shifts of terrain in picaresque narrative. A narrative threshold can, of course, be defined morally or spiritually or psychologically, without reference to properties of a story's virtual topography—though again, transitions of the kind *are* quite often signaled by reference to topography.

(X.1.b) The second genre of tropings that involve transitions is concerned with gifts and exchanges. We are speaking of the new, chance acquisition that empowers; or the *that* which is given up for *this*, maybe better or at least different. I take it that the underlying model for giving/receiving/exchanging *within* the world of the narrative is a version of the same happening in the narrative encounter itself—a giving/receiving and an exchanging of one construction of reality for another. Gifts and exchanges are familiar enough in romance and fairy tale. But under this heading it is also worth considering realist narratives like Merimée's novella *Carmen*. This text, whether seen from the standpoint of its lightly involved frame narrator or else from that of its main narrator and central figure, turns on a series of highly semioticized exchanges or transactions (whose materials are cigars, food, opportunities to escape the law, a flower, sex, a story . . .).

(X.1.c) A third troping of transition produces the effect of anamorphosis and necessitates a reorganization of perception: what has looked ordinary or natural from one standpoint abruptly ceases to look like that from the other one that now becomes available; or, conversely, what *has* looked weird or distorted can in a decisive act of re-perception become beautiful or perfect or irresistibly compelling. Again, Merimée's tale offers a revealing example in the representation of Carmen as the suddenly discovered object of irresistible desire; prior to this discovery the narrator of the experience has seen her as being alien, repugnant, even ugly. Traversals of thresholds, transformative gifts and exchanges,

anamorphic shifts of vision—all these tropes of transition occur commonly in narratives, including ones that we consider to be strongly *vraisemblable*.

(X.2) The second broad category of metaleptic tropes involves forms of cognitive mapping, which provide means for understanding the shape of the narrative that is being received, whether in its present unfolding or its entirety, and so of navigating one's way through the story. The vantage point that these tropes supply is one associated with the act of narration, as distinct from a virtual witnessing of story events in their immediacy. Lucien Dällenbach's study of *mise en abyme* (1989) stresses the capacity of such internal narrative self-reflection to produce effects of simplification and paradox. It can be disruptive in that it tells us things that—within the framework of what I am terming narrative Experience (i)—*we should not be in a position to know*, since it provides a real-world view of the complete story as object. But it can also clarify narrative design and simplify the reader's navigational task. For present purposes I wish to underline *mise en abyme*'s familiar production of discontinuity in narrative's cognitive processing, its communication with the what will have happened as well as with the now. The joke that begins "There was an elephant, a sheep, and an alien" is already holding up a small image of itself in finished form by so decisively identifying its narrative agents. Narrative *mise en abyme* often produces complexity *via* initial simplification. We assess Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* differently and find ourselves asking new questions as a result of reading the inset tale of Cupid and Psyche. Internal narrative resemblance can cascade in the production of differing qualitative assessments of what a narrative world presents, one of the effects of the mirroring of actions and persons that is pervasive in *Hamlet*. Here the operation of *mise en abyme* tends to produce a destabilizing of world, which is noted in another form below, as I shift to the second broad way in which narrativity can be figured through textual tropes.

(Y) Tropes of cognitive dissonance interfere with holistic conceptions of the accessed world that are the substance of narrative Experience (i). This second broad category of tropes can be divided into two families. In the first, the means offered for the decoding of narrative information as world is, from the standpoint of the reader working to re-

construct that world, manifestly skewed, limited, and partial. In the second, the proffered means of decoding are manifestly inconsistent.

(Y.1) I assume, with Culler and others, that readers' default tendency is to decode a narrative statement by applying the principle of *vraisemblance*: the software that we bring, as a result of nature and nurture, to the conceptualization of lived experience is also the starter software that we bring to the understanding of story data. But given that we learn to make sense of stories partly by gaining acquaintance with the storied, as distinct from the merely lived, storymaking can enhance the story-likeness of its own contents, with the result that these contents are seen as it were in different colors than those of ordinary experience: the cognition that is appropriate to them operates in friction against the cognition that retains its appropriateness to ordinary experience. A simple instance is offered by narratives that explore more or less fantastic worlds that are stably conceived—for example, the Italian sword-and-sandal films of the late 1950s that intercalate natural and supernatural forms of causation in completely explicated fashion. More complex instances are provided by narratives that offer the spectacle of the *hyperknowable*. Sometimes a narrative text and its genre support removal of knowledge's temporal delay, the delay usually needed in life if we are to gain necessary understanding of a person or situation with whom or which we happen to be involved. Thus the heterocosm set up by classical Greek pastoral writing smacks of an already established familiarity: what obtains is what our most immediate and unmodified desires or wishes, culturally instated as "natural," reveal as being the case—for example, the pleasures and pains of love, and the solaces of friendship and art. Pastoral fictions are often given no backstory, and generically require none.

More generally, narrative invention is frequently found to be organized in this way around generically hyperfamiliar narrative agents or situations. No one has ever met a pastoral shepherd, but we know them well as narrative creatures. Much the same can be said of talking animals or friendly robots, knowledge of which is even more clearly projective—simply put, the scenarios in which they participate offer experiences of felt certainty that life as such doesn't offer, and dispense aerosol puffs of optimism concerning the knowability of the world. Or,

more disconcertingly, the heterocosms set up by the short narratives of Borges are informationally self-sufficient in a way that lived experience cannot usually be. Though often joined on to culturally familiar schemes of history and geography, they are also closed off from the larger world in that they provide *in its entirety* the highly specific, often esoteric, information—genuine or cleverly forged—that is needed to understand their workings.

(Y.2) Other forms of narrative troping destabilize or positively disrupt certainties concerning the world that narratives typically provide. *Anagnorisis* in Aristotle's description of it has been seen to work in this fashion. Or we meet narratives projecting layered or gnostically conceived worlds, where the norms of the storyworld's formation—extending potentially to its theology and physics—are subject to slippage, and where constructions of a narrative real are threatened by abysses of counterpossibility. Examples are the fictions of Philip K. Dick and Philip Pullman, the *Matrix* films, or, as offered to young children in the 1990s, *The Teletubbies*, where the central partly humanoid figures have TV screens in their stomachs looking on to scenes of ordinary life, a strange thing in this dislocated setting. Hoffman, Poe, and others have also provided us with chaotic narrative heterocosms where identities slide between narrative agents in a way that simultaneously engages and disables the will to know.

Likewise, story creatures such as talking animals and pastoral shepherds have their strongly disruptive, uncanny counterparts in a-human narrative agents that are human-resemblant, inserted into narrative worlds that otherwise possess a fair measure of *vraisemblance*. Familiar examples are zombies, golems, werewolves, androids that pass the Turing test, human-replicant pods, fish-men, and vampires. These creatures are knowable, in the sense that stories and story traditions tell us what they are and do, but their presence in narrative has the effect of throwing into turmoil normative conceptions of nature and humanity. The novelist Jeanette Winterson has spoken in a radio interview of her interest in introducing "rogue elements" into her fictions, a helpfully suggestive phrase in the present context. I take it to mean an agent, object, situation, or narrative practice that is conventionally inappropriate to or otherwise out of place in its circumambient narrative world

and given regime of narration; or, more radically, a narrative entity so anomalous in itself (see the figure-ground morphing images of M. C. Escher) as to resist uniform conceptualization. An example of this last is the unspeakable Father in Kafka's story "The Judgement," feeble and childlike, terrifying and commanding. The son who is the story's focalized figure here gives up, as it were, on trying to bring these intolerable contradictions to a conceptual resolution, but dies instead. Or we might place in the same category some of the narrative agents in Kleist's stories for whom or in whom discrepant, irreconcilable constructions of identity are found to coincide.

In this concluding section, I have attempted to characterize narrativity by providing a summary account of narrative troping whose general form is the infraction/reinforcement of narrative Experience (i) by narrative Experience (ii). Here a central claim is that metanarrative awareness, or registration of a story's characteristics as artifact, pervades storymaking as such and not just explicitly self-referential storymaking, and that it is made manifest in several discursive forms. But the satisfactions of taxonomy can be short-lived, and what has been said about tropes of narrativity has to be considered suspect if it does not correspond to fundamental intuitions about story. The correspondence can be tested, I would suggest, by further study of the perceived differences between story and neighboring forms of discourse, especially lyric discourse, description, chronicle as recital of events, and commentary on live occurrence. It is also worth reconsidering those forms of storytelling and storied play, often complex or prima facie strange, by which human infants are practically initiated into the reception and production of narrative.

Notes

1. See for example the overview of recent developments provided by Shen (2005).
2. Compare Fludernik's (1996) statement that "any mythic or originary concepts of naturalness will here be repudiated" (15).
3. As an assessment of normative Western attitudes to the dichotomy that brings out some of their internal tensions, consider placing the following in order of ascending naturalness: a memory, a boat, an aeroplane, organic farming, a sporting event, a trained ape, democracy.
4. In this connection it is also helpful to consider Alasdair MacIntyre's account

of moral action, understood from the agent's standpoint, as enacted narrative and Charles Taylor's contention that experiencing life as an unfolding story is a requisite for establishing a sense of identity. Bell (1990) comments, however, on a problem that inheres in MacIntyre's use of the idea of narrative, which is representative in this respect of all "pan-narrativist" thinking. As Bell notes, there is justification in discussing moral life by reference to narrative models; but "the need for this metaphor to be so deep and subliminal as not to appear metaphorical at all leaves it with a slippery and potentially misleading value when extrapolated from its context. The essential problem here is that narrative has to be a different kind of thing from lived temporality, or there is no point in drawing any analogy between them. The meaningfulness of the comparison depends on an implicit recognition of this difference even while it is being overlooked" (174). In a well-known essay Galen Strawson (2004) argues, furthermore, that possessing the view of one's life as a narrative is not necessarily a psychological given and should probably not be set up as an ethical *desideratum*. It is also worth considering the psychological phenomenon of confabulation, which is the subject's spontaneous production of unknowingly false accounts of his or her own behavior, apparently in order to preserve appearances of autonomy and continuity in conscious functioning; see Hirstein (2005).

5. See Davis (1999), which examines elaborated narrative critiques of low-level narrative certainties—in particular, the ones that have a formative and confirmatory relationship to the dominant culture through their bearing on conceptions of reason and gender difference.

6. Compare Fludernik's (1996) emphatic statement that "mimesis must NOT be identified as imitation but needs to be treated as the artificial and illusionary projection of a semiotic structure which the reader recuperates in terms of a fictional reality" (35).

7. Aristotle postulates that mimesis is doubly natural: young human beings, unlike other animals, instinctively engage in it, and "everyone enjoys mimetic objects" (chap. 4; 37).

8. There are further similarities, as Francis Wolff points out (2007: 55–56). But for present purposes it is sufficient to stress the end-directedness that, in Aristotle's conception, natural and technical processes entirely share.

9. Aristotle was not, of course, a biological evolutionist in the modern sense. The burden of the statement is that Aeschylus and Sophocles gave the artificial species tragedy its definitive shape, bringing it to generic perfection.

10. This is a preoccupation of Aristotle's biological texts, especially *De Partibus Animalium*.

11. For a further attempt to model the space of narrativity as it is conceived here, see Davis (2012).

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