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‘Awake! Open your eyes!’ The Cognitive Logic of External and Internal Stories

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1 Introduction

Narratology’s standard objects of analysis are stories which exist in some physically tangible form—‘external’ stories such as one encounters in novels, anecdotes, movies, and plays. This chapter argues that postclassical narratology must wake up to the existence of ‘internal stories’, too—the stories which are stored in memory and performed in the mental theater of recollection, imagination, and dream.1 While theorists from various disciplines—philosophy, anthropology, and cognitive science—have emphasized the psychological and cultural importance of internal stories, their narratological relevance has generally escaped notice. Accepting internal stories as crucial counterparts of external stories, the chapter presents a model of the ‘cycle of narrative’ which connects external and internal stories. Three test cases are used to point up the model’s implications—conversational storytelling in Billy Wilder’s The Apartment, Coleridge’s account of the genesis of ‘Kubla Khan’, and operatic storytelling in Richard Wagner’s Ring.

1 On the notion of postclassical ‘narratologies’, see Herman (1999) and Fludernik (2000).

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2 The Object(s) of Narratology

When narratologists talk of the beginnings of their discipline, they typically hark back to the year 1966 and issue number 8 of the French periodical Communications. Although the term narratology has yet to be coined (by Todorov, in 1969), the title of the special issue cunningly anticipates what narratology is going to be all about—*L'analyse structurale du récit*, the structural analysis of narrative. As a matter of fact, mustering authors like Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Tzvetan Todorov, Algirdas-Julien Greimas, Umberto Eco, and Christian Metz, the list of contributors reads like a Who's Who of contemporary structuralists. Introducing the subject in the lead essay ("Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits"), Barthes begins by presenting his famous list of story forms (I am bolding the terms which denote possible medial realizations):

There are countless forms of narrative in the world. First of all, there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man’s stories. Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances: narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epic history, tragedy, *drame* [suspense drama], comedy, pantomime, paintings (in Santa Ursula by Carpaccio, for instance), stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation. Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds: narrative remains largely unconcerned with good or bad literature. Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural. (Barthes 1975 [1966]: 237)

Stressing the ubiquity of stories and storytelling, Barthes details a long list of genres as instances of narrative: ‘media’, ‘substances’, ‘vehicles’, and ‘forms’. As narratology grows into a full-fledged discipline in the nineteen-seventies, this broad conception of narrative forms quickly becomes a disputed issue, and to this day, the narratological community is largely divided on what constitutes the objects and the scope of the discipline. Commentators usually either claim that the list buries crucial differences or that it inundates the structuralist project in a sea of heterogeneous data. Embracing the latter view, Barthes presents a case for a ‘deductive’ approach which begins by hypostatizing a general ‘model of description’ and proceeds ‘from that model down, towards the species, which at the same time partake in and deviate from the model’ (1975 [1966]: 239). In Genette’s version of the deductive model, however, the objects of narratology are already restricted to verbally narrated texts so that novel and drama not only appear as different species but as incompatible categories. It is on this ground that he considers drama an ‘extranarrative’ medium—‘extranarrative if one defines narrative *stricto sensu*, as I do, as a verbal transmission’ (Genette 1988 [1983]: 16).

On reflection, however, there are notable pitfalls to restricting the field of analysis and pursuing a straight top-down approach. Restrictions can be arbitrary, and a general model of description may fail to generalize appropriately. Nothing goes if everything must always remain *stricto sensu*. A narrative enacted in a performance is anything but a contradiction in terms. Indeed, from a postclassical narratological vantage, Barthes’s argument for a set of initial terms and principles appears less important today than his equally sustained emphasis on the ‘plurality of narrative acts’ and ‘their historical, geographical, and cultural diversity’ (1975 [1966]: 239). Heeding Barthes’s twofold orientation, Seymour Chatman has passionately argued for the commonality of all narrative forms, a commonality which, according to Chatman, manifests itself in cross-generic modes of telling and showing, a large inventory of common plots and techniques, and the ‘double chronology’ (Chatman 1990: 9) of action and performance/reception. Proposing a taxonomy of ‘text types’ (1990: 115), Chatman manages to impose a top-down order on Barthes’s list and to treat novel, drama, and film as related narrative forms (Jahn 2001). Although quite rigid in a superficial sense, Chatman’s taxonomy is in fact open to Barthes’s notion of the ‘infinite variety’ of narrative forms and easily accommodates deviant and marginal types. Needless to say, it is just these latter cases that are the preferred objects of analysis in much of today’s critical discourse. Against this background, the perceived danger of broad definitions—of not seeing the wood for the trees—recedes behind the evil of the exclusionary generalizations that so often float in the wake of *stricto sensu* definitions.

2 Quite a few narratologists have followed this line of reasoning, though some are less certain, and others shift position from time to time. Gerald Prince, for instance, adopts Barthes’s broad definition in *Narratology* (1982), whereas in his *Dictionary of Narratology* he argues, along with Genette, that a play is ‘not a narrative because it is performed by actors on stage’ (1987: 58).
3 External vs. Internal Stories

Adopting Barthes's and Chatman's broadly conceived narrative objects, I find myself wondering whether the screw could not be given another turn, or rather, be loosened further. Saying this, I do not mean to complain that this or that genre or text-type is missing either in Barthes's list or in Chatman's tree—programme symphony, say, or soap opera, or hypertext fiction, or some other new-fangled form. Chatman's taxonomy includes a number of empty 'Other' slots so that extras and newcomers are easily accommodated. But what about internal stories? These are such significant Others that there is no provision for them in Chatman's taxonomy, open and flexible as it is. If dreams, memories, or fantasies find any acknowledgment in narrate logical accounts at all (which is a rare enough occurrence) they are usually treated as 'embedded narratives' (Ryan 1991: 156), i.e. located within and framed by an external narrative. As a matter of fact, it is Barthes who makes a move towards internal stories when, toward the end of the passage quoted earlier, he associates narrative with 'life itself', that is, something which transcends substance, media, and form.

If one looks beyond the confines of narratology, even broadly defined, independent consideration of internal, 'mental', or 'untold' stories is not as extravagant as may appear at first glance. There are a number of observers who view stories and storytelling as psychological and cognitive forces rather than as forms of communication or entertainment. Thus Eric Berne, a psychoanalyst, argues that a person's life plans are 'scripted' on fairy-tales. Daniel C. Dennett, a philosopher, claims that 'everyone is a novelist' (1988: 1016) writing his or her life story. Paul Ricoeur, a literary theorist, argues that life and identity are 'in quest of narrative' (1991: 20). Roger C. Schank (1995), an Artificial Intelligence pioneer (and co-inventor of the 'script' concept), suggests that human memory is a database of stories. Finally, Mark Turner, a cognitive critic, holds that 'most of our experience, our knowledge, and our thinking is organized as stories' (1996: i). Many more testimonials of this kind could be added. Although one of the observers, Paul Ricoeur, strictly denies that any analytical move toward 'narrative understanding stemming from the creative imagination' (1991: 24) could fall within the province of narratological inquiry, the testimonials quoted above raise two questions directly related to basic narratological issues. One of these questions is whether 'the study of narratives can help us understand the workings of the mind' (Chafe 1990: 96); the other is how internal stories impact on narratological theory.

Let us tentatively assume, at this point, that the general concept of story subdivides into external and internal stories, and that this is a primary distinction before any additional distinctions come into play. This decision allows us to think in terms of 'contrastive features' and perhaps a table of oppositions such as presented in Table 1. To include a level of exemplification, I have, somewhat arbitrarily, associated external stories with a fairy-tale, and internal stories with a dream.

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<tr>
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<th>external story</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(e.g., a fairy-tale)</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>6</td>
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Table 1. External and Internal Stories in a Table of Oppositions

Generally speaking, contrastive tables are highly efficient because they offer two definitions for the price of one. To make them work, one needs crisp and polar features, preferably features that can be rewritten as plus/minus pairs (for instance, one could use +public and -public rather than public vs. private). Unfortunately, however, most of the terms used in Table 1 are fuzzy rather than crisp, and this may be a reflection of the fact that the objects involved are too heterogeneous to allow a well-defined set of distinctive features. For instance, recordable vs. reportable in line 3 is an awkward opposition, and reportable in particular is not distinctive to internal stories. Nor are all external stories necessarily public, as is asserted in line 4, considering the evidence of the diary form. Hence public is only a typicality feature, at best, as is addressee orientation (line 5). The degree of permanence claimed for external stories (line 6) is not absolute either, considering that stories can be erased from public record—in which case their continued existence may paradoxically depend on somebody's 'internal record' of them.

In the final analysis, all the seemingly clean divisions suggested by the table are deceptive and the two types of stories are just as difficult to categorize as mundane objects like marrows and pumpkins (fruit or vegetable?). As happens so often, the range of properties of an object is
neither immediately manifest nor can it be absolutely delimited by a set of clear-cut conditions. External and internal stories, in particular, are highly indeterminate when viewed in isolation and prone to shift status erratically as soon as contextual factors come into play. Suppose you had a dream and you recount what you remember of it. The person who hears your report gets an external story of an internal story. Again, suppose your mother tells you the (external) story of Little Red Riding Hood. Subsequently, you may internalize it, script your life on it, and rely on it as one of your personalized internal stories (a similar scenario will be discussed in more detail, below). The contrastive features of Table 1 cannot tell us anything about such associations, transitions, and adaptations, not to mention the chicken-and-egg question of which comes first—the internal story which turns into an external one, or the external story which people adopt as an internal one.

At this point narratologists are likely to throw up their hands in frustration. If Barthes's inventory of story types was too heterogeneous already, gratuitous addition of internal stories appears to compromise systematic investigation beyond hope. No wonder that there is so little communication between narratologists, focusing on external narratives, and psychologists, anthropologists, and cognitivists, focusing on internal narratives.

4 A Cyclical Model

Nevertheless, giving up at this point amounts to a classic case of throwing out the baby with the bath water. As a matter of fact, the table's weaknesses are a strong clue as to where to look for a way out of the structuralist prison-house. We are not, after all, entirely unfamiliar with chicken-and-egg scenarios. The expression 'internalization', which insinuated itself into the discussion above, strongly suggests that what one needs is a model of transitional states rather than one of contrastive categories. Indeed, the theoretical precedent that immediately springs to mind is Bremond's model of the French folktale, whose plot line cycles through two main states—a 'satisfactory state' and a 'state of deficiency'. Each state change is the product of a 'procedure' in Bremond's model—logically enough, it is a procedure of 'improvement' which leads to the satisfactory state, and a procedure of 'degradation' which leads to the state of deficiency (Bremond 1970: 251). For convenience, the following graphic shows a version of Bremond's model as part (a), while part (b) presents the obvious extrapolation.

Figure 1. Appropriating Bremond's Model of the French Folktale (a) for a Cycle of Narrative (b)

As one can see, adaptation of Bremond's model simply consists of making some substitutions and introducing a procedure of externalization as the logical counterpart of the procedure of internalization. Let us see what happens when we add some detail. Consider Figure 2.

Figure 2. Flow-Charting the Cycle of Stories

The flowchart features of the refined design emphasize that we have shifted gears, so to speak, and begun to conceptualize external and internal stories as data structures connected by flows of information. (One of the practical advantages of a computational model is that it allows us to employ 'structured' strategies such as top-down design, modularity, and virtual testing.) Note that, in order to use the computational concepts, internal stories are here treated as if they were 'realized' (and thus transmittable) as 'mental representations'.

Interestingly, Ryan's treatment of 'embedded' internal stories rests on a similar assumption (1991: 274n2). Needless to say, the notion of mental representations is open to serious...
On the whole, the revised model pursues a more dedicated orientation towards how a human mind—treated as a ‘computational mind’ as suggested by Jackendoff (1987)—handles stories, particularly how it gets them, how it adapts and adopts them, and how it makes them. As is common in flowcharts, the model presents its procedures as ‘black boxes’ of which, at the present level of refinement, we know no more than their input and output. The major addition introduced at this point is the box labeled Perception. This actually means that the narrative cycle is no longer considered to be a hermetically closed one. Rather, the perception device provides an interface for three channels of information (marked a, b, and c). If input routes through channel a, the mind emplots a story from an ongoing stream of real-life events (typical cases: on-the-spot reporting and teichoscopy [‘viewing from a wall’] in classical drama). If perceptual input comes via route b, the mind is in the recipient mode of reading or watching a story cast in one of the forms and media listed by Barthes. Finally, channel c represents an internal feedback route which supplies story data for imaginary perception and offline thinking.

As I have argued on a prior occasion, imaginary perception is a crucial concept in cognitive narratology (Jahn 1996). According to the flowchart logic of the present model, imaginary perception is closely bound up with the procedure of Externalization and associates with three major types of events: (i) drafting a story for possible actual production, (ii) remembering, daydreaming, and similar mental activities, (iii) dreaming. In the first two cases, imaginary perception is a functional part of wakefulness, while during the act of dreaming the perception device mistakes channel-c (internal) input for channel-a (external) input. Actual composition of a story is understood to cycle through channels c (imagining, remembering) and b (external reception, reading) in close or near-simultaneous succession—a scenario which provides an interesting theoretical ground to Henry James’s statement that ‘the teller of a story is primarily, none the less, the listener to it, the reader of it, too’ (1984 [1908]: 1089).

The next level of refinement of the model will have to address further specifics of the Procedures of Internalization and Externalization, and on an informal level Figure 2 already anticipates some likely subprocedures. Thus Internalization is likely to factor out into ‘bounding’ (i.e., setting the beginning and closure boundaries of a story), ‘distilling’ (selection of relevant detail), ‘emplotting’ (selection of a plot schema), and ‘indexing’ (more on this below). Similarly, the Externalization box will presumably submodularize into an ‘adaptation’ procedure (for creating a specific media type), an ‘addresssee orientation’ procedure (tailoring the story to the needs of actual or hypothetical recipients, including oneself), and a ‘translation’ procedure (mapping visual matter into linguistic representations, and vice versa).

I will break off discussion of technicalities here, and will also deliberately evade the question whether a model synthesizing human story processing can ever be made to ‘work’, and if so, for what purpose. Rather, at this point, I would like to assess the explanatory gains established already. To begin with, the model’s attention to dynamic processes and transitions resolves most of the problems besetting the contrastive features of Table 1. Second, the cycle of Internalization and Externalization creates a causal chain linking reception and production and suggesting that both processes are perhaps mutually dependent (a point to be further explored below). While this explicit linkage closes the door to a ‘mentalism’ model in which ‘the thinker’ appears to be the solitary manipulator of self-contained mental representations, it opens the door to a system which accepts cognizers as participants in an essentially social process. Third, on a level of disciplines, the model generates a number of postulates and hypotheses which directly feed into investigative frameworks such as ‘narrative psychology’ (Sarbin 1986) and ‘psychonarratology’ (Bortolussi and Dixon 2003). (As far as I can see, it transcends these approaches by presenting a more holistic picture of the relatedness of reception and production.) And, fourth, the model situates real and imaginary perception in a framework of story-based memory processes.

Since memory processes are inherent in the model’s design, a brief excursion into the role of stories in cognitive theories of memory may be in order. In the cognitive literature, ‘semantic’ memory is often opposed to ‘episodic’ memory (Schacter 1996), or ‘MOP memory’ and ‘story memory’ in Schank’s terms (1995: 118). MOPs (memory organization packages) store information by disconnecting it from its original context and by filtering out irrelevant and distractive elements. Cognitive taxonomies, for instance, are potentially useful substructures of MOPs. For instance, one usually has an answer to the question of whether a flounder has gills even if one has never encountered the question before. The likely reason for this is that one has access to a highly organized knowledge database which first tells one that a flounder is a fish and then supplies the information that fish have gills. Hence, most people will claim that they ‘know’ that a flounder has gills even though they really deduce this on the fly (Schank 1995: 118). By contrast, story memory stores and recalls a sequence of events retaining
the connectivity of episodes. Moreover, often stories are memorized (internalized) so as to maximize future tellability. According to Schank, the ability to recall and produce a perspicacious external story is a major indicator of human intelligence. Another ingredient, as we shall see in more detail below, is the teller's ability to adapt the story to the pragmatic requirements of the narrative situation, that is, to activate a suitable process of externalization.

5 Three Test Cases

While it is one thing for a model to have a certain face validity, the true test of it lies in the question of whether it adds to our understanding of actual cases. In the remainder of this essay, I will discuss three test cases which crucially revolve around memory retrieval, adaptive storytelling, feedback loops, and forgetting. Illustrating the applicability of the model, I will focus on a hypnornarrative (or embedded story) from a film, an author's anecdotal account of the genesis of a poem, and the climax scene of a romantic opera. The recalcitrant data contained in some of these cases will put the model under considerable strain. Ideally, this will show us how far it (and we) can go.

5.1 Conversational Storytelling in The Apartment

In Tell Me a Story, Schank presents a fine example of intelligent storytelling. Schank is mainly interested in how an external story told by speaker A reminds hearer B of an internal story of his own, and how speaker B's subsequent narrative response pursues certain pragmatic goals. In the scene from Wilder's film, 'Bud' Baxter (Jack Lemmon) has barely managed to save Fran Kubelik (Shirley Maclaine) from committing suicide. Earlier, she had told him the story of her 'talent for falling in love with the wrong guy in the wrong place at the wrong time' [Wilder and Diamond 1998: 118]). This reminds Bud of a story in which he is the protagonist (the following passage has been directly quoted from Schank):4

4I quote from Schank rather than from the original because he conveniently filters out both the playscript format and all conversational interruptions and turntakings that encumber the original text. (This, too, is an example of appropriating an external story for one's own goals.)

...and drove up to Eden Park - do you know Cincinnati? Anyway, I parked the car and loaded the gun - well, you read in the papers all the time that people shoot themselves, but believe me, it's not that easy - I mean, how do you do it? Here or here or here [with cocked finger, he points to his temple, mouth, and chest]. You know where I finally shot myself? [Indicates knee.] Here. While I was sitting there, trying to make my mind up, a cop stuck his head in the car, because I was...
5.2 Coleridge on 'Kubla Khan'

Although 'Kubla Khan' was written in 1798, Coleridge did not initially feel that it merited publication. When he finally did allow publication, in 1816, he added a one-page prefatory note written in the third person. 'The poem is here published', he states, 'at the request of a poet of great and deserved celebrity' (this is usually taken to be a reference to Byron). Otherwise Coleridge strongly deprecates the poem, calling it 'a fragment' and adding that 'as far as the Author's own opinions are concerned', the poem is published 'rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed poetic merit'. I will come back to these judgments, but my main interest lies in the author's subsequent story of the genesis of the text:

In the summer of the year 1797, the Author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance in 'Purchas's Pilgrimage': 'Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall'. The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that [...], all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter! (Coleridge 1966: 295-296; all bolded emphasizes mine)

Today it is generally acknowledged that this account suffers from an abundance of factual mistakes, to say nothing of the blatant aesthetic misjudgment that provides the frame in which it is presented. Many critics are also fascinated by what Coleridge censors out in this particular account, namely that the medication he took for his 'slight indisposition' consisted of three grains of opium. Less attention is usually given to the cognitive oddity or even absurdity of the case, even though this is what makes the story anecdotally tellable in the first place. What is quite pertinent, in the present context, is the poet's description of the 'effortless' translation of vision into words, a process that supposedly begins even before he sets pen to paper. None of this sounds very credible at face value, but on the strength of the model presented here, and on the strength of assumptions common in cognitive studies today, the account is in fact far more plausible than critics are generally inclined to accept.

As a matter of fact, Coleridge's story presents a striking example of what Jackendoff (1997: 192) calls the 'dumb, and obsessive conversion of mental representations', in this case, the conversion of vision into concept, and of concept into vision, speech, and action. Inaccurate as Coleridge's story may be on historical facts, it is also a vivid confirmation of the cognitive commonplace that one has to rehearse what one wants to remember, especially in cases of fleeting data such as dreams. Once awaké, Coleridge proceeds to create and produce the external narrative he has all the while been composing, claiming that he only needed to write down what had already been finished. Then the fateful interruption by the messenger from Porlock apparently causes the rest of the dream vision, including its internal pre-composition, to pass away into oblivion. Again, while it is difficult to accept this on a level of historical accuracy, the story illustrates what our model presents as an entirely natural psychological process.

As Coleridge points out, the dream vision at the heart of the poem revives and continues the imaginary perception triggered by reading Purchas His Travels, an external story. Coleridge even quotes the pre-text's sentence that in the poem's subsequent intertextual adaptation translates into the initial lines of the poem. The author's paratext itself is not an original account either but an account of something recollected in tranquillity and rephrased to fit a particular narrative situation. In this light, the text's explicit addressee orientation and its transposition into the third person (a 'transvocalization' in narratological terms) are significant stylistic moves. Creating this as an instance of 'faulty' memory, drug-induced hallucination, and after-the-fact authorial spin-doctoring is only half of the...
truth. If one disregards the supernatural paraphernalia what remains is a sensible account of the processes of modification, adaptation, and incremental interpretation which our model suggests is the perfectly ordinary course of events. Moreover, nothing is ultimately settled; the cycle is only temporarily interrupted when Coleridge reaches his 'final' verdict. Even as he utters his disparaging disclaimer, the rhetoric of the gesture is obvious. Admitting the celebrity testimonial, the author, too, has embarked on a process of re-evaluation. 'Memory', as Schank puts it most succinctly (1995: 138), 'tends to lose the original and keep the copy. The original events recede, and the new story takes its place'.

5.3 Siegfried's Story

All of Richard Wagner's operas run on elaborate plots, and the Ring tetralogy, which weaves and binds the fates of generations, races, and worlds, has the most tightly knitted plot of all. Anything worth mentioning is directly or indirectly related to everything else. Tightly knitted plots encourage storytelling, and story-telling takes up much of the opera's time and action. Often, the second-degree stories told by the characters merely serve the standard function of exposition and reminder, sometimes they trigger major courses of action, and occasionally they stand as central moments of action itself. Act III, Scene 2, of Götterdämmerung is one the latter cases, but it begins harmlessly enough with a story told for the manifest purpose of entertaining and distracting King Gunther, who is under a cloud. Naturally, there is a twist: in a moment, the story will get out of hand, and its teller will be killed for telling it. These are clearly storytelling circumstances of a special nature, and in this case they are compounded by the fact, of particular interest to narratologists, that the teller will never return to the narrative level from which he sets out.

Though not a born storyteller, Siegfried's heroic status assures access to a rich store of tellable stories of personal experience, and it needs only a little priming to set him off. People say you understand the language of birds, Hagen, his unsuspected antagonist, prompts him, and, like many storytellers, Siegfried begins not in medias res but by going back a bit, knowing well enough that while one thing leads to another it is caused by something that happened earlier. He therefore begins by relating how he made himself a sword; how he used the sword to kill a dragon; how he found and appropriated the dragon's hoard; how, bathing in the dragon's blood he became invulnerable to external weapons. Then, tasting the dragon's blood, he began to understand the language of birds, and understanding their language helped him dispose of the foes who were after his life. Yet there is a complication to Siegfried's storytelling, a complication of which the audience knows all and the character knows nothing. Despite the fact that everything is tied up with everything else, Siegfried's recall is not total because he has earlier been tricked into consuming a magic drink which made him forget one particular episode—how he first met and fell in love with a woman, Brünnhilde. Siegfried is now offered the counterpotion—to refresh your memory, as Hagen duplicitously puts it. The potion takes effect while the music pauses dramatically. Then Siegfried finds himself narrating a sequel which he, only a moment ago, had not known to have taken place: how the bird whose language he understood led him to a mountainous rock encircled by a wall of fire. How, negotiating the wall of fire he found a sleeping girl. How he kissed her, as the rules of folklore demand that he do, and how she woke and smiled at him.

What makes the story gripping at this point is the fact that the sudden re-experience of the forgotten incident entirely floods the narrator's consciousness, blocking out all real-world circumstances—particularly the fact that he is at present engaged to be married to another woman, and has indeed sworn that there never was another woman in his life. In a word, telling this story perjures the teller and gives Hagen the political legitimacy to run a spear through him. (Suitably enough, the hero has a proverbial chink in his armor.) Beyond reaction or defense, Siegfried escapes into a wish-fulfillment fantasy replaying the boy-meets-sleeping-beauty scene. However, looked at closely, the story presents a considerably modified copy:

- Brünnhilde, heilige Braut!
- Wach auf! Öffne dein Auge!
- Wer verschloß dich wieder in Schlaf?
- Wer band dich in Schlummer so bang?
- Da lacht die Braut dich wach, der Wecker kam; der Braut er brocht die Bande, ihr nicht ihm Brünnhildes Lust!
- Ach, dieses Auge.

5 According to Schank, the main cause for failing to remember is a faulty or missing index rather than any wholesale erasure. Corrupting a story index, the drink of forgetfulness causes Siegfried's local loss of memory; the counterpotion repairs the faulty index and makes the story retrievable again. Cognitive theory in the service of practical criticism...
Climaxing in lustful oxymorons, Siegfried meets his fate. It is a strange end to a none-too-bright character, a hero who was never more than a pawn in the power games played by people of superior knowledge, and a figure absurdly defenseless against the invisible malice of magic potions. Still, one must grant there are worse things than to die remembering the best moment of your life, and believing it to have come round a second time, and telling the story of it, too. Clinging to the detail of the situation, the speaker’s discourse reverberates with the wave of emotion thus released. Although manifestly engaged in the mode of retrospective first-person narration, Siegfried makes the striking mistake of counting the re-lived experience as a second occurrence of the event. ‘Who sank you again in sleep’, he asks (both himself and his imaginatively present bride), and then continues to tell himself and his audience that he must ‘again’ break the bride’s bondage. The discourse’s conflicting impulses here not only affect the deictics of pronouns and referring expressions but also of tenses. The shift from the past tense to present (line 8 of the original text; line 18 in the translation) can be understood as a perfectly regular shift into the historical present, used in the standard function of foregrounding a significant past time, and he tells what he sees, he sees what he tells, and he tells what he sees. A case such as this will not necessarily faze the reader if narrators are, in effect, blind to the story world. The emotional involvement of narrators—an orientation practically precluded by the rule that narrators ‘can only report’ (Chatman 1995; Shaw 1995)—is not necessarily faze Chatman’s fundamental tenets, the logic of this argument is impeccable. What gives one pause is that neither Siegfried nor Wagner are playing any pre- or postmodernist game of alteration. As our discussion of the table of oppositions showed, a rigid take-it-apart-and-keep-distinct approach can easily pose the wrong questions and in its prefigured answers lead to error and confusion. Conducting a spirited debate withChatman, Harry Shaw has recently stressed the necessity of addressing the emotional involvement of narrators—an orientation practically precluded by the rule that narrators ‘can only report’ (Chatman 1995; Shaw 1995). Equally suspect are Chatman’s conclusions on the sense and scope of focalization. As James Phelan points out in an essay entitled ‘Why Narrators Can Be Focalizers’, Chatman’s ‘discussion of narrators and characters under a single term, whether “point of view”, “focalization”, or any other’ (Chatman 1990: 145)
must be too' (Phelan 2001: 57; see Jahn 1996: 258-260 for a similar argument). Indeed, on the cognitive logic of the model presented here, the feedback loop which sustains Siegfried's storytelling is not exceptional at all but indicative of the internal-external dynamic of all storytelling. Like Brünnhilde, postclassical narratology must wake up—wake up again, too—to the strange loops by which we perceive, remember, imagine, and tell stories which are like life itself.

References

Chatman, S. 1990. Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film. Ithaca: Cornell UP.