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Anticipation and Narratology

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Abstract

In one of the first analyses of its kind, this chapter examines how the tools and heuristics of narratology (the study of narrative) might enhance the study of anticipation. It assesses whether narratological insights into the ways in which stories narrate and readers read might enable us to tell better stories about the future and at the same time to become better readers of the possible worlds that such stories anticipate. Investigating the theory and praxis of anticipation across a broad temporal range of possible (fictional) and actual (real) world models and narratives (from antiquity to postmodernity), it scopes some of the pitfalls and possibilities opened up by treating the future as 'storied'. It engages with the latest studies on cognitive narratology, possible worlds theories, and so-called 'future narratives', examining anticipatory narratives particularly relating to the environment and to the self. It argues that the stories we tell about the future, including our future selves, must be open, multi-linear, and multi-dimensional in order to avoid anticipatory backshadowing, which forecasts the future as a continuation of the past and present.

1. Introduction

Narratology has made it clear that, while narrative can have any number of functions (entertaining, informing, persuading, diverting attention, etc.), there are some functions that it excels at or is unique in fulfilling. Narrative always reports one or more changes of state but, as etymology suggests (the term narrative is related to the Latin gnarus – 'knowing,' 'expert,' 'acquainted with' ...), narrative is also a particular mode of knowledge. It does not merely reflect what happens; it discovers and invents what can happen.

G. Prince, 'On Narratology (Past, Present, Future)', (1990:1)

Narrative shapes our knowledge and understanding of the world – our past, present, and future. Narratology explains how narrative does this. Narratology has been characterized as a science, as a methodology, as a theory, and as a humanities discipline, combining both theory and praxis in the formal, rhetorical, and critical analysis of textual discourse across a broad spectrum of different genres and media (Meister 2014). Alongside its various theoretical schools (formalist, structuralist, post-structuralist, etc.) narratology has produced many sub-disciplines in recent years (cognitive, feminist, computational, etc.),

prompting calls to eschew the singular term *narratology* in favour of the plural *narratologies*, so as to better convey the richness and multiplicity of this still expanding field (Herman 1999).

The study of anticipation in narratology (and its various narratologies) has therefore taken various different forms. Narratologists have shown keen interest in the way that anticipation functions in specific genres and narrative modes, such as counterfactuals in history and fiction (Dannenberg 2008), future utopian and dystopian fiction (Morson 1994), autobiography and life-writing (Bamberg 2011), and post-modern fiction, especially texts with experimental anachronic or polychronic temporalities (Richardson 2002). Perhaps the most important work, however, has focused upon the anticipatory dynamics of narrative itself. That is, analysis of the ways and means by which narrators and readers make sense of the possible worlds represented in stories (Ryan 1991), and by which they negotiate narrative prolepses (future anticipations and projections) in plots (Genette 1980). Indeed, theoretical and empirical narratological analyses of these phenomena have suggested that anticipation is one of the key motors of narrativity, that readerly competence in anticipatory processes is what drives narrative cognition and comprehension (Brooks 1984) at the most basic levels.

This chapter, then, investigates whether and how the tools and heuristics of narratology might enhance the study of anticipation. In particular it asks whether narratological insights into the ways in which stories function might enhance our narrative competences, so enabling us to tell better stories about the future and to become better readers of the possible worlds that future narratives anticipate. Assessing the theory and praxis of anticipation across a range of such possible story worlds and models, it examines some of the pitfalls and possibilities opened up by treating the future and its anticipation as ‘storied’.

2. Models as anticipatory narratives

A story answers a model.

But likewise a model answers a story.

D. McCloskey, ‘Storytelling in Economics’ (1990:6)

In anticipating the future, climatologists, economists, social and political scientists, and ‘futurists’ in many other sectors employ qualitative (narrative) as well as quantitative (modeling) methodologies. Mathematical and statistical data, scientific and political analyses, all typically require some degree of narrative mediation if decision-makers and stakeholders are to process and publish them. In order for future forecasts to be produced and disseminated to politicians and public alike, complex information and models have to be translated into an accessible – which often means *narrative* – form. Only once complex data has been ‘storified’ can wider audiences read and thus evaluate their significance by assessing the probability and possibility of various options and outcomes. In this context,

such stories function as metaphors of metaphors (meta-metaphors), re-describing and translating static models representing the real world into dynamic narratives representing possible or story worlds.

The following narrative, based on models projecting a global temperature rise of +2C, provides a salient illustration of the way in which complex climatological forecasts can be translated into story form, plotted according to a nexus of cause and effect which seeks to persuade its readers that it represents a credible and probable anticipation of the future (cited in Bode 2013: 75):

The heatwaves seen in Europe during 2003, which killed thousands of people, will come back every year with a 2C global average temperature rise. The Amazon turns into desert and grasslands, while increasing CO₂ levels in the atmosphere make the world's oceans too acidic for remaining coral reefs and thousands of other marine life forms. The West Antarctic ice sheet collapses, the Greenland ice sheet melts and the world's sea level begins to rise by seven metres over the next few hundred years. A third of the world's species will become extinct.

This scenario, analysed in terms of the narratological concepts order, duration, frequency, voice, and mode (*pace* Genette 1980), demonstrates a sophisticated narrative form. In terms of order, the story here has a teleological and chronolinear structure, a clear beginning (rising temperatures), a middle (melting ice sheets), and an end (global extinctions). Under the rubric of duration, its 'discourse time' (the time it takes to read) is very much shorter than its 'narrative time' (the time span covered by the story): it takes only seconds to read but covers a period spanning several centuries. It necessarily, therefore, abbreviates the 'frequency' and temporal extent of the events it narrates: the melting of ice sheets and the rising of sea levels are iterative processes which take far longer than their description here allows. The voice of the extradiegetic (external) narrator, however, lends the authority of omniscience to this narration, assuring the reader of the actuality of these events, and even making the reader a virtual eye-witness of happenings which exceed the span of a human lifetime. Indeed, the mode of narration is such that the reader (or narratee) is invited to share the same 'god's-eye view' of this global catastrophe as the narrator, to focalize events from a distant, dispassionate, and objective point of view.

Narratological tools (especially those borrowed from 'possible worlds' theory) throw up other meaningful insights into the narrativity of this climate change scenario. The 'principle of minimal departure' (Ryan 1991), suggests that when readers encounter possible worlds (such as the future world forecast in the scenario), they assume that there are no significant differences between that and the 'actual' world, that its conditions reflect as closely as possible those of their own 'reality' – until the narrative forces them to make a cognitive readjustment and acknowledge a difference or departure from that actuality. Thus, if a story introduces a flying horse, readers will typically imagine a 'real' horse in all respects other than its wings. If a climate change prediction introduces an average global

temperature increase, readers will typically imagine a variation of the real summer 'heatwaves' with which they are already familiar.

The climate change scenario here exploits this 'principle of minimal departure' in suggesting a temporal-causal connection between the possible future world it anticipates and the actual past and present world already familiar to its readers. It opens with a retrospective look back to the extreme weather events of recent history, using past-tense markers ('seen ... during 2003', 'which killed') to recall a memory of prior real world experience. In doing so, the narrative establishes a set of initial conditions which paradoxically anticipate its readers' pre-existing familiarity with a yet-to-be-experienced possible world; a world which it will go on to describe as an extension of or return to the past ('will come back'). Having established this continuity through change from past to future, from familiar real world to unfamiliar possible world, the tense markers then shift into the present ('turns', 'make', 'collapses', 'melts', 'begins to rise'). The use of the present tense here enhances the immediacy and thus the reality of this possible world, virtually locating the reader in the future as if it were the present. That is, until the imaginative limits of the temporal stretch of this future-in-the-present is reached ('over the next few hundred years') and a return to the simple future tense ('will become') is required.

Indeed, as Fludernik's work (1996) on 'natural narratology' has shown, English language narratives using the future tense tend to revert to the present and past tenses in this way, as soon as the future temporality of a scene has been set. In Michael Frayn's utopian future narrative *A Very Private Life* ([1968] 1981), for example, set 'in the good new days a long, long while ahead' (1981:5) the future tense quickly yields to the present and past (Frayn 1981:5-12, italics added):

Once upon a time there *will* be a little girl called Uncumber. Uncumber *will* have a little brother called Sulpice, and they *will* live with their parents in a house in the middle of the woods. [...] One day she *will* hear the familiar clink of their tools on the other side of the wall, and their muffled talk and laughter, and she *will* say: 'The animals *are* here again!'

It's all mixed up inside her head with some holovision programme she *has* seen. She *thinks* people live inside, and animals outside.

And she *takes* everything so seriously.

In Frayn's story, the unfamiliar future world that his narrative describes is introduced to his readers through a traditional story world setting ('once upon a time', 'a little girl', 'a little brother', and 'a house in the middle of the woods'). A similar device is used in the climate change scenario to enhance the familiarity, immediacy, and realism of the possible world anticipated there. Familiar global landmarks ('Europe', the 'Amazon', the 'Antarctic' and 'Greenland') work to locate the reader in a recognizable and stable space – albeit one that is simultaneously in the process of being transformed. In Poli's terms (2007: 3-4), the present space-time of a real world 'chronotopoid' is aligned here with a future possible

world 'chronotope'. Abbott characterizes this narrative device as the 'future present', and sees this conflation of tense in narratives set in the future as analogous to the 'historical present' – that is, the use of the vivid present tense to represent completed action in stories set in the past (Abbott 2008: 534).

What is more, the temporal-spatial entry point for the reader of the climate change scenario – via 'Europe' – posits a particular geo-political point of view, a deictic (here and now) vantage point from which the reader has already seen killer heatwaves. In this move the narrative subtly appropriates the reader as an eye-witness to both the actual past *and* to the possible future impact of climate change. Thus, at the same time as it presents and invites the reader to share an omniscient narratorial viewpoint (a god's-eye view of time and space embracing the past, present, and future of the world's lands, seas, and atmosphere), the narrative is focalized from a particular fixed perspective in time and space: that of a European in the early twenty-first century – the reader's own actual temporal-spatial coordinates. Indeed, so firmly fixed is that external (homodiegetic) focalization that, as the narrative unfolds from prologue (the heatwaves of 2003) to denouement (mass extinctions a few hundred years hence), the global conditions of the narrator's and reader's *now* are anticipated as ongoing without variation or intervention, privileging the chronocentrism or 'presentness' of that point of view.

A narrative scenario of this type clearly does not offer an objective or definitive projection of the future, despite the quasi-omniscient and prophetic character of its narration. It is widely acknowledged, in fact, that narrative scenarios do not predict actualities but rather anticipate possibilities and probabilities as perceived from the present, from the *now*. As Staley affirms (Staley 2002: 38): 'If a prediction is a definitive statement of what the future will be, then scenarios are heuristic statements that explore the plausibilities of what might be.' Or, as the National Intelligence Council puts it (2004: 16, *emphases in original*): '*scenarios are not meant as actual forecasts*, but they describe possible worlds upon whose threshold we may be entering'. Such storified scenarios are therefore useful in processing what Bode (2013: 88, *emphases in original*) describes as '*test-runs of futures*, or test-runs of known unknowns, revealing unknown unknowns, producing *multiple evolutionary paths* ... [treating] the present as a nodal situation that allows for different continuations and ... possible evolutions from this point in time.' In effect, then, narrative scenarios extrapolate from what is known in the present into the unknown future, telling stories about possible worlds based on real world models. By better understanding the ways in which such stories work, using the tools of narratology, we might be able both to tell better stories about the future *and* to become better readers of the possible worlds that they anticipate and represent.

3. Narratives as anticipatory models

Books are indeed world models. St Augustine found the best model he could find for our experience of past, present, and future was the recitation of a psalm.

F. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* ([1967] 2000: 52)

While real world future scenarios and models can be shaped in narrative form, narratives and stories (both fictional and non-fictional) can similarly be viewed as shaping real-world experiences – including (perhaps, *especially*) those pertaining to the future. Narrative in and of itself can be seen as an anticipatory model, simulating (perhaps even *stimulating*) key cognitive processes involved in the activity of anticipation.

Narratologists have long recognized that narrative constitutes an important heuristic tool for understanding the world, for making meaningful connections between past, present, and future events. As Boyd observes (2009: 137), ‘we will interpret something as story if we can’, ascribing significance and temporal-causal links to any incidents, applying rules of logic and probability to the actions and motivations of any agents, wherever possible. Taleb (2007: 62-84) describes this as ‘the narrative fallacy’, and associates it with ‘our vulnerability to over-interpretation and our predilection for compact stories over raw truths ... our limited ability to look at sequences of facts without weaving an explanation into them, or, equivalently, forcing a logical link, an *arrow of relationship*, upon them’ (2007: 63-4).

In his *Poetics*, the first sustained work of narratology from the third century BCE, Aristotle pointed out that even when two incidents are not causally connected, where there is no necessary or probable sequence or relation between two events, we will nevertheless see a story *if we can*. To illustrate his point about this tendency towards narrativization, Aristotle offers an anecdote (‘the murder of Mityls’) in which a statue of a murdered man happens to fall upon and so kill his murderer (*Poetics* 9. 1452a 4-10). There is no logical or causal connection between the two deaths, yet they nevertheless combine to make a satisfying story. Aristotle is critical of the false ‘*post hoc ergo propter hoc*’ (after therefore because of) syllogism at work here, and is disapproving of the low aesthetic and affective quality that such a plotless ‘story’, in his view, possesses. However, his intuition that we try to make sense of the random incidents of real life by imposing a narrative structure upon them *if we can* is instructive, anticipating as it does an important focus of modern narratology – and a salient problem in anticipation and future studies.

For modern narratologists, particularly those working in the field of cognitive narratology, similarly maintain that we make sense of the world ‘narratively’. That is, we view events in the real or social world as if they were, are, or will be narrated, seeing narrative as a metaphor for life, and treating lived experience as ‘storied’. For Ricoeur (1984-1988) this metaphor has particular valence in the context of narrative identity and the stories we live, tell, and read about our past, present, and future selves. Refining Aristotle’s intuitions, Ricoeur maintains that the structured continuity of narrative provides a model upon which we base individual stories of personhood, assimilating our imaginative experience of fictive story-worlds with our lived experience of the real world.

This has important implications for modelling how we live, tell, and read the future, and how we process anticipation *as if* narratively configured. For Currie (2007: 6) ‘the

reading of fictional narratives is a kind of preparation for and repetition of the continuous anticipation that takes place in non-fictional life ... [giving] fiction, and the study of fiction, a critical role in the understanding of what lies outside of fiction.' It might be objected that life is lived prospectively but narrativized retrospectively, making correlations between the processing of fictional (story world) and extra-fictional (real world) experiences unsound. Fictional characters such as Tristram Shandy and Emma Bovary similarly warn against forgetting to remember the fundamental differences between stories and lives. However, narratological studies into the phenomenology of reading demonstrate that even retrospective ('once upon a time ...') narratives are processed by their readers *prospectively*. That is, readers experience such narratives, as they experience the world, in a present mode of future-focused anticipation. For Brooks (1984: 22) stories require readers to respond to the preterite or past tense of a story world as if it were their own present and future. Thus, the experience of reading a story parallels the experience of living a life: incidents and events are read and lived in the present moment, pass into memory and the past, while the future remains open, the focus of hopes, fears and anticipations. As Ryan, in her study of the cognitive narratology of 'possible worlds', puts it (Ryan 2015: 83):

Living a narrative prospectively means placing oneself in a concrete imaginary situation, monitoring its evolution moment by moment, trying to anticipate possible developments, and experiencing the disappearance of possibilities that comes with the passing of time but remaining steadily focused on the hatching of the future.

By better understanding the ways in which such prospective reading and narrative anticipation works, then, might we better appreciate the subtleties and processes of anticipation in both story worlds and real world scenarios? Could narratological insights into the operations of anticipation offer useful insights into the way we read stories about the future?

4. Prolepsis as a model for narrative

This is the art of storytelling, so that by beginning in the middle of things through narration we return to the beginning and sometimes we anticipate things that are about to happen, as if through prophecy.

Servius, *Commentary on Virgil's Aeneid* (preface)

In narratology, the dynamics of anticipation in telling and reading stories have long been a key site of interest and analysis. The earliest narratives in the Western canon (Homer's epic *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from the 8th century BCE) already exhibit a range of techniques manipulating future time and temporality so as to achieve effects such as suspense, foreshadowing, and apprehension. Thus, the earliest extant body of literary criticism (the exegetical commentaries of the ancient Greek Homeric scholia dating back to the 6th

century BCE) already show a remarkable level of sophistication in their analysis of these anticipatory narrative features (see Nünlist 2009). The ancient scholiasts exhibit a particular concern with what modern narratologists call 'prolepsis': that is, an 'anachrony going forward to the future with respect to the "present" moment; an evocation of one or more events that will occur after the "present" moment ... an anticipation, a flashforward, a prospection' (Prince 1987: 79; see also Genette 1980: 40-78). Thus, the scholia assess the psychological and emotional impact upon ancient readers of a Trojan mother's pathos-filled anticipation of the future awaiting her son (*Iliad* 22.473-515), or the foreshadowing of the death of Achilles (not included within the plot of Homer's *Iliad* but frequently anticipated through prolepses in that text).

In modern narratology, prolepsis re-emerged as a prominent topic of attention in the work of Genette (1980: 39-40) and Bal ([1985] 2009: 53-66), who saw this present-future linking anachrony as part of the wider anticipatory world-building practices of both narrators and readers. Indeed, Genette (1980: 77, emphasis in original), saw the cognitive processing of narrative prolepses as depending upon – and thus offering insights into – the 'possible (or rather the variable) narrative *competence* of the reader.' Such narrative competence, shaped by past and present experiences of processing anachronies in story form, is what enables readers to identify and respond appropriately to prolepses; to feel sympathy for a character whose death is imminent, to feel suspense or relief according to the anticipatory cues provided by the text. Higher levels of this narrative competence will also enable readers to discount what Genette terms 'false advance mentions' or 'snares' and even 'false snares' – the red herrings and false red herrings often found in classic detective fiction or the 'black swans' found in real world scenarios, whose actual future significance may not be immediately recognized or recognizable. Indeed, even while processing these various kinds of prolepses *prospectively*, the competent reader knows that their significance or lack thereof can only ever be fully evaluated *retrospectively*. The true or false red herring or black swan can only be correctly identified as such with hindsight.

Narrative anticipations of the future through prolepses therefore perform what Brooks describes as an 'anticipation of retrospection' – a process which turns out to be a miniature working model of the way in which narrative itself functions (1984: 23, emphases in original):

If the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know to be already in place, already in wait for us to reach it.

Perhaps we would do best to speak of the *anticipation of retrospection* as our chief tool in making sense of narrative, the master trope of its strange logic.

Readers process any preview into the future that a narrator may provide by anticipating that at some future point in the narrative the substance of that preview will be revealed to have been meaningful or otherwise. As Brooks reminds us, we read a narrative 'in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings that will retrospectively give the order and

significance of plot' (1984: 94). When readers encounter a narrative prolepsis, the successful cognitive processing of its anticipatory dynamics necessitates a complex interplay of past, present, and future – an interplay which Brooks, along with many other narratologists, sees as illustrating the way in which narrative itself is cognitively processed. According to Bridgeman (2005: 130), 'The mental models relating to future action which are built in response to the explicit textual cues of prolepsis are part of a wider range of anticipatory and speculative activities by the reader.' Given narratology's claims that experience of reading a story parallels the experience of living a life, such cognitive processing of anticipation in narrative may yield crucial insights into the processing of anticipation in the real world.

5. Anticipatory competence and cognition

*The gods accomplish many things beyond anticipation;
The expected was not fulfilled
And god found a way for the unexpected.
That is how this affair turned out.*

Euripides, epilogue to the tragedies *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Andromache*, *Helen*, and *Bacchant Women*

For Genette, the successful operations of prolepsis depend upon readerly competence. But for Brooks, proleptic anticipation plays a much more fundamental role in reading and is in fact 'our chief tool in making sense of narrative' (1984: 23). Pioneering narratologists Wellek and Warren (1949: 419) had already 'anticipated' as much in their own account of what happens when readers process a story:

In reading with a sense for continuity, for contextual coherence, for wholeness, there comes a moment when we feel that we have 'understood', that we have seized on the right interpretation, the real meaning. It is a process that ... proceeds from attention to a detail to an anticipation of the whole and back again to an interpretation of the detail.

Indeed, as Augustine had noticed as early as the 4th century CE (*Confessions* 11.28.38; c.f. 11.30.41), the cognitive processing of a narrative depends upon a complex synergy between the reader's *memory* of what has passed, *attention* to the present moment, and *anticipation* (*expectatio*) of the future that is to come. According to Kennedy (2013: 30): 'In the case of future processes in which we are involved, we measure them by anticipation, but only if we already have some experience of what we are measuring or a pattern we have already noticed so as to make prospective calculations.'

Modern narratology confirms Augustine's theory. From Kermode's (1967) 'sense of an ending', Iser's (1978) 'protentions', Eco's (1979) 'extensional operations', to Brooks's

(1984) 'anticipation of retrospection', narratologists and literary theorists forward the view that anticipation is central to the processing of narrative fiction. Anticipation is understood as one of the principal dynamic forces that structures and motivates narrative. Anticipation allows, even drives, us to make temporal-causal connections between separate events, to make sense of the incidents of both real and story worlds by linking the past to a present or future moment, imposing a narrative pattern upon them. Currie (2007: 6) even goes so far as to suggest that 'this anticipatory mode of being might be a characteristic ... of human being.'

Cognitive studies of reading and reader-response, including neuropsychological and empirical studies reach the same conclusion, that 'the reader of a literary text must at one and the same moment recall, respond, discriminate, and anticipate' (Miall 1995: 280). Research into the cognitive systems that process anticipation also tends to corroborate Augustine's intuitions that memory, attention, and anticipation work synergetically in our reading of narrative texts, concluding that: 'the affective or somatic markers that initially guide reading derive their significance from prior experience' (Damasio 1994: 180). That is, our recall of past literary and extra-literary experiences shapes the processing of present attention *and* future anticipation when it comes to forming narrative competence in both story world fictions and real world scenarios. Anticipation may be 'our chief tool in making sense of narrative' (Brooks 1984: 23) but it is a tool sharpened by retrospection. Paradoxically, it seems that the same narrative competences and processes that allow us to 'tell' (and to read) the future in the first place prove to be a barrier in anticipating any kind of future that is not linked – through uni-linear causal-temporal connections – to the present and past.

6. Chronocentrism and anticipatory backshadowing

I have often noticed that we are inclined to endow our friends with the stability of type that literary characters acquire in the reader's mind. No matter how many times we reopen "King Lear," never shall we find the good king banging his tankard in high revelry, all woes forgotten, at a jolly reunion with all three daughters and their lapdogs. Never will Emma rally, revived by the sympathetic salts in Flaubert's father's timely tear.

V. Nabokov, *Lolita* ([1955] 2000: 265)

The implications of acknowledging this retrospective edge to the anticipatory processes of narrative competence are wide-reaching. For it suggests that projections of the future in both textual and extra-textual situations, in both story world and real world scenarios, will necessarily be influenced by prior experience of the past and present. Future anticipations are therefore liable to exhibit what Morson (1994) describes as 'chronocentrism', an assumption that the future, like the present, is a product of the past. Morson warns that one of the major limitations of chronocentrism (a mode of 'presentness') is its occlusion of

the probable difference of the future to both past and present, resulting in models of the future which merely extend the possibilities of the present (Morson 1994: 275).

Employing a literary metaphor to describe what happens to real world scenarios when we situate ourselves in what Morson calls 'epilogue time', he argues that (1994: 278-79) our views of the future, our ability to anticipate its differences and continuities to the past and present, prevent the projection of any real surprises or radical change. Like the narrator or novelist who adds an epilogue or postscript to his or her narrative text, those viewing the future from (or in) 'epilogue time' do not look for new plot lines or bifurcations. They anticipate a linear future evolving along already established trajectories; a predictable future that is predictable because it accords with pre-existing story scripts. For Morson (1994: 279): 'Epilogue time allows the future to be viewed in terms of a form of anticipatory backshadowing that might be called *preshadowing*: the future is to be like the present ...' For Taleb (2007: 83), this presentness or chronocentrism lies at the root of the 'narrative fallacy' in future anticipations and forecasts, imposing upon us 'a wrong map of the likelihood of events', blinding us to the unexpected, the new, the improbable.

A variant form of this chronocentric '*preshadowing*' can be found in association with the pre-existing story scripts through which readers seek to make sense of fictional story worlds or 'possible worlds'. Ryan's principle of 'minimal departure' maintains that readers will assume any story world essentially resembles their own unless and until pertinent differences are specified (1991: 48-54). Therefore, when readers negotiate the dynamics of possible worlds – both fictional and real-world – they will assume that the future essentially resembles the present unless and until any salient differences are made manifest.

One of the problems associated with such *preshadowing* (and, indeed, with the wider principle of 'minimal departure') is the risk of anticipating a future in which we posit ourselves just as we are *now*. Through a failure of imagination we populate the future with our present selves and therefore with our present concerns and perspectives, shaped by our past experiences. As Bode argues (2013: 147): 'Presentism occurs because we fail to recognize that our future selves won't see the world the way we see it now ... [and] this fundamental inability to take the perspective of the person to whom the rest of our lives will happen is the most insidious problem a futurian can face.'

Narratologists have had a longstanding interest in the presentism that readers typically encounter in 'life narratives' – particularly in the context of autobiography and other first-person (autodiegetic) narrative modes which seek to remember and reconstruct the past from the perspective of the present. The story logic that emerges from such narratives requires the reader to elide a quasi-schizophrenic split between the 'narrating I' and the 'narrated I', to process a simultaneous (dis)continuity between the now of the experiencing and the narrating subject, and between the simultaneous past/present/future space-time (or chronotope) occupied by this split subject.

In the *Confessions* of Augustine, one of the earliest narratologists and autobiographers, as in most life narratives, the present moment dominates. Remembered events from the past are selected for their significance in the light of the present. The re-

presentation of past experience turns out to be just that – a ‘making present once again’ – in which contingent events are transformed into a coherent plot, and meaningful temporal-causal connections are retrospectively drawn between them. The future is encountered only proleptically as an ‘anticipation of retrospection’. The future horizon towards which the plots of autobiographical narratives head is the present *now* of writing. The narrating subject in autobiography can say ‘this is the man I was’ and even ‘this is the man I will become’ but the future anticipated here is already past.

In the face of such teleological chronocentrism, modern and post-modern writers have challenged the idea that narrative can impose order upon the chaos of lived experience, and emphasised instead fragmentation, bifurcation, and polychrony in their own life narratives. In Virginia Woolf’s 1985 (posthumously published) *Moments of Being*, and Vladimir Nabokov’s 1966 *Speak Memory*, both the narrating and the narrated subject are encountered neither as wholly fixed nor as wholly protean characters, but as complex, contradictory figures, inherently surprising, and infinitely capable of improbable, unpredictable, and inconsistent behaviours.

Such narrative models of the bifurcated subject (the narrating I and the narrated I) have important implications for modelling future scenarios involving the self. For instance, in saving and planning for retirement, in reducing an individual carbon footprint, in issuing an advance directive declining anticipated future medical interventions (see Huxtable 2015). In anticipating any future – but especially in any medium to long-term future – in which ‘I’ am concerned, the necessary characterization of ‘my’ self will impact significantly on the anticipatory processes through which future scenarios are modelled and understood. What is more, the narratological comprehension and configuration of the bifurcated subject in such future scenarios (what we might describe as the ‘anticipating I’ and the ‘anticipated I’) applies not only to the first person singular (I, me) but to the first person *plural* (we, us). Narratology thus helps to show that the split subject plays a significant function in shaping the dynamics of anticipation in accounts not only of ‘my’ personal future but in ‘our’ collective social future(s). Indeed, in any future narrative in which we ourselves play a character role – or roles.

There is significant complexity involved in cognitively processing ourselves and others as bifurcated subjects in narrative world models. Yet wider exposure to and engagement with first person narratives and scenarios – both fictional and non-fictional – which offer the opportunity to reflect our bifurcated selves to ourselves might serve to expand our own temporal horizons and anticipatory competences. Immersive virtual reality experiences, and even personal digital archives such as Facebook, Snapchat Memories, offer new ways for us to narrativize our own lives as part of a multi-linear story-world – and crucially, to see ourselves as the-same-yet-different subject(s) occupying that world (or worlds). Such exposure to the complexity of our different-yet-same past and present selves may prepare us to better appreciate and anticipate the complex ontological status of our future selves too, to anticipate our participation in future worlds in which we can imagine ourselves (both individually and collectively) neither as wholly fixed nor as wholly unfixed

characters. By developing this aspect of our narrative competence(s) we may not necessarily learn to avoid populating the future with our present selves and our present concerns and perspectives, but we may find it easier to recognize the implicit bias of such 'presentness' and to pay attention to the blindspots and prejudicial *preshadowing* it entails.

7. The future narratives and narrative future(s) of narratology and anticipation

All stories and narratives tell of events past, present, or yet to come.

Plato, *Republic* (3.392d)

The same sorts of narrative (in)competencies that shape future scenarios involving the self also pertain to larger social and global future scenarios. Here too, chronocentric *preshadowing* which assumes the future will be like the present, alongside principles of minimal departure which assume the future will be familiar (and again, essentially like the present), impose limitations upon our capacity to imagine possible future worlds that are significantly different from the present. As Bode complains (2013: 100): 'being able to think about the future ... is perpetually spoilt by our present incapacity to be sufficiently imaginative, to think the unexpected, to factor in surprise, discontinuities, reversals, tipping points, etc.' How then might we use narratives and narratological tools to avoid chronocentrism and anticipatory backshadowing or *preshadowing* when thinking about the future? Morson offers us some possible ways forward. He suggests that (1994: 282):

We are all captives of our moment, and we live on a small temporal island. Complex moral thinking, informed by a rich sense of temporality, may liberate us from the tyranny of the present instant. The imagination of sideshadows and the process of dialogue with alternatives may expand our temporal horizons and make us more attentive to historical opportunity.

Morson advocates 'complex' thinking and the imaginative engagement with alternative narrative models such as counterfactuals (or 'sideshadows', as he describes them). Defined by narratologists as 'a principle of divergence that makes visible a vast horizon of alternative stories' (Ryan 2014: 735), the counterfactual is often viewed as a postmodern phenomenon but it actually has an ancient pedigree. Speculative and counterfactual narratives considering a possible world in which characters may have behaved otherwise and events may have happened differently can be traced back to first century BCE Rome, where the historian Livy wonders what might have happened if Alexander the Great had lived longer and, having subjugated Asia, had then turned his attentions to Europe and to the might of Rome (Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 9.16-18).

Such 'what if' speculation frequently appears in fictional narrative too, when narrators and characters imagine alternative futures – and alternative stories – for themselves, positing possible world scenarios within their own story worlds. In these

historical and novel counterfactuals the conjectural divergence from the actual story line and story world (from what 'really' happened in the history or fiction) is clearly delineated. The alternatives are processed as speculative 'sideshadows', clearly lacking the substance and reality of the main (hi)story. Following the story logic imposed by such counterfactuals, the reader will typically process the sideshadow as a diversion, as an ancillary narrative of lesser significance than the primary plot line from which it branches out. The readers of James Thurber's 1939 short story 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty', however immersed they may be in the possible worlds configured in Mitty's vividly heroic counterfactual daydreams, can readily identify the 'actual' possible world of the story in which Mitty performs a series of mundane domestic errands for his wife.

Imagining counterfactual possible worlds alongside (and even within) actual (or mimetically 'real') possible worlds may help to exercise the 'complex moral thinking' that Morson advocates as a correction to chronocentrism. However, its enrichment of our 'temporal horizons' is clearly limited. Despite the plot bifurcations and ostensibly multilinear narratives produced by counterfactual fantasies and stories, the reader is directed to privilege one central story line and one unified story world, focusing memory and anticipation upon the actual, even while focusing attention upon the counterfactual. This entails *remembering* that Mitty is driving his car too fast while he is fantasizing about piloting a seaplane, *anticipating* that while Mitty leans against a wall, smoking – and imagining himself about to face a firing squad – his wife will return any moment, and Mitty will have to face her ire for having forgotten to buy dog biscuits. That story world and its temporality are ever present and dominant in terms of their deictic (here and now) force.

Indeed, this is one of the more persistent narratological tropes of counterfactual speculation in both history and in fiction: whatever branching path is projected out from the here and now ultimately returns there. Historical counterfactuals, for example, imagine past events following a different path (Germany winning the second-world war is one favourite motif, as in Philip K. Dick's 1963 *Man in the High Castle*, and Robert Harris' 1992 *Fatherland*). But that alternate path will typically loop back to return the story world to a familiar present. In a move initiated by Livy in the first century BCE, counterfactual histories show us the unreality of what might have happened but chronocentrically privilege the present product of what really did happen. Alexander might have attacked Rome, but he would have been defeated – ensuring that Rome's long term future (Livy's present) would not have played out any differently. Hitler's Germany and its allies might have triumphed, but the Cold War and Europe's longer term future (our present) would not have played out very differently. Morson (1994) describes this influence of the future present moment upon re-tellings of the past as 'backshadowing', and if we extrapolate the principles of such historical counterfactual thinking to future anticipations, we can forecast an analogous effect. The present casts a shadow upon the future, limiting our ability to see differences and discontinuities – that is, *preshadowing*.

We may usefully consider a brief counterfactual sideshadowing of our own here. For it is worth noticing that Morson does *not* include utopian or dystopian narratives among his

recommended reading for enhanced anticipatory competence. Elsewhere he argues that (1994: 266-67): 'Utopias set in the future almost always engage in what might be called *anticipatory backshadowing*: the author invites readers to imagine how their world will look when viewed by their counterparts in the utopia to come. He passes certain judgements on his own time by projecting them forward onto people who will "look backward."' Bode offers a similar rationale for dismissing utopian fiction as a model for future anticipation, arguing that (2013: 11): 'The basic form of utopian narrative is nothing but the narration of a future which has already happened – and therefore grammatically as well as narratologically the narrative of a(n) (imagined) *past*. They present the future as *past* space: closed, determined, with uni-linear action.'

However, there are some narrative forms which do promise to foster the sort of complex future thinking that is required to see the future differently, free of – or at least alert to the existence thereof – the blindspots and limitations of 'anticipatory backshadowing'. In some modern science fiction inspired by scientific theories of multiple parallel universes (or the 'multiverse' of quantum physics), obvious distinctions between actual and counterfactual story lines are dissolved. The multiverse or metauniverse hypothesis that any and every possibility may be actualized in many possible worlds makes it increasingly difficult for readers to orient themselves in these story worlds according to fixed or stable time-space coordinates or chronotopes. In fact, the fundamental principles underlying the ways that readers perceive space and time may be compromised still further in a multiverse model where time itself can possess different properties in different universes.

Since H. G. Wells first anticipated the multiverse in his 1923 novel, *Men Like Gods*, in which the use of a 'paratime machine' makes it challenging for the reader to identify any central deictic here and now across multiple parallel worlds, such narratives have proliferated, finding film, television, anime, and interactive online gaming all conducive media for the multiverse or metaverse story form. Although several narratives in this genre straightforwardly evoke parallel or meta-worlds which are more or less clearly defined as alternatives to a central story world, and thus elicit the sort of sideshadowing effects typically seen in counterfactual narratives, others *do* embrace the complexity and opportunity offered by narrating across multiple story worlds. If Morson's theory is correct, that 'we live on a small temporal island' and are inclined to project shadows of the present onto the past and future, then exposure to such narrative complexity could help to increase our readerly competences in general, and our anticipatory competences in particular – both within fictional story worlds and real world scenarios. Cognitive and psychological studies into the phenomenology of reading narrative and of experiencing story worlds have consistently shown that levels of understanding and enjoyment of stories correlate to the reader's previous encounters with narrative intricacy (Hogan 2003). Faced with narrative complexity, uncertainty, and even incoherence and contradiction, experienced readers are able to supply familiar scripts and schemata to help them make surprising and improbable connections. The wider and more varied their past experience of fictional story worlds, the

greater their competence (and pleasure) in finding strategies to make sense of the strange and unfamiliar, and the more nuanced their anticipatory aptitudes (Schneider 2005).

Whether or not they are explicitly treated as such within the narrative frame, plural story multiverses (as distinct from unified, single story worlds) also appear in postmodern narratives which present multiple, mutually contradictory and incompatible tellings of the same story or event, with no obvious cues as to which version may be the factual and which the counterfactual (as in John Fowles' 1969 *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, or Kate Atkins' 2013 novel *Life after Life*; and in films like *Run Lola Run* (1998), or *Coherence* (2013)). Richardson, in his influential analysis of narrative time in postmodern and non-mimetic fiction (2002) has shown that the consciously unrealistic (also described by narratologists as 'anti-mimetic', 'non-mimetic', or 'unnatural') treatment of time and temporality encountered in many postmodern narratives radically destabilizes traditional notions of story and story worlds. In Richardson's account (2002: 48-49; c.f. Fludernik 1996: 333-37):

In these texts, there is no single, unambiguous story to be extrapolated from the discourse, but rather two or more contradictory versions that seriously vitiate the very notion of story (*histoire*) insofar as it is conceived as a single, self-consistent series of events that can be inferred from the discourse.

The tools of classical narratology must be refined and theories of reader-response revised if we are to analyse effectively the anticipatory dynamics at work in these postmodern narratives. This is because such postmodern novels treat past, present and future, alongside memory, attention, and anticipation, very differently to pre-modernist fiction. According to Herman's postclassical narratology (2002: 220-250), novels which employ such 'polychronic narration' resist recourse to any one dominant time or story line, to any singular deictic 'here and now', or to any unified chronotope. This entails 'a mode of narration that purposely resists linearity by multiplying the ways in which narrated events can be ordered', incorporating a kind of 'fuzzy temporality' (Herman 2002: 212-14).

Classical narratology, following the intuitions of Aristotle and the refinements of his poetics by the Russian Formalists in the early twentieth century, assumes that however intricately plotted a narrative may be (however complex its anachronies, its flashbacks and flashforwards, or its counterfactual bifurcations) the reader is able to make sense of it by cognitively reconstructing its 'real' chronolinear *story* (also known as *fabula* or *histoire*). The narratee (the reader or viewer) processes narrative complexity and multiplicity by attempting to reduce a temporally intricate pattern of incidents into a chronological series of causally related events. Thus, in Forster's famous definition, a story is 'a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence ... "The king died and then the queen died," is a story' (Forster 1927: 86), albeit not one with much narrative richness.

However, in a postmodernist narrative we might encounter a story in which a royal couple dies in 1066. And then dies in 1060. And then dies in 2017. In Atkinson's 2013 novel *Life After Life*, for example, the protagonist dies in November 1930. She is stillborn on 11

February 1910. She dies in June 1914. She dies in January 1915. Ensuing iterations of her multiple lives see her die in different ways and at different times, again and again. This self-contradictory chronologically *illogical* pattern prevents readers from reconstructing a story out of 'events arranged in their time-sequence'. It simultaneously prevents them from identifying any one life story as the 'actual' or principal story line from which the other lives branch out as 'counterfactuals'. In this plural story world (or rather, multiverse) all lives are possible and all alternatives equally probable. As Heise observes (1997: 55): 'Postmodernist novels ... project into the narrative present and past an experience of time which normally is only available for the future: time dividing and subdividing, bifurcating and branching off continuously into multiple possibilities and alternatives'. The readerly competence required to process such narratives, to see past, present and future as if open, contingent, and multi-linear (rather than closed, determined, and uni-linear) may open up new possibilities in the way that we process future anticipations too.

8. (In)Conclusion and Summary

Narrative space is now plastic and manipulable. It has become heterogenous, ambiguous, pluralized. Its inhabitants no longer appear to have an irrefutable or essential relation to any particular space. Rather, space opens up as a variable and finally indeterminate feature of any given world.

A. Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (1996: 12)

Bode characterizes such postmodern fiction as a distinctive type of 'future narrative' (Bode 2013). Not because its story multiverses represent future spatio-temporal worlds and chronotopes, but because they stage 'the fact that the future is a space of yet unrealized potentially, or, technically speaking, a "possibility space"' (Bode 2013: 1; cf. Boyd 2009: 122). Bode defines future narratives as those which are open-ended and multi-linear, with nodes producing bifurcations, multi-linear plots, and multiple continuations. Such narratives are supposed to be found in children's 'choose-your-own-adventure' books and other interactive fiction, postmodern novels (especially those where the reader chooses the reading order), multiplayer online gaming, and even the amusement park rides based on popular film narratives (see Abbott 2008). These future narratives are also found in the anticipatory story scenarios used by climatologists, social and political scientists, and other futurists (Bode 2013: 2 specifically mentions 'insurance companies and world climate change experts, [and] peak oil aficionados').

The postmodern novel, in Bode's analysis, is a particularly valuable type of future narrative because it 'testifies to the new idea that – though the present can be seen as the outcome of relatable cause-and-effect chains – it is also 'only' a probable state, alongside which other probable (or equally improbable) states can then be imagined' (Bode 2013: 206). The postmodern novel thus helps to mitigate against the negative preshadowing

effects of 'presentness' by affirming that the present itself is not singular but plural, not closed but open, not linear but complex. More like the future than the past, in fact.

Bode's claim that this is a 'new' idea may be challenged by the evidence of such openness, multiplicity, and complexity in ancient narratives (such as the plots of Greek tragedy) and in early novels (such as Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759)). However, Bode's championing of this kind of 'future narrative' thinking and its heuristic value as a model for anticipation is supported by recent work in the social and political sciences. His innovative theory and poetics of future narratives in literature finds an important corollary in Uprichard's work on 'narratives of the future' in social science. For Uprichard (2011: 104) the objects of anticipation and future studies: 'are dissipative, open, non-linear, multi-dimensional, social systems which are situated in time and space'. She maintains that the stories we tell about the future must therefore be themselves open, multi-linear, and multi-dimensional – plural rather than singular.

The same insistence upon the importance of multiplicity and plurality appears in studies concerned with the future of global sustainability (Costanza, Graumlich and Steffen 2007: 419-21):

The environment, society, and the economy each represent complex systems characterized by nonlinearities, autocatalysis, time-delayed feedback loops, emergent phenomena, and chaotic behavior [...] to achieve the outcomes we desire, it will be necessary to incorporate simultaneously several different perspectives, [and] ... the essential theories, tools, and knowledge of multiple disciplines.

Among the multiple perspectives and multi-interdisciplinary tools forecast here as necessary to achieve the effective anticipation of future scenarios and models for these complex environmental, social, and economic systems, future narratives and narratology can play a meaningful part. What we need in the future and for the future, perhaps, is not just a closer dialogue between narratology and anticipation studies, but a multiplicity of dialogues between *narratologies* and *anticipations* – *plural*: dialogues with cognitive narratologists and possible worlds theorists, with climatologists, economists, social and political scientists; readings of counterfactuals, post-modern fiction, and in particular so-called 'future narratives' with their non-linear, bifurcating, open plots and possibilities. Through such dialogues and readings we might find mutually enriching plots for the narrative future(s) of anticipation.

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