# Episode structures in literary narratives

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## Abstract

*This article is concerned with the moment-by-moment unfolding of the text as we might suppose the reader to experience it; in addressing one aspect of this reading experience, I propose a definition of the episode, and of episode structure, in literary narratives. To do so, I draw on insights from Ingarden, Iser, Barthes, Eco, Jim Rosenberg, and Ed Tan, but have found most useful the discussion of narrative structure in a 1922 essay by the Russian Formalist A. A. Reformatsky, which includes an analysis of Maupassant's story "Un Coq Chanta". Reformatsky's essay is analyzed in detail. In a final section, I review responses to a short story (Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour") and consider the evidence for episodes in readers' responses. To the number of convergent criteria used for characterizing episodes I add the role of the narrative twist occurring at or near the end of an episode, serving to intensify or redirect the issues raised, and itself characterized by a distinct development in readers' feeling. Episodes provide the phases during which issues of concern to readers are managed and developed, and the analysis of the episodes of a story may thus provide a valuable framework for identifying the key developments in the responses of readers.*

## 6. Linear reading

Investigation of the structure of literary texts is as old as literary theory itself: Aristotle's *Poetics*, for examples, provides a foundational set of perspectives on the most effective organization of tragic drama – the coherence of the plot that unfolds over a day, the place of peripeteia (a sudden change in fortune), or the effect of catharsis. Yet most discussions of structure have tended to focus on imbricated rather than linear components, that is, elements that recur and are interwoven at various levels, such as perspective effects (e.g., shifts in point of view), the recurrence of thematic elements, or an organizing metaphor. Less attention has been given to the moment-by-moment unfolding of

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the text itself as we might suppose the reader to experience it. The authors of standard treatments of narrative, such as Rimmon-Kenan (1983) or Seymour Chatman (1978), focus attention on other structural features and largely overlook the sequential experience of reading. The primary source of insight into this linear aspect is found, as might be expected, in the writings of the phenomenological theorists, notably Roman Ingarden and Wolfgang Iser, as we will note below, while some attention to sequence in narrative was offered in Roland Barthes's earlier structuralist work. Among the few other theorists who have discussed it I will mention Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Jim Rosenberg, and Ed Tan; but perhaps the most useful discussion is found in an essay on narrative structure dating from 1922 by the Russian Formalist critic A. A. Reformatsky, who analyzes a short story by Maupassant (an example that I examine in some detail).

In considering the structure of a literary text as it unfolds in the reader's experience, the distance at which we make our observations can be varied. Close to the surface of the text we find the type of effect described by Stanley Fish (1980) under the rubric of "affective stylistics" in which a given sentence arouses expectations that it then subverts; or we see clusters of phonetic effects, an ellipsis, or a figurative expression – stylistic features that have been termed foregrounding (van Peer 1986; Miall and Kuiken 1994). Moving further back from the text, larger-scale features come into view, such as the articulation of plot into its sections (induction, rising action, etc.), or the scenarios of successive chapters. In this article, however, I consider a structure that is in between: a mid-level focus on what I will term the *episode*. In prose this is likely to consist of a number of sentences taking up half a page or a page, usually demarcated by a coherence in the temporal or spatial setting or both. The most signal feature of the episode, however, is that it offers a thematically distinctive topic requiring a shift in the reader's understanding. As I will suggest, episodes often function by introducing and establishing a certain setting or concern, then offering a special twist, or insight, in the final sentence or two. Such a twist has the effect of motivating reader interest in the next episode, which it thus helps to launch.

A conception analogous to this can be found in Eco's (1984) work on the reader. He distinguishes three levels of topic: sentence, discursive, and narrative topics. Discursive topics, which "at the level of short sequences can rule the understanding of microstructural elements" (Eco 1984: 26) seem the closest to my sense of the episode as consisting of a series of sentences. While Eco's "topic" organizes lower-level semantic elements, hence the unity of elements in terms of time and space and their relevance to the actions of the characters, it also appears to participate in elaborating the larger meanings of the text, its macropropositions. These emerge for the reader, in Eco's words, from the "changes of state" undergone by characters in the text (the macroproposition,

a statement about the larger meaning of the text, usually inferred by the reader from the details of the text):

> Since every step usually involves a change of state and a lapse of time, the reader is led to make an intermediate extensional operation: he considers the various macropropositions as statements about events taking place in a still-bracketed possible world. Each of these statements concerns the way in which a given individual determines or undergoes a certain change of state, and the reader is induced to wonder what could happen at the next step of the story. (Eco 1984: 31)

While Eco's formula suggests how the reader is motivated to read, progressing from one topic to the next, it is less clear how Eco defines a topic or a change of state. The conception of the episode I offer here provides working definitions of both these aspects.

The homogeneity of such topics is developed by Barthes (1977), who considers the logical relationships that help tie the sequences of narrative together. Thus, "A sequence is a logical succession of nuclei bound together by a relation of solidarity: the sequence opens when one of its terms has no solidary antecedent and closes when another of its terms has no consequent" (Barthes 1977: 101). As I argue in more detail below, one implication of this view is that the coherence of a sequence lies not only in terms of time and space, since we usually recognize the event that motivates a sequence as delimited by where it occurs and how long it requires, but also in representing an advance in the narrative action. What occurs in the sequence unfolds a new phase that is in part unprecedented, but also constitutes the completion of an action on which subsequent sequences will build – eventualities that the current sequence, indeed, appears to invite. As Barthes (1977: 102) goes on to say, a sequence "always involves moments of risk": since the action involved is not predetermined, what a character says or does in it represents a choice, and this will have consequences that the reader may partly anticipate, but that invite attention to the ensuing narrative.

Similarly, Roman Ingarden (1973a) has provided an account of the experience of sequential reading. Having considered at length the different "strata" of the literary work (which interweave and co-exist), Ingarden (1973a: 304) goes on to look at it in "longitudinal section"; this is realized in temporal terms when the work is "concretized" during reading. In this perspective "every literary work of art contains an order of sequence, a determinate system of phase positions, in which every phase consists of corresponding phases of all the interconnected strata of the work" (Ingarden 1973a: 309). Each phase of the work, says Ingarden (1973a: 310), contains elements from earlier phases, elements that are new, and elements that provide the foundation of later phases. Thus we might see a given episode developing a character or a plot motif that is also manifested in previous or following episodes. "The presence of a 'sequence' of phases of a work has the consequence that every work has a determinate line of development and thus an *internal dynamics*" (1973a: 312).

While Ingarden's "phase" would seem to correspond to the term "episode," in fact elsewhere he shows that the unit he has in mind is smaller. While the "phase," defined as the present moment of reading, can vary considerably, encompassing a single sentence, several sentences, or a part of a sentence, "Usually the scope of the vividly present phase is identical with the semantic unit, the sentence" (Ingarden 1973b: 98). The sentences then flow into the past, appearing "as complete units of meaning" and "retained in active memory … condensed into a relatively simple meaning" (1973b: 99). For Ingarden (1973b: 101) the active memory is "a kind of peripheral feeling, which has no more precise content than that something has happened which is closely connected with our present moment" and has "a certain continuation in the present" – in other words, it will influence and help shape response to subsequent phases. It seems unlikely, however, that each sentence of a text will be so remembered. I suggest that it is the episode that leaves readers with a "peripheral feeling," first for the implications of the "twist" that impels a reader's interest in the action or the situation of the characters, and second for the ambience (overall setting in time and place) to the extent that this prepares for or enables the "twist," making it possible. For example, in the Maupassant story discussed below, "Un Coq Chanta," we are unlikely to remember that it was during a party that Madame d'Avancelles said she would probably yield to the Baron in the Autumn, since this is incidental to her statement; however, we are likely to remember that it is at night in the park that the couple first kiss passionately, since the natural setting seems an incentive to the characters' erotic potential.

In building on Ingarden's work, Wolfgang Iser (1978) points to the shifting and constructive nature of the reader's response, coining the term "wandering viewpoint" to characterize it. At any given moment the reader is occupied with one perspective or theme, but the others remain present as the horizon of his current view, while the previous perspectives condition his current understanding; thus a continual shifting of theme and horizon occurs in which "each position is set in a fresh context, with the result that the reader's attention is drawn to aspects hitherto not apparent" (Iser 1978: 97). Thus arises the "wandering viewpoint" of the reader, which "constantly switches between the textual perspectives, each of the switches representing an articulate reading moment" (1978: 114). As the viewpoint changes, what was foreground becomes background, "which is now to exert its influence on yet another new foreground" (1978: 116).

> Here we have one of the basic elements of the reading process: the wandering viewpoint divides the text up into interacting structures, and these give rise to a grouping activity that is fundamental to the grasping of the text. (Iser 1978: 119)

Iser (1978: 120) goes on to apply the term *gestalt* to the grouping process, in the sense that the coherent sections constructed by the reader constitute a series of

*gestalten*. Bal (1985: 23–24) offers some concrete suggestions for identifying the discrete narrative structures that would constitute a *gestalt* (chronology, the role of the actors, the nature of their confrontation, the location), although she leaves them undeveloped. However, when Iser turns to examples of *gestalten* his conception appears to relate more to vertical components of the text than to linear ones, and the extent to which the perspectives constitute episodes in our terms remains unclear. The concept of the wandering viewpoint, however, is undoubtedly appropriate to understanding the function of episodes, since each successive episode tends to promote attention to a different and, in part, unprecedented aspect of the narrative's thematics – a phenomenon that will be particularly evident in explaining the role of the narrative twist that often closes an episode.

The clearest example of episodic analysis is provided by Reformatsky (1973), the Russian Formalist critic, in an essay first published in Russian in 1922 in which he develops the structural approach to narrative of his teacher A. M. Petrovsky. Complaining of the inadequate state of the field, Reformatsky begins by listing the components that he feels should be considered in the morphological analysis of narrative. These include the distinction between descriptive and action-oriented aspects of narrative; the role of place and time (whether time is treated chronogically or not, for example); how characters are characterized (whether overall or for a specific scene); the themes or motifs that underlie plot construction, and the different plot types that result. While Reformatsky outlines these and related aspects, providing briefly and schematically various examples of their functioning, as Doležel (1973: 82) points out he "fails to establish relationships and hierarchies of the particular components of his 'model'". This limitation is partly overcome in the second half of his paper, which is devoted to a detailed analysis of "Un Coq Chanta" by Maupassant.[1] I will first describe the salient features of Reformatsky's analysis, then show how the conception of the episode I have outlined above can be built on his work.

## 7. Episodes in Maupassant's "Un Coq Chanta": A Formalist analysis

In Maupassant's story, Madame Berthe d'Avencelles is being pursued by Baron Joseph Croissard, a liberty that she is able to encourage without satisfying, as her own husband, who is said to be weak and small, takes no notice. In her honor the Baron lays on hunting parties at his estate. The main part of the story focuses on one particular boar hunt, during which Berthe plays the coquette with the Baron. She delays his participation in the hunt while seeming to promise herself to him if he will kill the boar in her presence. Although this fails to occur, the Baron is nevertheless able to find his way to her bedroom that night. But Berthe delays joining him in bed and, exhausted by his efforts during the day, the Baron falls asleep and wakes the next morning to satirical comment by Berthe.

In Reformatsky's analysis, there are two main "themes," that of the Baron ($a_1$) and Berthe (b), with the husband as a secondary theme ($a_2$). By "theme" here, Reformatsky appears to mean the disposition of the characters and what this implies for their actions: Berthe is "tall, dark and determined"; the Baron has "broad shoulders, strong build and fair moustaches," while the husband has "short arms, legs, neck, nose and everything else." Thus the outset of the story, where the characters are described, disposes the reader to see Berthe and the Baron as appropriate sexual partners. Reformatsky goes on to state that the main motif (A) is the courting of Berthe by the Baron, while the hunt provides the second motif (B); the second motif both complements the first, while also being in opposition to it (the Baron expresses his desire for Berthe by pursuing boar, while the specific hunt that is narrated serves only to thwart the consummation of his desire). Reformatsky divides the story into a prologue (*Vorgeschichte*) and story proper (*Geschichte*); the latter begins with the account of the particular hunt in which the Baron will pursue and forfeit access to Berthe. Chronologically the story is told in natural sequence ("dispositional order") except for two analepses in the *Vorgeschichte*. While the main setting is Autumn, two brief references allude to the preceding winter and the spring. Reformatsky also draws our attention to two treatments of nature, what he refers to as the *paysage de la culture* (e.g., the hounds, the lawns) and the *paysage de la nature* (e.g., the Autumn season, the falling leaves). These become associated with developments in the story, e.g., Berthe's announcement to the Baron: "If I do succumb to you, my friend, it will not be before the fall of the leaf."

Reformatsky goes on to trace the introduction and development of the motifs of the story in the prologue and the story, but more important for our purpose is his division of the narrative into scenes. In his analysis the prologue appears to be made up of three sections (although this is not quite clear from Reformatsky's account), while the story itself consists, in Reformatsky's terms, of the "onset" and five scenes. Reformatsky also specifies "connective" passages of description occurring between scenes 1 and 2, and scenes 2 and 3, in keeping with his distinction between descriptive and action-oriented aspects, but I incorporate these passages into my account of episodes. Scenes are characterized primarily by the development of the motifs. Thus in scene 1, the Baron is described as "Frémissant d'amour et d'inquiétude" ("trembling with love and anxiety"), listening to both Berthe's banter and the sounds of the hunt in the distance. This develops respectively motifs A (the courtship) and B (the hunt), and signifies "the first appearance of the Spannung" (the narrative tension). But already Reformatsky divides this scene into two episodes, since he refers to the ensuing kiss as a further development of the Spannung. It is not clear what characteristics impel Reformatsky to see one scene with two episodes here, since several occurrences in this scene serve to develop the story. I will argue

for merging the Onset with the opening of Scene 1, and dividing this part of the story into three episodes.

Reformatsky goes on to point out a number of felicitous features of the narrative construction in the scenes that follow: in particular, for each scene described he cites one or more key phrases that occur at or close to the end of the scene. In each case the phrase signals a point at which the Spannung increases, until it is said to reach its culminating point in the penultimate fourth scene with its climactic promise, Berthe's "Je vais revenir. Attendez-moi," spoken as she points to the bed, a promise that seems set to fulfil the principle motivation of the story. Yet it is followed by the unexpected and anticlimactic failure of the Baron: he falls into "the unconquerable, heavy sleep of the worn-out hunter." Considered as part of the episodes, such key phrases as this last signal the closing move of an episode, and have the specific function of surprising us as readers and engaging our interest in the ensuing portion of the narrative. Such phrases are striking particularly because they include the "moments of risk" of which Barthes (1977: 102) writes. The last example cited provides a clear example: as the Baron stretched out luxuriously in bed, he risked the eventuality that has now overtaken him – that of falling asleep. More poignantly, he has risked losing thereby the interest of Berthe, who will scorn him the next morning when he awakens. It is, in part, our sense of such contingencies that shapes our preoccupation with a narrative of this kind: events might have turned out otherwise.

The "Pointe" of the story, as Reformatsky puts it, lies in the way the hunt motif, apparently auxiliary to the motif of the Baron's courtship, turns out to be in opposition to it. While this is well observed, perhaps the more important development is contained in its succession of episodes. In the Table below I summarize the main divisions of the story made by Reformatsky, alongside my own division into episodes and the key phrases that signal the narrative twists that occur at the end of each episode. The right-hand column also indicates episode divisions where these differ from or subdivide Reformatsky's Onset and scenes 1 and 3 (e.g., 1a, 1b, etc.), but I retain Reformatsky's numbering in identifying episodes.

In general, it is evident that Reformatsky's scene divisions are based not only on development of motifs but also on unity of space or time, or both, although his account nowhere mentions this. Exceptions occur in scene i, which offers a general introduction to the characters and alludes only generally to the present time of the narrative, which turns out to be autumn, and to the main locations of the Baron's pursuits, Paris and Normandy; and scene iii, which refers analeptically to Berthe's anticipation in the spring that she might succumb to the Baron, then returns to the present. While Reformatsky divides the first part of the story into Onset and scene 1, characterizing the primary feature of the Onset as description, a consideration of time and place suggests that the Onset and the opening of scene 1 belong together in one episode: in both the hunt has been

Table 1. *Episode structure of "Un Coq Chanta" by Maupassant*

| Scene | Opening words | Reformatsky themes, motifs | Episodes and twists |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Vorgeschichte | |
| I | Madame Berthe d'Avancelles | A1 she had resisted<br>B1 he was giving hunting parties<br>A2 she had not granted<br>B2 there was a constant round of hunting parties | Le baron se ruinait pour elle. [The Baron was ruining himself for her] |
| Ii | Tout le jour, les chiens [All day long, the hounds] | *paysage* de la culture, pc1<br>*paysage* de la nature, pn1 | une odeur de chair nue [the odour of naked flesh] |
| Iii | Un soir, dans une fête, au dernier printemps [One evening, during a party, the previous spring] | Complication:<br>A3 'If I do succumb'<br>B3 A great hunt was going to take place | "Baron, si vous tuez la bête" [Baron, if you kill the brute] |
| | | Geschichte | |
| Onset | Dès l'aurore, il fut debout [At dawn he was up and out] | B hero/hunt<br>*paysage*: Les chasseurs partirent [The hunters left]: pc2 | (1a. Dès l'aurore) |
| 1 | a) Mme d'Avancelles, par malice [Mme d'Avancelles, out of mischief]<br>b) Puis ils tournèrent à droite [Just then they turned to the right] | a) *tension*: A4. listening to her chatter and the hounds, + B4: his anxiety [d'inquiétude];<br>b) *tension*: A5. parallelism: soit hasard, soit volonté [either by chance or by design]; soit confusion, soit remords [either from confusion, or remorse]<br>*paysage*: Le tumulte de la chasse, pc3<br>*refrain*: "Qui m'aime me suive!", rB | Frémissant d'amour et d'inquiétude [trembling with love and anxiety]<br>(1b. "Vous ne m'aimez donc plus?" [you do not love me any longer?])<br>"tant pis pour vous" [so much the worse for you]<br>(1c. Puis ils tournèrent à droite) "Qui m'aime me suive!" [Let him who loves me follow me] |
| 2 | Quand elle arriva, quelques minutes plus tard [When she arrived a few minutes later] | B5: motif completed, with killing of boar | dans l'épaule le couteau de chasse [in the shoulder the hunting knife] |
| 3 | La curée se fit aux flambeaux par une nuit douce [The quarry was cut by torchlight on a soft night] | *paysage*: pn2, then pc4<br>A6: amorous couple*refrain*: "Qui m'aime me suive!", rA.<br>Expect satisfactory culmination of A | (3a. La curée) leur besoin d'étreinte étaient devenus si véhéments [their longing for a closer embrace became so vehement].<br>(3b. Les cors ne sonnaient plus.) "Qui m'aime me suive!" |
| 4 | Une heure plus tard [An hour later] | *tension*: A7. "Je vais revenir" … du lit. [I will return]: anticipate final dénoument | sommeil des chasseurs exténués [sleep of the worn-out hunter] |
| 5 | Tout à coup, la fenêtre étant restée entrouverte [Suddenly, the window having remained half open] | Unexpected dénoument, A8. un coq, perché dans un arbre voisin, chanta [a cock, perched in a nearby tree, sang] | elle parlait à son mari [as she spoke to her husband] |

initiated, the Baron and Berthe proceed together (to the frustration of the Baron), while the setting specifies the park in which the hunt is taking place and its distance from the long alley in which Berthe keeps the Baron away from the hunt. The contrast of park where the hunt unfolds at a distance and alley is key to the position of the Baron, who we learn, far from being pleased with Berthe's company, is "trembling with love and anxiety" as the two major pursuits in his life become increasingly separated.

The intermediate level of focalization apparent in 1a then gives way to the closer focus of 1b in which we overhear the conversation between the couple and see the Baron's frustration intensify. In this conversation the absurd conditions that Berthe imposes on the Baron are presented: he must *both* continue by her side *and* kill the boar in her presence. If he doesn't, Berthe tells him, "so much the worse for you." The time and place in which this occurs is closely circumscribed. It is followed by an explicit change of place, "Just then they turned to the right," which initiates episode 1c. Here the couple first traverse a narrow path then the thickets of the forest where the boar suddenly appears. Having accidentally (or not) obtained a kiss on the lips from Berthe, the Baron is motivated to leave Berthe with the cry "Let him who loves me follow me!" (which, as we eventually learn, is the beginning of his undoing: the phrase will be repeated by Berthe at another critical moment at the end of scene 3).

The treatment of time and space constitutes a coherence-making strategy for staging episodes, one that has been reaffirmed in recent discourse processing models that point to the role of time, place, and other features in evoking the situation models of narrative (Zwaan and Radvansky 1998). As studies with readers have shown (e.g., Zwaan, Magliano, and Graesser 1995), shifts in time, place, or causality during a story require readers to reorientate; the extra processing that results is reflected in longer reading times. The validity of the episode structure emerged as a key outcome of studies of episodes in the earlier story-grammar tradition. For example, Haberlandt and his colleagues (Haberlandt 1980; Haberlandt et al. 1980) showed that readers of narrative take longer at episode boundaries: they must both assimilate the meaning of a completed episode and shift the current mental model to accommodate the new information presented at the beginning of the ensuing episode. In studies involving simple two-episode stories focused on elementary protagonists with basic goals and behaviors, readers were found to take longer to read sentences at episode boundaries, that is, the first and last sentences. At the close of an episode it was suggested that readers then organize the information they have assimilated into a higher-level "macroproposition," and this is likely to be among those aspects of the story transferred to long-term memory (Haberlandt 1980: 115).

While it seems unlikely that readers of more complex stories of literary quality would show a comparable pattern of responses, the episodes of such narratives are still characterized by a range of internal features that endow them with

a specific identity: not only unity of time or space, or the presence of certain characters, but also possibly stylistic resources, point of view, or thematic concerns. In literary narratives, in addition, as suggested in the Table above, each episode also presents an extra challenge to the reader's understanding at or near its end. This serves to develop the themes or motifs of the narrative in a specific direction, often unexpected by the reader; such narrative "twists," as I have called them, represent a focusing of issues for the characters involved, beyond which events may unfold in more than one way.

Thus the conversation of episode 1b elaborates the conditions that Berthe announces she is imposing on the Baron, which the Baron (not unnaturally) objects to as impossible. Yet Berthe seems to turn the screw on the Baron quite specifically at the end of this conversation by saying "laughingly" ("en riant") that he must comply, or "so much the worse for you," while then going on to speak "tenderly" to the Baron. Are we (and the Baron) to take her seriously or not? And how is the Baron to respond to such an impossible demand, which, now it has been placed in his path, threatens to disable his ardent pursuit of Berthe? This "twist" serves to cast Berthe in a new light, a coquet who only offers herself under impossible conditions. The structure of such episodes has some similarity to the "given-new" structure of the sentence shown by Clark and Haviland (1977) – and in various other forms, such as topic-comment. A situation is described for which readers can readily construct a situation model (the "given"), since the events shown are based either on structures already set up in the narrative (here, the hunt co-occurring with Berthe's response to the Baron's pursuit) or on situations that may be typical (Berthe's character as a flirt, toying with the man). This provides the background to the new element introduced at or near the end of the episode, which is calculated to catch the reader's attention in specific ways. In episode 1b Berthe's remark "so much the worse for you" strikes a new note, introducing a threat into the relationship whose consequences are unpredictable. We notice that in Berthe's previous statements to the Baron in episode iii, which seemed to promise eventual submission, nothing prepared us for this threat: her love was likely to be given on certain conditions only, which the Baron was well placed to meet.

In subsequent episodes the narrative twists seem new in the following ways. In the next episode, 1c, the cry of the Baron with its aphoristic structure, "Qui m'aime me suive!" ("Let him who loves me follow me"), introduces a ritualistic tone to the Baron's behaviour – it seems that now the boar is in sight, he is following some old, atavistic script, or perhaps citing some family motto, as he suddenly disappears from view. Evidently he expects Berthe to follow him, but the motto alerts us to another condition: does she indeed love him? The rest of the story will show one way or another.

The following episode, the shortest in our analysis consisting of only one sentence, ending in the phrase, "the Baron's hunting knife driven into [the boar's]

shoulder up to the hilt." The detail provided here is isomorphic in relation to the two motifs analyzed by Reformatsky; the violence and energy it derives from the hunt offers a parallel to the Baron's desire for Berthe. It is an anticipation of that gratification, but also a symbol for Berthe who perhaps witnesses it as a representation of her fate if she were to yield. The end of episode 3, nevertheless, seems to promise just this outcome, since for the first time Berthe is given a desire that appears to match that of the Baron: "their longing for a closer embrace." The "twist" at the end of episode 4 similarly seems to suggest that Berthe is now open to the Baron's wishes, as she repeats the motto, "Let him who loves me follow me." Since we already know that the previous utterance of this phrase by the Baron was followed by the violation of Berthe's condition (she did not witness the Baron actually killing the boar), the suspicious reader might anticipate that another miscarriage is in store here.

In episode 4 the Baron's enterprise takes him into Berthe's bedroom at last, where he is at least able to embrace her knees. But his own activity of the day has been too much, and the anticlimactic twist that closes this episode shows the Baron falling into "the sleep of the worn-out hunter." The activity by which the Baron had hoped to win Berthe ends by defeating him. In Reformatsky's (1973: 100) words, "The Pointe and the actual dénoument of the novella confirm the fact that the auxiliary motif B is constructed in a seemingly concomitant, but actually contrasting manner with respect to motif A. It has the auxiliary function of creating the conflict". In the final episode the next morning, the magnificent figure of the Baron is unexpectedly reduced to the derided, weak figure of the husband when Berthe speaks to him as "she spoke to her husband." The passage (and the story) also ends with the crow of the cock, an ironic reversal given the failure of Baron's sexual role: "cela ne vous regarde pas" – that is nothing for you to consider.

From the reader's perspective, the "wandering viewpoint" of Iser seems an apt description for the succession of episodes in this story each with its narrative twist. From the first ("The baron was ruining himself for her") to the penultimate (the Baron's "sleep of the worn-out hunter"), each twist switches our attention to a further series of possibilities or indeterminacies, launching the issues for the next episode. Thus what was foreground at the end of one episode becomes background to the next, "which is now to exert its influence on yet another new foreground" (Iser 1978: 116). In this process, Iser (1978: 114) argues, the reader's viewpoint "switches between the textual perspectives". Reformatsky's account demonstrates this feature in pointing to the alternating roles of motifs A and B (the courtship, the hunt), with the subsidiary descriptive feature of the *paysage de la culture* and the *paysage de la nature*. These perspectives undoubtedly provide the most significant structuring components of the story, but the twists also allow us to refine them and glimpse additional perspectives (e.g., the cruelty implicit in Berthe's taunt, "so much the worse for you"), and to rectify the gap in

Reformatsky's account noted by Doležel (1973: 82), that the relationships and hierarchies between components are not specified. We can consider each episode in this respect as being motivated by its twists. Just as each story we hear must confront and overcome the rejoinder "So what?", as Vipond and Hunt (1984) remind us in their account of point-driven reading, each episode also faces and answers that rejoinder in offering its concluding narrative twist. If, in episode 1b, we are led to ask what Berthe's behavior to the Baron seems to mean and why we are being shown this particular conversation, the twist, with its unexpected insight into Berthe's attitude, provides a provisional answer: "so much the worse for you," she says "laughingly." The shift in viewpoint this offers opens another perspective on Berthe, whom we had earlier thought ready to accommodate the Baron's desires (she would succumb in the Autumn); this perspective then provides in turn a part of the background against which we read subsequent episodes (i.e., we ask what she will make of the Baron killing the boar before she arrives, or why she runs off to bed without the Baron).

The recognition of episodes and their points remains, of course, the responsibility of readers. For certain literary narratives episode boundaries, rather than being objectively determinable, may depend in part on the interpretive attitude of the reader (just as our perspective on the Maupassant story varies in certain respects from that of Reformatsky). The process of locating episodes is dramatized in recent interactive fictions or hypertext novels, where readers are rarely presented with a complete episode in one section (or "lexia"), but must activate links embedded within the text to move to additional lexia. Assuming the reader is actively constructing the narrative in so doing, the process of reading across links can be described in Jim Rosenberg's (1996) helpful term as "episode foraging." While, unlike hypertext narrative, the sequence of sentences in an ordinary narrative is not open to question, yet the concept of foraging is still relevant in that the reader is faced with the task of constructing episodes from sentences encountered one after another on the page. As we saw in the case of Maupassant's story, the division into episodes is not given by the author's paragraphing (and it is notable that the larger paragraphs of the English translator's version violate several of the episode boundaries identified here or by Reformatsky).

In addition to foraging on grounds of unity of action, time, or place, the narrative twist, as I have suggested, provides a compelling moment for reassembling the meaning of the current episode and inferring its point. In this respect, episodes also present an affective structure, as Tan (1994) has argued. Building both on discourse processing models and on emotion theory, in which an emotion felt during reading represents a particular "concern" of the reader (Frijda 1986), Tan sees a story as a superepisode divided into a series of episodes. In his model, episodes are defined in terms of protagonist goals, as in the simple stories studied by Haberlandt and his colleagues (1980): i.e., problem, attempt, resolution, each with its accompanying emotion; and once emotion is instated,

"emotion controls further cognitive processing to a considerable degree, feeding back onto its meaning determinants" (Tan 1994: 184). Beyond the episode, Tan (1994: 183) also notes that longer term emotions can be created, i.e., desires, hopes, or fears, which may be subject to alteration during the story. In the Maupassant story it is clear that desire, to the extent that a reader feels empathy for the Baron, evolves and intensifies during the course of the story until the final episode. More specific emotions occur during particular episodes: in 1b, feelings of frustration (whether amused or irritated) at Berthe's provocations; in 1c, the erotic violence of the Baron's kiss and Berthe's answering gesture. In this way each episode can be characterized in terms of a specific feeling – although readers may vary in how they realize the feelings prompted in them by the story. In this perspective, the narrative twist becomes apparent either by intensifying the current feeling (as in 1c, when the Baron cries "Let him who loves me follow me!"), or by situating it unexpectedly (as in the opening episode, when we learn that the ardent and determined Baron "was ruining himself for her"). As Tan (1994: 184) suggests, emotion may be the guiding feature of readers' responses, with predictive inferences primarily arising from them, while "spatial and temporal relations are only inferred in as far as they contribute to emotional appraisal" (cf. Miall 1995).

## 8. The reader's representation of episodes in a short story

In the last part of this article I review responses to a short story and consider the evidence for episodes in readers' responses. The study to be described was based on "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin (first published in 1894).[2] In order to study readers' first responses to episodes, we divided the story into four sections that seemed to capture the story's episodic structure. These were presented on computer screen; each segment (usually consisting of one sentence) was revealed as the reader pressed the space bar, while previous segments scrolled upwards and out of sight. When the end of an episode was reached, readers were interrupted and asked to make comments about their experience of the story by talking to a tape recorder; they then answered nine questions by entering ratings. After this reading of the next section continued. The comments were later transcribed for analysis. We collected responses from 45 readers.

The story was divided as follows. In the first episode the young Mrs. Louise Mallard is told of the death of her husband in a railway accident, and after weeping at once in response she decides to be alone. In the second episode she sits in her room facing a window through which she can see trees and patches of blue sky. In the third, a strange sensation gradually overcomes her – she realizes that she is free, and rejoices in the life ahead of her. In the last episode she is persuaded to emerge from her room, but as she comes down the stairs her husband unexpectedly appears through the front door, and at the sight of him

she has a heart attack and dies. Each episode has a certain unity given by its location; while episodes 2 and 3 are both placed in Louise's room, the waiting that first occurs, the "suspension of intelligent thought," is followed by a marked shift in the next episode, where we are told that "There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully." Following her response to her sudden sense of freedom, the fourth episode begins by returning us to the immediate situation: her sister "Josephine was kneeling before the closed door" and persuades her to come downstairs. Each episode also seems to arouse a characteristic feeling: grief, suspense, liberation, then triumph followed by shock. At or near the end of each episode, as in the Maupassant story, we find an important narrative twist. In each case it serves to advance our understanding of the main character and her predicament. At the end of episode 1 the narrator mentions Louise's decision to be alone (foreshadowing the recognition of her new status). The last paragraph of 2 notes that the lines of her face "bespoke repression" and her stare the "suspension of intelligent thought." In 3 the recognition of freedom that sweeps over her obliges her to realize that she had only loved her husband "sometimes" and culminates in the "self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being." The last episode ends with the tragic and ironic comment (now from a point of view external to Louise) that "she had died of heart disease – of joy that kills."

The story was chosen not only for its literary qualities, but also because it undoubtedly presents a challenge on first reading. In examining the responses I consider the extent to which readers characterize their overall sense of an episode, and whether the twist at or near the end of each episode is noticed. But, given that these were first readings, our concern is less with how often readers made such comments than with the light such comments would cast on readers' developing understanding of the story. For readers who were able to describe the point of the story (i.e., offer a plausible and coherent account of what it meant to them), how dependent was this on the episodic structure as I have described it? In the following paragraphs, I first describe the responses of several readers who appear to have developed a good understanding of the story; then examples of those who appear to have found it difficult.

Reader A231 offers a brief and largely impersonal reading of the story, yet manages to characterize central aspects of each episode while also mentioning its narrative twist. She interprets the first episode in the light of Louise's wish to be alone: while "people are trying to be gentle to her, the heartbreak of this situation is more than she can bear. She just flees. She runs away." In her comment on the second episode she suggests perceptively (having only read this far in the story) that while Louise appears to wish to forget, "She just begins to experience those feelings that she's trying to repress." In the third, the reader interprets the sense of freedom as a manoeuvre: "She only loved him sometimes. And she's trying to make it okay with herself." In the last episode the reader

clearly grasps the ironic reversal in the final sentence: to see her husband after all "was almost a heartbreak"; "it wasn't a joy that killed her; it was the lack of the joy." The reader remains focused on Louise's point of view, seeking to understand it; and in attending to the twists at the end of each episode the reader is able to infer a coherent meaning for the story overall, as the final comment shows. The reader can be described as "point-driven," in the terms of Vipond and Hunt (1984), having noticed and responded to the "nonstandard elements" in the narrative, in particular the twists that open up new perspectives and call for interpretive effort.

Another reader, A240, applies the story more particularly to her own condition, both past and in the present. Commenting on the first episode, she recalls that when she read the story before in an English class her grandmother had just died: reading it now brings back the memory of her emotions then. While she did resist the significance of the death, unlike Louise, she says "I wanted to be alone, myself, but not for the same reasons as she." This difference may lie behind her lack of comment on the story in response to the second episode (she refers to the process of reading on the computer), but by the third episode she is strongly re-engaged with the story. She is impelled to reflect on her own sense of independence, and how when hiking across a high mountain pass her bodily sense of freedom was like that of Louise. But she also notes that love can compromise this: "I also was thinking about … how she had loved sometimes, often she had not. Didn't not. I was thinking about past boyfriends, actually," whether she had been in love. But then, "I was living for me now, as she was." In response to the last episode she recalls her earlier sense of shock on first reading the story, and how the story still compels her to think about the protagonist's predicament, that "she felt free and then all of a sudden it just came collapsing down on her." She adds, "there are some aspects in my life that came to mind"; although this is not specific, but rather "just the whole idea of how fast life can change." This reader is thus also point-driven, but in a way that seems to illuminate her experience and sense of her own life. Unlike the first reader, however, this commentary shows a reader who seems motivated by a particular concern, that of independence. From her first comment on wishing to be alone to the final comment on life (that it can change suddenly, as it does in the story), this reader adopts Louise's point of view, and seems able to use this narrative experience figuratively in order to reflect on her own stance towards life. Again, the narrative twists in three of the four episodes seem central to this process.

Several other readers show a similar process: a personal concern is evoked by the story, and this then develops alongside the story across several comments, and perhaps at times enables a convergence with the story when the character's and the reader's perspective seem to merge. For example, reader A218 found herself in episode 2 "placing myself in the woman's place. And I found myself picturing myself in a position in that room with a window and the birds and just

all that she was seeing." As she put it, "there is kind of a blending of the character and myself." Her concern here is her response to loss, and how far her reaction to grief is the same as the character's, but the larger issue for this reader is, once again, the question of independence. In expressing this near the end of the last comment, she adopts the generalized second person pronoun, which we have seen in many other readers' comments (Kuiken, Miall, and Sikora 2004), and which usually seems to signify the merging of reader and character: "That individual freedom versus the freedom that comes from loving another person and forgetting and forsaking your own wants and needs."

In summary, the readers described here behave as though each episode has a point, and they frequently identify the narrative twist as a salient passage for inferring the point, presumably because the twist introduces a new perspective that is, at the same time, fraught with indeterminacy. In so doing, however, readers also tend to be drawn into evoking their own experiences or perspectives and reflecting on their personal stance on the issues they see being raised by the story. The narrative twist seems an effective agent for engaging readers' close attention, principally because in the context of the current episode it seems incongruous, or adds unexpected information. Why would a person just bereaved want to be alone (episode 1)? What lies behind the appearance of repression in her face (episode 2)? Readers who noticed these passages seem to have been better placed to form a coherent representation of the story overall.

Other readers, in contrast, may respond to particular elements of the story that seem important to them, but appear to develop only a partial representation of the story or may even misrepresent it. For reader A264 the opening episode brings to mind the death of her grandfather when she was aged seven, so her main response is to wonder how "one deals with shock." She has no response to the specific contents of episode 2. The third episode, she suggests "is not so much about death but about love," yet she seems to think this points to "a philosophy called fatalism," adding, "It's really funny how you love a person … because you love that person, that sense of bondage can get so heavy." She is alert to the misreading of Louise by her family in the fourth episode: "often we don't really know what really happens in people's minds"; there is, she says, a fine line "between pain and joy, between loss and gain." Her comments capture a part of the story's pathos but neither its overall irony nor its challenge to familiar conceptions of love. The memory of her grandfather appears not to be relevant to her response to the remainder of the story.

For reader A234, the theme of the story is the role of relations and friends during bereavement. Episode 1 reminds her of the deaths she has experienced of grandparents and of a friend. In episode 2 she recognizes Louise's need to be alone, but adds, "all of a sudden you do realize, you know, that there are people that you can talk to and that kind of thing." Episode 3 seems "abstract," and Louise's sense of freedom appears foreign to her: she cannot see herself being

made free by someone's death. When she has felt "smothered," she says, "it's been resolved through, you know, conflict resolution and having to sit down and talk things out." Thus, in episode 4, she takes the family point of view: "I can definitely identify with Josephine and trying to get Louise to come out of the room." She may have misread the ending of the story: "I … don't know of much joy that comes from dying" (which seems to echo the narrator's final phrase, "joy that kills").

These readers, and others like them, tend to characterize the episodes only partially or not at all, and they rarely notice or comment upon the narrative twists. While the readers we have just described are clearly point-driven readers (Vipond and Hunt 1984), the points they elaborate encompass only a part of the story's meaning, or, as in the last instance, import a point that reflects the reader's own preoccupations rather than being derived from the story. More effective readers, our evidence suggests, tend both to respond to what is distinctive in each episode and to be influenced by the narrative twists that each episode contains. This makes it more possible for the reader to experience the modifying processes that a literary story makes possible. As we saw, for reader A240, this involved first an affirmation of her own bodily-felt sense of independence, then, as she recalled her shock at the end of the story, "just the whole idea of how fast life can change."

As the earlier review showed, episodes can be characterized by a number of convergent criteria: by unity of action (goal and outcome), as a phase in a character's predicament, by coherent location in place and time, and by feeling. To this analysis I have added the role of the narrative twist occurring at or near the end of an episode, serving to intensify or redirect the issues raised, and itself characterized by a distinct development in readers' feeling. Above all, episodes provide the phases during which issues of concern to readers are managed and developed: if readers experience the modifying of feelings or concerns about the self as a result of literary reading, it is in the transitions between one episode and the next that we are likely to find such changes – between the twist at the end of one episode and the onset of the scenario provided by the next. In studying the cognitive challenges of reading narrative, especially readers' concerns about a story, how it relates to their own experiences, and the emotional resonance it has for readers, the analysis of the episodes of a story may thus provide a valuable framework for identifying the key developments in the responses of readers.

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## Notes

1. The text of Maupassant's story is available in French at: http://maupassant.free.fr/textes/coq.html (site visited June 30th 2004). The English translation is cited with minor changes from "A Cock Crowed." In *The Complete Short Stories*, Guy Maupassant, vol. 1, 448–452. London: Cassell, 1970.
2. I am grateful to Don Kuiken who was my collaborator in designing and supervising this study. The study was supported by a program grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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