Songs of 'Experientiality': Reconsidering the Relationship between Poeticity and Narrativity in Postclassical Narratology

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Abstract

Despite the long tradition of narrative poetry, postclassical narratology struggles with acknowledging the genre. I argue that this stems from a common assumption that poeticity functions as an antonym to narrativity, such as when Monika Fludernik locates narrativity and poeticity at opposite ends of a spectrum by suggesting that the point where 'narrativity can no longer be recuperated by any means' is where 'the narrative genre merges with poetry'. Similarly, while critiquing Fludernik's proposition that experientiality be considered the bedrock of narrativity, Alber inadvertently predicates his argument upon the charge that natural narratology allows 'almost every poem [to qualify] as a narrative'. Instead of the model according to which poeticity and narrativity are two polar opposites at the ends of a spectrum, I propose that we reconceptualise them as two axes upon which literature might be iterated instead, with varying degrees of poeticity and narrativity present in any given text at any one time.

Keywords: *poeticity, narrativity, experientiality, natural narratology, postclassical narratology, segmentivity, naturalization, lyric poetry*

Introduction: Poetics versus Narratology

The call for contemporary narrative studies to consider poetry always seems slightly ungracious. Nearly three decades ago, at a time when the field of narrative studies was still coming to the fore, Benjamin Harshav noted in his capacity as editor of *Poetics Today* that narratology represented 'an attempt to develop a meta-language in which to speak about the art of fiction': 'a logical division of Poetics', in other words; 'a Poetics of Prose'.[1] Tellingly, the common employment of 'poetics' as a kind of shorthand or synonym for all attempts at systematizing the interrogation of literary form reveals to us the privilege poetry has traditionally enjoyed as a genre of high art, and by extension, the journey prose fiction has had to take on its way to literary respectability. Viewed this way, the call for poetry to have a seat at the narratological table must surely rankle.

Yet this call is not as easily dismissed as it might seem. In the three decades since Harshav's original observation, narrative theory has developed into a diverse, thriving discipline in its own right, with practitioners in fields as varied as media studies and cognitive neurology. In this contemporary moment, as we move away from classical Geneattean narratology, subjects of inquiry now include genres far beyond the original scope of prose fiction, such as graphic novels and video games. Yet as Brian McHale (who served as assistant editor of *Poetics* in 1980) has pointed out, poetry remains largely

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1. Benjamin Harshav, 'Theory of Narrative and Poetics of Fiction', *Poetics Today* 1.3 (1980): 5, 6 and 208.

an afterthought as a storytelling vehicle. In a 2009 article entitled 'Beginning to Think about Narrative in Poetry', McHale observed the paradox of this omission:

> Contemporary narrative theory is almost silent about poetry. In many classic contemporary monographs on narrative theory, in specialist journals such as the one you are now reading, at scholarly meetings [...], poetry is conspicuous by its near-absence. Even the indispensable poems, the ones that narrative theory seems unable to do without, tend to be treated as de facto prose fictions; the poetry drops out of the equation […] [Yet] *most poems before the nineteenth century, and many since then, have been narrative poems.* [2]

Ten years after McHale's article, not much has changed. While McHale acknowledges in 'Beginning' the efforts of figures such as James Phelan,[3] Peter Hühn and Jens Kiefer,[4] he also critiques their approach for insufficient attention to poetic form, noting, for instance, that Hühn is more interested in examining narrative's relationship to the lyric – viz. the lyric mode's ability to mediate and organize temporal events through a refracted speaker – than he is in poetry per se, and that Hühn's method could equally be applied to prose fiction as well as to lyric poetry.[5] Similarly, McHale observes that Phelan's analysis of Robert Frost's 'Home Burial' remakes the poem into a 'honorary short story' by failing to account for the 'regular meter, the lineation, or the other, less conventional features of spacing' that usually distinguish poetry from prose fiction. The problem of 'the poetry [dropping] out of the equation', then, remains for McHale; another methodology is needed, one which accounts for the 'poeticity' of poetry, the 'differentia specifica'.[6]

It is this question of poeticity, as read in relation to narrativity, which I intend to address in this article. As observed earlier, this contemporary moment in narrative studies – what we might call the 'postclassical', whether one conceives of that as a theoretical or a historical division – has been dominated by a diversity of genres. McHale therefore attributes in 'Beginning' the omission of poetry from narrative analysis to institutional reasons, suggesting that few scholars ever specialize in both narrative and poetic studies.[7] Be that as it may, I wish to argue that, far beyond being just an incidental omission, the awkwardness most narrative theorists encounter when taking on poetry might in fact also be attributed to certain conceptual structures underlying narratology which imagine poetry as the binary opposite of narrativity, conceptual structures which have survived – and which, in fact, were reinforced during – the postclassical turn.

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2. Brian McHale, 'Beginning to Think about Narrative in Poetry', *Narrative* 17.1 (2008): 11-12, my emphasis.

3. James Phelan, 'Rhetorical Literary Ethics and Lyric Narrative: Robert Frost's "Home Burial"', *Poetics Today* 25.4 (2004): 627-51.

4. Peter Hühn and Jens Kiefer, 'Introduction: The Theory and Methodology of the Narratological Analysis of Lyric Poetry', *The Narratological Analysis of Lyric Poetry: Studies in English Poetry from the 16th to the 20th Century* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 1-14.

5. McHale, 13.

6. McHale, 14. Several of McHale's articles following 'Beginning to Think' might be perceived as an attempt to correct for the over-emphasis on the lyric by his colleagues. In 2010's 'Affordances of Form in Stanzaic Narrative Poetry', for instance, McHale examines the 'narrative affordances of the Spenserian stanza' present in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (53), and again the employment of the *ottava rima* form by Kenneth Koch in *The Duplications* (56); similarly, in 'Narrativity and Segmentivity, or, Poetry in the Gutter', he interrogates the 'oblique and difficult relationship to forms of narrative coherence, and to the tradition of narrative theory' (34) posed by T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*.

7. McHale, 12.

Questions of Narrativity

To see what I mean, let us bear down upon a certain exchange between Monika Fludernik and Jan Alber over one of the perennial questions in narrative studies; namely, the question of what precisely constitutes narrativity. While the definitions of narrative under classical narratology are undoubtedly familiar to many, in the interests of better contextualizing how Fludernik's theoretical intervention departs from classical narratology, as well as Alber's subsequent responses to this intervention, let us quickly recapitulate the discourse around narrativity.

To begin with, in its most reduced, nuclear form, narrativity has been considered by some to be quite simply a matter of an event. As H. Porter Abbott observes, a statement of fact along the lines of '"my dog has fleas" is a description', but a simple rephrasing significantly increases the degree of narrativity present in the statement: '"My dog was bitten by a flea"', Abbot says, becomes a narrative because it 'tells of an event […] a very small one – the bite of a flea'.[8] The inclusion of the past perfect tense here thus immediately introduces a temporal order suggesting a state of affairs prior to the event – a blissful, flea-less dog – and a state of affairs after the flea bite. This perspective thus constitutes one common view among narrative theorists: the notion that narrativity revolves around *happening*.[9] As Abbott acknowledges, however, this perspective is often contested by other narrative theorists who feel that narrativity requires not just the single event, but events in the plural that come together to create a linear order of sorts. This is the notion of narrativity as *sequentiality*, which Genette relies heavily on in constructing his ontological categories of narrative discourse and story, as well as his temporal categories of discourse time and narrative time,[10] and which undergirds every major definition of narrativity under classical narratological texts such as those by Mieke Bal, Gerald Prince, Seymour Chatman etc.[11] Proponents of this argument posit that narrativity is not only concerned with happening, but also with what happens after. This notion is predicated upon two ideas: sequentiality and *causality*, with some theorists further suggesting that the more causally linked a sequence of events are, the stronger the degree of narrativity present in the text. E. M. Forster's suggestion, for instance, that the degree of causality present in the narrative discourse distinguishes between 'story' and 'plot' is manifested in his famous observation that while the simple temporal sequence '"The king died, and then the queen died"' might be considered a story, the causally linked sequence of '"the king died, and then the queen died of grief"' is instead a plot.[12] To be sure, Forster's demand for explicit, articulated causality is not a widely accepted one: Chatman's rebuttal, for instance, that the mind 'inveterately seeks structure' and assumes

8. H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.

9. Within the context of our interests regarding narrative poetry, it is this perspective of narrativity that Phelan adopts in describing the deployment of the lyric form towards narrativization when he defines a lyric narrative as 'somebody telling someone else that something has happened' (631).

10. Of course, this notion is so fundamental to the Genettean model that he devotes the first chapter of *Narrative Discourse* to it, and structures the entirety of his model around 'the order in which events or temporal sections are arranged in the narrative discourse with order of succession these same events or temporal segments have in the story' (35).

11. The work done by Bal, Prince and Chatman in seminal texts such as *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1985), *A Dictionary of Narrative* (1987) and *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978) are, of course, foundational to the field of narrative theory.

12. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012), 86.

a 'causal link that the king's death has something to do with the queen's'[13] is widely cited in almost every narratological study of causation, from Abbott to Fludernik and David Herman. For now, however, we might thus say that classical narratology appears to concern itself with events in a temporal sequence as the crux of narrativity.

Thus properly contextualized, we can see clearly how far Fludernik's proposal for a 'natural' narrativity aims to depart from the structuralist typology of classical narratology. Provocatively, Fludernik proposes to shift away from temporal sequence as the central constituent of narrativity, towards a focus on what she terms 'mediated human experientiality'.[14] Echoing Dorrit Cohn in suggesting that the distinction of novelistic fiction is its ability to 'portray consciousness, particularly another's consciousness, from the inside',[15] Fludernik argues that it is the capacity for 'quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience' that constitutes narrativity at large. Correspondingly, Fludernik agrees with Chatman that 'readers actively construct meanings and impose frames on their interpretations of texts',[16] but she goes even further by suggesting that this act of meaning-construction precedes any *a priori* notion of narrativity itself, so that the readerly construction of the text 'supersedes any inherent or essentialist understandings of narrativity'.[17] Fludernik thus calls this process *narrativization:* a cognitive practice through which readers interpret texts as 'manifesting experientiality' and align them with 'experiential cognitive parameters'.[18] Narrativization, under Fludernik's model, appears to dovetail with Chatman's argument against Forster that the mind 'inveterately seeks structure', and we will shortly return to the implications of narrativization − which Fludernik consciously borrows from Jonathan Culler's similar concept of naturalization − later on in this article. For the time being, let us thus note that on both a mimetic as well as a hermeneutic level, Fludernik's definition of narrativity could be said to prioritize the phenomenological experience of reading and existing with narrative. This definition of narrativity results in certain unconventional interpretations and allowances:

> In my model there can therefore be narratives without plot, but there cannot be any narratives without a human (anthropomorphic) experiencer of some sort at some narrative level. […] Merely plot-oriented narratives are therefore here argued to represent a zero degree of narrativity even though they are traditionally endowed with proto-typical narrativity.[19]

Against Forster and Edward Branigan, Fludernik argues that attempts to view narratives as solely defined according to their 'bounded sequentiality'[20] renders them staid and frozen, requiring a reconstruction of the narrative as a whole after the reading process is completed, so that 'narrative in these typologies always appear to be static, spatial'.[21] In an attempt to account for the dynamic conscious experience of encountering a narrative as it unfurls, Fludernik accordingly reworks the theoretical framework for narrativity in the way I have described earlier, subsuming causal sequentiality under what she terms

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13. Seymour Benjamin Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), 45-6.
14. Monika Fludernik, *Towards a Natural Narratology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), 26.
15. Fludernik, 20.
16. Fludernik, 9.
17. Fludernik, 235.
18. Fludernik, 235.
19. Fludernik, 9-10.
20. Fludernik, 16.
21. Fludernik, 15.

'actionality' – a way of describing the goal-oriented action and motivational choice are part of the anthropomorphic condition. This redesigning of narrativity therefore prioritizes the phenomenological experience of human existence: what is most crucial, according to Fludernik, is that the text can be related back to some aspects of what it feels like in the first person to be a human subject. Remade into a mere component of mediated experientiality, causal sequentiality thereby becomes merely one of several pillars that constitute narrativity in Fludernik's book, so that one may remove it from the equation and still read the final product as a narrative (albeit one in which very little happens).

As Alber thus observes, and as Fludernik herself states, the paradigm of natural narratology radically widens the parameters for what might traditionally be considered an appropriate object of analysis in the field. While classical narratology concerned itself mostly with 'the realist and Modernist novel or short story', natural narratology aims to open up the field for 'discourse types which have hitherto attracted comparatively little sustained analysis'.[22] Fludernik's scope is ambitious indeed: natural narratology aims to accommodate discourse types ranging from conversational storytelling and historical narratives to postmodernist literature. It is the latter form which we shall zoom in on in our immediate discussion: Fludernik proposes that under the umbrella of experientiality, 'logical oddity or inconsistency' such as we might find in experimental texts might be explained as 'the skewed vision of a ruling consciousness' which functions as a 'reflective or "registering" mind'[23]. Alber thus acknowledges that natural narratology goes some way towards helping to recuperate 'a great number of experimental and plotless texts as narratives'; texts that might otherwise have been disqualified under the traditional narratologies of Gérard Genette, Prince, or Franz Stanzel for their resistance to reconstruction as a bounded temporal sequence of events.[24] In an attempt to test the robustness of natural narratology, Alber thus applies the framework to Samuel Beckett's famously incomprehensible 'Lessness', and tries to narrativize the disparate and jarring elements of the text – which resemble 'repetitious echoings in a syntaxless chain of words and phrases' – into a mimicry of the experiential consciousness of 'a person in a state of shock, or a madman'.[25] This reading is only half-successful: as Alber notes, the effects of the text remain 'extremely disconcerting since the narrative voice cannot be pictured as directing or directly addressing readers',[26] and the ultimate lack of a 'deictic locus of utterance' where a first person narrator might be perceived persistently troubles any attempt to narrativize 'Lessness' through the experientiality framework. Alber eventually concludes that despite the various schemas and frameworks which natural narratology offers for narrativizing experimental postmodern texts, 'Lessness' remains situated at the 'boundary between the genres of narrative and lyric'.[27] Picking up on Fludernik's own assertion that 'the narrative genre merges with poetry' at the point at which 'narrativity can no longer be recuperated by any means at all',[28] he calls into question the experientiality paradigm's ability to 'distinguish between narrative and lyrical texts',[29]

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22. Fludernik, ix.
23. Fludernik, 202.
24. Jan Alber, 'The "Moreness" or "Lessness" of "Natural" Narratology: Samuel Beckett's "Lessness" Reconsidered', *Style* 36.1 (2002): 67.
25. Alber, 64.
26. Alber, 66.
27. Alber, 68.
28. Fludernik, 26.
29. Alber, 68.

and accordingly expresses scepticism about natural narratology's equation of experientiality with narrativity.

Here, we might make certain observations about Alber's response to Fludernik's natural narratology, as well as the function of poetry for both Fludernik and Alber as they orientate and calibrate their notions of narrativity. The first curious observation we might make is that both Alber and Fludernik appear to be using the term 'poetry' interchangeably with the term 'lyric'. This equivocation is understandable from a layman perspective: just as the term 'poetics' is often confusingly used in the contemporary critical context to mean both literary theory in general as well as specialized theories of poetry, most contemporary poetry that is widely accessible and read is, more often than not, of the lyric variety. Within the context of this discussion, however, it is strange that Fludernik uses these two terms so interchangeably, when elsewhere in *Natural Narratology* she devotes a significant chunk of Chapter 3 to looking at Middle English verse narratives. Crucially, during this examination of medieval poetry, Fludernik acknowledges that the formal features of Middle English verse have had a direct impact on the texts' narrative discourse, observing that '[…] most rhymed verse, especially of the couplet type, tends to correlate the verse line and the clause in parallel syntax, which calls for a narrative structure that is very similar to that of natural narrative'.[30] Fludernik's scrupulousness elsewhere in the text at making a space within her natural narratology model for medieval verse narratives thus suggests that it is lyric poetry, instead, which she intends to disqualify from narrativity, on the basis that lyric poetry is generally given over towards 'reflections and enthusings on the part of the speaker of a poem' without grounding such interiority within a storyworld that might furnish the text with 'a person's specific experience at a specific (fictional) moment in time'.[31] Yet even this separation of the lyric from the narrative is qualified with Fludernik's acknowledging 'many poems which veer toward the narrative text type and many so-called narrative texts that move toward the lyric or poetic mode'[32] – yet another moment where poetry and lyric are made synonymous. As McHale remarked in his review of narrative studies' contemporaneous engagements with poetry, then, there appears to be a prevailing confusion here, at this intersection in the conversation between Alber and Fludernik, between poetry as a literary genre distinguished by certain formal and stylistic features in which extensive narratives such as epics or dramatic monologues might be iterated, and the lyric as a thematic type distinguished by the nature of its content, which Fludernik and Alber both argue to be typically un-narrative.

This insistence that the lyric lies outside the boundaries of narrative, however, lead us towards another curious and salient point about Alber's critique of natural narratology: in concluding that 'Lessness' ultimately resists narrativization, Alber suggests that 'Lessness' exists as a sort of hybrid text 'at the boundary between the genres of narrative and lyric'.[33] Yet this description might strike as an odd one; one is arguably just as hard pressed to categorize 'Lessness' as a lyric as to call it a narrative. By Alber's own description, the very features about 'Lessness' that make it an uncomfortable fit for natural narratology – its refusal to be narrativized into a text by a single embodied narrator, or its lack of linear coherence – also disqualify it from being interpreted fully as what we might conventionally refer to as lyric poetry. Dennis Donoghue, for instance, has spoken

30. Fludernik, 79.
31. Fludernik, 266.
32. Fludernik, 266.
33. Alber, 68.

about the lyric tradition as one of 'the poet's mind communing with itself',[34] in which the interiority of a unified subject is presented to the reader. It might very well be that Alber is implying here, instead, Culler's argument for the lyric poem as a fundamentally impersonal genre, one in which the first-person lyric self is taken to be a mere 'poetic construct'; a 'linguistic act which we take the poem to be imitating – directly or deviously';[35] it appears to be this take on the lyric mode that Fludernik herself refers to when she describes the lyric speaker as void of embodiment in a specific storyworld. Be that as it may, one might also argue that this poetic construct remains a necessary 'fiction as interpretative device'[36] for the lyric tradition, so much so that the absence of the lyric persona as deictic locus is enough to call into question a text's status as the lyric. Even when the issue of 'Lessness''s random, shuffled composition is put aside, it is clear that the text bears little resemblance to the rhetorical situation of, say, Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'The Cloud', which, despite the non-human persona of the latter, nonetheless might still be said to present an anthropomorphized interiority. Instead, the disjointed, dissonant structure of 'Lessness' – as well the method of its making – appear to bear much more resemblance, to, say, experimental Oulipo writing, or the anti-lyric of Language poetry. Within the context of Alber's engagement with Fludernik's natural narratology, then, it seems that Alber assigns the label of 'lyric' to 'Lessness' largely because of the difficulty he has encountered in his attempts to categorize it as narrative. Lyric poetry, in this reckoning, appears to function as the inversion, the *absence* of narrative, so that a particular literary text which lacks narrativity – in which narrativity has been vacated – appears to be lyrical poetry by default. Yet one does not have to look too far to think of examples of experimental texts where narrativity co-exists amicably with either poeticity or lyricality, or both. One might consider, for instance, the attentive linguistic density of modernist works such as Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, which Jeanette Winterson has described as written in 'the language of a poet; heightened, exact, using rhythm not logic as its anchor.'[37] Similarly, Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* has often been described quite comfortably as both prose poetry as well as a novel. From the latter half of the 20th century, we might also think of John Banville's oeuvre, which might be conceived as poetic in terms of his characteristic rhythms, denseness and ontological echoes across multiple books.[38] One might also summon to mind Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee,* which presents us several experimental sequences that at times more closely resemble conventional lyric verses with enjambed lines as well as stanzas, only to collate them under the insistent label of a novel. Suffice it to say that several examples of texts both experimental and conventional which defy traditional distinctions between poetry and fiction abound. Alber himself has observed in his insistence that 'in the realm of extremely experimental writing, the traditional distinctions between genre are erased'[39] and Fludernik has similarly acknowledged that 'it is only in the context of publication […] [that] generic classification frequently determines the direction in which

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34. Denis Donoghue, 'Congenial Disorder: Why Should We Look for Comfort in Poetry?', *Harper's Magazine*; available at htttp://www.harpers.org/archive/2008/09/congenial-disorder/ [accessed 17 July 2019].

35. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature.* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1975), 193.

36. Culler, 193.

37. Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 87.

38. For an exhaustive investigation into John Banville's oeuvre, one might look to Neil Murphy's *John Banville*.

39. Alber, 68.

interpretation may move in the reading process'.[40] Yet traditional distinctions between genre must mean a great deal indeed, because as Alber's article closes, it is experientiality's inability to enforce a hard boundary between narrative and lyrical texts which trouble him, and ultimately lead him to conclude that natural narratology should retain classic narratology's requirements for plot to be present in a narrative, lest 'almost every poem qualifies as a narrative'.[41]

Narrativization, Naturalization and Poeticity

On hindsight, one might see how these reservations held by Alber about natural narratology eventually lead him towards proposing his own theory of an unnatural narratology[42] through which to accommodate postmodern, experimental, and anti-realist texts. Alber's discomfort at the possibility of narrativizing a text 'structured by a throw of the dice' like 'Lessness' as 'the expression of a subject's thoughts', for instance, eventually prompt him to seek non-anthropomorphic frames for those texts that he terms unnatural narratives. Alber is quite right here, I think, to warn against stretching natural narratology to quasi-universal extents, and to veer towards the side of caution in avoiding interpretative overreach, seeking instead alternative theoretical models which preserve and respect the intended alterity of experimental texts. As Culler has pointed out in his review of natural narratology, however, the act of creative interpretation which Fludernik's narrativization entails is hardly limited to her model. He carefully explains that his own concept of naturalization in *Structuralist Poetics* was not intended as a 'wholly positive operation', but instead a warning against the 'often inappropriate ways in which critics manage to overcome the oddness of texts that aim to disrupt our sense of the intelligibility of the world […] domesticating a potentially disrupting text by relating it to a frame deemed "natural"'.[43] It is precisely this act of naturalization which Alber seems to aim to avoid in his eventual development of unnatural narratology. Nonetheless, the process of narrativization which Fludernik describes and the phenomenological activities it entails does lead us to certain important questions. Culler's own warning against the pitfalls of over-enthusiastic interpretation is itself a reminder that the act of creative meaning-making is a near-automatic reflex, closely and inextricably linked with the act of reading. Alber intuits that natural narratology's definition of experientiality as the bedrock of narrativity means that a large swathe of poetry may be successfully narrativized through the interpretative process, including those modes of poetry not traditionally read as narrative, such as the lyric as well as its discontents. Here, Alber seems to anticipate McHale's earlier-noted reservations about Phelan's transformation of Robert Frost's 'Home Burial' into a 'honorary short story' by removing 'poetry from the equation'.[44] Contrary to Alber, however, I do not think that experientiality's

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40. Fludernik, 235.

41. Alber, 69.

42. Together with figures such as Henrik Skov Nielsen, Brian Richardson and Stefan Iversen, Alber has been, of course, one of the foremost champions of 'unnatural' narratology, which focuses on 'unnatural' narratives that break the rules of typical anthropormophic frames. One might look to the collection he co-edited with Rüdinger Heinze, *Unnatural Narratives – Unnatural Narratology* (2013), or his recent monograph, *Unnatural Narrative: Impossible Worlds in Fiction and Drama* (2016), for a fuller understanding of Alber's arguments in this regard.

43. Jonathan Culler, 'Naturalization in "Natural" Narratology', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 16.2 (2018): 246.

44. McHale, 14.

accommodation of lyric poetry through narrativization automatically charges it with overreaching naturalization – a conclusion that one may only arrive at if one starts with the premise that lyric poetry is antonymous to narrative to begin with. Rather, what is needed is a clear notion of poeticity that one might incorporate into the reading act; a cogent distinction between the poetic and the narrative impulse that does not fix them within a binary.

This necessity for a clear notion of poeticity is evident in the confusion between poetry and the lyric which seems to plague most contemporary narratological discussions of narrative in poetry. In a bid to remedy this, McHale has proposed adopting the definition which poet-critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis puts forth in her essay, 'Manifests'. DuPlessis begins by establishing verse as the formal foundation of poetry, arguing that poetry often consists of 'sequenced, gapped lines' which work as 'bounded units precisely chosen […] operating in relation to chosen pause or silence', thus allowing for the possibility of 'intricate interplay among the "scales" (of size or kind of unit) or comes in chords of these multiple possibilities for creating segments'.[45] Accordingly, DuPlessis suggests that 'segmentivity' be considered 'the underlying characteristic of poeticity as a genre'.[46] This notion of negative space as an organizing aesthetic principle is crucial. We understand from painting that within the realm of art, bounded units do not pre-exist the distances between them; rather, it is negativity that establishes the very borders and haecceities of those same units. Just as a length of rope may be made into two lengths of rope with a quick snip, so may a string of language be turned into two separate lines of poetry, with their own sovereign symmetries and aesthetic balances, through the deployment of the gap. This principle of negative space is similar throughout most artistic forms, but it is of particular significance to us in our inquiry into poeticity. On a readerly level, gaps reveal the existence of the multiple dimensions in which the poem operates. A line of language may be assumed to be operating under the conventional, left-to-right linear expectations of English prose until enjambment occurs. As Culler reminds us, our encounter with the formal features of poetry often instantly 'bring to play a new set of expectations, a set of conventions determining how the sequence is to be read and what kind of interpretations may be derived from it'.[47] At the moment of enjambment, several things happen: the reader is firstly made aware of the 'poeticity' of the language they are encountering, and all the senses and sensibilities with which one usually brings to bear upon poetry are engaged. This set of sensibilities may apply retroactively, in the sense that we are suddenly aware of the meter, assonance, and images which might have been present in the phrase we have just read. Moving forward and through the poem, one is suddenly also sensitive to the permutations of poetic organisation possible throughout the text. The gap at the end of a line regularly opens up a moment of suspense in which one wonders about the outcome of the sentence we have just been reading. In a regularly metered poem with a rhyme scheme, this gap also has the function of opening up a minute tree of possible word companions with which one might rhyme the word that has just ended a line – a range of possibilities which opens and shuts, rhythmically, throughout the poem as one reads it. In that sense, McHale is right to read DuPlessis's notion of segmentivity next to Shoptaw's definition – or rather, his re-definition – of poetic meter. In a bid to accommodate experimental 20th century poems that might not necessarily operate in verse, Shoptaw suggests that we consider the poem's essential measure to be

45. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'Manifests', *Diacritics* 26.3-4 (1996): 51.
46. DuPlessis, 51.
47. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, 188-9.

'its smallest unit of *resistance* to meaning', rather than the 'smallest unit of *construction* of meaning'.[48] Juxtaposing Shoptaw against DuPlessis's emphasis on the structuring function of negativity, McHale points out that 'it is where meaning-making is interrupted […] that the reader's meaning-making apparatus must gear up to bridge the gap and heal the breech […] we know [this] from narratology, which acknowledges narrative gaps and gap-filling to be one of the engines driving narrative progression'.[49]

We return once more to the notion of gap-filling in narrativity. Returning to the paradigm of narrativity as temporal sequentiality briefly, we turn to Branigan, who proposes a narrative schema which sees the narrative as the endpoint of a continuum of information organisation along the axis of causality: while reality might exist on one end of the spectrum as a 'heap' of 'virtually random [...] data or objects assembled largely by chance', a narrative is a 'series of episodes collected as a focused chain', that is, a 'series of cause and effects with a continuing centre'.[50] This sense of narrativity as predicated upon causality, Branigan argues, means that it inevitably leads to a final ending point where 'its cause and effects chains are judged to be totally delineated', so that 'the ending is seemingly entailed by the beginning [...] the feature of narrative often referred to as closure'.[51] Similarly, Barthes identifies in narrative 'two main categories of units, functions and indices', which roughly map onto the distinction between story and narrative discourse in the sense that 'one corresponds to a functionality of doing, the other to a functionality of being', so that a 'strongly functional narrative' propelled along by the boiled-down nature of its storytelling would resemble 'folk tales', while 'strongly indicational narratives' would explore much more the mimetic representation and evocation of reality, as in the case of '"psychological" novels'.[52] Barthes further suggests that within the category of functional narrative units, we might identify 'cardinal functions (or nuclei)' that 'constitute real hinges in the narrative' as well as 'complementary [functions]… catalyses' that 'fill up the narrative space between hinges'.[53] In Forster's reckoning, this second sub-category of 'complementary functions' are quite necessary for framing the cardinal functions as such – that is, the framework of the novel, in his view, requires that the narrative space between hinges be filled in order for the key events to stand out causally as such. Yet Chatman is also certainly right when he suggests that the mind is more than capable of filling in the blanks between two presented events so as to create a clear causally linked sequence of events. Barthes observes that the space between two events such as a phone ringing and a protagonist picking up the receiver may be populated with a myriad of other banal occurrences, such as the protagonist putting out his cigarette or walking towards the phone, and that while 'these catalyses remain functional, insofar as they are correlated with a nucleus', their functionality is in fact 'diminished, unilateral, parasitic'.[54] He thus goes on to conclude that the 'mainspring of narrative activity is the confusion of the consecutive and the dependent [consequence], what comes after being read in the narrative as if it is caused

48. McHale, 16.
49. McHale, 16.
50. Edward Branigan, 'Narrative Schema', *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), 20.
51. Branigan, 20.
52. Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of the Narrative', *New Literary History* 6.2 (1975): 247.
53. Barthes, 247.
54. Barthes, 248.

by […] a systematic application of the logical fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*'.[55] In other words, Barthes argues, not only does narrative not require the deliberate articulation of causality, but it is, in fact, the automatic assignment of implicit causality – the operation that Fludernik has referred to as narrativization – that creates narrativity. At the same time, a casual survey of the history of literature is sufficient for us to recognize that a broad spectrum exists between inexorable narratives (such as *Oedipus Rex*, in which causation and predestination is responsible for much of the affective pathos of the story) and seemingly random, chaotic texts in which no clear causal sequence might be derived. These texts thus often either demand that the reader actively step into the text and co-construct the narrative alongside the author,[56] as Alber has done in his attempts to make sense of 'Lessness', or, as Fludernik suggests, they often self-reflexively and teasingly subvert the narrativizing impulse itself, through 'their structured anticipation of readers' attempts at reinterpreting them mimetically'.[57]

Returning once more to the works of Beckett, we might locate the randomly scrambled composition of 'Lessness' at the far latter end of this spectrum. While 'Lessness' might represent an avant-garde extreme for Beckett in terms of pushing the removal of explicitly articulated causal links between narrative events, the questioning and subverting of teleological causality is a recurring trope throughout the rest of his work. The metaphysical angst present in 'Waiting for Godot' for instance, is yoked to the absence of eventfulness ('nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful') that Abbott associated with narrativity,[58] and the introduction of certain loaded symbols (such as the sprouting of leaves upon the tree at the beginning of Act 2)[59] only serve to set up expectations of certain thematic developments that never pay off. Elsewhere, in the prose fragments collected as *Texts for Nothing*, a distinction is drawn between speech, life, and story, with a speaker remarking: 'there has to be [a life], it seems, once there is speech, no need of a story, a story is not compulsory, just a life, that's the mistake I made, one of the mistakes, to have wanted a story for myself, whereas life alone is enough […]'.[60] Most significantly, this subversion of causal sequentiality often takes place alongside a similar evacuation of subjectivity; that is to say, Beckett's questioning of narrativity cannot be said to assign lyricality to these works, as Alber has suggested with 'Lessness'. For instance, while the earlier quote might appear to echo Fludernik's insistence that experientiality – or 'life' – is larger than causal sequentiality – or 'story', closer examination of *Texts for Nothing* reveal that the 'life' claimed by the first-person voice is far from anthropomorphic. Rather, it is alternately disembodied as well as dissociated from itself, suggesting the voice to be that of the text's, of unarticulated language, or of some other abstract unnameable void. Beckett's reckonings with the function of deictic pronouns in literature are most visible in *Not I*, where a disembodied Mouth narrates the story of an old woman's life and trauma in the third person, while simultaneously

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55. Barthes, 248.

56. Particularly pertinent here is the distinction Barthes makes between writerly and readerly texts in *S/Z*, with readerly texts rendering the reader a mere passive participant whose only freedom in reading is to 'accept or reject the text […] nothing more than a referendum', and the contemporary novel writerly, a 'perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would eventually make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves* writing…' (4-5).

57. Fludernik, 26.

58. Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 41.

59. Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, 53.

60. Samuel Beckett, *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 92.

distancing itself from the protagonist of the story ('and she found herself in the – …what? …who? ... no!...she!').[61] Enoch Brater has suggested this distancing to be a psychological affect in which the trauma suffered by the protagonist is 'so painful that she refuses to acknowledge it as hers – she can only face it by making herself a third person',[62] which is an interpretative strategy not unlike Fludernik's template for narrativizing experimental texts into anthropomorphic experiences. Under the model of unnatural narratology favoured by Alber, this model of reconstituting a human subject from the shattered speaker might be considered a form of critical overreach. Yet to quarrel over the accurate interpretative strategy for reconstructing the story of *Not I* would be to miss the point. As signposted in the title, the play's chief aesthetic feature is precisely the mediated ambiguity and distance between the vocalizing Mouth and the protagonist of the narrated story, that gap between the two diegetic levels which uneasily provokes us into an engagement with the text. The ellipses through the rest of *Not I* which mark the trailing syntactic dislocations and disjunctions between phrases therefore remind us of the importance of gaps in literature: these "units of resistance to meaning", as Shoptaw might describe them, serve to bridge, juxtapose, associate and pivot between images, judgements, sublimations, and confessions from the speaking mouth in the play, tracing a heavily rhythmic narrative trajectory which one might almost describe as poetic.

Narrativity in the Valley

As one might observe, narrativity and poeticity thus prove again and again to overlap in their meaning-making mechanisms, in their mutual dependence on the deployment of negative space to provoke phenomenological reaction, and in their eliciting of hermeneutic activity. Naturally, I do not mean to suggest that narrativity and poeticity amount to the same phenomenon. Instead, my intention is that this article might provoke the beginning of a conversation towards reconsidering the relationship between narrativity and poeticity. Instead of positing the two phenomena as antonymic binary opposites, might we not perhaps see poeticity and narrativity as two axes upon which literature might be iterated, with varying degrees of poeticity and narrativity present in any given text at any one time? It is my belief that, properly considered, the premises of Fludernik's natural narratology (in particular, the experientiality model of narrativity that she champions) lead unavoidably to this conclusion. By her own statement, natural narratology aimed to 'institute organic frames of reading rather than formal concepts or categories that are defined in terms of binary oppositions';[63] yet the reinforcement of the poetry-narrative binary shows us both how enduring structuralist binaries are to our sense of narratology, as well as how difficult decentred thought is as a project in general. Yet admirably, engaging with Fludernik's emphasis on phenomenological processes and narrativization in particular, we are still reminded nonetheless that literary texts do not exist *a priori*, but only manifest their full being through the creative gesture of reading. In this particular moment for narrative studies, we may recognize the tremendous feat of intellectual muscle which *Towards A Natural Narratology* accomplished in widening the borders of narrative to accommodate a larger range of genres than classical narratology allowed for. Might it also be the case, however, that the liberalization of narrative thus

61. Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*, 376.
62. Enoch Brater, "The 'I' in Beckett's 'Not I'", *Twentieth Century Literature* 20.3 (1994):190.
63. Fludernik, ix.

entailed also provoked a sense of existential anxiety, a fear that opening up the borders of narrativity might lead to a loss of its quiddity, rendering narrative theory a dispossessed, strange, and unfamiliar field, not unlike the subject – if one might call it a subject – of *Lessness*? If I might venture a judgement, I reckon on this matter we need not worry. Regardless of how we conceive it, narrative remains, as Hühn reminds us, a semiotic practice that is anthropologically universal. Just like poetry, narrative survives, always, in the valley of its own making.

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Cântece ale „experiențialității". Reconsiderarea relației dintre poeticitate și narativitate în naratologia postclasică

Rezumat

În ciuda tradiției poeziei narative, naratologia postclasică are rezerve în a recunoaște această specie literară. Argumentul meu este că această reticență își are originea în presupunerea că poeticitatea funcționează ca antonim al narativității, așa cum rezultă din modul în care Monika Fludernik localizează narativitatea și poeticitatea la polii opuși ai unui spectru, sugerând că punctul în care „narativitatea nu mai poate fi recuperată în niciun fel" este acolo unde „genul narativ se unește cu poezia". În mod similar, în timp ce critică presupunerea lui Fludernik că experiențialitatea poate fi considerată piatra de temelie a narativității, Alber în mod neașteptat își formulează teoria pornind de la premiza că naratologia naturală permite „aproape oricărui poem [să se califice] ca narațiune." În locul modelului conform căruia poeticitatea și narativitatea se află la poli opuși, articolul propune o reconceptualizare a acestora ca două axe pe care literatura se poate repeta, implicând diverse grade de poeticitate și de narativitate ce sunt prezente într-un text la un moment dat.