

# On story as values-framed construct

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## ABSTRACT

There is significant current interest in demonstrating the influence of the cultural context on story configuration. In this paper, however, I want to highlight the inherent culture-framed character of 'story', in Labov's essentially context-free conception of it (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Labov 1972, 1981, 1997), to show that it is the 'in cultural-values' constructed character of the configuration that serves to put in place the impact of the story. I will examine randomly collected literary narratives of the Western tradition, to illustrate that Labov's configuration is a prototype of this 'in cultural-values constructed' constituency, effecting standard prospectings/expectations, and through them a very particular psycho-emotive impact. I will also show how the values-framed componential structure of this prototype is customarily strategically reshaped in well-defined ways to effect different prospectings/expectations and hence altered story impact.

## KEYWORDS

narrative, culture, discourse analysis, genre analysis

## 1. Introduction

There has been considerable recent interest in exploring the connect between story and its socio-cultural context. In the post-Labov assessment of conversational narrative, this is in response to the decontextualized character of Labov's configuration (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Labov 1972, 1981, 1997). Recent assessments of conversational storytelling have argued that it is inextricable from the encompassing exchange, and therefore the very local context, suggesting that difference in this local context is correlative with difference in story configuration. Multiple departures from the canonical Labovian construct have been identified in the assessment of 'small stories' (Bamberg 2004, 2006; Georgakopoulou 2005, 2007; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008). But configurational difference with correlation to contextual dimensions, such as communicative purpose and participant relations, is also evidenced in Eggins and Slade (1997). Along somewhat different lines, in acknowledging the impact of a less local cultural context, the ethnographic approach has a long tradition of drawing attention to culture-specific manifestations of the genre; seen as 'performance', a cultural artefact, it assumes a broader cultural, sometimes national, uniqueness, but one that is also particularized in individual storytellings (Hymes 1981, 1996, 1998, 2004; Scollon and Scollon 1981; Gee 1986). From a differ-

ent, values-defined, perception of this broader, national, conception of culture, Polanyi (1989) argues as forcefully for its role in shaping the story. A values-based conception is also applied in assessing the perception of, and therefore reference to, narrative-events and participants, in Chafe (1980) and Tannen (1979, 1980). Tannen (1989) also suggests that choice amongst involvement-securing stylistic devices in narrative is culture-determined. What is evident overall is a general movement away from treating oral narrative as autonomous from its context of appearance, suggesting in this that it is the internalization of the surround in which the story takes shape, whether local or broader, that accounts for its impact on the character of the genre.

I will go against this general trend to focus on the inherent values-framed character of 'story', a la Labov. (While Labov's configuration is context-free, it is by no means an acultural construct.) For this purpose, there is a need to recognize a broad, general, conception of normative cultural values and use this to reveal Labov's configuration as a values-defined componential structure, which puts in place standard prospections/expectations and through them a very particular psycho-emotive impact. This configurational prototype is also routinely altered in well-defined ways to effect different prospections/expectations and reshaped story impact.

### 1.1 Labov's story configuration and the cultural values dimension

The core components of the Labov configuration – the orientation, complication and resolution<sup>1</sup> – are, in fact, definitionally assessed in terms of broad and general value judgements, such as 'normal', 'disruptive' and 'rectifying', respectively, making the assumption that the average reader has a shared sense of what these value judgements represent. One might put this somewhat differently, and say that the orientation captures the 'normal' social order vis-à-vis the naturalized values of the majority culture, which we know and take for granted even when our own differ. Mundane social life is assumed possible when such values are upheld. Conversely, when life is a departure from the mundane, then it is expectable that such shared values will be violated or difficult to maintain. The complication is such a 'disruption', and the resolution that follows serves to 'rectify' what has gone 'wrong' and reinstate a new 'normality', with re-introduced acceptable values. Together these components trace a values-framed experiential path from the normal (M for future reference) via its violation (U for future reference) on to the reinstated normal (new M for future reference).

### 1.2 Prospecction/expectation and story impact

Because every reader has an intuitive understanding of how the prototype story will be configured, the M (the state with expectable values), U (its disruption) and new-M (its reinstatement) trajectory is anticipated. But M as the ultimate state of normalcy also diminishes the prospecction of U; it is engineered to be a kind of psycho-emotive lull, a state of stasis which prospects only more of the same, or, in effect, does not prospect at all. This is, then, unexpectedly violated

<sup>1</sup> The evaluation, as I see it, differs from these components, in that it serves in supplementary role, to explain or clarify their character, while making no separate and identifying contribution of its own. The remaining two components – the abstract and coda – sometimes but very infrequently make a contribution to the central impact of the story.

by U, and ultimately gratifyingly reinstated by new M, creating the standard impact of the canonical configuration.

It is this character of the prototypical experience that is also strategically altered to fashion other kinds of story configuration with different psycho-emotive impact. Change in the defining 'normalcy' of M and/or its violation by U and/or the gratifying reinstatement of new M alters the evoked propections/expectations and hence the psycho-emotive story impact. There are different permutations of these potential departures, evidencing generic-subtypes.

### **1.3 Principal objective: To explore the cultural values and story configuration connect**

My principal intent is to show that the impact of the story rests on the treatment of expectations about cultural values, to suggest that the canonical story is by definition a violation followed by a correction of expected values, and that the departures from this prototype differ in their realization of this violation and/or correction. In what follows, I will illustrate

1. the prototype values-defined configuration, and the propections/expectations-affected story impact it effects, and
2. some instances of strategically selected departures from this prototype, with their resulting altered story impact,

in an arbitrarily selected<sup>2</sup> collection of a consummate kind of decontextualized story, the literary short story of the western tradition<sup>3</sup>. This assessment of the definitionally decontextualized story is proffered as evidence of how entirely in-terms-of-cultural values the Labovian design, in fact, is; one does not have to contextualize it to recognize the role that culture plays.

In each of the following eleven story-assessments, I will summarize the thematic content of the core components and interpret the character of the realized M-U-new M constituency. I will close each assessment with an attempt at a succinct capture of key strategies adopted in the use of values, and a record of resulting propections; each whole assessment should support a claim to the uniqueness of eight individually labeled story formats.

<sup>2</sup> Whereas the stories are deliberately taken from the western tradition, they are not selected because they fit a preconceived configurational construct, or definable departures from it.

<sup>3</sup> The written narrative is context-free in that its essential structure is not receptive to influence by the encompassing context. Although it can accommodate a certain range of audience receptions/interpretations, and therefore a range of contexts, these are constrained, and therefore made predictable by the structure itself. Recent research suggests that conversational narrative, and oral narrative more generally, by contrast, comes with a context-sensitive and, in fact, context-dependent configurationality; its form, therefore, is essentially context-determined.

## 2. Configurational types

### 2.1 The canonical case or the 'poetic justice' construct:

The canonical configuration is illustrated in the following analysis of the short story 'Bernice bobs her hair', by Scott Fitzgerald (1920).

"Bernice bobs her hair" by *Scott Fitzgerald* (1920)

#### THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS

##### M:

In this story, Bernice, a teenager who is spending her vacation with her cousin Margery, overhears her cousin complaining about her awkwardness on the dance floor and general ineptitude in matters romantic. Hurt and mortified, she first confronts her cousin, but then changes her mind and decides to follow her directives to learn to present herself to better advantage.

She learns well, and, amongst much else that suggests how socially savvy she becomes, resorts to repeated use of a rather daring assertion on how resolute she is to join the jet set by getting her hair bobbed. She soon becomes such a social success that she manages to secure the attentions of Cousin Margery's favorite beau.

##### U:

One evening in the company of the usual crowd of party goers, Margery retaliates to the loss of her favorite admirer, by daring Bernice to act on that often repeated promise, and actually get her hair bobbed.

Youth culture dictates that such a dare is not easily brushed off; after all Bernice has threatened to 'go bobbed' for a long time. She feels cornered, struggles for a ready 'out', but then in helpless desperation grits her teeth and undergoes the bobbing, witnessed by the crowd of fellow party goers, including the newly acquired one-time Margery infatuate.

Shorn of her beautiful hair, she looks and feels monstrous, and the beau of contention post-haste returns to the original focus of his ardor, who accepts her victory with the cool and composure of a practiced socialite.

##### NEW M:

Appearing to opt for a speedy retreat, Bernice decides to take the train home the night after the hair bobbing. But, on her way out of the house, under cover of dark, she first makes her way to her cousin's bedroom. There she bends over the sleeping girl, locates the point of connection of each long blond braid to her head, and deftly chops it off.

This act of retaliation concluded, she walks out into the moonlit night with the two braids still tightly clenched in her rigid fist. Coming upon the residence of the singularly fickle beau, she utters a guffaw of laughter, and sends the braids flying through the dark night to land with a dull thud at his front door.

**INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY:**

Though it is set in the early nineteen hundreds, the values of M are convincingly contemporary. It captures American youth culture in its stereotypical preoccupation with competition on the dance floor and at the dating game. Success calls for skillful presentation of one's natural advantages, but also charm, ease of manner, wit and the ability to outwit the competition. It is in all it gives the reader suggestive of the normal in terms of expectable behavior from high school and college-going young women. There is, therefore, no clear suggestion that anything particularly untoward is about to happen.

The unprospected U breaks into the cycle of dances and dates with its obvious disregard of some inviolate values: in the hair bobbing incident fair play is set aside, and winning is pursued at any cost, however dubious and manipulative.

The new M that follows captures the delightful act of poetic justice in the retributive act of hair mutilation. Evil doers are punished, and expectable values, in consequence, are reaffirmed. With its reinstated sense of the just and the deserving, this new M is enormously gratifying.

**Summary of key strategies:** *It is clear that in the canonical, 'Poetic Justice', construct expectable values of M are unexpectedly violated in U and gratifyingly restored in new M.*

**2.2 Violating the norm: Departures suggesting generic difference**

The following ten stories exemplify select departures from the above-illustrated standard constituency, with accompanying differences in effected prospections/expectations and resulting psycho-emotive impact.

**2.2.1 THE 'STUDY OF GREAT FEAR' CONSTRUCT:**

**"That evening sun"** by *William Faulkner* (2012)

**THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS****M:**

In the short story "That Evening Sun", a black washerwoman and all-purpose maid for a middle-class white family has provided sexual favors for a white man of some standing in the community, and, on demanding payment, been beaten, kicked in the teeth and sent to prison, where, both pregnant and acutely distraught, she is beaten again for attempting suicide. Upon her release she fills in for the family's cook who is out sick.

After her release from prison she is mortally afraid that her black lover will appear out of the dark to kill her in retaliation for the interlude with the white man. She is overcome with terror night after night and on each occasion appeased only marginally because the family is present to serve as a deterrent. The narrative stops on a night when she is finally left on her own, watchful in acute mortal dread of an imminent and inescapable end.

**INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY:**

M, which prototypically realizes the values of ordinary everyday life, is, here, the socio-cultural reality of an era made distinct by its complete normalization of the torture and animalistic victimization of Blacks. In such a brutal and predatory world, U is inevitable; it is, in fact, an expectable and permanent threat. In this M it is made known before its occurrence, and then, as the protagonist anticipates the attack night after night, repeatedly prospected and an increasingly more imminent. This fear-filled vigil, however, remains unfulfilled, when the narrative disengages mid-stream, with U profoundly evoked but ultimately unrealized. The threat of the fatal attack is all that is, therefore, real and abiding, and this anguished terror suggests the mundane of Black lives in such a world order.

**Summary of key strategies:** *In the 'Study of Great Fear' construct, M which is profoundly in violation of ordinary values, atypically and repeatedly prospects U, and then, in the context of its maximized prospection, stops, with the U and new M ultimately unrealized. The threat of U is, thereby, both much magnified and deeply instated.*

**2.2.2 THE 'STUDY OF LOSS' CONSTRUCT:**

**"Sunstroke"** by *Ivan Bunin* (2012)

**THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS****M:**

In the short story "Sunstroke", a man has a brief 'no-strings attached' romantic encounter with a beautiful stranger on a holiday boat trip, and then bids her a cheerful farewell without the exchange of any identifying, or contact, information.

**U:**

Once the young woman has left, the man is suddenly deeply overcome with inexplicable longing for the nameless woman, now on her way to a life and place he knows nothing about. He spends a long and painful day devising means of seeking her out and grappling with his sense of loss.

**NEW-M:**

Finally, with no useful information in hand and no possible leads, he painfully reconciles himself to this irrevocable loss.

**INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY:**

The acceptable normal does not, as a rule, accommodate transient romantic interludes with strangers, which are associated with irresponsible thrill-seeking and superficial experiential highs. This M is, therefore, not in character with values associated with mundane living.

The U – the emotional fallout that follows – is also not ‘normal’, and not anticipated in association with a casual and fleeting romance in the assumption that such encounters furnish an experiential high but have no lasting impact. The U, here, dismantles this belief; it suggests love is love under any circumstances. This U is, therefore, completely unprospected, and as a depressed frame of mind is in stark contrast with the high experienced in M.

The new M that follows is a hard-fought reinstatement of psychological balance in the face of a deep sense of loss. This resignation to the loss of love does not reinstate the values of M displaced by U, as does the canonical new-M. Rather it gives credence to the values evidenced in U.

**Summary of Key strategies:** *In the ‘Study of Loss’ construct, the prototype M-U-new M juxtaposition is strategically altered to achieve a magnified contrast between first M, an unexpected experiential high, improbable, inherently fleeting, and so also irretrievable, and U, an unprospected experiential low, itself irreparable and lasting, and in every way, therefore, its mirror image. This manipulation of prospectations puts in place a rollercoaster ride from unexpected elevation to unanticipated deflation. The new-M that follows also contrasts dramatically with the opening high of M, accentuating the permanence of the deflation it instates.*

### 2.2.3 THE ‘WEAKNESS AND VICTIMIZATION’ CONSTRUCT:

“What that kind of mush gets you” by Sinclair Lewis (2012)

#### THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS

##### **M:**

The lovers in this story are involved in a seemingly light-hearted affair, each to compensate for a joyless marriage.

##### **U:**

But to secure a more complete togetherness, they devise a fool-proof means of permanent escape from their respective marriages, which is discovered to be the joint act of suicide.

##### **NEW-M:**

The attempted suicide fails, and the outcome finds the twosome much less favorably placed than they were before it. The playful romance of their pre-crisis life is now replaced by a mind-numbing want of stimulation. The man is more irretrievably ‘under the thumb’ of his vicious wife. The woman, divorced by her husband, is forced to move away to a remote destination, to take up a minimum wage job, where she receives none of her lover’s letters, each of which is meticulously intercepted by his ever watchful wife.

### INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY

The M is, again, out of the ordinary: commonly accepted values do not accommodate extra-marital relations. This experiential high is also not a state of being that can readily prospect more of the same indefinitely. One anticipates that something will go wrong.

U is therefore, atypically, prospected but not known before it is attempted. The attempted act of breaking free by suicide, in fact, cannot be anticipated as a reasonable response to marital unhappiness in a contemporary western setting, and is, therefore, still imbued with the surprise factor of the prototypical M-U juxtaposition.

Surprise is also experienced in consequence of the failed carry-through; this failure is as unanticipated as the suicide itself. But by the time of the failed attempt, both this failure and the attempt at suicide itself fall together with the weak and unassertive initial dalliance, and collectively suggest a predictable pattern of weak resolve, want of courage and self-inflicted suffering, rather than helpless victimization.

Although the attempted suicide does not 'pan out', and life is preserved, the new-M is by no means a gratifying outcome, since it does not suggest the reinstatement of commonly accepted values: Fidelity is not supposed to mean servitude and bondage. Nor is a non-deviant, non-indulgent lifestyle supposed to be tantamount to death. The resignation to life as a passive and joyless experience, with the vicious wife, and the mind-numbing job is far removed from a prototypical just and gratifying reinstatement of normal order.

**Summary of key strategies:** *In this realization of the 'Weakness and Victimization' construct the standard M-U juxtaposition is manipulated to make the M component less mundane and in consequence make the U anticipated in its implementation and broad character, without being known. Its actual realization is outside the frame of normal expectations, and therefore shocking. Its failed carry-through is also unpredictable. The subsequent resignation to ordinary life, of the new M, is to a much more unappetizing condition than the opening normality, which works against the gratifying close of a just correction of U.*

#### 2.2.4 THE 'STUDY OF FORTITUDE' CONSTRUCT:

**"The Father"** by Björnstjerne Björnson (2012)

#### THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS

##### **M:**

On the birth of his son, a wealthy landowner makes his first visit to the local priest for the boy's christening. This is followed by a number of such visits on significant occasions in the son's life over a span of many years (viz. his eighteenth birthday and his engagement), each time to seek blessing and to give thanks and a gift of charity, suited to the occasion and the father's status in society.



**U:**

Quite out of the blue one day the son drowns in a freak accident, while out on a fishing boat with his father.

**NEW M:**

The devastated father returns to the priest again, but this time as a much altered man, one who no longer cares about worldly possessions. Ennobled by deep suffering, he shows great selflessness, humility and generosity; in place of the laudable but modest gifts of charity he made in happier days, he now donates half his property in the name of his son.

**INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY**

The M presents a world where values are constant and lifestyle unchanging and seemingly unchangeable, far beyond the norm. The rural background, the farming community, the simple ways of people well attuned to nature, all accentuate equanimity and composure.

The implementation of this M is also non-normative, in that it appears as a recycled routine, and one that spans many years. This accentuates the sense of inertia and complacency and diminishes prospection of U significantly beyond what is normative in the prototype story.

The U, therefore, happens after the several unexceptional implementations of this recycled routine. Hence its unexpected break into the profound inertia that precedes it is magnified and shocking.

The new M reinstates the established routine, in the father's return to the priest after the death of his son. But it also captures the transformative change the father experiences in an ennobling and redemptive resignation to his loss (evident in his enormous generosity, selflessness and quiet grace), which is in line with, but also an elevation of, accepted values. This accentuates the gratification associated with the standard new M.

**Summary of key strategies:** *In the 'Study of Fortitude' construct, the values of M first are profoundly representative of deep and sustained normalcy, a want of disturbance, and peace. The recycled routine, then, inflates the typical effect of the prototype realization of M, which is to diminish the prospection of U. The U which follows, consequently, is much less anticipated than its prototypical realization, thereby enhancing the shock-effect it puts in place at its coming about. The following reinstated and corrective normalcy, of the new M, enhances the values of the opening M, and is therefore more deeply gratifying than its prototype realization, in spite of the devastating disruption of its preceding U.*

### 2.2.5 THE 'DRAMA OF LIFE' CONSTRUCT:

“The operation” by Roger Martin du Gard (2012)

#### THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS

##### NEW M:

In “The Operation”, a young victim of a serious road accident, who is at home rather than in hospital due to the obstinacy of a senior relative, finds herself fortuitously in the hands of a young surgeon. He, without sophisticated equipment, medicines and support staff, saves her life.

##### INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY

Since M, U and new M are identified by recognizing their distinctive character in comparison to co-occurring story components, I think it is fair to say that the M and U of this story are presupposed: Mundane life – M - is shattered by a life-threatening accident – U; the patient survives, but is in a critical condition. The story commences at this point, with the resolution and resulting reinstatement of normalcy in new M.

By skipping the obvious experiential extreme of the life-threatening accident itself, the story opts rather for a detailed presentation of the minutia of what is generally assumed to be an unglamorous event, the operation. The step by step and graphic depiction of the process of saving a life becomes incrementally more prospective of an imminent outcome, good or bad, and is therefore tension packed. By its point of successful completion, it appears unique in being both authentically of the substance of life and at the same time an enormously just and gratifying realization of new M, evoking satisfaction and a sense of spiritual elevation.

**Summary of key strategies:** *In this realization of the ‘Drama of Life’ construct, presupposing the M and U, even though M contrasts in standard ways with U and would therefore make for good tellability gives a prototypical focus to the new M. Its coverage becomes disproportionately expansive relative to the treatment of M and U, because, of course, they remain untreated. The values represented in new M are also heightened beyond the norm – the new M represents an act of extraordinary selflessness and generosity. No M and no U, followed by a deep and expansive treatment of a new M that upgrades normative values, evokes a utopian goodness authenticated by graphically represented details of tasks generally considered un-newsworthy and unappealing.*

### 2.2.6 THE 'EXTREME DEPRAVITY' CONSTRUCT:

"Death" by *Wladyslaw Reymont* (2012)

#### THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS

##### M:

In "Death", the setting is the household of a peasant, where an adult, married daughter is standing over the bed of her dying father, cursing him and telling him to go and do his dying elsewhere – at her sister's, she suggests, to whom she accuses him of having left all his property. She is both verbally and physically abusive to him in front of her infant daughter, whose distress is palpable.

##### U:

The woman eventually pushes her father off the bed and drags him out of the house and into the pig pen, where she shuts the door on him and leaves him to die. Overnight the old man slowly freezes to death in the bitter winter cold.

##### NEW M:

On finding his frozen body the next morning the daughter and her husband are fearful only of being discovered. Once that fear subsides their focus is on the expense incurred by the burial and related pecuniary matters, made evident at the funeral where they engage in open battle with the sister who is supposedly blessed with her father's inheritance.

#### INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY

The M of this story is extremely aprototypical, since it is not expectable for daughters to abuse their dying fathers.

The U is merely an elevation of that inhuman cruelty, and therefore not unprospected in type, though still shocking as token.

The new M records no resolution, but since the M of this story-world, with its marked absence of values, is not fundamentally displaced by the act of U, this M is, in fact, still securely in place.

**Summary of key strategies:** *In the 'Extreme depravity' construct, the so-called 'normal' is not so for the average reader; it is, in point of fact, specific to a morally defunct sub-group. Everything else is set against this norm, to speak to the horror of this world. The prospected U elevates the brutality, and the new M does nothing to diminish it. The pattern of development – the opening with, and return at the end to, a base-line animality as the norm – presents this world as stolidly instated, and immutable.*

### 2.2.7 THE 'RECLAMATION' CONSTRUCT:

"The furnished room" by *O. Henry* (1906)

#### THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS

##### **M:**

The protagonist of this story is engaged in a long and arduous search for his missing lover, a would-be actress.

On this his latest quest, he rings the doorbell of yet another nondescript boardinghouse on a nondescript street, and asks the landlady about his missing lover, describing her with care. Then receiving the customary denial of any knowledge of the young woman and being greatly tired after a long day's search, he rents a room for the night. Once in the room, he seeks to discover evidence of his lover's previous residence there.

Momentarily, he is transfixed by the smell of her. The perfume that she wore floods the room, and he has a palpable sense of her presence. As the moment passes, he carries out a frantic and meticulous search of the room for anything that he can tie to her, only to be thwarted, as he sees it, yet again, in his long and apparently fruitless search.

##### **U & NEW M:**

Feeling hopeless and defeated, he finally seeks peace in a permanent escape from his misery: Unbeknownst to anyone he shuts up the room securely and turns on the unlit gas in peaceful resignation.

##### **CODA:**

The evening that the young man rents the room and then takes his own life in it, his landlady is having a drink with a friend. She is in a celebratory mood because, as she tells her friend, she has managed at long last to re-let that room where the gruesome event occurred some weeks before. She lets her friend know that she, naturally, did not reveal to the new tenant the death by suicide of the woman he was asking about. How could she tell him that the girl had 'done away' with herself by turning on the unlit gas in the very room he was occupying?

#### INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY

It is not possible to gauge the represented circumstance of the opening M as just 'normal'. The heightened other-orientation that comes with love and makes one go to enormous lengths to connect with the loved one is a considerable accentuation of more everyday realizations of goodness, generosity and the like; love does not work in ordinary ways. This values-component, therefore, makes M atypical, and atypically imbued with tension that is by no means suggestive of mundane living.

The prospection of U is not effectively mitigated in this context, as it is for the customary U. But its realization as suicide is nevertheless unexpected. This U is also not a violation of the

values of the M it follows, as is the typical U. Taking one's life for love is in line with the desperate and selfless pursuit of the loved-one, depicted in M. It has the additional feature of evoking oddly mixed reactions: shock and anguish at the outcome, but also a sad reconciliation in tune with the protagonist's own attitude to it, which sees the climax of the fruitless search as also its resolution.

In the postscript to the story we realize that a crucial element of information that is in fact a part of the M has been withheld in its depiction from the perspective of the protagonist. The missing piece of the M presented in the coda gives a curiously different dimension to the events that have transpired. In it, it is revealed that she whose perfume fleetingly floods the room, holding the young man in a palpable embrace, has in fact taken her own life in the same room and in the same way, a short time before his suicide.

This manipulated revelation, holding back and postponing a crucial piece of information about M, is able to represent the core story from the young man's perspective, with his knowledge and understanding only, and then, at the point of the total revelation, imbue the act of his suicide with some intuited understanding of the relevant past. In fact, the withheld and delayed information is able to give an even more extraordinary character to love, the defining value of this M. It apparently comes with unaccountable powers of intuited understanding: The young man's smelled and sensed contact with his lover, we realize in retrospect, was in fact, and his suicide by inhaled gas was, therefore, not fortuitous.

**Summary of key strategies:** *In this realization of the 'Reclamation' construct, M upgrades normative values of goodness and caring. As unhappy love, it prospects disappointment, but not as the act of self-annihilation that U reveals. The realized U, which is also the resolution, is therefore completely unexpected. A postscript filling in information withheld from M reframes the recorded U-cum-new M as an act of uncanny intuited connection with the loved one.*

**"The call of life"** by *Knut Hamsun* (2012)

#### THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS

##### **M:**

A man out on a solitary walk comes upon an attractive, well-dressed and sophisticated young woman, who he quickly deduces is interested in becoming intimate with him. The young woman takes him home, to a lavish, wealthy household, where from the open door of her bedroom he sees a body, laid out in preparation for burial, in an adjoining room.

##### **U:**

The man's curiosity is piqued, but the woman explains nothing, and he spends a night of love and mystery with her.

The initial meeting, itself shrouded in mystery, hence, develops into this unaccountable act of intimacy with a complete stranger.

**NEW M:**

The next morning, intent on seeking an explanation for the previous night's encounter, the man searches the obituary columns in the local newspaper and learns from the relevant entry that a wealthy middle-aged businessman, resident at the address at which he spent the previous night, passed away after a lingering and protracted illness. He awakens then to a full understanding of the previous night's adventure: A man marries a woman thirty years his junior and in time dies after a long-drawn illness. In the immediate aftermath of his demise, his long suffering wife breathes in the bracing air of her new found freedom and in an act of passionate abandon reclaims her life, youth and vitality.

**INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY**

The M, here, is not prototypical. The values realized are in violation of accepted norms, since sophisticated young women of sufficient means are not customarily pacing the streets with an interest in picking up men. Nor do they routinely take strangers to a home where a body is laid out for burial. The represented behavior is unusual and remains unexplained in M. The M, in presenting these only partly accounted for circumstances, triggers prospections and evokes the mystery associated with the partially known and the less than fully understood.

The deviance of M – evident in the interest in an illicit and tawdry form of romance – is not contradicted in U; rather it is sustained in the represented indulgence. This U is, of course, at the same time, not unprospected as is the prototypical U, since the indulgence it speaks of is inevitable.

In the new M that follows, the protagonist's careful search of recent obituary columns reveals the circumstances that account for this rather extraordinary encounter, acknowledging through this the established place of normative values under more normal circumstances. That is, the discovered unusual circumstances convincingly account for the depicted moral transgression, and gratifyingly imply the secure place of normative values under normal conditions.

**Summary of key strategies:** *In this realization of 'The Reclamation' construct, the amoral character of M played out in the prospected U is explained and made reasonable by information presented in new M.*

In both these two instances of the 'Reclamation' construct, the delayed revelation serves to reconstruct the represented events to allow for their profoundly more gratifying resolution in new M.

### 2.2.8 THE ‘THIS IS LIFE, NOT A STORY’ CONSTRUCT:

“Fanny and Annie” by D. H. Lawrence (2014)

#### THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS

##### M:

The average young woman is not expected to be depressed about her forthcoming wedding and married life. However, Fanny, the protagonist of this story, having resolved to marry her first love after a decade of interesting living in a world far from the small, grimy town he lives in, is both depressed and embittered by her own decision.

##### U:

In the U, the first love is discovered to have been unfaithful and in a particularly disturbing way: At a church gathering and in the middle of his solo hymn recital, a woman brings the whole proceedings to a halt by loudly accusing him of violating and impregnating her underage daughter. Fanny confronts him and insists on knowing the truth. In his response, he does not deny responsibility, but also suggests that he is as responsible, only, as a number of potential others.

##### NEW M:

Fanny has found her excuse to bail out. But, oddly, she does not. Rather, she appears to feel a newly acquired comfort with both the decision she has made and the life that is ahead of her.

#### INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY

The M of this story is not prototypical; it does not realize the expectable values expressed by would-be brides. This serves to prospect some kind of U. The impact of the discovered infidelity that follows is, therefore, diminished by the character of the M that precedes it. While infidelity is, obviously, a violation of standard values and expectations, it does not come with the shock factor, here, that a typical preceding M would have given it. Additionally, in the context of the discovered infidelity of this U, a just and gratifying new M would warrant the couples’ break up: the knowledge of her fiancé’s betrayal, on top of her already felt dissatisfaction with him, would make it both reasonable and just for Fanny to end the engagement. The realized new M – Fanny’s newly-acquired contentment and intent to stay put – is, therefore, no more predictable than it is self-explanatory or gratifying. This, however, appears to be Lawrence’s purpose: to suggest that this, in its unreasonableness and inexplicability, is life, not fiction.

**Summary of key strategies:** *In this realization of the ‘This is Life, not a Story’ construct, the unhappy ‘settling for’ of M prospects a U, but does not suggest the discovered disloyalty of the realized U. New M disappoints in proffering no poetic justice; to the contrary, the ‘settling for’ is adopted with an odd newfound sense of contentment.*

“You touched me” by D. H. Lawrence (2014)

### THEMATIC CONTENT OF CORE COMPONENTS

#### M:

In “You Touched Me”, two unmarried sisters share a house, jointly run the household, and care for their ailing father.

#### U:

In U, an unforeseen and most unfortunate occurrence derails the normal order of things: The adopted son, a twenty-one year old, twelve years younger than the older of the two sisters, visits after a protracted absence from home. Mistaking him for her father late one night, the older sister touches him affectionately on the cheek, igniting in him an unreasonable passion to possess her. He declares his interest in marrying her and receives the blessing of her dying father, who threatens both sisters with disinheritance should the young man be refused.

#### NEW M:

Though she takes deep offense to the proposal and shows both her contempt and unveiled dislike of him, the wooed sister ultimately does the unthinkable and agrees to marry her adopted brother.

### INTERPRETING THE M-U-NEW M CONSTITUENCY

The M represents a normative lull, the unexceptional routines of everyday life, realizing ordinary, expectable values: the sisters look after their home and their ailing father. The U is also prototypical in being both unprospected and in going in the face of expected values: a woman is not expected to be wooed by her adopted brother. The new M that follows, however, is atypical in failing to reinstate expectable values. The anticipated, just and gratifying resolution would see the young man rejected whatever the consequences; this does not happen. By violating the reader’s expectations of a reasonable and gratifying new M, as in the previous story Lawrence seems to suggest that life is not a story, and that he is in the business of representing the irrational unpredictability of life itself.

**Summary of key strategies:** *In this realization of the ‘This is Life, not a Story’ construct, mundane life is shockingly shattered by a deeply offensive proposal, in U. The resolution, in which the proposal is accepted, flies in the face of any sense of just reinstatement of order.*

*Both instances of the ‘This is Life, not a Story’ construct violate an anticipated story closure in a gratifying realization of new M. While there are other constructs that do not come with the typical gratifying new M (e.g., the ‘Weakness and Victimization’ construct), they show a convincing development to this deviance. In the ‘This is Life, not a Story’ construct, this violation is so opposed to reasonable expectation that it appears counter intuitive.*



### 3. Concluding remarks: A recap of the overall mechanics

We have shown that the character and appearance of M, U and new M are strategically manipulated in the nine identified story formats.

#### **M:**

We have seen that the prototype M is realized as some instantiation of standard values, which allows for mundane kinds of living. As such M diminishes prospection of its following U (as for example in “Bernice bobs her hair”).

*But M is also realized in the form of a departure in terms of values:*

M as a departure from the prototype appears as behavior that is to some degree deviant, failing in consequence to meet standard expectations of mundane living (as in, for example, “What that kind of mush gets you”). Such an M serves to work against the diminished prospection of U.

*There are also departures from a prototype realization of M:*

M with a manifest departure in realization can be

- a. presupposed, along with its following U, forgoing the dramatic core of the story (as for example in “The operation”),
- b. partially realized, creating prospectations in connection with the information gap (as for example in “The furnished room”), or
- c. represented as a recycled routine, serving to enhance the diminished prospection of U (as for example in “The father”).

#### **U:**

We have seen that prototypically U is realized as a violation of the standard values of its preceding M: In doing this it also goes in the face of its diminished prospection, that is, it is outside the realm of expectation with respect to M (as for example in “Bernice bobs her hair”).

*But U is also realized in the form of a departure in terms of values:*

As a departure from the prototype, U appears as behavior that does not violate the values of M. Its appearance is accommodated by an M that realizes deviant behavior and prospects a U of some kind. In this context U serves to heighten the non-normative behavior of M (as for example in “Death”).

The prospected U can be known (as for example in “That evening sun”) or unknown (as for example in “What that kind of mush gets you”), each affecting the quality of prospection in a unique way. This replaces the normative sudden surprise of encountering an unprospected U.

*There are also departures in the realization of U:*

As a prospected U, it can also be

- a. delayed, becoming more prospected and more anticipated the longer it is postponed (as in, for example, “That evening sun”), and/or
- b. not implemented at all after repeated delay, creating a frustrated increasing expectation (as in, for example, “That evening sun”), or
- c. attempted without success, resulting in obviated expectation and attached emotional deflation (as in, for example, “What that kind of mush gets you”), or
- d. presupposed, along with its preceding M; foregoing, thereby, the defining dramatic happening of the story (as in, for example, “The operation”).

**NEW M:**

We have seen that prototypically new M is realized as a reinstatement of the normative values of M in the form of a corrective response to U, predictably judged ‘just’, in that it serves to resolve the ‘disruption’ introduced by U in a gratifying way (as in, for example, “Bernice bobs her hair” and “The operation”).

*But new M is also realized in the form of a departure in terms of values:*

The main departure is that normative values are not reinstated (as in, for example, “Death”).

This can be realized in a number of ways:

- a. as aberrative behavior, e.g., criminal or psychopathic, which is not in line with the prospected corrective normalcy that new M typically reinstates after U (as in, for example, “Death”),
- b. as more deflated than M, which takes from the expectation that new M will be gratifying in some way (as for example in “What that kind of mush gets you”), or
- c. as distinguished by its lack of poetic justice and therefore again emotionally deflating, though at the same time more authentically characteristic of life, than story (as in, for example, “Fanny and Anny”).

*New M also shows departures from prototype realization:*

1. in no realization, which removes the opportunity for resolution (as in, for example, “That evening sun”), or
2. in a deeply assessed realization (in a context where M and U receive comparatively less, or no, treatment) giving atypical focus to a presumed return to ‘normal’ life (as in, for example, “The operation”).

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that there are multiple dimensions of manipulation, with varied potential permutation and nuanced outcome, as is illustrated above in the prototype configuration and its eight well differentiated departures. But ultimately at core it is clearly an

exercise in managing expectable cultural values along an expectable experiential trajectory, the baseline realization of which is captured in the Labovian M, U, and new M configuration.

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