99 ways to retell a story: The style and functions of narrator reconstrual

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1. 99 ways to retell a story

The examination of different ways of telling the same story has been revisited, fittingly, through a number of different perspectives in stylistics, narratology and literary criticism. This famously includes Queneau's *Exercises in Style* which features 99 versions of a seemingly prosaic episode in which a man goes on a bus ride and enters into an argument with another passenger. Each version is retold in a different literary style, which includes different rhetorical figures, parodies and speech acts. The collection is seen as a "metalinguistic challenge" (Eco, 11) that both explores and makes fun of the affordances, rhetorical styles and genres of texts. Reformulations of this collection have since appeared across other modes of writing, including the graphic novel *99 Ways to Tell a Story* (Madden) which comprises 99 one-page comics that retell a similarly everyday episode (an artist working at home who heads downstairs to inspect the fridge and asks his partner for the time) via a series of drawing styles and genres, and Hoover's poetry collection *Sonnet 56* which rewrites Shakespeare's the sonnet into 56 stylistically different versions.

In prose fiction, retelling stories occurs in a number of different forms, modes and genres, at different parts of the writing and reading experience. Some of these are explored in Lambrou's edited collection *Narrative Retellings: Stylistic Approaches* which examines the interpretative significance of language choices and changes across retold stories. As Lambrou (1) notes in the introduction,

> Once told, it is inevitable that the narrative will be retold, reconstrued or reimagined into a new text where original elements, such as characters and plot, may or may not always be recognizable, influenced by factors such as the audience (reader, listener, etc.), the medium (and its affordances) and the rhetorical goal linked to its retelling. By understanding reworkings of narratives as process and product, it is possible to gain insights into the complexities involved in their reconfiguration.

Within this collection, these "reconfigurations" are primarily explored at the site of text production, in the contexts of a writer or speaker retelling the same account through stylistic edits and amendments (e.g. the studies by Gregoriou, Giovanelli, Canning and Ringrow), and in the contexts of adaptation and translation across different writers or speakers (e.g. the studies by Scott, Furlong, Bray, Boase-Beier, Cushing and Warner). At the site of text reception, Harrison and Nuttall's chapter additionally examines how rereading a short story can give rise to different reader interpretations, most notably in the experience and identification of character perspective.

While the emphasis in the research orients towards choices made by writers, extra-diegetically (as a reworking of the narrative "process"), retellings also occur within published narratives and within the story "product". Storytellers may revisit, repeat or reconfigure a scene within the story for particular purposes, as the analysis in this article will explore. Retellings, then, can be said to occur at different levels of the text. These can be summarized as in Table 1 below.

<Table 1. A taxonomy of narrative retellings>

In *inter-writer retelling*, an author revisits or refashions an existing publication of another writer in order to create a different reading experience. In many cases, the retelling involves a stylistic departure from the original account. For example, in "Good People", Wallace revisits Hemingway's short story "Hills like white elephants" which describes a couple who sit at a table, have a drink, and who discuss a topic that is never explicitly mentioned. The original story is told almost entirely through direct speech. In Wallace's retelling, the essentials of the story remain the same: a couple discuss the same topic, and sit at a table with a drink. At the same time, there are marked deviations in style and language choices, and most notably in that

"Good People" undergoes a perspectival shift: the narrator in this retelling moves from a more external position to instead focalize the thoughts and feelings of the male protagonist. Significantly, the direct speech which makes up the majority of 'Hills like white elephants' is removed in Wallace's retelling, and the only direct speech that does appear is embedded in the hypothetical conversation that the protagonist imagines having with his partner. In the context of this retelling, an alternative subjective, introspective experience is offered.

In a stylistic exploration of *writer retelling*, Gregoriou ("Re-writing misdirection", "On the making of Robinson's stylistic 'Fast Ones'") considers how an analysis of a writer's redrafting choices makes it possible to trace how misdirection functions in crime fiction. She explores how *misdirection* and *clue burying* are noted to be particular stylistic strategies employed in the creation of a successful "whodunit". Red herrings, for example, are identified as an effective means of misdirection as their irrelevance is revealed retrospectively at the point of (re)solution and remain as potentially misleading clues until confirmed otherwise. With reference to early drafts of Peter Robinson's popular Inspector Banks novels, Gregoriou examines how the author rewrote and edited his novels to include a higher number of clues and thereby create false suspicion surrounding particular (innocent) characters through the manipulation of narrator focalization, sympathy alignment and the representation of (un)reliability.

A writer can choose to encode a scene in a particular way, and a reader can also infer the represented scene in a particular way. This can be based on a number of different factors including their experiential baggage, idiosyncratic set of schemas and prior knowledge or expectations of a story. In previous stylistic studies of rereading, Harrison and Nuttall ("Re-reading in Stylistics", "Re-reading as retelling", "Cognitive Grammar and reconstrual") examine how readers' re-interpret scenes when they reread texts, and how this might impact on how readers understand character perspective or the prominence of particular schemas

within a text. In their analyses of Margaret Atwood's short story 'The Freeze-Dried Groom' ("Re-reading as retelling", "Cognitive Grammar and reconstrual"), for example, they observe how rereaders of this short story become more distanced from the focalizer on a second reading, and how reading this 'whodunit'/ crime story more than once can actually create greater ambiguity rather than increased clarity (cf. Millis).

Less extensively examined from a stylistic perspective, however, is the process of retelling within the context of the storyworld; those cases where alternate renderings of the same narrative event or scene are repeated within the same text. A famous example of retelling events as represented through different characters is the film *Rashomon* (Kurosawa), which is centred on working out the identity of a murderer. In this film (itself a retelling of the original short story 'In a Grove', by Akutagawa), four conflicting accounts of a murder, from four character perspectives, are presented. Since the film's production, the term "the Rashomon effect" has been associated with the unreliability of eye witnesses and their accounts. Studies of this phenomenon in both film and literature examine how these conflicting descriptions play crucial roles in the representation of character unreliability and the obfuscation of plot, placing the reader or viewer in the position of "negotiator" of the story (Davis and Burnham; see also Ryder). This type of retelling can be considered an *inter-narrator retelling* as it involves a collaboration between different character accounts to piece together facets of the story.

Within Lambrou's collection, Toolan's chapter on McGahern's short story "Swallows" provides the only analysis of this type of intratextual, or "story internal", storytelling. Toolan argues that any occurrence of intratextual retelling will inherently incorporate some type of change, "minimally, of tense and pronouns, as when direct speech is retold as indirect speech. But often also of speaker or tone or perspective or interpretation of the thing (re-)told" (61). Toolan examines how the repetition and retellings of one brief encounter and subsequent conversations between a police sergeant and a surveyor fulfil a particular narrative function

within the short story. He argues that the lexical repetition highlights the metaphorical parallelism between the two central characters, such that it offers a form of satisfactory narrative closure that is otherwise not formally marked.

This article builds on Toolan's study to explore the prevalence of story-internal retelling across different text types and genres. Specifically, it examines illustrative cases of *narrator retelling*: where an event or scene is retold by the same narrator, more than once, in the same story. In narratology, repetition and recursion have been noted as a feature of specific genres (e.g. Hofstadter's work on "Strange Loops" and "Tangled Hierarchies" in postmodernist fiction) and as a prominent feature of isolated texts (e.g. the repetition and structural complexity in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, see Kumar). As a wider narrative phenomenon, however, same-narrator retelling in fiction has not received the same extensive stylistic scrutiny, as indicated by its absence in *Narrative Retellings*. This paper argues that narrator retelling is ubiquitous across genres and beyond postmodernist forms alone. The case studies demonstrate that this form of retelling has a number of different functions in prose fiction, and that a stylistic account of *reconstrual* provides a means of exploring the linguistic mechanisms that give rise to its interpretative implications.

2. Reconstrual dimensions

The choices made by the conceptualizer of the scene (the writer or narrator, within the context of fiction) in rendering a scene carries information about the interpretive impact of its conceptual content and how readers might experience it. This process of "construal" works at the sites of both text production and reception, in that writers and narrators have the ability "to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways" (Langacker 43), and readers may also be invited to conceptualize alternate construals based on particular linguistic cues.

To contextualise construal operations in stylistic analysis, consider the following extract, which is taken from the opening of Susanna Clarke's epistolary *Piranesi*[1].

> **When the Moon rose in the Third Northern Hall I went to the Ninth Vestibule**
> ***Entry for the first day of the fifth month in the year the albatross came to the South-Western Halls***
>
> When the Moon rose in the Third Northern Hall I went to the Ninth Vestibule to witness the joining of three tides. This is something that happens about once every eight years. The Ninth Vestibule is remarkable for the three great Staircases it contains. Its Walls are lined with marble Statues, hundreds upon hundreds of them, Tier upon Tier, rising into the distant heights.
>
> (Clarke 1)

The construal of this unusual fictional world is presented through distinctive style choices of the eponymous narrator, Piranesi, relating information about his idiosyncratic perspective. Firstly, the scene is described through heightened *specificity*, which provides readers with exact details of the time and date of this initial diary entry, albeit via an unfamiliar notation system ("the first day of the fifth month in the year the albatross came to the South-Western Halls"). The location of parts of the scene are similarly highly specified through numerals and the identification of room types ("the Ninth Vestibule" of the "Third Northern Hall"), which suggest that Piranesi has explored and documented this strange place very closely. At the same time, other descriptions are more schematic. It is not clear at this point, for example, what the mysterious "marble statues" depict, as they lack further details which *elaborate* on their figural subject matter.

Prominence is given to particular figures in the scene. For example, the use of capital letters foregrounds the places and particular objects that populate Piranesi's environment. "Moon", "Staircases" and "Statues" are all capitalized and therefore attributed with heightened significance. This style choice also contributes to the archaic quality of the writing: the

[1] All key terms from the construal model are italicized on first mention and taken from Langacker's original work in Cognitive Grammar (summarized in 2008).

Germanic influence of noun capitalization can be observed in older English texts, and its inclusion therefore obscures the time in which the narrative is set. Attention is also directed to those figures in the description that move or are given grammatical agency. Piranesi "went to the Ninth Vestibule", and similarly the "Tiers" within this large space are noted as "rising into the distant heights". Both Piranesi and the Tiers hold readerly attention as moving *trajectors* against the background, or *landmark*, of the "Vestibule" and the "distant heights", respectively. Again, the grammatical choices at this micro-level of the text creates a blueprint for readers' interpretation of the wider themes of the novel, and especially the role played by the "House" and its impact on Piranesi and its other visitors.

Finally, there are a number of meaningful style choices that locate Piranesi's physical position as conceptualizer. Notably, his *vantage point* is spatially situated through deixis. The first-person pronoun "I" and demonstrative pronoun "this" establish closer physical proximity between Piranesi and the space he inhabits, while the scale of the room, and his position at the bottom of it, is suggested in the description of the "hundreds and hundreds" of Tiers and Statues, and the remoteness of the top of the "distant heights" within the bounded space of the Vestibule. Though the structural format of this opening extract appears epistolary, the description of events in the title and in the first sentence display a more *objective construal*. When a description is recounted via a more objective construal, attention is directed towards the scene primarily, while the narrator's perspective is backgrounded. This tends to occur where accounts are rendered through categorical assertions. At the time, the description of the scene undergoes a more *subjective construal* when the narrator's perspective becomes more marked, as in the use of first-person pronouns, for instance, or in modalised or evaluative descriptions (the adjective "remarkable" here, for example, suggests Piranesi's personal evaluation, and that he considers the Ninth Vestibule to be noteworthy). Degrees of subjectivity and objectivity are not absolute and will fluctuate across any text, such that reader attention

will be shifted from the scene to the conceptualizer at alternating points. In this opening scene, Piranesi's unusual perspective and experience of the world are encoded in the way he describes the House, but, significantly, other details of his identity, and the ontology of the space he inhabits, are left offstage.

This illustrative analysis of the opening to *Piranesi* demonstrates how linguistic choices carry meaningful information about the relationship between the narrator and their conceptualization of scenes and events. All of these choices work together to produce a distinctive experience of the conceptual content, which will differ from other accounts as constructed through available linguistic alternatives. While there is not space in this paper to extend this overview in further detail, this brief analysis introduces some of the key components of the construal apparatus that will be most relevant for the exploration of narrative retelling under consideration, including specificity, figural prominence, perspectival vantage point, and subjectivity.

When an event is rewritten or retold, it is likely that the construal dimensions of the scene will be altered. As noted in the earlier examples, a writer making edits on their work might choose to embellish a passage by increasing the specificity of an important plot point; a character might retell the same event by widening the scope of the description as more panoramic details of an event are recalled; on a second reading of a crime text, a rereader may attach more figural prominence to a character who was revealed to be the criminal, and so on. In a recent extended application of construal, Giovanelli suggests that such changes across multiple versions of a text can be described according to *reconstrual dimensions* which give rise to a number of text- as well as discourse-level effects (131). For the purposes of this paper, the discussion will focus on four of these phenomena:

Respecification:	granularity or schematicity
Refiguring:	figure-ground relationships
Relocating:	vantage point of the conceptualizer(s)
Reviewing:	subjective/objective construal

As well as including formal changes, any retold event or scene carries interpretative significance, for, as Toolan observes, "the adjacent retelling or repeating of what has been just reported is an obvious kind of local foregrounding and can trigger reader inferences as to its purpose" (70).

3. Narrator reconstrual: Forms and functions

Previous work by Mullins and Dixon argues that the narrator plays an integral role in how readers construe perspective. They are seen as a kind of "cooperative" conversational participant who guides the reader and, hopefully, indicates narrative items of significance for them. This is seen as particularly salient in crime fiction, where readers are invited to actively engage in inferential processing to remember key pieces of critical information in solving the crime. In this view, reading is framed as an interaction and exchange in which both readers and narrators are co-participant.

Processes of inferential processing and the interactive exchange between reader and narrator become complicated when a scene is reconstrued by the same character, since any instance of retelling will flout maxims of *quantity* (in its repetition) and *manner* (e.g. if the retelling disrupts the chronological sequence of the narrative). Simply put, Kukkonen (207) maintains that when narrators flout the Cooperative Principle, they are "uncooperative". At the same time, though, readers will infer that such choices are meaningful, as "readers assume that the author (unlike the narrator) keeps the Cooperative Principle and represents the narrator's violations for a rhetorical purpose" (Kukkonen 207). Kukkonen's study of rhetorical figures of adynaton and prolepsis in the writing of Eliza Haywood argues that sustained or systematic appearances of uncooperative narration "can alert readers to the personality of the narrator, and

contribute to the build-up of narrative suspense as well as the emotional involvements of readers" (207).

The next sections (§3.1 – §3.4) explore some examples of these inferential functions of narrator reconstrual, and the forms they might take, in contemporary fiction.

3.1. Narrative cohesion

In some instances, the same scene is repeated verbatim, or near verbatim, by the same narrator, and the retelling can have a structural function within the text. This occurs, for example, in Keyes' comedy drama *Grown Ups*, which follows the lives and secrets of the Casey family. The novel opens with a scene of an argument at a large, family dinner as the prologue, and then moves back in time and moves chronologically up to the present day. To mark this temporal progression, the chapters are labelled as "Six months earlier", "Two weeks ago", "One day ago", and so on, leading up to a repeat of the Prologue in the chapter "Now":

<Table 2. Event reconstrual in *Grown Ups* (Keyes)>

There are only minor local changes that alter the retelling from the first account. The exposition of character relationships ("Ed's wife, Clara") and character personality ("that was how things rolled in Jessie's world") are absent in the reconstrual, as such relational dynamics are more necessary for world-building (Gavins, Werth) earlier in the novel. The direct speech from Cara is also slightly *reviewed* in the retelling, where her feeling of compulsion ("I have to say it") is removed but her negative evaluation of the dinner is comparatively emphasized: "I am bored to *tears*". Given the physical distance between the prologue scene and its retelling (appearing a couple of hundred pages later), readers' understanding of the story and sympathetic alignment with the characters will have significantly altered, however, and change the interpretive impact

of the review. It becomes clear that Cara's behaviour and speech is unusual for her, and that her comments are not a result of intentional rudeness (as it appears in the first extract) but instead of a recent head injury which is making her act out-of-character and, as it transpires, more likely to openly share family secrets.

In *Grown Ups*, this retelling indicates the narrative significance of the family dinner, its heightened emotional involvement family dinner and Clara's atypical behaviour, within this story. The placement of the reconstrued scene and its build-up in the preceding text suggests that this event is the narrative climax; the point of convergence between the previous narrative strands and various character arcs that have appeared before it. The position of the narrative retelling in the text therefore holds a cohesive function, which both marks the start of the narrative *denouement* that follows and generates reader expectations of narrative closure.

3.2. Narrative world salience

In the context of crime or detective fiction, or more generally where a character is solving a mystery, reconstrual can function as a means of indicating *narrative world salience* (Emmott and Alexander). This occurs where an item "has apparent importance for one of more characters in the narrative world" (331). If a scene or event is retold as part of a mystery and readers are primed to be in a "puzzle-solving mode" (Emmott and Alexander, 331), it is likely that readers will attribute greater significance to parts of the reconstrual that have been altered, and assume that any difference will be important to the plot.

In the fantasy novel *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Rowling), Harry investigates the past of evil wizard Tom Riddle in an attempt to understand his history and motivations. It is discovered that one of Harry's teachers, Professor Slughorn, spoke with Riddle about a piece of dark magic, "Horcruxes". Through magical means, Harry and Professor Dumbledore are able to visit and witness Slughorn's censored memory of the conversation with

Riddle (left in Table 3). The second account (right in Table 3) appears a few chapters later when Harry and Dumbledore revisit the memory, after they have discovered the omitted details of the original exchange:

<Table 3. Event reconstrual in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Rowling)>

The retold scene begins in the same way as the first but undergoes both a *review* and a *relocation* in the description of Slughorn's reaction to Riddle's question. In the first telling, Slughorn's external position interrupts the narrative and draws attention to the redaction of details of the memory. Slughorn's direct speech is framed through evaluative language as an angry retort: *"I don't know anything about Horcruxes and I wouldn't tell you if I did!"* In the context of the scene, this speech foregrounds the edit made by Slughorn to the memory, which is marked through the arrival of the "dense fog" that obscures the figures of Slughorn and Riddle, the volume of speech ("Slughorn's voice boomed out again") and also, graphologically, in the use of italics. It also locates Slughorn's italicized speech as occurring outside of the experience of the conversation. In other words, this interjection is evidently an edit by a later "enactor" (Emmott) of Slughorn, whose vantage point is spatiotemporally displaced from the memory itself. These choices move Slughorn, and his angry outburst, onstage as the object of attention. Readers might question why he would have this heightened, emotional reaction to this topic, and why he would wish to edit the memory and his response to Riddle.

In the retelling, in contrast, the absence of italics and the omission of the obscuring "dense fog", suggests the presented direct speech is all located in the original memory, and a more cohesive account of the remembered conversation ensues. While Slughorn's evaluative response to Riddle's question remains onstage (his reluctance to respond is suggested by the use of ellipses, for instance), his emotional reaction still undergoes a *review* in that it is not

foregrounded within his direct speech. Instead, details are *refigured* in the retold scene so that greater attention is firstly given to Slughorn's physical response, which explicitly moves onstage within the description. His discomfort is indicated through the verb choices "stared" and "clawing", and in the continuation of the conversation where Slughorn does, in fact, relate details of this "very Dark" magic.

Harry's vantage point is *reviewed* in that his thoughts and assessment of Slughorn's response are described ("But Harry could tell that Slughorn knew perfectly well this was not schoolwork"). This reconstrual indicates Harry's awareness of the reasons for Slughorn's reticence, and, in this instance, creates increased narrative world salience of the hitherto missing piece of information. Its addition, and the way it is represented, cues the additional details as being particularly central to Harry and Dumbledore's research and their ongoing investigation, marking the information as something important for the reader to remember in their own interpretive processes of puzzle-solving.

3.3. Obfuscation of storyworld details

In the first two examples of narrator reconstrual in §3.1 and §3.2, the narrator can be considered to "present their storytelling as a shared communicative endeavour" (Kukkonen 205) in which the reconstrued account is included to emphasise a structural component of the text (§3.1), or to reveal an important piece of information as and when discovered by the protagonist (§3.2.). Other reconstrued scenes can be considered an attempt by narrators to "taunt and mislead their readers" (Kukkonen 205). Event reconstrual can play a key role in obscuring facts or details, and can be seen in cases where the audience is deliberately misled in order to hide guilt or agency.

Atwood's *Alias Grace* is a piece of historical fiction which recounts the life of Grace Marks, who was found guilty of being an accomplice to the murder of Thomas Kinnear, in

whose household she lived and worked as a maid, and Nancy Montgomery, Kinnear's housekeeper and mistress. The novel moves between the perspective of Dr Jordan, who interviews Grace about her life, and Grace's own first-person account. Grace revisits the events leading up the day of the murder and, in particular, the recurring dream she is said to have about the day of the murder. The description is further complicated through Grace's reference to another memory, her trip to Mr. Kinnear's "that first day", which creates another embedded narrative level in the scene and contributes in part to the overarching patchwork organization of the novel. The same scene is described in the opening chapter, and then much later in the novel where it is framed through direct speech and directed to Dr Jordan:

<Table 4. Event reconstrual in *Alias Grace* (Atwood)>

Given the significance of this scene in discerning Grace's culpability, readers are likely to be primed to note differences in description. One of the changes in the retold account is the tense shift from present to past within the first paragraph ("Out of the gravel there are peonies growing' becomes 'On the ground there were loose grey pebbles") which creates a greater division between Grace's "experiencing" and "observing" self (Cohn) compared to the first description. In the retelling, she is more distanced from the direct experience of what happened, and this passage of time between the retelling and the event, and what this suggests about the reliability of the account, is therefore more salient.

Other differences in the reconstrual appear to be noteworthy. Nancy is *refigured* as an object of attention across both versions. She is introduced more objectively in the first telling where Grace describes her memory of their first meeting, and Nancy's actions and appearance, through categorical statements: "Nancy was cutting them", and "She wore a pale dress with pink rosebuds". Her actions are also grammatically foregrounded in the first telling, and she is

made attentionally prominent through her appearance as agent in successive clauses: "She wore", "she carried", "she bent", "she heard us and turned", "she put". In the reconstrued account, however, Nancy's actions are framed and filtered more explicitly through Grace's role as an observer, where Grace's perception is noted from the outset: "*I saw her in the dream*, just as she was then" (emphasis added). In contrast to the first description, Nancy's action of cutting the roses is grammatically backgrounded in the reconstrual, where it appears in a clause tagged on at the end of the sentence: "[…] when Nancy was cutting the last of them". At the same time, a more specific part of the action is also brought to attention. That she is cutting "the last of them" in this second account creates ominous metaphorical value in this context, given that Grace is, indirectly, describing her memories of the day Nancy was murdered.

Finally, in the first telling, another character is described as belonging to the vantage point of the speaker. Nancy's response to "when she heard *us*" (emphasis added) is referenced, whereas, significantly, Grace is singled out as the sole conceptualizer in the second, as marked through first person singular pronouns ("I dreamt I was walking") and in the absence of who Nancy saw when she felt "startled". This gives Grace greater singular prominence in the second extract and *reviews* the scene by heightening the subjectivity of Grace's perception. In other words, readers are positioned to frame the scene through what Grace "saw" in her role of experiencing self. Grace's role as an observer is additionally exacerbated in the explicit framing of this account as a dream, rather than as a "real" event she experienced.

Instead of increasing clarity, the retellings in *Alias Grace* leads to a progressive obfuscation of details. Grace, as narrator, directs our attention to specific parts of the scene – and maybe those that hold metaphorical value, such as the flowers – but withholds other details. The time and place, the people involved, the extent of Grace's involvement and complicity, and the "reality" status of events all become altered and obscured (for a more extended stylistic analysis of this novel, see Harrison). Crucially, the repeated event does not reveal or confirm

the key details that readers would otherwise expect in the resolution of a murder mystery, contributing to the "anti-detective" (Ingersoll) categorization of this novel and its resistance to formal closure.

3.4. Disnarration

Another specific way that narrators may mislead a reader is through *disnarration*, in which a version of the story is presented to readers and then revoked (Prince). Disnarration can occur through negated constructions, narrative refusal and through hypothetical focalization (Herman) where the narrator imagines another's account of a scene or event. Within these texts, and where multiple versions are offered, a reconstrual initially masquerades as an account given by a different storyteller, only for the identity of the voices to be conflated later on.

In *Atonement* (McEwan), readers are presented with an altercation by a fountain between two characters, Cecilia and Robbie. The first description of the scene is presented as a third person account, seemingly focalized through Cecilia's perspective (left in Table 5). A few pages later, the scene is reconstrued and through the perspective of 12-year-old Briony who witnesses their argument from a distant window (right in Table 5). The reveal of Briony's identity of "author" of both these accounts at the end of this novel is part of the rug-pull experience of reading this text. It becomes apparent that readers were not presented with Cecilia's more direct account of what happened by the fountain but, in fact, both versions of the scene are fabricated by Briony as the narrative's storyteller and third person narrator. Readers are then required to revoke the narrator status as represented in the rest of the novel. It is significant, too, that readers' first encounter with this scene is, in fact, the retold account; the one what is hypothetically focalized after Briony witnesses the scene:

<Table 5. Event reconstrual in *Atonement* (McEwan)>

The retelling of the scene instantiates a *relocation* of vantage point in terms of the spatial position of each conceptualizer, which in turn invites a *respecification* of details of the scene. Cecilia's physical position closer to the fountain affords a different specification and experience of its details. She is close enough to observe the "moss" and "algae" that cover the Triton and the broken pieces of the "lip of the vase", and to hear the sound of the break "like a dry twig snapping". In contrast, the reconstrual positions Briony at a higher and more distal point so that the scope of her account is broader, sweeping from the maximal whole of the fountain and its position within the gardens and "the boundaries of the balustrade", to "the distant blue hills". The illusion that each perspective is an authentic account by a different perceiver is strengthened through the fact that the vantage point of each version is also characterized through a *subjective construal* of the events described. Cecilia "knew what he was about" and her evaluation of Robbie's actions are clear ("Intolerable"). Briony's subjective perspective in the second extract is similarly referenced through evaluatives ("extraordinary", "mercifully"), and through epistemic judgements (for example, Robbie's hand raise is regarded as "less comprehensible"). Readers are, seemingly, aligned with the immanent reactions of each character.

Briony's spatial distance from the event also means that other details are *refigured* in the retelling, and that her judgement of the situation may not be accurate. The description of how "Robbie imperiously raised his hand" is foregrounded as a more central and assertive act, while the action of unbuttoning his shirt is unobserved. Other details of objects are absent, including, significantly, the broken vase which incited their actions in the first place. Cecilia and Robbie are placed onstage as the focus of attention, and in the absence of key actions and details, Briony attributes a different causality and circumstances to the actions that they perform. The formality of their arrangement is perceived as a "proposal", and Cecilia removes her clothes "[a]t his insistence" rather than by her own volition (cf. "well, she would show

him"). Significantly, these details, and the context of the scene, are provided in the first account, so that readers are aware that a vase was broken and that the seemingly imperious command from Robbie was instead a "warning" about her safety. Having read this more detailed account first, then, readers are likely to observe that the retelling is clouded by Briony's naïve misunderstanding of the events. In the context of the chapter, this misunderstanding is framed through a childlike vantage point: a FAIRYTALE narrative schema is evoked to describe what she thinks she is witnessing, "a proposal of marriage" and a rescue scene.

As Briony notes at the end of the novel, her rewriting is her attempt to depict the truth of what happened and also to mitigate the errors in judgement made by her younger self. The realization that the more detailed version is the fabricated account, functions to emphasize – in retrospect – Briony's duplicity, the extent of her "double-dealing", and for readers to question the credibility or authenticity of what they have read. Heightened specificity does not mean reliability, vantage points can be fictionalized, and the idea that there is one account that is more "real" gives rise to metaliterary discussion on the nature of veracity in fiction writing (see Adam, 192).

4. The styles and functions of narrator reconstrual

This article opened with an overview of the different types of narrative retellings and argued that, though not given extended attention in stylistics and narratology, *narrator retellings* are a pervasive phenomenon appearing in different narrative forms and across narrative genres (cf. Toolan). Langacker's construal dimensions were introduced as a framework for analysing the linguistic choices and shifts in conceptualization that underpin reconstrued events or scenes (§2).

The analysis of illustrative examples of narrator reconstrual in §3.1 –3.4 has explored how changes in construal dimensions across multiple tellings give rise to a number of

interpretive implications and generate particular local and discourse level effects (following the work of Giovanelli). One of the key discourse effects of any repeated, story-internal narrative event, regardless of other stylistic or genre factors, is the process of conceptual comparison it invites. Where an episode or scene is told and retold, the retelling automatically will attract greater attention and heightened narrative salience. Readers will assume that the writer has purposely included such repetition and it is therefore likely to be perceived as noteworthy, potentially describing a climactic, plot-significant or emotionally charged moment, such that any differences and discrepancies between accounts will be interpreted as rhetorically meaningful. In some cases, this might lead to a clarification or resolution of storyworld facts and details; in others, the reconstrual may create increased ambiguity. Crucially, though, in narrator reconstrual, such retellings play a key role in readers' perception and characterization of the narrator, and expose the extent of the narrator's cooperation or deception in the storytelling process.

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