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Shaping Memory Through Lyric Narration

The Specificity and Scope of Noun Phrases
in the Depiction of Past Events

The article fleshes out the concept of lyric narration in the depiction of memories by suggesting that Ronald W. Langacker's Cognitive Grammar offers a helpful framework for understanding how lyric narration operates on spatiality. Expanding from Werner Wolf's (2005, 2020) idea of the lyric as a cognitive frame, the paper posits that lyricality may be fruitfully viewed as a quality of narrative texts, particularly in regard to portraying mental processes such as reminiscing. To argue for this view, the paper first outlines characteristics of lyric narration, as well as linguistic features that contribute to a sense that eventfulness is being backgrounded. Here, the discussion is inspired by Paul Simpson's (2014) stylistically oriented and empirically tested model of narrative urgency, guided by the assumption that reflection on past events constitutes a lack of narrative urgency. Subsequently, since the narration of memories often involves a strong spatial element – the retrieval of autobiographical memories has been linked with scenes (Rubin et al. 2019) – the discussion zooms in on the role of spatially anchored noun phrases in narrated memories. In analysing several extracts from English-language narrative fiction, Langacker's concepts of *specificity* and *scope* (2008, 55–56, 62–63) are employed to explore how noun phrases contribute granularity to memories but also suggest crucial conceptual connections.

1. Introduction

Thinking of objects as markers of past events and the past as a place that can be mentally revisited are common ways of remembering. Objects may retrospectively "thicken time"[1] by simultaneously connecting to the past and possessing present-day significance (Rigney 2015, 14). This 'thickening' may contain a profound incommensurability between the object's meaning then and now, however, as Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2006, 359) argue with reference to Roland Barthes's notion of the 'punctum of time'. In a broader perspective, spatial terms make time more tangible in many languages and cultures (Bender / Beller 2014). Among English speakers, the past is commonly thought of as being to the left or behind the conceptualiser, while the passage of time involves either time or the conceptualiser moving (Boroditsky 2000; Evans 2003, 57–58; Núñez / Cooperrider 2013). In actively recalling a past event, the mental act of *scene construction* – identifying actions, objects and / or people relevant to a given space-based memory – has been shown to increase vividness and belief in autobiographical memories (Rubin et al. 2019). While in neurophysiological terms memories are not stored in mental 'rooms' waiting for retrieval (e.g. Fink

2003), the material aspects of experiences clearly offer tangible anchors for re-membering.

What these two distinct expressions of spatial memory have in common is how they may come to be manifested in language. Namely their verbalisation inevitably relies on the 'thingness' conveyed by nouns. In Ronald W. Langacker's Cognitive Grammar (1987, 1991, 2008), this essential quality of nouns is under-stood more broadly than just as the tangibility of physical objects: processing a noun involves conceptualising individual elements as constitutive of a unity, as in the noun 'moment' consisting of proximal points in time (Langacker 2008, 105–106). Following Langacker's theorising, this article delves into how memory-related 'thickenings' of time may be rendered in language through the use of nouns. I suggest that the notion of a unity arising from perceived com-monalities resonates profoundly with the focused spatialisation of time in acts of remembering that are scene-based. As evidence, the article explores selected excerpts from English-language narrative fiction, guided by the assumption that the meaning-laden retrospection afforded by literary narrative provides rich ma-terial to discuss. In chronological order, the excerpts are taken from A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990), Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), Emerson Whit-ney's *Heaven* (2020), Farah Ali's "Present Tense" (2020) and Ysabelle Cheung's "Galatea" (2022).

Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, the focus of my analysis is not on ret-rospective narrative patterns as such but on what I call *lyric narration*. As will be explained in more detail in the next section, remembering often coincides with a reflective narrative mode that backgrounds plot progression and foregrounds cognitive processes and sensory experience. Thus, the 'thingness' of experiences, rather than their eventful qualities, comes into view. Such a tendency then stands in opposition to a certain urgency that event-driven narration often creates (cf. Simpson 2014). Similarly to modal and scalar views of narrativity (e.g. Ryan 2005, 292; Phelan 2007, 215; see also Abbott 2014, 593), lyricality is understood as a set of textual features observed by the reader. In order to show how the notion of lyricality may be relevant to memory-intense storytelling that builds on the tangibility of nouns, the example passages represent a variety of genres, themes, and narratorial choices. Pursuantly, the approach to lyric narration sketched out in the article is *stylistic* in its ethos of applying linguistic concepts to the analysis of literary expression, rather than aligning with a particular strand of narrative theory. As a framework, stylistics is not only concerned with authors' linguistic choices but also their potential readerly effects (Giovanelli / Mason 2018, 2), which I argue is very relevant to the language patterns I identify as constituting lyric narration.[2]

2. Lyric Narration and the Tangibility of Memories

Considering David Rubin and colleagues' (2019, 46) conclusion that spatial organisation is crucial to the vividness and believability of personal event-based memories, perhaps the most obvious qualifier for narration endeavouring to capture such detailed scenes would be "descriptive." Although description is by no means synonymous with lyricality, discussions of lyrical prose have often built on an opposition between lyric as sensorially rich and narrative as eventful, a distinction that can be seen in theorisations of description in narrative as well (see Schmid 2003, 21). For example, Gérard Genette's famous notion of a *descriptive pause* amounts to a "nonexistent diegetic duration." (1979, 93–94) Apart from temporal distortions, description may of course perform many different roles in fiction (Nünning 2007, 102). Drawing on criteria and typologies outlined by Mieke Bal (1981), Gerald Prince (1987) and José Manuel Lopes (1995), Ansgar Nünning (2007) discusses the various levels at which description may operate (discursive, stylistic, structural, content, and function). Most relevant for the present article are Nünning's (2007, 113–114) observations on functionally determined forms of description, specifically whether there is an explanatory function to a description (as opposed to an "ornamental" one). Assuming that there is certain overlap between description and lyric narration as modes, if lyricality is to be meaningful for the narration of memories, a certain purposefulness will likely characterise it. That is not to say that 'explanatory' and 'ornamental' are mutually exclusive in any way – notable aesthetic effects may well accompany narration that highlights the interiority of a character engaged in remembering.

Still, it is this opposition between functional and decorative that has often characterised discussions of lyricality in narrative. When it first emerged in the context of Russian literary criticism, the term *ornamental prose* was a derogative designation for plotless prose, later appropriated into neutral use (Schmid 2014, 720). However, as Wolf Schmid's (2014) survey on research into ornamental prose makes apparent, poetic (or lyric) narration is a designation that regularly occurs in scholarly contexts but is rarely explicitly defined, similarly to uses of description as a term (cf. Nünning 2007, 93). This is also evident in the various names the phenomenon has been studied under, such as Ralph Freedman's (1963) "lyrical fiction" and Michel Delville's (1998) "lyrically intimated prose" (for an overview, see Hindrichs 2006, 3–8). The terminology is quite often a reflection of the specific genre in focus, as evidenced in the notion of 'intimation' in Delville's study centering on the prose poem.

An influential definition of lyricality in narrative comes from James Phelan (1996). Adopting Susan Stanford Friedman's (1989) formulation, Phelan posits that lyric narration "foregrounds a *simultaneity*, a cluster of feelings or ideas that projects a gestalt in stasis." (1996, 31, italics in original) Although the idea of an absence of plot progression is suggested in the word "stasis" (as with ornamental prose above), the definition does not discard of eventfulness but rather backgrounds it. In fact, Phelan (2007, 22–24) conceptualises lyricality and narrativity

as modes that may co-exist in hybrid constellations, with one being dominant. The emphasis on feelings and ideas in Phelan's take on lyricality also brings the interiority of characters to the fore, as opposed to employing decorative language simply for the sake of style. As Cheryl Hindrichs (2006, 4–5) discusses, both Friedman and Phelan build on Freedman's (1963, 7–9, 17) observations about the salience of the "lyrical self" and the impulse-giving role of the literary milieu to a lyric mode of narration. In Friedman's feminist approach, these tendencies are meaningful in the sense that they allow for the subversion of the "tyranny of plot" (1989; see also 1999, Ch. 9). Hindrichs (2006, 5–6) expands this to encompass modernist writers' resistance to conventional forms of expression and makes the important point that the solipsism often associated with the 'lyric I' is renegotiated in the process. Further, the milieu-based motivation for employing a lyric mode is an idea that lends itself well to considering the role of scene construction in retrieving memories.

Of course, many accounts of lyricality also consider the converse situation of narrativity in poetry, even beyond such obviously narrative forms as ballads and novels in verse (e.g. Hühn 2004, 2005; McHale 2009, 2014; cf. Hühn/Sommer 2014, 421–423). Peter Hühn's (2004, 2005) idea of eventfulness in poetry expands Schmid's (2003, 24) notion of event as a change of state that registers as such, i.e. is not trivial (see also Abbott 2014, 595). Eventfulness is defined as "the degree of deviation from the expected continuation of the sequence pattern activated by the text." (Hühn 2005, 151) Although the sequentiality component connects Hühn's approach to many classic theorisations of narrativity (cf. Abbott 2014, 593–595), Hühn also observes that poetry typically omits "circumstantial explanations and connections" and may involve a focus on "discourse events." (Hühn 2004, 151–152) By contrast, Werner Wolf argues that eventfulness is not central to creating immersive effects in engaging with poetry because "we are confronted with the more or less static results of (possible) previous changes or happenings, and this focus precludes suspense and surprise, which both require *future* changes." (2020, 160, emphasis in original) While Hühn and Wolf base their respective accounts on readers' expectations of a text's progression, the lack of consensus on eventfulness seems to arise from the role of interpretive inferences in abstracting such a progression. Indeed, Hühn points out that the type of narrative sequences one may find in poetry often activate "the readers' narrative competence to fill in gaps and supply missing or merely implied connections by associating the appropriate conventional schemata or stereotypical procedural patterns." (2016, 11) This has bearing on lyricality in prose texts as well, and especially retrospective narration: because episodic (event-related) memories readily lose detail and coherency (Richardson 2010, 280), there are likely to be gaps and (seeming) inconsistencies in narrating them too.[3]

Where much of the previous research is quite general in theorising lyric narration as an analytical category, Phelan's (1996) discussion of lyric utterances in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) shows how lyricality may contribute to characterisation and narrative development. Phelan (1996, 38–39) identifies and ex-

plores four functions of lyric narration in *The Waves*: the revelation of a character's feeling; a focus on perception and sensation; recurring utterances that show a character's movement through life; and a character's revelation about another character. All of these may arguably be relevant to the narration of memories. In fact, Freedman discusses how in another work by Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), particularly potent single moments "unite past and present," simultaneously existing in memory and being "converted into symbols intensely meaningful to an inner consciousness." (1963, 200) Notably, Freedman also mentions the importance of "objects in the external world," (ibid.) such as trees, waves, and people, to this amalgamation. Along similar lines, Hindrichs argues that Woolf and other modernists furthered a "move toward aesthetic forms that rejected linear narrative for its failure to express an individual's sense of time and memory." (2006, 94) While subjective time is clearly a modernist preoccupation, it is also worth considering to what extent such tendencies can be seen in other memory-oriented narratives. As an intriguing recent point of comparison, the notion of lyricality has been picked up by essayists such as Maggie Nelson to underscore what Michelle Dicinoski (2017) calls 'associative uncertainty' in handling temporality.

At this point in the discussion, it seems prudent to address the definition of lyric narration the present article adopts. Given the conceptual principles underlying language use in Cognitive Grammar, Werner Wolf's (2005) reimagining of the lyric from a cognitive perspective aligns well with the article's aims, even if Wolf's position concerns lyric poetry as a genre. Namely according to Wolf, the cultural knowledge of what the lyric is, as possessed by both writers and readers, means that it can be thought of in terms of cognitive schemata (2005, 33). Wolf argues that the notion of a schematic *prototype* allows for a flexible understanding of the lyric:

> A prototype is characterized by a number of features that are mentally stored and are then used as standards for the identification of phenomena which are intuitively felt to be similar, but on closer inspection may turn out to correspond to these standards to various degrees only. (2005, 34)

Importantly, these features are not fixed; they are more like tendencies with varying degrees of prominence, identified by readers in context. To my mind, these tendencies can be thought of as constituting lyricality also in other forms of writing than the lyric, taking inspiration from Brian McHale's discussion of *weak narrativity* in poetry – "telling stories 'poorly,' distractedly, with much irrelevance and indeterminacy." (2001, 165) Indeed, Wolf has advanced a similar scalar view of narrative (e.g. 2003), and in this way Wolf's approach aligns well with Phelan's thinking on lyricality and narrativity working alongside each other in 'hybrid' textual environments.

Furthermore, Wolf outlines what the lyric *does* in terms that resonate with Phelan's and Hindrichs's findings regarding lyric narration and literary characters' inner workings. Two traits mentioned by Wolf are particularly relevant here: how the lyric enables authors to "construct worlds in which there are no external developments nor (series of) actions" and to treat "consciousness not as a means

of shedding light on elements of external reality but of revealing itself." (2005, 36) Thus, the absence of an expectation for advancing the story and fleshing out the storyworld allow for thought processes and emotions to emerge. In sum, then, I treat lyric narration as a mode that prioritises the internal – emotional, sensory and reflective aspects – over eventfulness and is often motivated by the milieu prompting such an internal focus. Correspondingly, I suggest that lyric narration is typically visible in word choices foregrounding the modal and the perceptual, such as nouns modified with descriptors, modal verbs and adverbs, and verbs of perception. Here I additionally lean on – or rather away from – Paul Simpson's (2014, 5–7) stylistic markers of narrative urgency[4] (which constitutes the opposite of a focus on interiority) such as action-orientation in verbs, proneness to categorical statements, and simple sentence structures. Regarding syntax, sentence structures not necessarily aligning with the standard SVO word order and / or containing various kinds of clause coordination can be presumed more prominent in lyric narration than in moments of narrative urgency. In line with this, parallelism at the level of syntax, word choice and phonetics may not be uncommon either.

3. The Construal of Nouns: Scope and Schematicity in Cognitive Grammar

Cognitive Grammar models how language works, with an emphasis on meaning-making. Langacker's definition of meaning includes both the conceptual content evoked by language and the way that content is *construed* as a consequence of a particular linguistic formulation of the conceptual content (2008, 43). Put differently, when conceptual content is encoded into a linguistic expression, a specific construal is imposed, out of several possible ones. Although Langacker (2008, 55) stresses that Cognitive Grammar does not claim meanings are necessarily visually or spatially based, he uses the metaphor of a scene and a certain way of perceiving it to illustrate how construal works. What is "on-stage" depends on how a given "scene" is verbalised: "It's quiet" and "I don't hear anything" represent different construals of the same circumstances, potentially with different effects when processed by a particular recipient in a particular context. Moreover, construal is profoundly dynamic, the notion of dynamicity referring to "how a conceptualization develops and unfolds through processing time." (Langacker 2008, 79) This means that Cognitive Grammar facilitates detailed attention to the specific ways in which linguistic encodings of experience may be received in on-line processing of language, including in literary contexts (cf. Harrison 2017, 1–2).

An important related term, particularly with reference to nouns, is *scope*. It is about selection in conveying conceptual content linguistically and in such a way focusing the recipient's attention: an expression's scope is its coverage in a con-

ceptual domain (Langacker 2008, 62). For example, the word 'cup' with its defining property of holding liquid activates the domain of space but is restricted to a particular extent, as opposed to in an unlimited, general sense. In other words, scope can be thought of as a particular "substructure" within conceptual content that an expression evokes as the focus of attention (Langacker 2002, 4). The distinction between *immediate scope* and *maximal scope* is a useful way of thinking about this further: an expression's immediate scope is what tends to be foregrounded in a specific communicative context due to being "directly relevant for some purpose," however an expression's maximal scope, i.e. the full extent of the domain evoked, may also be relevant to the communicative context, even if typically backgrounded (Langacker 2008, 133, 63–64). Again, Langacker (2008, 133) uses the perceptual metaphor of focusing attention to something on a stage, equating scope with the term 'onstage region'. To illustrate, a word such as 'hand' belongs to the domain of BODY (= maximal scope), but is likely conceptualised as attached to an arm, which would be the expression's immediate scope. Nouns often exist in part / whole relations that are hierarchically or otherwise organised, such as the human body, which can lead to "a layered arrangement of successively embedded scopes." (Langacker 2008, 65) The extent of such layering depends on what can be considered foregrounded in a given context; a phrase like 'we held hands' may evoke the concepts of FINGER and PALM, perhaps WRIST and ARM, but SHOULDER and NECK are (successively) less likely to be mentally accessed.

The distinction between *count nouns* and *mass nouns* is meaningful for a fuller understanding of scope as a focusing phenomenon. Namely while an expression's scope is always *bounded* (Langacker 2008, 63), that is to say within certain confines, the construal of count nouns is "*bounded within the immediate scope in the domain of instantiation*," but the construal of mass nouns is not (Langacker 2008, 132, emphasis in original). In other words, the notion of boundary is not required for determining that something is an instance of a mass noun:

> A mass noun like *wood* names a kind of substance, distinguished from other substances by *qualitative* factors. The distinguishing qualities are apparent in any portion we might sample, irrespective of shape or size. The portion observable within a restricted immediate scope […] can thus be identified as an instance of the type of substance in question. (Langacker 2008, 133, emphasis in original)

Consequently, boundedness is only constitutive of a mass noun's immediate scope in terms of perceptual restrictions, which is something that becomes particularly interesting with more abstract nouns.

Specificity is another aspect of construal that may offer insights into the use of nouns in verbalising memories. It is defined as "the level of precision and detail at which a situation is characterized." (Langacker 2008, 55) With nouns specificity can be thought of as the degree of granularity (Langacker 2008, 56), for example the difference between related expressions like 'room', 'bedroom' or 'nursery with yellow walls'. On the one hand, granularity may be a matter of elaboration through adding qualifying adjectives or complements including other nouns[5] (as in 'with yellow walls'), but it may also hinge on taxonomies or

hierarchies (Langacker 2008, 56), as discussed earlier with scope and the example of body parts. In other words, knowing that human dwellings tend to contain rooms that have different purposes allows for the apprehension of the specific concept of a bedroom, but even more detail goes into the conceptualisation of 'nursery' as a particular type of bedroom.

Given the overlap in the concepts of scope and specificity, it is prudent to dwell a little more on what makes specificity a potentially useful tool for textual analysis. Here, thinking of specificity in relation to its opposite, *schematicity*, is helpful. Schematisation is a fundamental cognitive operation that involves detecting commonalities between things (Langacker 2008, 57), and not just in the 'thingness' sense of nouns but in human experience in general. These commonalities may be at different levels of granularity, and thus the schematicity/specificity distinction is a continuum. Schematicity means that there is room for a wide range of construals of the linguistic content at play (Langacker 2008, 56), which increases the importance of contextual clues. For instance, without further qualifiers or context, 'bedroom' can be envisaged in a number of ways. The schematicity/specificity scale is therefore a fluid resource in verbalising experiences: it enables leaving in gaps where they may be desired or necessary, as well as providing enriching details. Moreover, schematisation also forms the basis for the application of prior experiences to new experiences with similar features (Langacker 2008, 56–57), which is not only relevant to memories being triggered by something in the present moment resembling a particular past experience, but also to apprehending an account of something one does not have direct experience of. The latter is what routinely occurs in engaging with literary texts.

Indeed, the specificity/schematicity continuum showcases why Cognitive Grammar is such a flexible tool for text analysis: the same entity can be construed "in alternate ways, each of which highlights certain aspects of it and downplays others." (Langacker 2008, 131) This also means that a noun does not necessarily strictly represent one category (Langacker 2008, 132): a mass noun may become countable in a specific linguistic context, for example, and gain specificity in the process. Furthermore, Langacker's modelling of specificity sidesteps issues with distinguishing between abstract and concrete language, as discussed for example by Bryor Snefjella and Victor Kuperman (2015). In their study on the level of linguistic abstraction in relation to psychological distance, Snefjella and Kuperman built on a norm rating scale of abstract / concrete language and found that there was a gradience to how the level of abstraction increased the further into the past the events at hand referred (2015, 1458). In a literary context, this general tendency does not of course have to hold, but it is worth considering to what extent specificity allows for an impression of here-and-now to be created and to what extent schematicity produces distancing 'gaps' in lyric portrayals of remembering.

4. Shaping Memory: Nouns and Lyric Narration

This section aims to illustrate the role that the specificity and scope of noun phrases may have in the narration of memories, with the notion of lyric narration providing a framework for thinking about the significance of such linguistic features. The discussion is divided into three subsections based on prominently emerging patterns in the example texts as regards said significance. I begin by addressing emotional revelations in Byatt's *Possession*, followed by a discussion of tangible intersubjectivity in Whitney's *Heaven* and Ali's "Present Tense." Lastly, I take up iterativeness as a particular memory-related revelation, with example passages from Hamid's *Exit West* and Cheung's "Galatea."

4.1 Emotional Revelations: Nouns as Sensorial and Symbolic

Possession follows two modern-day academics as they uncover the previously unknown love affair between Victorian poets Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte. Consequently, memory has an emotional charge in the novel, but there is often also a strongly sensorial component. In many places, then, two of the functions of lyric narration discussed by Phelan (1996, 38–39) become relevant at the same time. This is seen in the following extract depicting Randolph's memory of an outing with Christabel:

> He remembered most, when it was over, when time had run out, a day they had spent in a place called the Boggle Hole, where they had gone because they liked the word. […]
>
> They had come across summer meadows and down narrow lanes between tall hedges thick with dog-roses, intricately entwined with creamy honeysuckle, a tapestry from Paradise Garden, she said, and smelling so airily sweet, it put you in mind of Swedenborg's courts of heaven where the flowers had a language, and colours and scents were correspondent forms of speech. (Byatt 1990, 311)

Notably, the domain of PLANTS that provides a situational framing for the cherished memory becomes quickly narrowed down from "summer meadows" to "tall hedges thick with dog-roses, intricately entwined with creamy honeysuckle." The specificity of the latter, with the hedges qualified through an adjective and two complements, is not only highly descriptive but also reflective of the character's interests: typically for a Victorian gentleman, he collects specimens. Moreover, there is an effect of the characters being encased in the hedge-lined lanes, accentuated by the way in which "creamy honeysuckle" acts as a mass noun: its immediate scope is not bounded but rather the creamy colour can be attested to at different points in the scenery (cf. Langacker 2008, 133). Consequently, the memory is localised and specific but also dynamic in that this visual aspect supposedly continues along the hedgerow.

Interestingly, this detailed description is followed by a shift towards the more abstract in the way that Christabel is said to have commented on the flowers, suggesting that Randolph's fond memory of the scene is not only due to his keen

eye for plants but also the significance the plants hold in his mind because of Christabel's appreciation of the scene. Christabel associates the flowers with a tapestry depicting paradise, specifically the views on flora put forward by the theologian and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg: "it put you in mind of Swedenborg's courts of heaven where the flowers had a language, and colours and scents were correspondent forms of speech." Similarly to Freedman's (1963, 200) discussion of *To the Lighthouse*, details of the external reality become symbols here. This constitutes a move away from the specificity of the beginning of the extract and towards schematicity that puts emphasis on interpretation: here, "flowers" designate an elaborate system of communication rather than being descriptive of the particular scene shared. However, in the context of the novel, there is more specificity to the symbolic than meets the eye in this passage: Randolph and Christabel's relationship has involved in-depth discussions about religion, philosophy, the arts, and the beauty of nature. As such, remembering Christabel's words about the scene is essential to how Randolph associates meaning to their time together.

The 'internalisation' of the external at the face of a vivid scene is a frequent pattern in the novel and is developed further in the same part of the novel as the above extract. After making detailed observations about rocks, sediments and insects, Randolph thinks of Christabel "momentarily as an hour-glass, containing time, which was caught in her like a thread of sand, of stone, of specks of life, of things that had lived and would live." (Byatt 1990, 312) While in the depiction of the preceding observations the domain of MINERALS has been instantiated in a fairly narrow sense (e.g. with reference to specific types of sediments), here the idea of Christabel's waist as an hour-glass containing "a thread of sand, of stone, of specks of life" explicitly broadens the scope: rocks as ancient formations are also envisaged ground down into sand, signifying the passing of time. This is further highlighted by the schematic "of things that had lived and would live," connecting back to the beginning of the memory quoted earlier: "He remembered most, when it was over, when time had run out […]." Thus, the singular moment expands to symbolise the fleetingness of happiness and how Randolph remembers it in hindsight.

Lyric narration is not restricted to the poet Randolph or happy memories alone in *Possession*. After Randolph's passing, his wife Ellen has to face up to remembering their life together:

> A few flames made their sinuous way upwards. She remembered her honeymoon, as she did, from time to time, and deliberately.
>
> She did not remember it in words. There were no words attached to it, that was part of the horror. She had never spoken of it to anyone, not even to Randolph, precisely not to Randolph.
>
> She remembered it in images. A window, in the south, all hung about with vines and creepers, with the hot summer sun fading. The nightdress embroidered for these nights, white cambric, all spattered with lovers' knots and forget-me-nots and roses, white on white.
>
> A thin white animal, herself, trembling. (Byatt 1990, 498)

The specificity of the things that Ellen remembers seeing while being approached by her new husband underscores the horror of the moment for her. It is as if she must focus on external things to endure the situation and is at a loss for words. The patterns of the nightdress are described intricately as "all spattered with lovers' knots and forget-me-nots and roses, white on white" but she herself is a "thin white animal […], trembling." The schematicity in the description of her state contrasts with the external description of the nightdress and the view from the window, portraying her in that moment as non-human and lacking control, trembling out of fear. A lack of control is also subtly suggested in how the pattern on the night dress is "spattered," as if some kind of liquid spread across the garment, appearing boundless (cf. the perceptual verification of a mass noun's immediate scope [Langacker 2008, 133]). Yet, Ellen remembers the scene voluntarily, suggesting a need to not forget and a will to come to terms with the past.

4.2 Touching the Past: Intersubjective Intimations

In Emerson Whitney's autobiographical novel *Heaven*, the idea of lyricality projecting a cluster of feelings in a stasis (Friedman 1989; Phelan 1996, 31) is continually challenged in that the narrator's struggles with their bodily existence are often brought to the fore in a reflective yet dynamic way. The following remembered scene is not given much of a framing as to the circumstances, which creates a sense of *in medias res* for the reader but also accentuates the prominence of mental processes by way of drawing attention away from world-building (cf. Wolf 2005, 36):

> This will only take a minute, this will only take a minute, Mom was saying. She was steering, pulling my hand toward her chest, it had slipped, so she was just gripping the fabric, I was wearing a cotton dog costume and she was pulling me down the sidewalk. The crotch of the costume was so low I had to sway my hips to move, had to walk like I was wagging. This was Halloween. I was a dalmatian. Mom's body was so heavy, like the sidewalk. I felt magnetized twice, toward home and away, I wanted to go home and at the same time I wanted away from everything, her hand. Mom tugged me and I tripped over a woman waiting at a bus stop with several sizable plastic bags and her own children. The two kids I tripped over were dressed as Jasmine.

While there is a strong focus on movement here, or rather the difficulty of moving, it is the specifics of the costume the narrator is wearing that give the memory much of its imageability. However, these specifics are relayed piece by piece, as if adding things the narrator knows well for the benefit of the reader. For instance, the mother pulling the narrator by the fabric of the costume precedes mentioning the costume itself: "she was just gripping the fabric, I was wearing a cotton dog costume." Further on the context of wearing the costume is revealed (Halloween), as well as the specific breed of dog the costume was meant to emulate ("I was a dalmatian"). Such gradually increasing specificity (cf. Langacker 2008, 131) then allows the reader to visualise the situation but potentially also

reflects the way memory works – not necessarily in clear-cut narrative movements but as flashes of a scene. Moreover, the prominence of what was *felt* is highlighted in this way – for the narrator, the details of the scene are secondary compared to the emotions conjured up. In other words, the reader will likely fill in gaps in the sequence by drawing on cues relating to the character's internal state (Hühn 2016, 11), which could be seen as mirroring the patchiness of episodic memory (cf. Richardson 2010, 280).

Further to the felt qualities of the memory, crucial aspects of the scene reside in the realm of touch. In stating that "Mom's body was so heavy, like the sidewalk" the narrator parallels the experience of being dragged by their mother with the costume dragging them down towards the sidewalk. This is also modally expressed in the following sentence: "I felt magnetized twice, toward home and away, I wanted to go home and at the same time I wanted away from everything, her hand." The two pulls are fundamentally concrete and situated for the narrator, hence the noun phrases "Mom's body" and "sidewalk" standing for them – they represent a concretisation of something difficult to process, i.e. the immediate scopes of the noun phrases are "directly relevant" (Langacker 2008, 133) to the situation as it unfolded in the past. Simultaneously, their 'thingness' represents times, or experiences, that induce – or would ideally induce – certain states of mind: home appears both safe and not safe compared to having to feel awkward in one's own body in public, given that it is the mother insisting on going to the Halloween event despite the narrator's discomfort.

"Present Tense" by Farah Ali also centres on childhood memories through the tangibility offered by the haptic modality:

> We had grown up on thin air in the house, the oxygen sucked up by our father and mother's moods. We were curved and wiry and tense like antennae, picking up signals of impending storms from the way our father snapped his newspaper or how our mother shut the fridge door. Too sharp a sound meant that soon old wounds were going to be reopened with blade-like words. Sometimes I mouthed along those words, being my father and mother by turns like an actor playing two roles. Other times I went to my brother and found him elaborately coloring in a map, or a picture of the human heart, or an eyeball, or the circulation system. (2021, n.p.)

The interiority of the characters' perspective is conveyed through the reference to antennae, whose functioning is described in quite granular terms using several adjectives, "curved and wiry and tense." While these are properties that associate with one meaning of "antenna," synonymous with aerial, the continuation of the sentence brings in the more prototypical meaning as sensory organs: the antennae signify the protagonists' tendency of "picking up signals of impending storms" in the domestic setting. This gives rise to two alternative immediate scopes at once: the antennae may pick up both naturally occurring signals (such as changes in air pressure) and purposefully encoded messages (such as radio waves). From the fact that the children seem to be listening in, rather than direct targets of abuse, the former meaning becomes more salient, with the implication that the tense situation is 'natural' in their home. At the same time, the adjectives associated with the aerial sense of antennae bring into view how the protagonists

are affected by what is going on, additionally giving their responses a 'technical' character that underscores the tragicness of the situation – the children act according to learned patterns as soon as they pick up warning signals. Together with the sensorial focus, the specificity arguably creates an effect of the past's closeness (cf. Snefjella / Kuperman 2015, 1458).

4.3 Seeing the Same Things: Iterative Patterns

Hamid's *Exit West* tells the story of a young couple who flee war through a magical portal that takes people to different destinations around the globe. In London, Saeed finds both solace and a reminder of what was left behind in a community of people with a similar background:

> One afternoon he was there at prayer time, and he joined his fellow countrymen in prayer in the back garden, under a blue sky that seemed shockingly blue, like the sky of another world, absent the airborne dust of the city where he had spent his entire life, and also peering out into space from a higher latitude, a different perch on the spinning Earth, nearer its pole than its equator, and so glimpsing the void from a different angle, a bluer angle, and as he prayed he felt praying was different here, somehow, in the garden of this house, with these men. It made him feel part of something, not just something spiritual, but something human, part of this group, and for a wrenchingly painful second he thought of his father [...]. (Hamid 2017, 148)

Saeed's perception of the sky during prayer time contrasts with the memory of praying at home. The noun "sky" is modified with "blue" twice within the same phrase, but is absent from the past setting, with the implication that "the airborne dust" prevented one from seeing the sky in the same way as now. This is clearly not just a sensory experience since a shift in mental state is indicated (cf. Phelan 1996, 38) using the comparative form of "blue" to modify "angle". The nouns "sky" and "angle" are thus paralleled, suggesting that they belong to the same domain, that of PERSPECTIVE – here altered through prayer and community. The repetition of "blue," along with the sound parallelism with frequent 's'-sounds, furthermore provide the passage with a lyrical, almost meditative, quality.

Parallelism relating to a remembered scene also bears thematic significance in Cheung's sci-fi story "Galatea." The protagonist's habit of going on walks by the river, relayed through you-narration, is shown to be formulaic to the extent of alienating:

> Early spring is when you like to visit the river. It is usually very cold, but with your body wrapped in wool you can walk for hours. When you return home, your toes, your eyes, your ears are singed with cold. And for a short while, as you warm up, your cheeks blood-red, it feels as if you are changing. But the next day arrives, and then the next, your walks by the water grow warmer, and soon it is sweltering again. You join a dating app, message a few people, have a few mediocre dinners, delete the app. You buy a new summer dress and hang it up alongside all of your other thin, long dresses. Time passes but nobody seems to notice except you. You aren't even sure you're processing anything; you're just observing. When you look back at photographs of yourself by the river, you even notice the same vendors

> in the background, the same dogs wearing glow rings on their necks. Everything you do feels copied and pasted, templated from another life. (2022, n.p.)

Syntactic parallelism (for example in "your eyes, your toes, your ears" and "the next day arrives, and then the next") creates a sense of iterativeness, and the sameness of the vendors and "dogs wearing glow rings on their necks" (neither of which are described in detail) suggests genericness. This is reinforced in the schematicity of messaging "a few people" and going on "a few mediocre dinners": these experiences and the people in them appear insignificant since no further specification is offered. Yet, there is a moment of realisation for the protagonist: everything is as if "templated from another life." Combined with the syntactic parallelism, this is akin to Phelan's (1996, 38) observations on recurrent phrases being revealing about a character's movement through life.

The same pattern is picked up later in the story when the protagonist goes on another date. It is not like the ones before, however, as the date turns out to own a companion robot that can play the piano expertly. When asked if she also plays, the protagonist is irritated about the stereotype implied:

> *Not all Chinese people play the piano*, you want to say. But he is right. You did play, from the ages of 3 to 17. You remember the hours, the scales, the burnt-biscuit taste of the music store when you picked up your manuscripts. You like to think these are individual memories, but the truth is all your classmates also played the piano. (2022, n.p.)

The veracity of the memories relating to playing is called into question, despite the fleeting specificity of "the burnt-biscuit taste" of the store where she got her sheet music from. Or more accurately, what is questioned is whether it is only her memory that contains such details, given that the stereotype evident in the date's initial question rings true for her and all her (female) classmates. Indeed, the protagonist goes on to compare herself to the robot companion when she learns that the robot represents a whole series of human replicas meant to fill the social needs of the buyer. This eventually presents a path forward away from the sense of alienation: empowerment emerges from the realisation that even specific sensorial memories could be anyone's.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the narration of memories relies on the 'thingness' of nouns in ways that align with definitions of lyric narration. While these definitions tend to focus on the difference between lyricality and narrativity as broad modes, or the rhetorical effects of lyric narration, I outlined a stylistic reorientation of the concept. This was geared towards the assumption that in memory-oriented narration (but also in a reflective narrative mode more generally), modally anchored scene construction is likely to be foregrounded at the expense of eventfulness. The linguistic tools for this stylistic endeavour, specificity and scope as aspects of construing noun phrases, were enlisted from Langacker's Cognitive Grammar. My argument with this choice of approach was that

Cognitive Grammar's position on meaning as something that is both conceptual and affected by particular linguistic encodings is flexible enough to facilitate a range of example cases in a way that takes the role of the conceptualiser into account.

The discussion of the literary examples showed how the gradience of the schematicity/specificity continuum is a fluid resource for providing detail in one place and omitting it in others. Indeed, Langacker's definition of nouns as profiling things takes a very broad view on what constitutes a 'thing' – tangibility is not only a property of clearly delineated physical objects. This has particular significance to practices of remembering where material reminders of a past moment may not exist. Moreover, the notion of scope allowed for an analysis of conceptually zooming in and out when looking at the role of noun phrases in scene construction. This was relevant to thinking of concrete aspects of a scene in symbolic terms in particular, a common mechanism for making such aspects meaningful from a distance. Overall, the functions of lyric narration identified by Phelan (1996), based on ideas from Freedman (1963) and Friedman (1989), offered a scaffolding onto which the extracts analysed mapped quite easily. However, further modifications that better account for linguistic features such as sentence structure, parallelism and dynamicity are needed in order to sharpen lyric narration as a text-analytical tool.

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[1] Rigney borrows the expression from Jessica Dubois and Richard Steadman-Jones (2013).

[2] Something that speaks to the relevance of lyric narration as a focus of attention is that style is an important criterion for many when searching for new literature to read. For example, lively discussion on various kinds of lyrical prose can be found under the Reddit "Suggest me a book" (https://www.reddit.com/r/suggestmeabook/comments/zy6fp7/suggest_me_a_book_with_beautiful_lyrical_prose).

[3] While my take on the narration of memories is inspired by applications of neurophysiological memory research to literature (cf. Richardson 2010), the role of narrative in remembering and self-making has of course been discussed extensively in the broad field of narrative studies. This discussion will not be taken up here due to the article's limited scope, but see e.g. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) and De Fina (2015).

[4] The suggested markers of lyric narration are not intended as a checklist, however, but rather as tendencies of lyric narration that may be more or less prominent, following Wolf's (2005) prototypicality thinking.

[5] While nouns are conceptually autonomous in that they need not be part of an event to be conceptualised (Langacker 2008, 104), in practice they frequently occur in relation to other linguistic elements. Due to modification and complementation, there is considerable variation in the complexity of noun phrases (Keizer and Sommerer 2022, 1).