ANGLICA

UNIVERSITY
OF WARSAW

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Peter Hühn
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7380-9340
University of Hamburg

Forms of Sequentiality in Contemporary English Poetry: Simon Armitage and Glyn Maxwell

Abstract: This article discusses the sequential devices which structure lyric poems. The sequentiality of poems is usually given little systematic attention to in poetry analysis. The main focus tends to be on speaker, imagery, theme and prosody. But a central aspect of the meaning of any poem is the manner in which the progression of the poetic utterance is organised. One such device, widely used in traditional and contemporary poetry, is the schema of the narrative. This article briefly sketches a theoretical approach to the description of the sequential extension of poetic texts and applies it to examples from the work of two prominent contemporary English poets, Simon Armitage, the present poet laureate, and Glyn Maxwell.

Keywords: poetry, sequentiality, poetry analysis, narrative, schema, meaning, Simon Armitage, Glyn Maxwell.

1. Introduction: Some Methodological Remarks

The sequentiality of poems is rarely given systematic or extensive attention to in handbooks of poetry analysis[1] and in general theories of the lyric[2]. The main focus is usually on speaker, imagery, theme and, especially, on prosodic devices. But a central feature of a poem (as of any text) concerns the question how its sequence is organised on the semantic level, what devices are applied to direct the progression of thoughts and constitute the meaning which is unfolded in the course of the poetic utterance. The premise underlying the following analyses is the assumption that poems are primarily read for their meaning, not for the "pleasure […] derive[d] from the physical re-enactment of a poem's sound pattern or the cognitive appreciation of its formal mastery" (Zettelmann 136).[3] Meaning signifies some phenomenon

of human existence, some problem of living and acting, of experience and imagi-
nation, of desire and resistance to gratification. Such phenomena and problems are
centrally conditioned by change, on account of the essentially temporal constitution
of human existence. A fundamental device available to human consciousness for
representing, ordering and treating such problems and phenomena in a text is the
operation of narration. A narrative can minimally be defined as a change of state
predicated on a person, a thing or a situation, typically undergoing some significant
shift, an event (cf. Prince 1988a, 58–61),[4] "a transformation, a transition from an
earlier state to a later and resultant state" (Genette 19). In this sense change and
dealing with change inform also the contents of literary works of art, centrally in
narrative fiction but pervasively also in lyric poetry (cf. Hühn and Schönert 2002;
Hühn and Kiefer 2005), albeit with significant differences between these kinds.
Poems frequently feature narrative structures in a hidden or submerged form, which
one might call "covert narrativity" (cf. Hühn 2022, 250–251).

　　This article will briefly sketch a theoretical approach to the description of
the syntagmatic extension of poetic texts and apply it to examples from the work
of two prominent contemporary English poets, Simon Armitage, the present poet
laureate, and Glyn Maxwell. The analyses will demonstrate the pervasiveness
and variability of narrative as a prime device for structuring the sequence of their
poems and discuss the relevance and function of such a narrative structuring. The
different forms and causes of change presented in the process of narration within
the select examples do characteristically possess an ethical dimension, i.e. they are
motivated by and endorse specific values.[5]

　　A poem, as a delimited, self-contained text published as a separate verbal
entity,[6] clearly marked off from its environment (within a poetry collection, a
periodical, an anthology), presupposes for the reader some form of internal unity
and connectivity – of whatever kind and of whatever degree, some connectivity
stretching from the beginning across the extensive middle part to the ending. Ques-
tions of sequentiality, of cohesion and coherence, in texts are theoretically dealt
with by text linguistics. The approach in the following analyses is loosely based
on the assumptions of the *Rhetorical Structure Theory* by Mann, Thompson and
Matthiessen,[7] which describes the connection within the sequence of a text by a set
of *relations* among functionally significant textual spans. A textual span is defined
as the minimal cohesive section, element or component part of a text, ranging from
a sub-clause in a sentence via an entire sentence to a stretch of sentences. Such
minimal text-spans include, for instance, statement, proposition, alteration, con-
cession, consequence, antithesis, corroboration, explanation, repetition (cf. Hühn
2022, 251). And the interconnections or interrelations among such textual spans can
take various supra-segmental forms such as narrative development, explanation,
argumentation or description.[8]

2. Simon Armitage: Exploiting Narrativity

Simon Armitage is particularly prone to resort to narrative structures in one form or another in the treatment of his subjects. Several of his lyric poems are in fact straight-forward narratives, such as "Hitcher," "On the Trail of the Old Ways," "Tale," "Reverse Charge" and "Parable of the Dead Donkey" (all in Armitage 1993). Instead of analysing such obvious examples I will choose three other poems in which he employs narrative schemata in a more involved and ambivalent way. Armitage's poetry is generally characterised by a thematic focus on everyday experiences and common views rendered with a dry wit combined with critical seriousness. These features are all apparent in "Homecoming" (1997, 20). In this poem, the speaker tackles a psychological problem in an elaborately imaginative way, utilizing narrative devices both for presenting the problem and for suggesting the solution.

The speaker addresses a young adult, presumably a woman, asking her ("think," line 1) to listen to three "narratives," which he then proceeds to "tell," all of which concern her personally, though in different ways ("you," lines 8, 11, 12, 21). The first is a programmatic process or mini-story of learning to expect and accept help and support from others, a trust exercise, "where those in front / stand with their arms spread wide and free-fall / backwards, blind, and those behind take all the weight" (lines 2–4). The second (lines 5–13) is a personal story about the addressee in which support and help for her had been lacking. The speaker recalls an incident and its consequences (lines 5–11 and 12–13) which she had experienced as a child sixteen years before (line 15). She had carelessly allowed her canary-yellow cotton jacket to fall off the hook (obviously at school), get trampled over and become sullied, an act of negligence for which she had been severely reprimanded by her mother. When she came home, her mother had guessed what had happened ("puts / two and two together," lines 7–8), told her so furiously into her face ("makes a proper fist of it / and points the finger," lines 9–10) and caused a violent row ("Temper, temper. Questions / in the house. You seeing red. Blue murder," lines 10–11), in the end peremptorily sending her to bed (line 11). Later that night she had desperately sought relief by stealthily leaving the house and apparently trying to phone some understanding friend: "you slip the latch and sneak / no further than the call-box at the corner of the street" (lines 12–13). This tale ends without a comforting conclusion.

The speaker introduces these two stories by asking the addressee to connect the general example in the first stanza with her own personal retrospective narrative in the second, applying the former as a solution to the latter: "Think, two things on their own and both at once" (line 1). In his third narrative (lines 18–23) the speaker does just that: he proceeds to "set things straight" (line 17). He imaginatively describes – "narrates" – the act of how the addressee may put her neglected yellow jacket back on, detailing this procedure by referring to the sleeves, the buttons and the zip or buckle (lines 18–22). The speaker makes clear that this

act of belatedly "try[ing] the same canary-yellow cotton jacket [...] / [...] for size again" (lines 22–23) has to be understood as the practical application of the trust exercise to her personal case: "Step backwards into it" (line 21, literally referring back to lines 3–4). Thus, the former inconclusive painful story of damage, guilt and punishment is finally brought to a happy conclusion by redressing the neglect of the jacket and asking the addressee actually to put it back on. By implication, the speaker even goes one step further: he metaphorically describes the process of putting on the jacket as an act of hugging the addressee, as indicated by naming parts of her body instead of the corresponding parts of her garment:

> These ribs are pleats or seams. These arms are sleeves.
> These fingertips are buttons, or these hands can fold
> into a clasp, or else these fingers make a zip
> or buckle, you say which. (lines 18–21)

This comforting hug finally makes up for the former reprimand and the unrelieved suffering it had caused in the past: "It still fits" (line 23).

This hug as belated consolation for youthful suffering functions as the event, the eventful closure of the retrospective tale. The successful conclusion is also implied in the title of the poem, "homecoming," and the shift in its meaning. Applied to the past incident, the original homecoming described in the beginning, the term acquires an ironic meaning: coming home means being sternly told off by the mother. With the concluding third narrative in mind, however, the term recovers its original positive meaning of returning into the safety and comfort of one's home. On the level of utterance, the poem thus performs the proper trajectory of a conclusive narrative – a development in the addressee's situation finally resulting in a decisive turn, in an eventful change of state.

This shift from the inconclusive, unsatisfactory ending of the former story to the belated resolution of the crisis in the present is brought about by the speaker imaginatively projecting himself into the past situation. He does so in two respects (lines 14–17). He imagines himself as the recipient of the addressee's phone call asking for help ("I'm waiting by the phone," line 14) and provides, as it were, the consolation the addressee had then been longing for. In addition, he projects himself into the past situation as a "father figure [...] want[ing] to set things straight" (line 17) and to redress the mother's harshness, ironically rejecting her moral right to criticise her daughter ("the very model of a model of a mother," line 8). This desire to set things straight is eventually enacted by the speaker in the final consoling story. The connection between the past crisis and the present consolation and resolution, across a gap of 16 years, is purely imaginative and reveals a strong emotional attachment on the part of the speaker for the addressee. Their constellation might be construed as an affectionate relationship and the consoling hug as a gesture subtly expressing love.[9]

As to the function of the narrative structuring of the utterance, both courses of action narrated successively in the poem are motivated by the intention to encourage mutual trust, to help and to console, to overcome emotional problems for other people. Thus, the function of narrating is clearly ethical, based on the value of mutual assistance and love and demonstrating the enactment of this value in interpersonal relationships. This ethical motivation informs both the dimension of the told and of the telling,[10] the behaviour narrated within the two mini-stories and the narrating of them in the course of the poetic text.

A narrative structuring of the poetic sequence in conjunction with a thematic focus on everyday experience and contemporary living conditions is also apparent in the title poem of Armitage's 2017 collection *The Unaccompanied* (2017, 74). This poem presupposes a speaker who is responsible for the utterance but remains covert (i.e. without explicit reference to himself). He employs narrative sequences in two respects and on two levels – first, as a means to structure the progression of the utterance at the superordinate level of the text, namely the protagonist's on-going behaviour, his physical movements, and, second, to structure the sequence at a subordinate level, the protagonist's ongoing perceptions and imaginations while walking. The second (internal, mental) sequence has an impact on the first (external, physical) sequence.

The external sequence, which structures the utterance from beginning to end, consists of the movement of the protagonist ("he") through a riverside landscape and finally across the river: "Wandering slowly back after dark one night / above a river, towards a suspension bridge" (lines 1–2). This physical movement is accompanied by a continuous mental activity, summarily described as what "concerns him," the activity of imagining or remembering: "a sound concerns him" (line 3), "Then concerns him again, now clearly a song" (line 5), "Then his father's voice […], / "his father's father's voice, and voices / of fathers before, concerning him only" (lines 14–16). This narrative sequence of the protagonist's external and internal acts is presented through a cohesive string of text spans, sentences in the present tense all referring – directly or indirectly – to the protagonist as the subject. These physical and mental acts are presented im–mediately, that is, by a covert narrator, whose hidden mediation is only revealed by evaluative comments such as "a sound […] that might be a tune / or might not" (lines 3–4), "clearly" (line 5), "shabby" (line 8), "cheesy" (line 13). The external sequence is set at a particular point in time ("one night," line 1) and characterised as a walk back, presumably home. The place where he is walking is separated by the river from the other side, as the references to a suspension bridge (line 2), to the "gorge" (line 17) and to the "cliff edge" (line18) indicate. In this movement, the protagonist, as the title implies, is "unaccompanied," i.e. he is walking alone. But, mentally, he turns out to be accompanied nevertheless by an emerging "sound," "a tune," a "noise," "a song" (lines 3–5), progressively reaching further back into the past – constituting the chain of men singing in a men's choir ("sung / by chorusing men," lines 6–7) – a

continuous chain of singers in a choir directed by a conductor: "Above their heads a conductor's hand / draws and casts the notes with a white wand" (lines 9–10). This emerging chain of singers singing is progressively specified with respect to location (a shabby hotel on the opposite bank, lines 6, 8), topic of the songs ("songs about mills and mines and a great war […]," lines 11–13) and identity of the singers (his father and his forefathers, lines 14–16). This quasi-narrative sequence of singers, as constituted in the protagonist's mind, is not drawn out chronologically in each link but described summarily in its various aspects, imaginatively forming the recollected history of his male ancestors in their living conditions. The narrative direction of this sequence is regressive – reaching successively back into the past. The great variety of the songs sung by the forefathers makes it clear that this is not an aloof elite song culture but a broad spectrum of themes, ranging from working conditions ("mills and mines," line 11), war experiences ("a great war," line 11) and fantasy and myth ("mermaid brides and solid gold hills," line 12) to religion ("broken hymnbooks," line 13) and low-quality popular art ("cheesy films," line 13). The relevance of these imaginative recollections for the protagonist is stressed throughout ("concerns him"), but particularly towards the end: "concerning him only" (line 16).

The personal impact of this internal (mental) sequence on the external (physical) sequence of wandering home is achieved in the last two lines: the imagined chain of singers is "arcing through charged air and spanning the gorge" (line 17) enabling the protagonist to "step […] over the cliff edge and walk […] across" (line 18). Thus, the protagonist is enabled, during his nightly walk home and his concurrent ruminations about and his imaginative probings into the past, to re-establish a close link to his collective past, the string of his forefathers, and join them again (or for the first time), thus to achieve a new re-integration both into his regional and his social and cultural environment as well as his family past and paternal tradition. This connection is described (literally) as a boundary crossing (imaginatively walking across the gorge) – a genuine narrative event.

The title is obviously meant to be ironic. Even in his solitude (walking alone, in darkness, separated spatially from his environment as well as temporally from his family's past), this man tracing the line of his ancestors is mentally connected both with his past ancestors and with his present environment. The function of these two narratives is insofar ultimately ethical as they exemplify and endorse the positive humane value of overcoming personal isolation, loneliness and separation, by connecting the individual with his family, his origins, his family's past as well as with his present environment, thus bringing about overall harmonious personal and social integration and fulfilment.

A completely different approach to the narrative structuring of a poem can be seen in "The Dead Sea Poems" (1995, 1–2). Instead of an ethical function the narrative is employed in a playful, fanciful und self-referential manner. The narrative design structures the sequence of the utterance from beginning to end. Essentially,

the speaker, in the role of the poet (as it turns out in the middle, line 17), "narrates" the production – or more precisely, the inadvertent coming into being, the emergence – of the present poem. The most decisive feature of the narrative organization of this poem is the shift in framing, the switch from a pastoral to a literary, a poetic frame. In the beginning, the speaker employs the schema of a shepherd driving a flock of goats in search of water across a rocky, arid and barely vegetated country:

> And I was travelling lightly, barefoot
> over bedrock, then through lands that were stitched
> with breadplant and camomile. Or was it
> burdock. For a living I was driving
> a river of goats towards clean water. (lines 1–5)

This is a course of happenings during which one of the goats breaks free and escapes into a cave:

> To flush it out, I shaped
> a sling from a length of cotton bandage,
> or was it a blanket, then launched a rock
> at the target, which let out a racket –
> the tell-tale sound of man-made objects. (lines 7–11).

Inside the cave the shepherd in his pursuit then comes across some caskets, in which he – suddenly switching from the schema of goat herding to that of a poet dealing with his poetry – discovers "poems written in my own hand" (lines 15–17).

The poem's utterance is a syntactically cohesive narrative, a coherent chain of changes of state all predicated on the same figure, the speaker, who throughout refers to himself explicitly by pronouns of the first person singular (lines 1, 2, 7, 17, 19, 24, 25, 29). Although the narrative sequence is syntactically cohesive, there are several semantic deviations, disruptions and shifts or distorted, incongruous and odd expressions (emphasis mine): "camomile. *Or was it* / burdock" (lines 3–4), "driving / a *river* of goats" (line 5), "one of the herd *cut loose to* a cave / *on the skyline*" (lines 6–7), "*flush* it [the goat] *out*" (line 7), "a sling from of cotton bandage / *or was it* a *blanket*" (lines 8–9), "*launched* a rock / at the *target*" (lines 9–10), "the *tell-tale sound* of man-made *objects*" (line 11), "caskets […] *gasped* […] *theatrically* perhaps" (lines 13–14), "a *breath* of musk / and pollen" (lines 15–16), "twelve *times nothing*" (line 20), "*under infra-red* and *ultra-sonic*" (line 22), "bearing it all in mind, like / *praying*, saying […]" (lines 26–27). These deviations and distortions serve to foreground and problematise the status and foundation of this narrative, effectively questioning its literal validity and somewhat obfuscating its narrativity.

The other conspicuous feature of this narrative sequence, which likewise draws attention to its status and validity, is the aforementioned shift – in the course

of its development – of the frame. The first part (lines 1–17) is framed as the tale of a shepherd tending a flock of goats and accidentally coming across a hoard of manuscripts in a cave. This part of the tale is clearly an allusion to the discovery of jars housing ancient biblical manuscripts in the Qumran caves near the Dead Sea by a Bedouin shepherd in 1946. The second part of the sequence (lines 17–31), however, is framed as a poet's – the speaker's (in his role as a poet) – rediscovery of his early poetry. Due to a momentary financial squeeze he auctions off these poems: "being greatly in need of food and clothing, / and out of pocket, I let the lot go / for twelve times nothing" (lines 18–20). Described in somewhat fantastic terms the speaker thereafter takes "it all / to heart" (lines 25–26), reprocessing the texts, writing new poems, "singing the whole of the work / to myself" (lines 28–29) and coming up with "innocent, / everyday, effortless verse" (lines 29–30), "verse, of which this / is the first" (lines 29–30), explicitly referring to this very text which the reader is currently reading. This concluding abrupt reference to the present poem functions as the eventful termination and aim of the narrative drive underlying the poetic utterance. The link constituting the transition between these two narrative frames is the *Qumran scrolls*, in their quality as written texts. This link between the two frames forms the basis for the title of this poem as well as that of the entire collection: "The Dead Sea Poems."[11]

The pervasive verbal, lexical and semantic incongruities in the development of the narrative introduce a playful, witty note and highlight as well as undermine the narrative devices as such – the tale becomes more fantastical and volatile when dealing with poetry and cannot be taken too seriously. This device draws particular attention to the poem itself and its meaning and the artificially contrived devices: one can observe how this very poem is "crafted" – surreptitiously coming from afar and suddenly being there: "this / is the first" (line 30). The title is ironic (dead sea) and "the first" also refers to the structure of the collection as a whole, in which this poem is indeed the first item. As against the ethical approach in the other two poems, in which narrative devices are employed to tackle some serious human problem, in "The Dead Sea Poems" (and more pervasively in the entire collection of that name) Armitage stages the act of narration as such to demonstrate and celebrate his poetic imagination and inventiveness as a means of writing poetry. Narrativity is here performed for its own sake, as a spectacular and surprising feat resulting in its own eventful constitution, which allows him to sequentialise and order a large amount of material.

3. Glyn Maxwell: Complicating Narrativity

Like Armitage, Glyn Maxwell draws widely on narrativity to organise the sequentiality of his poems. But while Armitage employs narrative generally in a more or less straightforward, if elaborate manner, Maxwell tends to complicate the narrative

organisation of his poems extensively by undermining, revoking, contradicting, denying, ridiculing or submerging narrativity and playing with it. The thematic frame of a great many of his poems is love, the emergence and the difficulty of a love-relationship. The treatment of love (in poetry) is almost necessarily narrative, in as much as it is concerned with the origin, the growth, the experience and the decline of a love relationship. A relatively simple example is "The Ages" (2013, 5).

The speaker addresses another person ("you"), presumably a woman, with whom he seems to have a close relationship. He starts his utterance with the promise of a definitive clarification of the situation: "Let's get this straight" (line 1). He then proceeds to describe his behaviour and movement before the addressee existed at all ("when you were not," line 2). In this, he appears to claim ("yes," lines 2, 3; "sure," line 5) that everything she has been told has actually already referred to him, had included him: "all the stories you were told / have me in them somewhere, off to the side" (lines 7–8). The speaker's previous history is characterised, as stressed through his description, by a vast temporal and spatial extension: he "roamed the earth" (line 2), he was a contemporary of President Lincoln's life and death ("some President got shot / trying to enjoy the play," lines 4–5) and witnessed war and peace ("my world / had wars in it and peace," lines 5–6). The reference to Lincoln is odd (it is not clear why this particular historic person should be mentioned) but the general claim is obvious: the speaker's existence was prepared and forecast for the addressee in everything she had heard so far ("all the stories you were told / have me in them somewhere," lines 7–8). The same claim is then repeated and reciprocated for himself, for his knowledge about her: "all the stuff I know has you somewhere" (line 9). These rather fanciful and exaggerated mutual claims amount to romantic lovers' idealistic, hyperbolic notions that both were exclusively predestined for each other from time immemorial.

Then a sudden shift occurs from the long stretches of their two pasts – the two "ages" – to the present hour: he announces something ("this") he has been trying to do "since half-four" (line 10), which is then specified as the elaborate reflections about their recollections of the past in the first nine lines, irreverently summarised as the brief time the speaker had been waiting for her to wake up:

> So all that to and fro means nothing more
> to me than time I took and time I make,
> awning and fretting in this garden chair,
> whiling away the ages till you wake. (lines 11–14)

Meeting her again after her afternoon nap functions – wittily – as the eventful fulfilment and closure of their mutual love story, as the event of this narrative.

So, the poem presents rudimentary narrative structures on two levels. First, the content of the speaker's reflections refers to the "story" of him and the addressee eventually coming together in the concluding event of a love relationship. Second,

on the present level of speaking, the speaker's recollections of his past and of the past in general (abbreviated to a few items) function as the ongoing "story" of his waiting for the addressee to wake up. Thus, the providential movement of their lives towards each other in the past is identified with the brief span, in the present, of waiting for her to wake up from an afternoon nap ("And I've been trying to do tis since half-four," line 10). These narrative structures are presented in a condensed form, but they can clearly be re-construed as résumés of lengthy changes of state. The point about their presentation is the playful, ironic, exaggerating style. This first goes for the vast expansion of the speaker's past to include Lincoln's assassination, which is wittily explained as the speaker's "small talk with the dead" (line 3). This is further indicated in the reference to his knowledge as "stuff" (line 9). And the playful note is especially expressed in the description of the brief period waiting for her to wake up from her nap as "yawning and fretting" (line 13) and "whiling away the ages" (line 14). While the recollections of their respective long pasts are condensed rigorously, the brief hour of waiting for her is expanded to "ages." What is also highly ironic is the confrontation of their condensed recollected long lives with the expanded short afternoon period. Both periods together are referred to as ages, in the plural, as mentioned in the title. Witty is also the concomitant contrast between the high romantic topic of predestined love and the trivial, hum-drum experience of waiting in a garden chair for the beloved to wake up from an after-lunch nap.

The half-ironic, half-serious use of narrative structures for the topic of love characteristic of this poem is generally typical of Maxwell. Another aspect of the ironic-serious stance is the particular poetic form used here: This is a sonnet, a form originally (during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance) set aside for the theme of love. The form of the sonnet, with the traditional break after line 8, the *volta*, is utilized here for the narrative structuring of the text. There is a conspicuous division between the octave (abab cdcd) and the sestet (eff geg), between the speaker's focus on his own life in his recollections (lines 1–8) and on his knowledge of her and her present nap (lines 9–14). It is after line 8 that the focus shifts from her knowledge of him to his knowledge of her and his present situation of waiting for her to wake up. The essentially serious experience of love can only be treated, this poem seems to imply, ironically, which does not at all mean that it is dismissed, and by exposing (and opposing) it to the humdrum everyday reality of sitting in a garden chair. The condensed narratives underlying this poem have basically an ethical function, expressing affection and loving devotion. But the pervasive exaggerations and incongruities within this utterance imply an ironical stance on the side of the speaker creating a certain ambivalence, tempering affection with a degree of exasperation.

A much more involved and allusive treatment of the love narrative is presented by "Love Made Yeah" (1995, 20).[12] The sequence underlying "Love Made Yeah" is clearly narrative, appearing to present a traditional love story, albeit in a

very involved, suggestive and highly ambivalent manner. The speaker's utterance consists of a seemingly incoherent chain of references to situations, actions and events, described in the present tense. They are ascribed by the speaker to himself ("I," "my," "me") and addressed to a group of (presumably male) friends ("you," 11; "guys," line 19; "friends," line 30). As indicated by the title and a number of expressions within the text, the speaker's utterance is framed as the narrative presentation of his evolving love story with a girl (lines 25, 29) from its beginning ("my eyes meet eyes," line 1) to its ultimate fulfilment in their union ("I am hers," line 29). The intermediate stages stress the passionate intensity of this love affair: from the triumphant accumulation of descriptive adjectives for "love made" ("Nothing but glorious, jealous, incredulous, / bibulous, fabulous, devil'll envy us / love made, love made!" lines 8–10) via the emphasis on intimate trust in the phrase "here at the heart / of the movement I trust my hand in another" (lines 16–17) to the strong attachment to the beloved in the concluding statement "I am hers" (line 29). This is expressed by another accumulation, this time of present participles ("following, wishing on, crediting, catching," line 24), which culminate in the speaker declaring "her my star" (lines 24–25), who kindles his burning desire: "Her eyes are as hot as one needs to ignite / the cave in the human guy" (lines 28–29). This result refers back to the intimate mutual gaze at the outset: "my eyes meet eyes" (line 1).

This love narrative is interspersed with references to the political narrative of a violent uprising against an oppressive government, in a public square, with allusions, through French phrases, to the French Revolution ("va ten to the King," line 5; "drapeaux," line 6; "sans doute," line 16). This political narrative portrays the speaker, as does the love story, more as a victim than as a successful active protagonist. The string of references starts with the expulsion of the rebels from the public sphere, the Square, to a (law) court with the speaker opposed to the ruler: "Whoever was marched from the Square […] / and to what court, I don't give a hyphen, / "va t'en to the King!" (lines 3–5). This constellation continues in the second stanza with the persisting spirit of rebellion ("Our drapeaux are waving," line 6) despite the threat of punishment ("what's in the offing / but tears, tribunals and unwelcome aid," lines 6–7). The next two stanzas (lines 11–15, 16–29) refer to the public media (Press and TV, namely CNN) reporting on the fall of the heroic revolutionaries ("the heroes felled / in the upshot," lines 12–13) and the success of the shady bourgeois followers, who value money rather than freedom ("the oiliest climb of the customary / bourgeois fuckers," lines 13–14) as well as the speaker's own imminent personal punishment ("I am odds-on to cop it," line 18). He is already familiar with such consequences, since he is vulnerably human, as he acknowledges in his reference that he was born of a mother ("I did arrive here / via a mother," lines 19–20). The fifth stanza reports on the ultimate failure of the rebellion, the victory of the ruling powers ("oligarchy or puppet or shah," line 22) and the speaker's own imprisonment and humiliating trial ("I am banged up and on trial in slippers," line 23). The speaker initially rejects the addressees' pity for

his failure in the rebellion, only to accept it on second thought, although he does not really concede that he has failed: "don't do the pity. All right, do the pity, / but that won't happen, believe it from me!" (lines 26–27)

These two contrastive narratives of love and rebellion are linked in three ways. First, they are juxtaposed: in lines 1–5 (stanza 1) the story of love is followed by the story of rebellion; in lines 6–10 (stanza 2) the succession is reversed and the question about the negative consequences of a rebellion is countered by a triumphantly emphatic insistence on "love made; love made;" in lines 11–20 (stanza 3), (trustful) love is surrounded by references to the (failing) rebellion. Second, the two narratives are causally linked in lines 21–25 (stanza 5), as the speaker is punished by the ruling power for remaining faithful to his beloved ("on trial […] / for following […] / her my star," lines 23−25). Lines 26–30 (stanza 6) then ignore outright the danger of punishment for his love (line 27) and declare his private love to have been won in a final political or historic victory: "I am history" (line 30). Third, an allegorical connection is introduced when the ruling power is identified with "my reason" (line 3), and love is presented as a rebellion against the speaker's rational mind. This suppression of love is finally overcome by the passionate intensity of affection returned by the beloved one. The phrase "Her eyes are as hot [...]" (line 29) relates to the speaker's initiative in "my eyes meet eyes" (line 1) in the beginning and finally concludes in her active choice: "I am hers" (line 30) – instead of "she is mine." This declaration signifies the eventful closure of the love story, the event of "love made."

The narrative presentation of the love theme is made more ambiguous by a string of incongruous words or phrases such as the implication in "zillionth [time]" (line 1) of an uncountably large number of instances, denying the notion of uniqueness for the speaker's love; the nonsensical replacement of "hyphen" for the idiomatic complement "a damn" in the phrase "I don't give a hyphen" (line 4); the strange insertion of French terms, especially the combination of the colloquial "va t'en" with "King" (lines 5, 6); the colloquialisms "yeah" (line 11), "Uh-huh" (line 16), "That ain't news, guys" (line 19); the references to the "Press of this planet" (line 11) and to CNN (line 18) in this private love context; the expression "bourgeois fuckers" (line 14); the various foreign or slang terms for money ("*argent, ackers, geld*," line 15); the description of her eyes as "ignit[ing] / the cave in the human guy" (lines 18–29); the spurious argument (and its odd phrasing) for rejecting the news-value of his imminent indictment ("That ain't news," line 19): "I did arrive here / via a mother" (lines 19–20). The effect of these pervasive incongruous terms is jocular and disruptive, partly depriving the love theme of its seriousness, an effect also brought about in another respect by the jarring combination of love and rebellion on the level of contents. As a result, a sense of ambiguity characterises the events narrated.

The semantic ambiguity created by these lexical elements is further corroborated by prosodic devices. The speaker's joy of having won his love is underlined

in two places by the emphatic enumeration of several words with similar endings: six adjectives ending in "-ous" qualifying the noun phrase "love made" (lines 8–10), and four present participles qualifying the beloved, "my star" (line 24). The triumphant tone is somewhat undermined by the incongruous nature of the enumerated words, especially in the first passage: "jealous" and "bibulous" possess a negative quality in this context, and the contracted phrase "devil'll-envy-us," at odds with the rest of the list, adds a humorous note. The morphological similarity in "unturnable from, unstarable in" (line 2) in fact conceals a contradiction, as the speaker can neither turn away from his beloved's eyes nor can he stare into them. The unexplained, abrupt reversal within a single line from a rejection of pity to its acceptance (line 26) increases the ambivalence of the situation, all the more so as the need for such pity is immediately afterwards denied ("but that won't happen [...]," line 27).

In general, however, the pervasive incongruities and inherent tensions within "Love Made Yeah" are balanced by the parallel construction of the six stanzas, the melodious rhythm of the lines (mostly dactyls, sometimes alternating with iambs) and the emphatic closure of the endings in each stanza, supported by rhyme. The internal incongruity and tension characterising the narrative progression of the speaker's utterance are thus reflected in the relationship between the semantic and the prosodic dimension. The changing interactions between the two narrative frames of love and rebellion together with the multiple incongruities create a highly ambivalent and complex rendering of a love story in its precarious progression from abrupt beginning to eventual fulfilment, to the concluding event. The poem combines elements of success and failure, moments of victory and defeat, as well as instances of active achievement and passive acceptance. Throughout, a precarious balance is kept between emotional devotedness and ironic detachment. The result is the poetic presentation of a personal love narrative that renders palpable the elusive nature of love and the contradictions it causes in the lover. To summarise the status of narrativity in Maxwell's poem: the narrative structuring of the sequence as a continuous change of state is strongly corroborated while the internal quality of the changing human state as such is persistently made ambivalent and ambiguous (cf. Hertel and Hühn 2021, 397–401). The underlying motivation of the two intertwined narratives of love and rebellion is ultimate ethical – the desire for affection and for freedom, respectively. With respect to the love narrative the ethical quality is raised specifically by stressing that the motive is not selfish and possessive (as frequently in love stories) but expressly unselfish: "I am hers" (line 29).

In its particular narrative perspective Maxwell's "Rest for the Wicked" (1995, 13) can be compared and contrasted with Armitage's "The Unaccompanied." While "The Unaccompanied" is regressive, as it were, intent on recovering the antecedents of the present situation and going back in time to the narrative beginnings, Maxwell's "Rest for the Wicked" is concerned with endings, with the termination of a narrative development. "Rest for the Wicked" is a reflection on the experience of the end, of

coming to an end, in various phases of one's life. And this reflection on the signifi-
cance of coming to an end is specifically focused on the question of knowledge with
respect to such a sense of an ending, the awareness that a development – and what
development – is actually coming to an end, as is emphasised by the string of words
referring to the cognitive dimension: "know" (lines 1, 7, 8, 14), "ask" (line 8), "watch"
(line 12), "language" (line 12), "gives […] away or shows" (line 13).

By contrast to the deployment of two long narrative sequences in Armitage's
"The Unaccompanied," "Rest for the Wicked" – both in the body of the poem and
in its title – presents numerous short narrative text spans constituting compact
developments or changes of state. These sequences are of two types and their
succession is accompanied by the variation of these types. These two types are:
termination: a development or movement coming to an end; and transition (plus
expected continuation): a new beginning and the further development after a tem-
porary end. In other words: the difference between these two types is that between
end-stopped and run-on narrative sequences. The poem starts off with the first type
of sequence, termination: "We only know we've come to the end of something / by
our meeting happily here" (lines 1–2). This is a present development described by
the speaker as a member of a group ("we"), predicated on this group and consisting
in the event of its conclusive constitution: "meeting happily." The awareness ("we
only know") of this eventful termination calls up the memory of similar experiences
in the past: "the end of a termtime, a school play, a holiday," always resulting in
happy emotions: "would splash us away towards love, hearts wrapped, some hero"
(lines 3–4). And the former experiences function as a confirmation of the happy
outcome at present. Thus the narrative and its eventful termination have a clear
ethical component: solidarity, fulfilment and restfulness.

This variant of the first type of sequence (termination) is followed by the
second type, transition: "goodbyes" (line 5) implies a fresh departure and move-
ment towards something different, something new (lines 5–9). This departure and
its goal at first appear both diffuse and problematical as indicated by the expres-
sion of regret ("sniff," "tears," lines 5–6) and furthermore by the group's internal
heterogeneity ("incompatible salt-group *A,*" line 6; possibly a reference to a blood
group). But the negative evaluation is subsequently rejected, if in convoluted terms:
"weren't true" (line 5), "we are all *0*" (line 7; another oblique reference to blood
groups – where group 0 is compatible with all others, indicating the basic homo-
geneity of the group), "the world is still turning" (line 8; i.e. developments are
continuing), "we went with the force of fifty greetings" (line 9; i.e. with a positive
outlook).

The controversial aspect of both sequences, termination and transition, is
the evaluation of the end, of the outcome of the development. The first type, ter-
mination, ends positively, the second type, transition, problematically, but with a
rigorous attempt to come to a positive evaluation, nevertheless. In the present situ-
ation ("today," line 10), both aspects are juxtaposed or opposed to each other: "we

greet" and "the strain of some mere losses" (line 10): "greeting" is positive, implying welcome, while "losses" is negative, signifying reduction. This ambivalence seems to be the final stance of the speaker's train of thoughts at the present moment. The poem then ends with a long sentence (lines 10–14), which comprises both – negative as well as positive – stances: "*compound* eyes in which all the *darkly* envisioned / watch with us" (lines 11–12; emphasis mine). The main point of the ending then is the awareness that an end has been reached at all, a sense of an ending, a concluding insight expressed in language: "always gives us away or shows" (line 13) and "a loop and whorl of a language" (line 12). This new insight is highlighted by the crucial difference between the introductory line of the poem and its repetition in the last line: While in the beginning the quality of the ending had been emphasised ("We only know we've come to the end of something / by our meeting happily here"), now the fact of ending as such is stressed ("we know it was only the end we came to"), the eventful awareness of the final termination of movement and change.

The title frames this variation and commutation of coming to an end and establishes an ironic perspective on these reflections. "Rest for the wicked" reverses the proverbial phrase "No rest for the wicked," which goes back to a passage in the *Old Testament*: "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked" (Isaiah, 48: 22). This phrase also comprises a temporal sequence, a change of state: people who are wicked, i.e. responsible for evil-doings, will in the end be able to rest without persecution and punishment – against the common notion that evil-doings always entail persecution and punishment. As the title for the complex variations of the two sequences, termination and transition, this reversed phrase promises comfortable – eventful – restfulness as a reward for whatever one has done in life, sounding a generally consoling note for people looking back on their past. Insofar as the conclusion of narrative developments is considered in value-related terms, in terms of good and bad, the narrative structures in "Rest for the Wicked" are ultimately based on an ethical motivation. The poem downplays the gravity of the end and valorises the ending as an event – as against unending persecution.

4. Conclusion

The analyses of select poems by Armitage and Maxwell have demonstrated the pervasive as well as diverse employment of narrative structurings for the sequentiality of their poems. Narrative text spans occur on various levels, in various extensions and in various concatenations. Differences concern, on the one hand, the extension and complexity of narrative and, on the other, the motivation of narrative. As to the extension and complexity of narrative, in two cases – Armitage's "The Dead Sea Poems" and Maxwell's "Love Made Yeah" – the narrative trajectory is co-extensive with the entire poem. But in each case the narrative is inherently complicated and somewhat obscured by the combination of two heterogeneous frames: goat-herding

and poetry processing in Armitage's poem, erotic love and political rebellion in Maxwell's poem. This combination of the ultimately incompatible has different effects for the dominant theme of the narrative: grotesque ironizing and emotional ambivalence. In three cases two separate narrative spans are combined to form a more comprehensive narrative development: the continuation and completion of an unsatisfactorily interrupted personal story in Armitage's "Homecoming," the integration of an isolated contemporary individual life into a long historical collective tradition in Armitage's "The Unaccompanied" and the playful and teasing opposition between a life-long predestined love story and the brief waiting for the beloved to wake up in Maxwell's "The Ages." In one particularly complex case – Maxwell's "Rest for the Wicked" – several condensed brief narrative text spans of two types, termination and transition (together with continuation), are combined and opposed for a reflection on the ending of a narrative.

Pervasively both Maxwell and Armitage problematise and undermine the clarity of the narrative structure by blending or linking various (heterogeneous) schemata or by obfuscating the clear trajectory of a narrative. The basic narrative organisation of the whole of the poetic text or of parts of it has thus to be extracted as underlying changes of state (cf. Hühn 2022). As to the (dynamic) motivation of narrative developments, the poems by both poets present narrative structures, i.e. basically the development of human states of affairs and the sequence of human acts, which are guided by ethical motives, by positive human values, such as affection, consolation, comfort, assistance and desire for gratification and happiness. This is especially true for Armitage's poetry, but essentially Maxwell's various treatments of the love theme are ultimately also guided by motives of affection and fulfilment of desire. In all cases the dynamic narrative development aims at and finally reaches some kind of conclusion, some kind of concluding event.

Notes

1. To name a few select English and German examples: Lennard mentions only "syntax," sentence construction and combination; Burdorf discusses sequence on two brief pages; O'Donoghue does not refer to sequence at all; Mandel offers an idiosyncratic approach of extracting "propositions," which is difficult to operationalise and systematise; Strobel is an exception: he has a long chapter on syntagmatic reading and on cognitive semantics (coherence, scripts and frames).
2. Culler, promoting the ritualistic feature as the core element of poetry, restricts the sequential dimension to sound and visual patterings and plays down and dismisses the semantic sequentiality relegating it to what he considers marginal cases of poetry such as dramatic monologues and ballads.

3. Zettelmann compellingly argues for the primary focus on the semantic dimension of poetry, without ignoring the prosodic structures.
4. See also Prince: "narratologists agree that narrative sequences represent linked series of situations and links […] and that these sequences can be expanded and summarized, that they can be combined with other sequences in specifiable ways such as conjunction, embedding, or alternation and that they can be extracted from larger sequences" (2016, 12).
5. For an overview of "Narrative Ethics" see Phelan.
6. For the concept and the structure of a prototypical poem which underlies the analysis of the examples in this article see Hempfer.
7. See Halliday and Webster, Averintseva–Kisch.
8. See e.g. the text types proposed by Virtanen, the sequential or textual schemas proposed by Adam.
9. See Hertel and Hühn 2021, 401–403.
10. These are two of the four dimensions identified by Phelan in his discussion of "Narrative Ethics."
11. With this manner the title poem sets the scene for the majority of the ensuing poems in the entire collection *The Dead Sea Poems*.
12. "Love Made Yeah" was first published separately in 1990.

References

Adam, Jean-Michel. 1992. *Les textes: Types et prototypes*. Paris: Armand Colin.

Armitage, Simon. 1993. *Book of Matches*. London: Faber and Faber.

Armitage, Simon. 1995. *The Dead Sea Poems*. London: Faber and Faber.

Armitage, Simon. 1997. *CloudCuckooLand*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber.

Armitage, Simon. 2017. *The Unaccompanied*. London: Faber and Faber.

Averintseva-Kisch, Maria. 2018. *Textkohärenz*. Heidelberg: Winter.

Burdorf, Dieter. 1997. *Einführung in die Gedichtanalyse*. Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler.

Culler. Jonathan. 2015. *Theory of the Lyric.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Genette, Gérard. 1988 [1983]. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Halliday, M.A.K., and Jonathan J. Webster. 2014. *Text Linguistics: The How and Why of Meaning*. Sheffield, UK and Bristol, CT: Equinox.

Hempfer, Klaus. 2017. "Theory of the Lyric: A Prototypical Approach." *Journal of Literary Theory* 11.1: 51–62.

Hertel, Ralf, and Peter Hühn. 2021. *English Poetry in Context: From the 16th to the 21st Century*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt.

Hühn, Peter, and Jens Kiefer. 2005. *The Narratological Analysis of Lyric Poetry: Studies in English Poetry from the 16th to the 20th Century*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Hühn, Peter. 2022. "Covert Narrativity in Contemporary Poetry: English and German Examples." *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* 8.2: 250–263.

Lennard, John. 1996. *The Poetry Handbook: A Guide to Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mandel, Oscar. 1998. *Fundamentals of the Art of Poetry*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Mann, William C., Sandra Thompson, and Christian Matthiessen. 1989. *Rhetorical Structure and Text Analysis.* Marina del Rey: University of Southern California. www.sfu.ca/rst/01intro/definitions.html

Maxwell, Glyn. 1995. *Rest for the Wicked*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe.

Maxwell, Glyn. 2013. *Pluto*. London: Picador.

O'Donoghue, Bernard. 2019. *Poetry: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Phelan, James. 2014. "Narrative Ethics." *Handbook of Narratology.* Ed. Peter Hühn, Jan Christoph Meister, John Pier, and Wolf Schmid. 2nd edition, fully revised and expanded. Vol. 2. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter. 531–546.

Prince, Gerald. 1988a. *A Dictionary of Narratology*. Aldershot: Scolar Press.

Prince, Gerald. 1988b. "The Disnarrated." *Style* 22.1: 1–8.

Prince, Gerald. 2016. "On Narrative Sequence, Classical and Postclassical." *Narrative Sequence in Contemporary Narratology*. Ed. Raphaël Baroni and Françoise Revaz. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. 11–19.

Strobel, Jochen. 2015. *Gedichtanalyse: Eine Einführung*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt.

Virtanen, Tulja. 1992. "Issues of Text Typology: Narrative a 'basic' Type of Text?" *Text* 12: 293–310.

Zettelmann, Eva. 2018. "Discordia Concors: Immersion and Artifice in the Lyric." *Journal of Literary Theory* 11.1: 136–148.

PETER HÜHN is Professor of English Literature, University of Hamburg (retired). He has published on the theory of poetry, the history of British poetry, the application of narratology to poetry analysis. He is author of *Geschichte der englischen Lyrik* (1995), *Facing Loss and Death: Narrative and Eventfulness in Lyric Poetry* (2016), co-author of *The Narratological Analysis of Lyric Poetry: Studies in English Poetry* (2005), editor-in-chief of the online and print editions of the *Handbook of Narratology* (2009, 2014), co-author of *English Poetry in Context* (2021), co-editor of *Handbook of Diachronic Narratology* (forthcoming, 2023).