

**STORY
AND
STRUCTURE**

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AND
STRUCTURE**

A COMPLETE GUIDE



LEON CONRAD

illustrated by Jason Chuang

the
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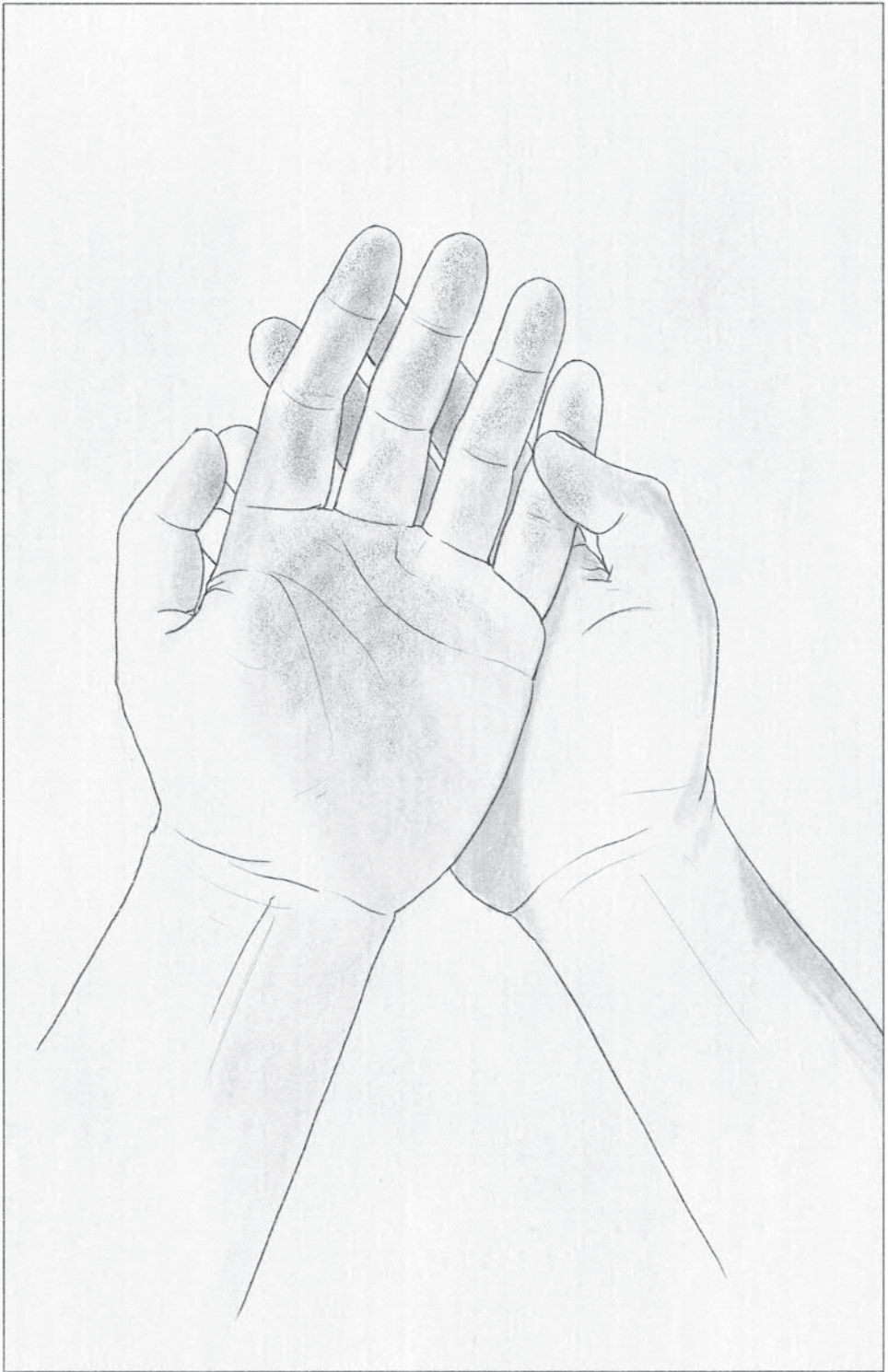
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In memoriam
GEORGE SPENCER-BROWN



*Who really knows? Who shall here proclaim it?—
from where was it born, from where this creation?
The gods are on this side of the creation of this (world).
So then who does know from where it came to be?
This creation—from where it came to be, if it was produced or if not—
[s/]he who is the overseer of this (world) in the furthest heaven,
[s/]he surely knows. Or if [s/]he does not know . . . ?*

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To explore the ideas outlined in this book further, visit my website (www.leonconrad.com), sign up to my mailing list and follow The Unknown Storyteller Project on social media channels.

PREFACE

*What is necessary for the story of Cinderella to be the story of Cinderella?
... This is a question that can never be answered with precision.*

H. PORTER ABBOTT

*The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*¹

Where do stories come from? Why do stories exist? And while we're on the subject ... how does story work? What makes it what it is?

These aren't easy questions to answer. If we're going to find satisfactory answers to them, we'll need to go right back to the very source of story.

The process is rather like being a moth in flight trying to watch itself flying. You might just manage to catch a reflection out of your peripheral vision while keeping your focus straight ahead. You might just manage to slow down time and stretch past the boundaries of space to touch infinity, where there's no beginning and no end, and observe the infinitesimal changes that occur within that state of infinity.

It's a bit like trying to hear music that exists potentially in silence, or trying to catch a thought in flight without confining it or changing its course in any way.

To make sense of anything we come across or realise, we need to tell some kind of a story. Every thing we say or do is either a story or part of one. And the way to make sense of the mystery of story is to become story – and be storied by story – in a living process. It's a bit like an embryo trying to hear the beat of the heart it's yet to develop.

We don't ask to be born, but as human beings, we're called to fulfil our potential, to realise our vocation, to respond to our calling. Sometimes we can get in our own way; sometimes life presents us with challenges. And sometimes, there are those moments of

clarity which allow us to catch a glimpse of what's possible. Story shapes all of those experiences.

Story shapes the story spinner ... the story spinner's story ... and how the story spinner develops their story. And when a story spinner becomes aware of that, story recognises itself.

In this book, I invite you to rethink your idea of story. Rather than classifying stories based on content and saying that myths and legends are stories but essays and adverts aren't, I invite you to see story in a different way: like a necklace.

Necklaces are a combination of the discrete and the continuous: beads and the filament on which they're strung. Stories are no different: they feature discrete moments or events arranged sequentially like beads and a dynamic of relationships through which events are linked forming a string that links them together. Story is the ultimate necklace – a necklace that can form itself, restring and refashion itself again and again and again in countless narrative patterns that conform to a far smaller number of story structures.

Looking at story this way, we can observe how and why events in stories are linked, a process which will lead us to identifying the structures that lie under the surface of any story.

We use these story structures far more often than when we just tell stories – we use them throughout our everyday '9-to-5, Monday-to-Friday, weekend-break, 4-weeks-of-holiday-a-year' lives. As human beings, we're uniquely positioned to reflect on this. Once we get to know the story structures and understand how they work, we'll be far more empowered to solve problems we come across in 'everyday life'. We'll start to see parallels between the story structures and the habitual patterns of thinking and acting we use. Some are typically helpful; some less so. Learning to appreciate their differences will help us think more clearly and live our lives more effectively, more purposefully. The good news is that there's a way we can do that which is both easier and more intuitive than it ever has been before.

We know that stories can be classified under different headings: 'Cinderella' stories, for instance, are referred to as 'Rags to Riches' stories; 'Snow White' and 'Sleeping Beauty' stories as 'Death

and Rebirth' stories. You may be familiar with Vladimir Propp's 31 functions, Georges Polti's 36 dramatic situations, Joseph Campbell's 'monomyth' popularly referred to as 'the hero's journey', or Christopher Booker's 'seven basic plots'. These writers all focus primarily on content in their work. And that makes it more difficult for us to match our own stories to the patterns they've defined. In order to capture the pulse—or heartbeat—of story, we need to go beyond the content and we need an easy way to chart the patterns that appear at this deep level.

Some people have tried to use algebraic symbols to map the shapes of stories – Claude Levi-Strauss is one example. Some (like Kurt Vonnegut) have used squiggly lines or graphs. Others have used tables, charts, or diagrams. There are word-based descriptions for different kinds of motifs, and numbers for different tale types. Many of these are explored in appendix 2. Nevertheless, despite our long history of telling stories, we still need a simple, easy, intuitive way of visualising how stories work. And that's precisely what the system outlined in this book provides.

It's inspired by the work of Professor George Spencer-Brown whose book, *Laws of Form*, was first published in 1969. I had the privilege of studying it with him towards the end of his life. To date, Spencer-Brown's work has been applied mainly in the fields of mathematics, logic, and social theory. Its application to literary analysis and narrative studies has been minimal. While there have been attempts to apply his work in the field of literary analysis, this is the first time his work has been systematically applied to analysing story structure in its broadest sense.² Based on only six symbols, Spencer-Brown's approach is remarkably simple. It's visually intuitive, easy to understand, and extraordinarily powerful.

Using his six simple symbols allows us to get fresh insights into how story works, how and why story structures differ, and why story really is a much wider phenomenon than most people have taken it to be up to now. It has the potential to take us right to the heart of what makes story work, to make us better problem solvers, and – perhaps most importantly – to help us understand ourselves better.

This book introduces 18 distinct story structures:

Quest
Transformation
Rags to Riches
Death and Rebirth
Trickster
Revelation
Call and Response (Variation 1)
Call and Response (Variation 2)
Trickster Variation
The Chinese Circular Structure
Dilemma
Ki-Shō-Ten-Ketsu
Open-Ended Ki-Shō-Ten-Ketsu
Koan
Riddle
Voyage and Return
Perpetual Motion
Creation Myth

It shows that story structures can be classified in four distinct ways – by the quality of how the stories unfold based on the quality of the first step in a character’s story line; by key elements that can be found in the middle (Threshold/Non-Threshold structures); by what happens at the end (Open-Ended/Closed structures); and finally, by quality, acknowledging the two aspects of story outlined above (Linear and Dynamic), linking to the ideas of the discrete lines of ‘beads’ and continuous ‘stringing’ that the necklace of story uses to create its patterns. While every bead is different, all beads fit into common families of shapes – spheres, cylinders, teardrops, for instance. Every static bead, however, depends on a unifying string to hold it in place as part of the dynamic structure which is a necklace.

Although the approach is based on Spencer-Brown’s work, don’t worry if you aren’t familiar with it. All you need is laid out right

here in this book, pitched in a readable, easy-to-understand way. You probably instinctively know much of this already. It's just hasn't been described in this way before.

Even though the approach is based on only six primary symbols, it allows for unlimited expansion, without any additional symbols being needed. It's like a mandala – the kind in which small fractal elements scale up to form a whole that's larger than the sum of its parts.

I've found Spencer-Brown's minimalistic system not only beautiful but a joy to work with.³ Using it has allowed me to answer H. Porter Abbott's question (quoted at the beginning of this section) about what makes the story of Cinderella the story of Cinderella ... with precision.

The pattern of that story structure (the Rags to Riches structure)—and those of the 17 other story structures outlined in this book—can be traced back centuries – back to some of the earliest written records, which means they existed as part of oral culture well before that. And we're still using the very same story structures to create stories today! There clearly are *laws of story*. The methodology presented here works in harmony with them.

When we look at how structures compare, deep relationships appear – giving us new insights into the relationships between story structures. Understanding how the Quest structure is nested in the more compressed Transformation structure, for instance, leads to a deeper understanding of how we process emotions – and that can help us manage anger more effectively. It can also show us how we can avoid being pulled in to emotional traps laid for us by unscrupulous advertisers. That's just one of many fascinating insights and applications that emerge.

This book clearly demonstrates how different story structures can be distinguished ... more precisely than ever before, but also why Comedy and Tragedy are structure neutral; it shows how these can be applied to *any* story structure, and presents the argument that they exist to bring us into a better state of balance. Moreover, it shows that our innate yearning for balance *is* the energy that drives story. If there's any bias to be detected in the

work, it'll be found to align with principles common to Daoist and Perennial Philosophy and the kind of rationalism advocated by J. M. Robertson.⁴

The stories I've drawn on as examples come from a range of cultures and eras – from China, Japan, Europe, North, West and South East Africa, North America, India, Persia, the Middle East, and others. They go back to ancient Egyptian times, to ancient Israel and Babylonia, ancient Greece and Rome, and on through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the early modern period to the present day. They're all relevant.

I've based my examples on stories which are well known and well loved – Brer Rabbit and Simple Jack stories, riddles from *The Old English Riddle Book*, classics like Beowulf, stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Greek tragedies and extracts from literary works such as Kipling's *The Just So Stories*. I've also drawn on some lesser-known examples such as a tale about a cuckolded husband from *The Arabian Nights*. In addition, I've included jokes, West African dilemma tales, oriental Ki-Shō-Ten-Ketsu stories, koans, and a story from Malawi about *The Moon and His Two Wives* (a rare example of a Perpetual Motion structure story), tales from Russia, China, the Middle East, and extracts from Chinese literary classics.

I also draw on a range of poetry in regular forms, including a limerick about Kim Kardashian by Salman Rushdie, haikus by Bashō and Buson, a Shakespearean sonnet, a ghazal by Wali, and a collection of landays from Afghanistan.

I look at why some story structures feature more commonly in songs or poems than they do in stories ... all this to get closer to finding the source of story than we've managed to get previously.

This way of looking at story demands we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, but experience with our soul. It requires embodied engagement – it calls for thoughts and feelings to work together in a balanced way. It requires a new way of looking. Individual journeys will differ. The book has one goal: to bring story to life in you.

If, as I argue here, story structures arise in and from human awareness, and reflect aspects of human awareness related to a

yearning for balance, then one has to ask why ... what purpose do they serve? The only satisfying answer I've come to so far is that they point to a deep need for the voice of The Unknown Storyteller to be heard. We achieve this through being open to story storying within us – to story storying us.

In the prologue, I present some key definitions. In chapter 1, I introduce a brief basic overview of the methodology outlined in this book, which I expand on in the subsequent three chapters. In chapters 5 to 18, the individual story structures identified are presented in turn, showing how they differ, following which, in chapters 19 onwards, I explore some of the implications of the methodology. In chapters 21 and 22, I introduce insights that the approach can bring to the appreciation of literary forms such as narrative and poetry, pending a more in-depth work showing how the methodology can be applied in the practice of writing.

Some of the best story spinners are poets. Poets know how story works better than anyone – they create in the moment, while also being storied as living, breathing beings caught up in the awe-inspiring mystery of a living, breathing cosmos.

The greatest of these poets have left us treasures – Farīd ud-Dīn 'Attār, whose quotes frame the work, for instance and the great poets behind the text of the *Rigveda* whose words take us as close as I think we can get to the source of story.

We start and end this journey with their works, which point to a starting point and destination for our exploration of story which lies just beyond us ... until we re-discover it all around us, and within ourselves. Once that happens, it becomes easier to see that life lives; story stories. Story lives. Life stories. Story = life; life = story. Story and life are one-and-the-same. Realising that gives us the potential to achieve a more finely tuned sense of balance – both in relation to ourselves and in relation to others.

I hope this book will help you tell life's story and help you to story your life by living your life story in harmony ... with story.

NOTES

- 1 H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 21.
- 2 Spencer-Brown's work has been seen – at least potentially – as providing an answer to what Bouissac calls the 'Saussurean unfinished agenda' (Paul Bouissac, "Saussure's Legacy in Semiotics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure*, edited by Carol Sanders, 240–260 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), at 256, 260). Ingo Berensmeyer ("'Twofold Vibration': Samuel Beckett's Laws of Form," *Poetics Today* 25 (3): 465–495), Bruce Clarke (*Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008)), and Don Kunze ("Triplexity in Spencer-Brown, Lacan, and Poe," in *Lacan and the Nonhuman*, edited by Gautam Basu Thakur and Jonathan Michael Dickstein, 157–176 (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)) are, to my knowledge, the only narrative scholars to have drawn on Spencer-Brown's work in print to date. A detailed analysis of the ways in which they have applied Spencer-Brown's work in this field can be found in my paper, "Laws of Form – Laws of Narrative – Laws of Story," in *Laws of Form: A Fiftieth Anniversary*, Series On Knots & Everything. Vol. 72, edited by Louis H. Kauffman, Fred Cummins, Randolph Dible, Leon Conrad, Graham Ellsbury, Andrew Crompton, and Florian Grote, 785–806. Singapore: World Scientific, 2022.
- 3 While the Chinese Circular Structure can be easily mapped with Spencer-Brown's six primary symbols, I've added five further 'nice to have' symbols for visual clarity.
- 4 Rt Hon John Mackinnon Robertson, *Letters on Reasoning*, 2nd ed., revised with additions (London: Watts, 1905). The important influence that Robertson's work had on George Spencer-Brown's is explored in Leon Conrad, "Roots, shoots, fruits: William Blake and J M Robertson: two key influences on George Spencer-Brown's work and the latter's relationship to Niklas Luhmann's work," *Kybernetes* 51, no. 5 (2022): 1879–1895.

PROLOGUE

COMING TO TERMS WITH STORY

*Whosoever desires to explore The Way—
Let them set out—for what more is there to say?*

‘ATTÂR, TRANS. UNKNOWN, *Canticle of the Birds*¹

Let’s begin with a few definitions. I use story; stories, a story, the story; and narrative(s) to stand for the three levels that are found together in every narrative.

Story

I use the word ‘story’ to mean two things which are linked: firstly, the relatively static ways in which events in a chronological sequence are linked; and secondly, the dynamic impulse that links these events. The combination of these is what makes story ‘story’.

Stories, a story, the story

Stories come into being when someone initiates or communicates a series of events which are (or are capable of being) meaningfully related to each other.²

I use the terms stories, a story, or the story to mean a linked arrangement of events that's easily recognisable, regardless of how a/the story is told.

Because there are many ways of telling a story, we end up with different narratives.

Narrative(s)

By narrative(s), I mean (a) particular version(s), or telling(s) of a story.

A narrative is the static, finished form that results from an interpretation of a story.

A book can be made into a screenplay that's made into a film, then adapted for theatre, and retold in the form of a graphic novel. The graphic novel might be remade as a film and its plot could be summarised as a spoiler on a review site on the internet, or retold among friends in a social setting. Each of these is an example of a narrative based on the same key source: a story.

For instance, *West Side Story* (a film) is based on Shakespeare's stage play, *Romeo and Juliet*, which could have been based on the poem by Arthur Brooke (1562), and/or the prose narrative by William Painter (1580), either of which could have been based on the earlier Italian prose version by Luigi da Porto, written in the 1520s, and published in various editions from 1531 onwards, which may have been based on an earlier version from an oral tradition.³ These are all narratives based on 'a single, common core story' recognised as the story of the 'star-crossed lovers'. Folklorists have estimated that there are over 1,500 Cinderella stories, for instance,⁴ all of them recognised by the similarity in their key content as being based on 'a single, common core story' which could be described as the 'Rags to Riches' story. Each of these stories can be told in a variety of narrative ways, which leads us to interpretations.

Interpretation(s)

Different (re)presentations of a work or performances of a production come about as a result of a dynamic process of engaging with a narrative.

An interpretation is a dynamic process through which a narrative unfolds over time.

Within any narrative, each character has their own story line.

Story line(s)

Story lines map the moment-to-moment sequence of events each character experiences. Story lines always follow (a) particular story structure(s).

Story structure

I use story structure to mean the minimum number of related events we need for a unified whole we can recognise as being common to a particular group of stories with the qualities of distinctive 'single, common core stories' or 'masterplots', as Porter Abbott calls them.⁵

Joseph Campbell has argued, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, that the 'hero's journey' masterplot can be traced through a wide range of narratives. He describes their story structure as having three main stages (separation, initiation, return), each stage containing several subsections.⁶

By starting from a narrative, then following each character's story line, identifying the distinctive narrative units which unfold through these story lines, arranging them in chronological order, reducing them to the minimum number of units required to tell the 'bare bones' of a story, and then seeing how the characters' story lines interlink, we identify the story which underpins the narrative. We can then analyse the relationship between the story and the story structure(s) which it follows to understand the role that story plays in that context – both in the story and in our engagement with it. The approach develops and builds on the work of many narrative theorists and writers, and I am particularly indebted to the work of Mieke Bal, Roland Barthes, Joseph Campbell, Gerard Genette, A. J. Greimas, Claude Levi-Strauss, Georges Polti, Vladimir Propp, Philip Pullman, Arielle Saiber, Ferdinand de Saussure, and John Yorke.⁷

Plot pattern

Plot pattern deals with how a story is told and the order in which the sequence of events is narrated.

Story unfolds in both space and time, but they're treated differently at different levels. Story structures emphasise time – they map sequences of events in the order in which they happen, moment to moment. Plot patterns, however, emphasise space. Think of where a narrator is positioned, for instance. Usually, shifts in a narrator's position indicates a scene change and takes us from place to place in the story – but not necessarily in chronological order.

<i>Story</i>			
Story spinner			
<i>Plot pattern</i>		<i>Story structure</i>	
Space	Time	Space	Time
<i>Narrative</i>			

Other terms will be defined as we come to them. In homage to Spencer-Brown, the quirky injunctive style he uses to introduce definitions in his book *Laws of Form* is invoked here when structures are defined.

By defining terms, or story structures, we fix them – temporarily. It's more useful, however, to see the structures in particular as flexible, responsive building blocks, which can merge, and develop variant forms in context and yet still follow recognisable structural patterns. Often the story seeker's interpretation will influence how a character's story structure is determined. The detailed analysis presented in appendix 1, which complements and develops the basic overview of the structures as presented in the main part of this work, provides an example of this.

NOTES

- 1 The last lines of the poem (lines 4482–4483), as quoted in Clarissa Estes’ introduction to Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), xxix.
- 2 There are useful definitions to be found in the glossary in H. Porter Abbott’s *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 243–263, particularly those for ‘entity’, ‘event’, and ‘story’ on pages 248, 249 and 261 respectively.
- 3 For the film, see Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, directors, *West Side Story* (Los Angeles: United Artists, 1961); the play, William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*. In *The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series*, edited by René Weis (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 1125–1158; the poem, Arthur Brooke, “Romeus and Juliet.” *Shakespeare Navigators*, 1 February, 2021, <https://www.shakespeare-navigators.com/romeo/BrookeIndex.html>; the prose narratives, William Painter, “Romeo and Juliet,” *The Palace of Pleasure: Elizabethan Versions of Italian and French Novels from Boccaccio, Bandello, Cinthio, Straparola, Queen Margaret of Navarre, and Others*. Vol. 2, Tome 2, edited by Joseph Jacobs, 3 January, 2011, Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34840/34840-h/34840-h.htm#novel2_25; Luigi da Porto, Matteo Bandello, and Pierre Boaistuau, *Romeo and Juliet Before Shakespeare: Four Early Stories of Star-crossed Love* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2000); and Luigi da Porto, *Romeo and Juliet*, translated by Maurice Jonas (London: Davis & Orioli, 1921), <https://archive.org/details/romeojulietphoto00dapo/page/n9>.
- 4 Marian Roalfe Cox, *Cinderella; three hundred and forty-five variants of Cinderella, Catskin, and Cap o’Rushes, abstracted and tabulated, with a discussion of mediaeval analogues, and notes* (London: David Nutt for the Folk-Lore Society, 1893), <https://archive.org/details/cinderellathreeh00coxmuoft/>; Anna Birgitta Rooth, *The Cinderella Cycle*, (New York: Arno, 1980); Alan Dundes, ed., *Cinderella: A Folklore Casebook* (New York: Garland, 1982); Russell A. Peck, “The Cinderella Bibliography”, in *A Robbins Library Digital Project*, accessed 16 November, 2018, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/cinderella>. According to Heidi Anne Heiner, ‘Sources disagree about how many versions of the tale exist, with numbers conservatively ranging from 345 to over 1,500.’ “History of Cinderella,” 1998–2021, <https://www.surlalunefairytales.com/a-g/cinderella/cinderella-history.html>. Heiner elsewhere states that

‘the general consensus is that well over 1,000 variants, with a conservative estimate of over twice that amount, have been recorded as part of literary folklore.’ *Cinderella Tales from Around the World*, (n.p.: SurLaLune Press, 2012), 1.

- 5 For the definition of ‘masterplots’ as ‘recurrent skeletal stories’, see Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction*, 254–255 and further references listed therein. See also Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005). Italics mine.
- 6 See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2004, 28–36, and chapter 18 of this work, where I compare Campbell’s views on the ‘navel of the world’ and the Chinese Circular Structure.
- 7 Mieke Bal, *Narratology in Practice* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2021), *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), *On Storytelling: Essays in Narratology* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1991); Roland Barthes, “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,” in *New Literary History: On Narrative and Narratives* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1975): 237–272, <https://doi.org/10.2307/468419>; Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2004; Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979); Algirdas Julien Greimas, “Elements of a Narrative Grammar,” in *Diacritics* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 23–40; Algirdas Julien Greimas, and François Rastier, “The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints,” in *Yale French Studies: Game, Play, Literature* 41 (1968): 86–105; Georges Polti, *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*, translated by Lucile Ray (Franklin, OH: James Knapp Reeve, 1924), <https://archive.org/details/thirtysixdramati00polt/page/n4>; Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005), and Levi-Strauss’ commentary on his work therein; Philip Pullman’s “Poco a Poco,” in *Daemon Voices: Essays on Storytelling* (Oxford: David Fickling, 2017), 150–173; Arielle Saiber, *Giordano Bruno and the Geometry of Language: Literary and Scientific Cultures of Early Modernity*, (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005); Charles Bally, Albert Riedlinger, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Albert Sechehaye, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth, 1983); Carol Sanders, *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and especially the chapter therein by Bouissac entitled “Saussure’s Legacy in Semiotics,” 240–260; and John Yorke, *Into the Woods: How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them* (London: Penguin, 2013).

1

THE BASICS IN BRIEF



The poet ... must familiarize himself with the secrets of his calling, the great and inviolable laws and the lesser and breakable rules of his discipline or craft.

GEORGE SPENCER-BROWN, WRITING AS JAMES KEYS,
*Only Two Can Play This Game*¹

Just as a farmer ploughs a field before starting to sow, or a builder lays foundations before putting up a building, in this chapter, I lay out the foundations of the methodology. With the foundations in place, we'll be able to build on them in more detail. We start with some key ideas.

Assumptions and conventions

Story implies the presence of a story spinner. The story spinner communicates information to a story seeker.

Story emerges from a sense that something is out of balance with respect to a specific character – a sense that something (from their perspective) either should be, but isn't; or a sense that something isn't, but should be.

Story is based on a series of events that can be classified as 'backward and forward steps' (the 'heartbeat' of story, the pulsing beats of which being 'counted' when the story is 'recounted' or 'told') within a character's story line.²

Story lines always relate to a particular character in a particular situation.

Stories involve one or more characters' story lines unfolding.

This emergent unfolding of a related series of events is how story 'stories'.³

The events are (or are capable of being) meaningfully related to each other in relation to the initial state in which a character (concrete or abstract)⁴ starts out and to the state

in which they end up, taking the character from one point in space and/or time to another.

The events are either seen as ‘fortunate’ and/or ‘unfortunate’ relative to the perceived state of imbalance to which they relate.⁵

At the level of story structure, the sequences of steps always follows the chronological order in which the events unfold in time.

The order in which these steps occur at the level of plot pattern in the narrative telling of a story need not be chronological.

The minimum number of events, and the order in which these events unfold distinguish different story structures.

Notation

George Spencer-Brown’s calculus, which inspires this work, is based on a single mark (\sqcap) which represents a token of the first distinction, resulting from a self-realised ‘act of crossing’.⁶ Its presence implies an unmarked state which stands for the space in which the mark appears, ‘in the form’ (\sqcap).⁷ The unmarked state contains unlimited potential for the emergence of new marks – just as we have unlimited potential for ideas to appear in and from our minds. When ideas are expressed, the expressions can expand (\rightarrow) and contract (\leftarrow).⁸ Where the movement has potential to expand or contract, but the result is (as yet) undetermined, the double barb is used (\rightleftharpoons).⁹ Finally, ‘the snake eating its own tail’ is introduced – the mark of recursion, or re-entry into the form – to deal with memory, time, and other looping or indeterminate forms such as the principle behind the square root of minus 1. Until one option is chosen, it can either be -1 or $+1$. It’s indeterminate (\square).¹⁰ These six simple symbols, along with the absence of form, are the only elements we need to map the deep structure of story. They’re applied as follows:

Events	Symbols	As used by George Spencer-Brown	As used in this work
Openings/ Closings	□	Recursion or re-entry. Introduces time, memory and second-order forms, like the principle behind the square root of minus 1.	The mark of recursion or re-entry is used to symbolise openings and closings of stories. These typically set up and resolve cognitive dissonances in space-time (e.g., 'Once upon a time', which treats time as a bounded region of space on which something can be placed, rather than something flowing, moving and constantly in motion; and 'they lived happily ever after', which treats the extent of characters' lives as indefinite rather than definite). This applies to all story structures.
Initial/final situations	┌	Mark of indication. Performs a pointing function. Stands for the marked state.	The mark is used to symbolise a 'who, when, and where': a character in a particular point in space and time at the start and end of a story. This applies to all story structures.
Empty space		Absence of form. This indicates the unmarked state. In relation to the first distinction, it signifies 'nothing'; 'mystery'; the void from which, and in which, form emerges.	The only structure in which a blank space appears, indicating the absence of a mark, is the Open-Ended Linear Koan structure. Here, I focus on the comparatively static aspect of the symbol, and link it to a transcendent, awe-inspired 'WOW!' state.
Backward step	←	Act of condensation, cancellation. Retracing	The backward barb symbolises an event which poses a problem for a character or hinders them from resolving it. In this context, meetings are interpreted as backward steps.
Forward step	→	Act of confirmation, compensation. Tracing	The forward barb symbolises an event which helps a character resolve the problem they face, or propels them towards realising their destiny.

Events	Symbols	As used by George Spencer-Brown	As used in this work
Events involving cognitive dissonance	\Rightarrow	Potential for expansion or contraction, as yet unrealised, thus indeterminate.	<p>As will be described, the double barb symbolises an event which involves a 'mistake' of some kind – specifically, an Aristotelian categorical cognitive dissonance often in the form of defeated expectation in the quality of the interaction between two characters.¹¹ This could be:</p> <p>(i) an active intention to dupe (Trickster step and its resolution in a Transformational Twist),</p> <p>(ii) a comic outcome (Comic step, based on a simile-based category mistake and its resolution in a Transformational Twist), or</p> <p>(iii) a surprising outcome (Trickster Awe step, based on an interjection-like perception of dissonance between categorematic and syncategorematic qualities of being (Huh?!) and the resolution of that perceived sense of dissonance (Ah!) in a Transformational Twist).</p> <p>The double barb typically appears either singly (\Rightarrow), not ($\Rightarrow\Rightarrow$), or as a pair framing a backward step ($\Rightarrow\leftarrow\Rightarrow$).</p>

Although I introduce an extra set of secondary symbols in chapter 13 to map the dynamic movement of the energy in a story in relation to the Chinese Circular Structure for convenience, the steps can still be notated in a basic manner using Spencer-Brown's marks of indication (\Uparrow) and cancellation (\Downarrow) alternately.

Treatment of steps and step sequences

Sequences of *the same* step type can expand and contract as follows:

A double ($\leftarrow\leftarrow$) sequence of steps can contract to a single (\leftarrow) step.

A double ($\rightarrow\rightarrow$) sequence of steps can contract to a single (\rightarrow) step.

A single (\leftarrow) step can expand to a double ($\leftarrow \leftarrow$) sequence.

A single (\rightarrow) step can expand to a double ($\rightarrow \rightarrow$) sequence.

Sequences of *different* step types can expand and contract as follows:

A triple ($\leftarrow \rightarrow \leftarrow$) sequence of steps can contract to a single (\leftarrow) step.

A triple ($\rightarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow$) sequence of steps can contract to a single (\rightarrow) step.

A triple ($\rightleftharpoons \leftarrow \rightleftharpoons$) sequence of steps can contract to a single (\rightleftharpoons) step.

Contrariwise, as Tweedledee might say:¹²

A single (\leftarrow) step can expand to a triple ($\leftarrow \rightarrow \leftarrow$) sequence.

A single (\rightarrow) step can expand to a triple ($\rightarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow$) sequence.

A single (\rightleftharpoons) step can expand to a triple ($\rightleftharpoons \leftarrow \rightleftharpoons$) sequence.

Call this the expansion and contraction of steps.

Process of working

With the basic principles outlined above in mind,

1. Select a story to analyse.
2. Note the source version, where relevant.
3. Summarise the story in 'bare bones' form.
4. Note the story opening and closing, stated or implied.
5. Identify the main characters and their initial situation (who, when, where, and in what condition).
6. Identify the problem(s) which caused the story to emerge for each of these characters – these are typically resolved (but sometimes left unresolved) at the end of the story.
7. Identify the main structural parts of the story (beginning, middle, end, and any subsections).
8. Arrange the events related to each character's story line in chronological order.
9. Within these story lines, look for pairs of 'unfortunate'/'fortunate' steps which relate to the ebb and flow of the story structure. The terms 'unfortunate' and 'fortunate' are relative

to the solution of the character's initial problem. Ask yourself, 'Where does the tide of the story's flow change?' 'Which elements of the story flow forward and help the character on their journey towards solving their problem?' 'Which elements of the story relate to a reversal of the flow, that delay or distract a character on their journey?' Are there any outliers? Are there any single steps that don't fit into a pair? Note these. Analyse them. What do they point to?

10. Identify the quality of each element using the appropriate symbol:

Opening, Closing: Oscillatory Step (\square)

Character: Mark (\sqcap)

Forward step: Forward barb (\rightarrow)

Backward step: Backward barb (\leftarrow)

Meetings are always interpreted as backward steps in this approach to the analysis of story structure, as they stop the character in their tracks and delay or distract the character from continuing on their journey.

Trickster, Dupe, Comic, Transformational Twist, Trickster Awe steps: Double barb (\rightleftharpoons). These steps signify an interaction between two characters which involves a defeated expectation or cognitive dissonance of some kind.¹³

11. Can you condense ($\leftarrow \leftarrow$) or ($\leftarrow \rightarrow \leftarrow$), to (\leftarrow); ($\rightarrow \rightarrow$) or ($\rightarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow$) to (\rightarrow) and/or ($\rightleftharpoons \leftarrow \rightleftharpoons$) to (\rightleftharpoons) without losing essential information? If you can, then do.
12. Analyse the overarching structure of the entire story based on the dominant pattern which results, using the 18 story structures currently identified as a guide.
13. Note any questions or variations that result from your analysis when compared to the 18 story structures currently identified.

Application

For the purpose of demonstration, we'll be using the story of *The Gigantic Turnip*.¹⁴ It's a cumulative story in which the main

character (the grandfather, in Afanas'ev's version, analysed below) starts with a problem, goes through a sequence of events that, after many failed attempts, leads to him overcoming the hindrance that lies in the way, with the help of his family and friends, which results in his problem being solved. In the following analysis of his story line, each step is assigned an appropriate symbol.¹⁵

Analysis of the grandfather's story line in the story of *The Gigantic Turnip*

Steps	Symbols	Structure	Outline of content
1	□	Opening	[Implied]
2	┘	Initial situation	Grandfather planted a turnip.
3	←	Problem	When the time came to harvest it, he couldn't pull it up.
4	→	Journey	He called for help.
5	←	Meeting with ...	A character came over ...
6	→	... friend/helper	... and tried to help him harvest it, but the attempt failed. <i>Loop back to step 3 in a series featuring grandmother, granddaughter, a dog, five beetles.</i>
7	←	Meeting with ...	The fifth beetle, adding its strength to the cumulative build-up ...
8	→	... enemy/hindrance	... helped them pull up the turnip ...
9	┘	Final situation (outcome/resolution)	... enabling the grandfather to harvest it.
10	□	Closing	[Implied]

When the 'friend/helper' characters join the story, they're simply that – friends/helpers. As soon as their attempts to help fail, they share in the grandfather's problem and their story lines and his merge. The final iteration (relating to the fifth beetle) allows the story structure to resolve. The story structure is then revealed to be a standard Quest structure, outlined in full in chapter 5, the typical steps of which are shown in the column marked 'Structure' above.

Classification of story structures

(a) *Linear and Dynamic story structures*

16 story structures involve barbs in their notation – whether these relate to backward steps (\leftarrow), forward steps (\rightarrow), or steps involving a categorical cognitive dissonance of some kind, indicated by (\rightleftharpoons). All of these 16 story structures are Linear structures.

Two story structures start off, as the Linear structures do, with an opening step (\square) and a mark for the character (\sqcap). From there, an alternation between marked (\sqcap) and unmarked (\sqsupset) states unfolds, the number of such steps, and their qualities distinguishing the structures and giving them their individuality. These story structures are the Chinese Circular Structure and the Revelation structure. They're identified as Dynamic story structures. Dynamic story structures symbiotically underpin Linear story structures.

Call the Chinese Circular Structure and the Revelation structure Dynamic story structures. Call the remaining structures identified Linear story structures.¹⁶

Each step in the Chinese Circular Structure or Revelation structure relates to one or more steps in a Linear story structure. Steps in Dynamic story structures are notated using the following three symbols (\square), (\sqcap), (\sqsupset), which, in the context of Dynamic story structures, are used to denote the following:

Events	Symbols	As used by George Spencer-Brown	As used in this work
Oscillation	\square	Recursion or re-entry. Introduces time, memory and second-order equations.	In Dynamic story structures, the mark of oscillation symbolises a qualitative change in the relationship between knower and known. The change is from either a marked or an unmarked state to an oscillatory state.

Events	Symbols	As used by George Spencer-Brown	As used in this work
Marking	┌	Mark of indication. Performs a pointing function. Stands for the marked state.	In Dynamic story structures, the mark of indication symbolises a qualitative change in the relationship between knower and known. The change is from either an oscillatory or an unmarked state to a marked state. Elsewhere, I refer to this as a state which gives rise to a statement (the declarative mood).
Unmarking	┐	Mark of cancellation. Cancels a mark of indication, or stands for the unmarked state. Equivalent to the blank piece of paper on which it is written. In relation to the first distinction, it signifies 'nothing'; 'mystery'; the void from which, and in which, form emerges.	In Dynamic story structures, the mark of cancellation symbolises a qualitative change in the relationship between knower and known. The change is from either an oscillatory or a marked state to an unmarked state. Elsewhere, I refer to this as a state which gives rise to a wish or prayer (the optative mood).

(b) Threshold and Non-Threshold structures

The 18 story structures can be classified according to whether a character crosses a threshold between transcendent (metaphysical or supernatural) and immanent (physical) dimensions of being, with the Creation Myth structure straddling both:

Threshold structures	Non-Threshold structures
Transformation	Quest
Trickster Variation	Trickster
Death and Rebirth	Ki-Shō-Ten-Ketsu
Rags to Riches	Open-Ended Ki-Shō-Ten-Ketsu
Revelation	Dilemma
Call and Response (2 Variations)	Riddle
Chinese Circular Structure	Voyage and Return
Koan	Perpetual Motion

Threshold structures typically feature fairy godmothers, angels, demons, etc. It may be useful to distinguish between concepts and percepts here – we experience trees with our senses; we experience tree spirits with our mind ... until they cross a threshold and manifest in physical form. In the Creation Myth structure, both dimensions unite.

Linear story structures can also be classified according to (c) the quality of a character’s initial step and (d) the quality of the ending.

(c) Classification by initial step

The mark (丿) stands for a character in a particular time and place. It can be followed by any of the other 5 primary symbols used in the methodology:

□	丿	←	→	⇌
Revelation	The Chinese Story Structure	Quest Transformation Death & Rebirth Trickster Call and Response (2 Variations) Trickster Variation Dilemma Voyage & Return Perpetual Motion	Ki-Shō-Ten-Ketsu Open-Ended Ki-Shō-Ten-Ketsu Creation Myth	Riddle Koan

(d) Classification by endings

Closed	Open-Ended	No clear ending
Quest Transformation Rags to Riches Death and Rebirth Trickster Trickster Variation Call and Response (2 Variations) Ki-Shō-Ten-Ketsu Voyage and Return	Dilemma Open-Ended Ki-Shō-Ten-Ketsu Koan Riddle	Perpetual Motion Creation Myth

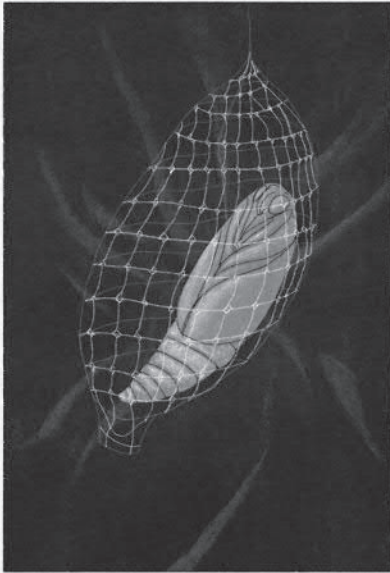
NOTES

- 1 James Keys, *Only Two Can Play This Game* (Bath: Cat Books, 1971), 37.
- 2 One exception is the Creation Myth structure, although this can be expressed as the first contraction and release that generate the heartbeat of all of the other story structures. Another could be the Chinese Circular Structure, which exhibits a similar contraction/expansion pattern – the ebb and flow of *qi*.
- 3 The principle is behind a game used in storytelling, improvised theatre, and theatre warm-up contexts. It has inspired two books: Remy Charlip, *Fortunately* (New York: Aladdin, 1993), and Michael Foreman, *Fortunately, Unfortunately* (Minneapolis, MN: Andersen, 2011). More recently, it has appeared as a ‘texting game’: Simon Hill, “The best texting games,” in *Digital Trends*. 15 July, 2019. <https://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/best-texting-games/>.
- 4 Abstract concepts are often personified as fictional characters; mathematical proofs are an example of stories which feature abstract propositions as characters.
- 5 The terms ‘unfortunate’/‘fortunate’ are intended as props to help bridge the gap of unfamiliarity with the symbolic methodology, to be swiftly discarded once familiarity with the methodology is acquired.
- 6 George Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969; Leipzig: Bohmeier Verlag, 2011), 3. Citations refer to the Bohmeier edition unless stated otherwise. In Spencer-Brown’s work, all acts (and thus marks) of distinction are taken to be tokens of the first distinction.
- 7 Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form*, 5.
- 8 Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form*, 7–10.
- 9 Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form*, 10. In Spencer-Brown’s work, the \Leftrightarrow is used this way, but is not expanded on further. It plays a key role in the analysis of story structure in this methodology.
- 10 Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form*, 53; Louis H Kauffman, “Laws of Form and Form Dynamics,” in *Cybernetics & Human Knowing* 9, no. 2 (2002): 49–63 at 58; André Reichel, “Snakes all the Way Down: Varela’s Calculus for Self-Reference and the Praxis of Paradise,” in *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 28, no. 6 (2011): 646–662, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.1105>. In conversations with me, Spencer-Brown referred to this as the ‘if’ function.
- 11 The dissonance relates to Aristotle’s 10 Categories of Being, summarised in chapter 9 of this work. See Aristotle, “The Categories,” translated by Harold

- P. Cooke, in *The Categories; On Interpretation*, translated by Harold P. Cooke and Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).
- 12 Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, illustrated by John Tenniel, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin, 2001), 180.
- 13 These are explained in detail in the main body of this work. See especially chapters 6, 12, 14, and 15.
- 14 My analysis is based on the version in Aleksandr Afanas'ev, *Russian Fairy Tales*, translated by Norbert Guterman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945), 26–27.
- 15 A step-by-step analysis of this story is outlined in a presentation I gave entitled “The Unknown Storyteller,” (PowerPoint presentation, LoF50, ‘Laws of Form’ 50th anniversary conference, Liverpool, 10 August, 2019), YouTube: GZJdlhG0z78.
- 16 A mapping of the links between Dynamic and Linear story structures can be found in chapter 18 and is explored further in Leon Conrad, “The Chinese Circular Structure,” 2 parts, unpublished manuscript, last modified 18 and 2 June 2020 respectively.

2

WHAT MAKES A STORY ... A STORY?



... the poignant question strikes a spark to the engine that ignites the heart. This starts up the energy of the story; it rolls the story forward. The mythic tale unfolds in response to that single igniting question.

CLARISSA ESTES, *What Does the Soul Want?*¹

When we come across something we think is different, something unusual, or something that makes us stop and ask questions, a story appears. Our ability to spot subtle changes in our environment—and our drive to make sense of these changes—are innate instincts on which the deeply embodied frameworks which story uses to story are fashioned.

Firstly, within the story spinner, a story emerges as a result of a causative spark. That spark shapes—and links—a chronological sequence of events. Without it, there can be no story.

Take this sequence of events, for example ... is it a story?

I woke up yesterday morning.
The sun was shining.
I had breakfast and went out.
I sat in the park.
I got hungry.
I went to the park café.
It started raining.
I had lunch.
It had stopped raining when I started my journey home.
I met Janet on the way.
We talked for a bit.
We parted.
I had a quiet supper at home.
I went to bed and slept through the night.

It could be a story – there's potential there, but at the moment, it's simply a sequence of events.

But what if those events were presented like this ... ?

I woke up yesterday morning and saw that the sun was shining, so I decided to have a quick breakfast and take a walk. I went where my feet led me and ended up sitting in the park around 12 o'clock, by which time I was hungry, so I walked over to the café by the lake. I'd just chosen something to eat when it started to pour down. Luckily, I was inside, so I avoided getting wet. It took a while for the rain to clear, and when it did, the world looked fresh and clean. The rain had given me an opportunity to focus on clearing my mind, sorting out some stuff, and I started home with a clearer head. It took me about half an hour to walk back. Just as I turned the corner into my road, I met Janet and stopped to chat with her. We talked for a bit – I found out about what had been going on with her and shared some of the stuff I'd been thinking about. It brought us closer together somehow. Then we parted. As I prepared a light supper at home, I reflected that I was better off for having shared something of my life with another human being and hoped that she felt the same. I think she might have. When my head hit my pillow that night, I ended up sleeping better than I'd slept for a long time.

Although it's definitely not Booker prizeworthy, the events in this version are woven together more meaningfully than they are in the first version. They hang together better. They're explicitly related both chronologically and causally rather than simply being listed chronologically. They open up more possibilities: What did the protagonist need to sort out? And why? ... Who was Janet? ... What was their relationship? ... Is romance likely? ... Why had the protagonist been sleeping poorly by comparison to how they slept after their day out? Is this just one story? Or are there many? You're the story spinner ... you get to decide. They're your stories. Story emerges in a general sense – not just the stories mentioned here, but all stories – because something sets off a sequence of events at

the level of story. Come across something unusual, or something that makes you stop and ask questions ... a story is born.

What ignites the process for one person may well be different to what ignites it for someone else. Nevertheless, the stories which flare up will usually be connected to some form of unresolved question or perceived state of imbalance. This book argues that stories exist for a purpose. They help us restore unrestricted flow. Stories help us bring things back to a state of balance. Through the power of story, stories help us realise the Oneness-of-Being.² Being is one, so logically, story facilitates the manifestation of a fully formed entity that unfolds step by step through time, yet is fundamentally unified.

Our relationship to this fundamental unity is supported by the coming together of three universal principles: truth, goodness, and beauty (harmony, or proportion) – an idea that goes at least back to Plato,³ who identified these as ‘goodness, symmetry, truth’.⁴ When we’re out of balance, story helps bring us back into balance. As we’ll see in the chapters on Comedy, Tragedy, and Riddles, story also depends on the embodied ways in which we make sense of the world around us, first categorised, as far as I know, by Aristotle, in the 4th century BCE.⁵

If Janet and the protagonist had failed to meet; if there’d been no mention of them being together, could the story of their evolving relationship ever be told? If the overriding questions are about who the protagonist is, what kind of person they are, or why they did what they did, the questions open up a back story for them, a story that begs to be told.

We’re predisposed to respond to our environment, and we respond in particular ways to imbalances in that environment. We can’t help responding to change. When an unresolved question is involved, a story invariably emerges ...

Imagine you’re in a familiar spot – the room you spent the most time in as a child, where you were happiest. Imagine that out of the corner of your eye, you see a shadow ... a shadow that shouldn’t be there ...

Hold that thought ... let it develop ...
 What happens?

Where did it happen?
 What's really happening?
 Is a story being set up?
 Probably.

So, what's setting up the story?

My guess is that it's not the shadow, but something else. Shadows are part of the environment, after all. Perhaps it's that a particular shadow *shouldn't be there*. The imbalance we perceive in relation to our environment sets up ... the story.

Stories are linked to perceived imbalances in our environment, and stories are ways of making sense of—and resolving—those imbalances.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle describes changes in state and perception (changes that flow naturally, or changes that involve reversal and recognition) which drive story forward.⁶ You might prefer to use terms such as 'inciting incidents', 'problems', 'mythic questions', or 'conflicts' – the essence is the same. Flow and balance are essential to story. They go back to the birth of story, well before the first written theories on how story works appeared, and well before 'problems' emerged.

Stories are set up as a result of imbalances which can manifest in several forms.

That shadow that appeared as an imbalance because it shouldn't be there is one kind of imbalance. It shouldn't be there, but it is. Defeated expectation stops us in our tracks; it 'blocks flow'.

But what about this?

Imagine that you're just about to walk into a place that's very familiar to you. As you enter, you notice that a particular piece of furniture is missing.

It should be there, but it isn't. Or is it the other way round?

Is it that there should be an absence of a shadow in that particular place in the first of these two scenarios, but there isn't? And is it that there shouldn't be an absence of that piece of furniture in the second one, but there is?

Is—Isn't—Is—Isn't—It could be thought of as rather agonising, couldn't it?

I'd be hard pressed to think of any other way to frame an imbalance – either we feel something should be and it isn't, or it shouldn't be and it is. Either way, the flow is blocked; the block is unhelpful because flow is necessary.

So how can flow be restored?

Should we try to solve problems? Or give up hopelessly? Should we find someone or something that can help? If so, then who or what can help put things right? How can we know what the right thing to do is? How can we find the best way to solve a problem? Can we ever?

I could ask: What makes the difference? What sets up these responses? Story happens because these responses emerge. Without the responses, we wouldn't have story, but we do – and one of the clues to understanding how story works can be found embedded deep in the story of how story is born ...

NOTES

- 1 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, xlviii.
- 2 The thesis that as all things participate in Being, in that sense, they are all paradoxically ‘one and the same’ can be traced at least as far back as Parmenides, if not earlier, and onwards through Plato and Aristotle. It is central to Spencer-Brown’s work.

For references, see Parmenides’ “Fragment 8”: ‘A single story of a route still / Is left: that [*it*] is; on this [route] there are signs / Very numerous: that what-is is ungenerated and imperishable; / Whole, single-limbed, steadfast, and complete,’ in Parmenides of Elea, *Fragments*, translated by David Gallop (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 64–75, at 8.1–4, 64.

Plato describes three states of Being united as one – ‘the Being which is indivisible and remains always the same and the Being which is transient and divisible in bodies’ and a compound, all blended together ‘into one form’: *Timaeus*, 35a, from *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9, translated by W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann Ltd. 1925), <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0180:text=Tim.:section=35a>.

For Aristotle, ‘Unity is nothing distinct from Being.’ *The Metaphysics*, translated by Hugh Tredennick, Vol. 1. (London: W. Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1933) 4.1003b, 150–151.

On ‘The Oneness-of-Being’ (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) in the Sufi tradition, see René Guénon, *The Essential René Guénon: Metaphysics, Tradition, and the Crisis of Modernity*, edited by Ed Herlihy (Bloomington, IA: World Wisdom, 2009), 125–126; Seyyed Hosein Nasr, “Scientia Sacra,” in *The Underlying Religion: An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy*, edited by Martin Lings and Clinton Minnaar, 114–140 (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), 120n13; and Muhammad Ali Aziz, *Religion and Mysticism in Early Islam: Theology and Sufism in Yemen. The Legacy of Ahmad Ibn Alwān* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 69.

- 3 Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, translated by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991). Truth and measure are covered at 6.486d, 166; exemplary philosophic practice is defined as integrating being, truth, goodness, and the ability to apprehend the harmony or relationship between them at 6.501d, 181; truth and goodness (with knowledge of them implying harmony) at 6.508d, 188–189. See also Seth Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing: On Plato’s “Republic”* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 157–177.

In his book *On the Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius, in the late 5th or early 6th century CE, drawing on revelation 'from the Oracles' and on inspiration from philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, lists among his names for the Nameless: Being, One, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty: Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, translated by Clarence Edwin Rolt (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1920), <https://archive.org/details/dionysiusareopag00dion/page/n5> at 1.5–6, 59–62; 2.11, 78–81; 3.1, 81–83; and 5.1, 131–132 respectively. He discusses the Platonic link between the Universals (in his terms, the 'divine names') and light in chapter 4, 86–130.

- 4 Plato, *Philebus*, from *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 8, translated by Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, W. Heinemann Ltd. 1925), 64e–65a and ff, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0174:text=Phileb.:section=64e>. See also Plato's *Seventh Letter*, in Hans Joachim Krämer, *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics: A Work on the Theory of the Principles and Unwritten Doctrines of Plato with a Collection of the Fundamental Documents*, edited and translated by John R. Catan (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 342d, 196 and Plato, *Symposium*, from *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 3 translated by W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1925), Diotima's speech, 205e ff, especially 210e–212a, where the discourse soars from the physical realm, through the metaphysical realm to transcend both. Symmetry is variously translated as proportion, harmony, balance, or beauty, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0174:text=Sym.:section=205e>.
- 5 Aristotle's 10 Categories of Being are summarised in chapter 9 of this work. See Aristotle, "The Categories," translated by Harold P. Cooke, in *The Categories; On Interpretation*, translated by Harold P. Cooke and Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 1–111, and especially at 4.1b25–1b26, 16–19.
- 6 *Aristotle: On Poetics*, translated by Seth Bernardete and Michael Davis (South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press, 2002) 1452a, 29.