THE *Literary* Mind

MARK TURNER

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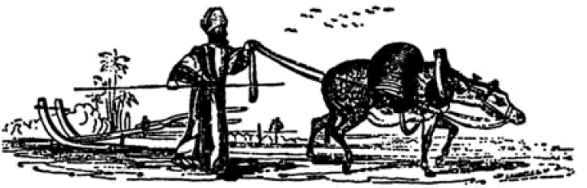
BEDTIME WITH SHAHRAZAD



THERE WAS ONCE a wealthy farmer who owned many herds of cattle. He knew the languages of beasts and birds. In one of his stalls he kept an ox and a donkey. At the end of each day, the ox came to the place where the donkey was tied and found it well swept and watered; the manger filled with sifted straw and well-winnowed barley; and the donkey lying at his ease, for the master seldom rode him.

It chanced that one day the farmer heard the ox say to the donkey: "How fortunate you are! I am worn out with toil, while you rest here in comfort. You eat well-sifted barley and lack nothing. It is only occasionally that your master rides you. As for me, my life is perpetual drudgery at the plough and the millstone."

The donkey answered: "When you go out into the field and the yoke is placed upon your neck, pretend to be ill and drop down on your belly. Do not rise even if they beat you; or if you do rise, lie down again. When they take you back and place the fodder before you, do not eat it. Abstain for a day or two; and thus shall you find a rest from toil."

Remember that the farmer was there and heard what passed between them.

And so when the ploughman came to the ox with his fodder, he ate scarcely any of it. And when the ploughman came the following morning to take him out into the field, the ox appeared to be far from well. Then the farmer said to the ploughman: "Take the donkey and use him at the plough all day!"

With this story, the vizier, counselor to the great Sassanid king, Shahriyar, begins to advise his daughter. The vizier's daughter is Shahrazad, known to us

as the gifted and erotic storyteller of the thousand and one nights, whose genius and beauty will make her famous. But at the moment, she has told no tales. She has not offered herself to Shahriyar as a wife or given him any of the multiple pleasures of her bed. She is merely the vizier's daughter, and her father would like to keep it that way. For the last three years, it has been his grim daily task to execute Shahriyar's queen of the day before and procure for him another virgin.

The trouble began when Shahriyar discovered that his first wife was unfaithful. In sorrow, he abandoned his throne to roam the world. He unwillingly became involved in a distasteful episode that convinced him that no woman can be trusted. He returned to his kingdom, ordered his wife to be slain, and redefined "married life."

The situation in the kingdom is very bad; rebellion is simmering, and the vizier is running out of virgins. Shahrazad offers herself as the next bride, but not as the next victim. She is far too well bred ever to place her father in the awkward position of having to execute his own child. Instead, she will marry King Shahriyar and by telling him marvelous stories free him of the need to behead each morning the woman he had taken as his virgin bride the preceding afternoon. Her hope is to begin once again the daily royal wedding tale, but this time to replace its local, twisted finish with the more common and traditional ending.

Her image of her wedding night is unusual, in keeping with her circumstances: After sex with the king, she will begin a story, supposedly for her younger sister Dinarzad, but really meant for the king's ears. She will time its climax to be interrupted by the breaking of dawn so that the king, to hear the rest of the story, will have to postpone her execution by a day. She hopes to repeat this trick for as many days as it takes. Some of her stories will be veiled parables. Some will carry King Shahriyar beyond his bleak interior landscape. Some will be symbols of what could be. All will have an amazing and wonderful surface.

The vizier fears that his daughter will merely suffer. True to his character and to his role, he does not say so directly, but instead tells her a story of a donkey who, proud of his intelligence, schemes to trick the master of the farm into excusing the sweet, simple ox from labor. The scheme works, but not as the donkey expected. The wealthy farmer orders the donkey driven into the field to work in the ox's place.

In using a story to warn Shahrazad, the vizier engages in narrative imagining, a form of thinking before acting. In trying to change her mind through story, he unwittingly endorses the very strategy he asks her to reject—to try to change the king's mind through stories.

Narrative imagining—story—is the fundamental instrument of thought. Rational capacities depend upon it. It is our chief means of looking into the

future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining. It is a literary capacity indispensable to human cognition generally. This is the first way in which the mind is essentially literary.

The vizier asks Shahrazad to think before acting by imagining a story and then evaluating it. He traces the consequence of her action forward to disaster, implying that Shahrazad should abandon her plan. In doing so, he puts to domestic use a fundamental cognitive activity: story.

But there is something odd here. The vizier does not say, "Look, daughter, this is your current situation: You are comfortable, so comfortable that you have the leisure to get interested in other people's problems. But if you keep this up, you will end in pain." Instead, he says, "Once upon a time there was a comfortable donkey who got interested in the problems of the ox. The donkey, who thought he was the sharpest thing ever, gave some clever advice to the dullard ox. It worked amazingly well, at least for the ox, but it had unfortunate consequences for the donkey. Before you know it, the ox was lolling about in the hay of contentment while the donkey was sweating and groaning at the ox's labor."

The vizier presents one story that projects to another story whose principal character is Shahrazad. We, and Shahrazad, are to understand the possible future story of Shahrazad by projecting onto it the story of the ox and the donkey. The punch line is that Shahrazad is the donkey. This projection of one story onto another may seem exotic and literary, and it is—but it is also, like story, a fundamental instrument of the mind. Rational capacities depend upon it. It is a literary capacity indispensable to human cognition generally. This is the second way in which the human mind is essentially literary.

One special kind of literature, parable, conveniently combines story and projection. Parable serves as a laboratory where great things are condensed in a small space. To understand parable is to understand root capacities of the everyday mind, and conversely.

Parable begins with narrative imagining—the understanding of a complex of objects, events, and actors as organized by our knowledge of *story*. It then combines story with projection: one story is projected onto another. The essence of parable is its intricate combining of two of our basic forms of knowledge—story and projection. This classic combination produces one of our keenest mental processes for constructing meaning. The evolution of the genre of parable is thus neither accidental nor exclusively literary: it follows inevitably from the nature of our conceptual systems. The motivations for parable are as strong as the motivations for color vision or sentence structure or the ability to hit a distant object with a stone.

Literary parables are only one artifact of the mental process of parable. Proverbs frequently present a condensed, implicit story to be interpreted through

projection: "When the cat's away, the mice will play," "Once burned, twice shy," "A poor workman blames his tools," "Don't get between a dog and his bone." In cases like these, the target story—the story we are to understand—is not even mentioned overtly, but through our agile capacity to use both story and projection, we project the overt source story onto a covert target story. "When the cat's away, the mice will play," said at the office, can be projected onto a story of boss and workers. Said in the classroom, it can be projected onto a story of teacher and students. Said of sexual relationships, it can be projected onto a story of infidelity. With equal ease, we can project it onto stories of a congressional oversight committee and the industries regulated by that committee, a police force and the local thieves, or a computer security device and the computer viruses it was intended to control. If we find "When the cat's away, the mice will play" out of context, in a book of proverbs or in a fortune cookie, we can project it onto an abstract story that might cover a great range of specific target stories and muse over the possible targets to which it might apply. "Look before you leap" similarly suggests an abstract story that applies to indefinitely many target stories.

The ease with which we interpret statements and construct meanings in this fashion is absolutely misleading: we feel as if we are doing no work at all. It is like listening to a speaker of English utter scores of syllables a minute: We use complicated unconscious knowledge to understand the speech but feel as if we are passive, as if we merely listen while the understanding happens by magic. With parables and proverbs, just as with language itself, we must see past our apparent ease of understanding if we are to locate the intricate unconscious work involved in arriving at these interpretations.

To study mind, we must become comfortable with the fact that mind generally does not work the way it appears to. This sounds paradoxical. We expect our introspective sense of mind to serve as a reasonable guide to the actual nature of mind. We expect it to give us a loose picture that, once enhanced by science, will represent the workings of mind. But it is instead badly deceptive. Our loose picture of mind is a loose fantasy. Consciousness is a wonderful instrument for helping us to focus, to make certain kinds of decisions and discriminations, and to create certain kinds of memories, but it is a liar about mind. It shamelessly represents itself as comprehensive and all-governing, when in fact the real work is often done elsewhere, in ways too fast and too smart and too effective for slow, stupid, unreliable consciousness to do more than glimpse, dream of, and envy.

Fables like Aesop's, cautionary tales like the vizier's to his daughter Shahrazad, veiled indictments like the one the prophet Nathan delivers to King David in 2 Samuel 12:1-7 ("You are the man"), epithets like "wing-footed Hermes," conceits in metaphysical poetry, and extended allegories like *Everyman* or *Pilgrim's Progress* or the *Divine Comedy* all consist of the combination of story

and projection. Even stories exceptionally specific in their setting, character, and dialogue submit to projection. Often a short story will contain no overt mark that it stands for anything but what it purports to represent, and yet we will interpret it as projecting to a much larger abstract narrative, one that applies to our own specific lives, however far our lives are removed from the detail of the story. Such an emblematic story, however unyieldingly specific in its references, can seem pregnant with general meaning.

The projection of story operates throughout everyday life and throughout the most elite and sacred literature. Literary critics, observing it at work in exceptional literary inventions such as the *Faerie Queene* or *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* or *Through the Looking Glass* or *The Wasteland*, have from time to time proposed that these spectacular inventions are not essentially exotic, but rather represent the carefully worked products of a fundamental mode of thought that is universal and indispensable. Parable—defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the expression of one story through another—has seemed to literary critics to belong not merely to expression and not exclusively to literature, but rather, as C. S. Lewis observed in 1936, *to mind in general.* If we want to study the everyday mind, we can begin by turning to the literary mind exactly because the everyday mind is essentially literary.

Parable is today understood as a certain kind of exotic and inventive literary story, a subcategory within the special worlds of fiction. The original Greek word—παραβολή (*parabole*), from the verb παραβάλλειν (*paraballein*)—had a much wider, schematic meaning: the tossing or projecting of one thing alongside another. The Greek word could be used of placing one thing against another, staking one thing to another, even tossing fodder beside a horse, tossing dice alongside each other, or turning one's eyes to the side. In these meanings, παραβάλλειν is the equivalent of Latin *projicere*, from which we get the English "to project" and "projection."

I will use the word *parable* more narrowly than its Greek root but much more widely than the common English term: *Parable is the projection of story.* Parable, defined this way, refers to a general and indispensable instrument of everyday thought that shows up everywhere, from telling time to reading Proust. I use the word *parable* in this unconventional way to draw attention to a misconception I hope to correct, that the everyday mind has little to do with literature. Although literary texts may be special, the instruments of thought used to invent and interpret them are basic to everyday thought. Written works called narratives or stories may be shelved in a special section of the bookstore, but the mental instrument I call narrative or story is basic to human thinking. Literary works known as parables may reside within fiction, but the mental instrument I call parable has the widest utility in the everyday mind.

We can learn a surprising amount about story, projection, and parable in everyday life by considering for a moment the fictional lives of the fictional vizier and Shahrazad. The vizier is in a terrible position, on the edge of dealing with his daughter's life or death, the complex mind of his king, and the fate of his country. He is called on to foresee, a basic human mental activity, and he is supposedly the national master at foresight. He is the vizier. He has had unparalleled experience in crucial foresight when there is no second chance. He is fully exposed in his roles as both father and adviser. A failure at this moment will destroy absolutely everything. He turns, naturally, to the most powerful and basic instruments he possesses: story and projection. His motivation is absolute, since he knows that to succeed at her scheme, Shahrazad will have to outperform him at his own professional practice her first time out, under conditions more unfamiliar and dramatic than anything that has accompanied his own feats of forethought and persuasion. Yet the contest is unequal: She is a rank novice while he is the reigning grand master.

Shahrazad sees everything at stake, too, but from a different viewpoint: It is her country, her king, her father, her sisters (literally and figuratively), and sooner or later, no doubt, her own virginity and life, whether she volunteers them or not. It is also, potentially, in narrative imagination, her marriage, her children, her future, her genius, her life story. A failure will destroy absolutely everything. She too turns naturally to the most powerful and basic instruments she possesses: story and projection. These are the powers of mind she will live by, not only in the drama of her execution or reprieve, but also in the minute details of her storytelling nights.

It is a recurrent tale: The cautious parent sees all the danger while the adventurous child sees all the opportunity. They stand in conflict at just that moment in their lives when the parent's power is ebbing and the child's capacity is rising. The child, of course, will have her way. Her father must step back into the condition of hope. Shahrazad has always been in his hands. Now he will be in hers. In this story, repeated in every generation, the child is confident and ambivalently thrilled at the prospect of having her capacity put to the test in action, to see whether she can succeed where her parent has failed, while the parent is nearly overcome with fear yet sustained by the secret thought that if anyone can do it, it's his kid.

I imagine Shahrazad at this moment as prescient, knowing just how good she is and just what powers and opportunities she possesses that are beyond her father's capacity to imagine. Her presentiment comes from her own use of foresight through narrative imagining. But not even she, for all her looking into the future, can know that her performance during the next thousand and one nights will bring her a reputation as the greatest literary mind ever. Along with that

other fictional author, the Homer of the *Odyssey*, she will become a paragon of human imaginative superiority.

If Shahrazad and the vizier could know of her fame down to our age, it would probably mean less to them than would its implication that her daring idea succeeds, which further implies that tomorrow morning her head will not fall beneath her father's sword. She will live, not happily ever after—this is an adult story—but for the appropriate temporal space of risk and terror, intimacy and pleasure, until she and Shahriyar are visited by the Destroyer of all earthly pleasures, the Leveler of kings and peasants, the Annihilator of women and men.

The story of Shahrazad presents to us in miniature the mental patterns of parable:

Prediction. The vizier imagines the consequences of an event, namely the story that follows the donkey's intrusion into the affairs of the ox and the farmer. By projection, he is at the same time imagining the story that would follow Shahrazad's proposed intrusion into the affairs of the virgins and Shahriyar. Narrative imagining is prediction.

Evaluation. If the event whose consequences we imagine is an intentional act, we can evaluate the wisdom of that act by evaluating those consequences. The vizier not only predicts the consequences of Shahrazad's proposed intrusion, he thereby evaluates its wisdom. Narrative imagining is evaluation.

Planning. Shahrazad imagines a goal: to stop Shahriyar. She intends to "succeed in saving the people or perish and die like the rest." It so happens that she has a second goal: to establish a sound marriage with King Shahriyar. It is convenient that achieving the second goal automatically achieves the first. She constructs in imagination a narrative path of action that leads from the present situation to the sound marriage. This story is her plan. Narrative imagining is planning.

Explanation. We often need to explain how something "came about." We appear to do this by constructing a narrative path from a prior understood state to the state we need to explain. Shahrazad's plan to change Shahriyar depends upon a prior explanation, of how Shahriyar the happily married king became Shahriyar the destroyer of women. This explanation consists of the narrative that starts with Shahriyar the happily married king and ends with Shahriyar the destroyer of women. Narrative imagining is explanation.

Objects and events. We recognize small stories as involving objects and events. This raises a problem: The world does not come to us with category labels—"This is an object," "This is an event." How do we form conceptual categories of objects and events?

Actors. We recognize certain objects in stories as actors. This raises another problem: The world does not come labeled with little category signs that say "This is an actor." How do we form conceptual categories of actors?

Stories. We recognize stories as complex dynamic integrations of objects, actors, and events. But again, we do not recognize each story as wholly unique. Instead, we know abstract stories that apply to ranges of specific situations. How do we form conceptual categories of stories?

Projection. The tale of the ox and the donkey, in which the donkey helps the ox but then suffers in the ox's place, is offered as a source tale to be projected onto the story of what will happen should Shahrazad be foolish enough to try to help the suffering virgins. The power of this projection is obvious, but how it works is a mystery. How do we project one story onto another? What is the cognitive mechanism of parable?

Metonymy. In the tale of the ox and the donkey, the sifted straw is metonymic for luxury—that is, it stands for luxury—and the plough and the millstone are metonymic for labor and suffering. We know this without conscious evaluation. We know, for example, not to take the sifted straw as metonymic for yellow things, or the plough and millstone as metonymic for man-made artifacts. This seems obvious and even automatic, but how we make metonymic associations is mysterious.

Emblem. The vizier and his daughter stand as emblems or instances of parent and child; their conflict stands as an emblem or instance of generational conflict. What is an emblematic narrative?

Image schemas. When we think of one thing, for example, the donkey's pride and nosiness, as "leading to" another, such as his suffering, we are thinking image-schematically. This particular image schema—"leading to"—is basic to story. It consists of movement along a directed path. The points on the path correspond to stages of the story: We say, "What point have we reached in the story?" The "path" of the story "leads from" its "beginning" "to" its "end." What are image schemas and what are their roles in the literary mind?

Counterparts in imaginative domains. The vizier, in warning his daughter, has a mental model of the present. He imaginatively blends it with a hypothetical scenario in which Shahrazad goes to Shahriyar. Mentally, he develops that blend into a robust picture of a hypothetical future. These two narrative mental spaces, of the vizier's present reality and the hypothetical future, are separated in time and in potential. But there are conceptual connections between them as well as differences. In the mental space of the present, the role of vizier's elder daughter and the role of Shahriyar's wife do not have the same inhabitant. But in the mental space of the hypothetical future, they do, which is to say, the vizier is imagining a future in which the person who happens to inhabit the role of vizier's elder

daughter also happens to inhabit the role of Shahriyar's (temporary) wife. The vizier, expressing these connections, could say, "If you marry Shahriyar, I will have to kill you," and we would know that the cause of the killing would not be his anger at his daughter for having disobeyed him but instead his obligation as vizier to execute whoever inhabits the role of Shahriyar's wife. We understand these mental space connections as well as the vizier, instantly, despite their complexity. If Shahrazad were to say, "If I marry Shahriyar, you will be surprised; you will be grandfather to the next king," we as well as the vizier would know immediately the connections between Shahrazad's mental space of the present and her mental space of the future. Constructing these mental space connections is amazingly literary and complicated. Shahrazad's mental space of the future, for example, includes a father who remembers his previous mental space of the future and who knows that it does not accord with his mental space of the present reality in the way it was supposed to. How do we construct narrative mental spaces and establish such connections between them?

Conceptual Blending. The ox and the donkey talk. Talking animals are so common in stories as to seem natural. Why do they arise in imagination and why should they seem natural? This apparently idle question turns out to be both essential to the investigation of mind and profoundly difficult to answer. Conceptual blending—in this case, the blending of talking people with mute animals to produce talking animals—is a basic process of thought. How does it work? What is its range?

Language. The parable of the ox and the donkey is expressed in language. Where does the structure of our language "come from" and what is its relation to parable?

We imagine realities and construct meanings. The everyday mind performs these feats by means of mental processes that are literary and that have always been judged to be literary. Cultural meanings peculiar to a society often fail to migrate intact across anthropological or historical boundaries, but the basic mental processes that make these meanings possible are universal. Parable is one of them.

2

HUMAN MEANING

Hamlet: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?
Polonius: By th'mass, and 'tis like a camel indeed.
Hamlet: Methinks it is like a weasel.
Polonius: It is backed like a weasel.
Hamlet: Or like a whale.
Polonius: Very like a whale.

William Shakespeare, Hamlet

IN THE TALE of the ox and the donkey, it is easy to see that we are dealing with *story*, *projection*, and *parable*. It is harder to see these capacities at work in everyday life, but we always use them. The rest of this book explores how the human mind is always at work constructing small stories and projecting them.

Story, projection, and parable do work for us; they make everyday life possible; they are the root of human thought; they are not primarily—or even importantly—entertainment. To be sure, the kinds of stories we are apt to notice draw attention to their status as the product of storytelling, and they often have an entertaining side. We might therefore think that storytelling is a special performance rather than a constant mental activity. But story as a mental activity is essential to human thought. The kinds of stories that are most essential to human thought produce experience that is completely absorbing, but we rarely notice those stories themselves or the way they work because they are always present.

This conjunction of what is absorbing but unnoticed is not as weird as it sounds. Human vision, for example, produces content that is always psychologically absorbing to everyone—we are absorbed in our visual field, no matter what it contains—but only a neurobiologist is likely to notice the constant mechanisms of vision that create our visual field. What everyone notices are some exceptional

products of vision: A fireworks display seems more interesting than an empty parking lot, even though vision uses the same mechanisms to see both of them. We almost never notice the activity of vision or think of vision as an activity, but if we do, we must recognize that the activity of vision is constant and more important than anything we may happen to see.

Story as a mental activity is similarly constant yet unnoticed, and more important than any particular story. In the next three chapters, we will analyze some very basic abstract stories and some very basic patterns of their projection. We will find that the same basic mechanisms of parable underlie a great range of examples, from the everyday to the literary.

The basic stories we know best are small stories of events in space: The wind blows clouds through the sky, a child throws a rock, a mother pours milk into a glass, a whale swims through the water. These stories constitute our world and they are completely absorbing—we cannot resist watching the volley of the tennis ball. Our adult experience actually revolves around pouring the drink into the cup, carrying it, watching the bird soar, watching the plane descend, tracking the small stick as the stream carries it away.

As subjects of our prolonged conscious investigation, however, these small spatial stories may seem hopelessly boring. We are highly interested in our coherent personal experiences, which are the product of thinking with small spatial stories, but we are not interested in the small spatial stories themselves. When someone says, "Tell me a story," he means something unusual and interesting. *King Lear* is a "story"; *Peter Rabbit* is a "story." Someone pouring coffee into a cup is not a "story." Why waste time thinking about a human being pouring liquid into a container? This small spatial story takes place billions of times a day, all over the world, with numbing repetition. No one who pours the liquid thinks it is an interesting story; what is the point?

We must adopt a scientific perspective to see why something we already know how to do without effort or conscious attention can pose an extremely difficult and important scientific puzzle. The capacity for recognizing and executing small spatial stories is—like the capacity to speak, to see color, or to distinguish sounds—an obvious and deceptively easy capacity. In fact, it presents the chief puzzle of cognitive science. How can five billion different human beings all recognize and execute small spatial stories?

Even the most boring person can do it, so we have a hard time imagining that the capacity can be interesting. We devalue it as we devalue any plentiful resource. Since it is universal instead of scarce, the calculus of supply and demand must fix its price at zero. But it is actually worth whatever it is worth to be a human being because if you do not have this capacity, you do not have a human mind.

These small stories are what a human being has instead of chaotic experience. We know how they go. They are the knowledge that goes unnoticed but makes life possible. We do not need to worry about our movements or our interaction with the world because we have absolute confidence in these stories. They are so essential to life that our mastery of them must be almost entirely unconscious; from a biological point of view, we cannot be trusted to run them consciously. In important moments, we had better not notice them, just as we had better not notice mechanisms of vision while we are fleeing a predator. We have in fact no practical need to analyze them. Biologically, they must be *unproblematic*, making them seem intellectually boring. But they become intellectually interesting the moment we lack them.

These stories are inventions. They are essential, but they are invented. This conjunction of adjectives may seem paradoxical if we think of essential things (like a heartbeat) as compulsory or necessary and invented things (like a light bulb) as optional. In that way of thinking, what is essential and what is invented must be contraries. But although these small spatial stories are inventive constructions of the human mind, they are not optional. The necessary biology and the necessary experience of any normal human infant inevitably produce a capacity for story in the infant. It is not possible for a human infant to fail to achieve the concept of a container, for example, or liquid, or pouring, or flowing, or a path, or movement along a path, or the product of these concepts: the small spatial story in which liquid is poured and flows along a path into a container. Our core indispensable stories not only can be invented, they must be invented if we are to survive and have human lives.

We can see their status as inventions by contrasting them with alternative representations of the world. When we watch someone sitting down into a chair, we see what physics cannot recognize: an animate agent performing an intentional act involving basic human-scale categories of events like *sitting* and objects like *chair*. But physics offers a representation of the world that leaves out agency, motive, intentionality, and a range of structure that is part of the conceptual equipment of everyone, including physicists. The basic elements of physics are not tied to the human scale; *sitting* and *chair* are elements of story but not elements of physics. The fundamental units of physics exist at levels that are foreign to us—subatomic quarks, metrics of space-time, integrations from zero to infinity. Where physics offers an impenetrable but accurate physical description in the form of a wave equation, story offers Einstein sitting in a chair.

In our small stories, we distinguish objects from events, objects from other objects, and events from other events. We categorize some objects as belonging

to the category *person* and other objects as belonging to the category *chair*. We recognize what a person does with a chair as belonging to the category *sitting*.

We understand our experience in this way because we are built evolutionarily to learn to distinguish objects and events and combine them in small spatial stories at human scale in a way that is useful for us, given that we have human bodies. This is what the human brain does best, although a divine intelligence with a God's-eye view might have no use for the human concepts *object* and *event*, no use for human perceptual categories of kinds of objects and events, and no use for small spatial stories.

There is a general story to human existence: It is the story of how we use story, projection, and parable to think, beginning at the level of small spatial stories. Yet this level, although fully inventive, is so unproblematic in our experience and so necessary to our existence that it is left out of account as precultural, even though it is the core of culture. When it is left out of account, the human condition can appear to have no general story. As Clifford Geertz has observed,

> It is necessary then to be satisfied with swirls, confluxions, and inconstant connections; clouds collecting, clouds dispersing. There is no general story to be told, no synoptic picture to be had. Or if there is, no one, certainly no one wandering into the middle of them like Fabrice at Waterloo, is in a position to construct them, neither at the time nor later. What we can construct, if we keep notes and survive, are hindsight accounts of the connectedness of things that seem to have happened: pieced-together patternings, after the fact.

But Geertz's claim that there is no general story is itself a general story not of what we know but of how we know, and his story is possible only because there is already in place, behind it, a general story about human thought. The general story is that human beings construct small spatial stories and project them parabolically. Geertz's story depends upon this general story: Like Hamlet and Polonius, he gives us small spatial stories in which we recognize clouds that collect or disperse, shapes that we assign to categories of objects, pieces that we put together, liquids or gases that swirl and flow together, vistas that we see, and so on; and he encourages us to use the mental process of parable to project these small spatial stories we know and must know since we are human onto the story of human culture and knowledge. His description of the absence of a general story begins with small spatial stories and projects them parabolically onto stories of human thought. Its compelling use of story, projection, and parable demonstrates the general story of the human condition—a story whose existence it denies.

IMAGE SCHEMAS

How do we recognize objects, events, and stories? Part of the answer has to do with "image schemas." Mark Johnson and Leonard Talmy—followed more recently by Claudia Brugman, Eve Sweetser, George Lakoff, Ronald Langacker, me, and many others—have analyzed linguistic evidence for the existence of image schemas. Image schemas are skeletal patterns that recur in our sensory and motor experience. *Motion along a path*, *bounded interior*, *balance*, and *symmetry* are typical image schemas.

Consider the image schema *container*. Like all image schemas, it is minimal. It has three parts: an interior, an exterior, and a boundary that separates them. We experience many things as containers: a bottle, a bag, a cup, a car, a mountain valley, rooms, houses, cupboards, boxes, chests, and drawers. Two of our most important containers are our heads and our bodies.

We use the image schema *motion along a path* to recognize locomotion by people, hands reaching out to us, our own hand reaching out, a ball rolling, milk pouring into a cup.

Simple image schemas can combine to form complex image schemas. For example, the *goal* of the *path* can be the *interior* of a *container*. This combination produces the complex image schema *into*. Alternatively, the *source* of the *path* can be the *interior* of a *container*, producing the complex image schema *out of*. The *path* can intersect a *container*, producing the complex image schema *through*.

There are many other image schemas we use to structure our experience, and thereby to recognize objects and events and place them in categories. Leonard Talmy originally analyzed image schemas of force dynamics such as *pushing*, *pulling*, *resisting*, *yielding*, and *releasing*. Other dynamic image schemas include *dipping*, *rising*, *climbing*, *pouring*, and *falling*.

Image schemas arise from perception but also from interaction. We *perceive* milk flowing into a glass; we *interact* with it flowing into our bodies. We recognize a category connection between one door and another, one chair and another, one ball and another, one rock and another, one event of *pouring* and another not only because they share image schemas of shape or part-whole structure, but also because our image schemas for interacting with them are the same. Our image schemas for *interacting* with an object or an event must be consistent with our image schemas for *perceiving* it if perception is to provide a basis for action.

To recognize several events as structured by the same image schema is to recognize a category. We have a neurobiological pattern for throwing a small object. This pattern underlies the individual event of throwing a rock and helps us create the category *throwing*. We have a neurobiological pattern for reaching

out and picking something up. This pattern underlies an individual event of reaching out and picking something up and helps us create the category *reaching out and picking up.*

Every time such a pattern becomes active it is slightly different. If we think of how often we reach out to pick up a glass and under what different conditions the event takes place, we see how varied the actual event is in its exact details each time it occurs. Our bodies are at slightly different orientations to the glass; the glass is slightly nearer or farther away; the glass sits on a slightly different surface; there may be obstructions to be avoided; the glass has a slightly different shape or weight or texture. We recognize all of the individual events of picking up a glass as belonging to one category in part because they all share a skeletal complex image schema of dynamic interaction.

Partitioning the world into objects involves partitioning the world into small spatial stories because our recognition of objects depends on the characteristic stories in which they appear: We catch a ball, throw a rock, sit in a chair, pet a dog, take a drink from a glass of water.

PROJECTING IMAGE SCHEMAS

Parable often projects image schemas. When the projection carries structure from a "source" we understand to a "target" we want to understand, the projection conforms to a constraint: The result for the target shall not be a conflict of image schemas.

For example, when we map one rich image onto another, the (relevant) image schemas of source and target end up aligned in certain ways. It may seem obvious when we say someone's head is hanging like a wilted flower, or when Auden describes a solitary man weeping on a bench and "Hanging his head down, with his mouth distorted, / Helpless and ugly as an embryo chicken," that the verticality schemas in the source images (flower and chicken) and target image (human head) should align. It may seem equally obvious that part-whole relationships in source and target images should align, that a bounded interior should project to a bounded interior, that directionality of gaze should correspond in source and target, that relationships of adjacency should correspond, and so on. But in fact it is not at all obvious, however natural it seems. The specific details of the rich images need not correspond, but the relevant image schemas are lined up.

When we project one concept onto another, image schemas again seem to do much of the work. For example, when we project spatiality onto temporality, we project image schemas; we think of time itself, which has no spatial shape, as

having a spatial shape—linear, for example, or circular. We like to think of events in time, which also have no spatial shape, as having features of spatial shapes—continuity, extension, discreteness, completion, open-endedness, circularity, part-whole relations, and so on. This way of conceiving of time and of events in time arises by projecting skeletal image schemas from *space* onto *time*.

We think of causal relations as structured by spatial image schemas such as *links* and *paths*. These image schemas need not be static. For example, we have a dynamic image schema in which one thing comes out of another, and we project that image schema to give structure to one of our concepts of causation, as when we say that Italian *emerged from* its mother, Latin. Abstract reasoning appears to be possible in large part because we project image-schematic structure from spatial concepts onto abstract concepts. We say, for example, "Shame *forced* him to confess," even though no physical forces are involved. Forms of social and psychological causation are understood by projection from bodily causation that involves physical forces. This is parable.

SEQUENCES

A woman sees a rock, moves toward it, bends down, picks it up, and stands back up. Her legs, body, and arms begin an amazingly intricate sequence of movements. Her hand releases the rock, which follows a trajectory through the air to hit the window, which shatters.

The brain is extremely good at constructing refined and intricate sequences of movement and then executing them, as when we run to catch a baseball. William H. Calvin's *Cerebral Symphony* is a meditation upon whether this capacity might be considered the one central capacity of human intelligence. As Calvin shows, running and walking are marvels of the brain's ability to compose and execute motor sequences. We share the capacity for such sequencing of bodily action with other species. But peculiarly human mental activities also depend upon sequencing. Composing or recognizing a musical phrase, speaking or listening to a sentence, and telling or understanding a story are all examples of our ability to recognize or execute a sequence that counts as a whole. The sequential nature of speech has historically been recognized as one of the defining features of language. Many cognitive scientists have observed that the human brain is uncommonly sophisticated in its capacity for constructing sequences.

To recognize small spatial stories requires us to recognize not only objects involved in events, but also sequences of these situations. The ball is pushed; it rolls; it encounters an obstacle; it knocks the obstacle over, or the obstacle stops the ball. In another small spatial story, our father's hand grasps an object and

moves the object to a position in front of us; the hand releases; the hand withdraws; we reach out; we touch the object; we grasp the object; we put it into our mouth; we release it; we remove our hand; we chew it; we swallow it.

In recognizing small spatial stories, we are recognizing not just a sequence of particular objects involved in particular events, but also a sequence of objects *that belong to categories* involved in events *that belong to categories*. Every time our father places food in front of us, both his actions and the food will be somewhat different, and our actions in response will be somewhat different. But we recognize the objects and events as essentially the same, as belonging to the same category. We recognize a general story. Our experiences differ in detail, but we make sense of them as consisting of a repertoire of small spatial stories, repeated again and again.

These small spatial stories are routinely held together by one or more dynamic image schemas. Consider a fish jumping out of the water through an arc and back into the water, a baseball hit from a bat to fly through an arc into the stands, a rock thrown to hit a distant object, a bird flying from one tree to another. All of these sequences are structured by the image schema of a point moving along a directed path from a source to a goal. This dynamic image schema inherently carries with it a sequence of spatial situations. Consider the image schema of something moving to the edge of a supporting plateau and falling off. This is a temporal sequence combining image schemas. There is no end to the number of particular small spatial stories it structures: a ball rolling off a deck, a keg rolling off a dock, a puddle of tea pouring off the side of a table, a human being walking off a roof.

EXECUTION, RECOGNITION, IMAGINATION

Most of our action consists of executing small spatial stories: getting a glass of juice from the refrigerator, dressing, bicycling to the market. Executing these stories, recognizing them, and imagining them are all related because they are all structured by the same image schemas.

If we see someone pick up a stone and throw it at us, we do not need to wait for the stone to hit us before we can recognize the small spatial story and respond to it. We recognize small spatial stories on the basis of partial information. When we duck, it is because pattern completion tells us the possible end of the small spatial story in which we are hit by the stone. Suppose we see nothing but a stone smashing into a window. We immediately look in the direction from which the stone came to see who or what threw it. Suppose we see only someone's arm go back, and a few seconds later, a stone hitting a window. We can imagine