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Narrative, intersectionality and argumentative discourse

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I argue that a "use-based" approach to narrative and narrative arguments provides the kind of conceptual architecture necessary for developing a much-needed intersectional analysis of arguers' identities, their arguments, and the contexts that inform their positions. Without such an approach, we risk coming away with an understanding of narrative argument that, at best, fails to capture its dynamism, or, worse yet, risks being conditioned on methodologically ethnocentric grounds.

KEYWORDS: colonizing discourses, epistemic humility, ethnocentric, inclusive, intersectionality, narrative

1. INTRODUCTION

There is an ongoing debate in narratological circles regarding the traditional interpretation of narrative as a methodological constant and whether it should be abandoned in favour of a more dynamic, less rigid model. With strong incompatible convictions on both sides of the aisle, consensus appears not to be forthcoming. Nevertheless, what is philosophically interesting about this impasse is that a growing number of narratologists are beginning to question if the whole narrative-defining enterprise is a futile, superfluous exercise in competitive academic ink spilling. Their thinking is that in a folk psychological sense we *already intuitively know* what a narrative is and does, but that "we do so without noticing or troubling ourselves about it, and certainly without recourse to the definitions narratologists make of their subject matter" (Rudrum, 2006, p. 203). Perhaps this is right. But, for those of us who cannot resist the temptation of troubling ourselves with narrative, it has become exceedingly obvious that the difficulties in defining it are not idiosyncratic to narratology; rather, they speak to the vexing complications inextricably linked to the tricky business of assigning fixed definitions to anything at all, for "it inevitably turns out that for every generalization there is an exception . . . and for every definition there is always room for further definition, as extraneous elements creep into our classifications" (p. 197). Of course, those exceptions to our classifications are not always a necessary byproduct of the limitations of the concept in question.[1] To this end, a major claim of this paper is that scholars in

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[1] The topic of nominalism—its problems, challenges, and ongoing debates—looms large over this discussion and is the source of many philosophical disputes in its own right. And I do not pretend to have a solution to any of the metaphysical puzzles it presents. I am simply calling attention to the fact

argumentation theory and informal logic who take up the daunting task of defining and developing the notion of "narrative argument" will find themselves presented with similar challenges identified by those narratologists ready to give up on the project of defining narrative—challenges that, so far as I can tell, have yet to be adequately addressed, much less overcome.

To get a sense of these difficulties in action we will pay close attention to Trudy Govier and Lowell Ayers' (2012) recent discussion of narrative arguments. I intend to show that the limits of their definitional constraints (and the problematic assumptions underwriting them) lead them to severely underestimate the argumentative value of narrative. They, however, paint these constraints as though they were inadequacies tethered to the inherent implausibility of narrative arguments themselves. Thus, by way of contrast, I argue for a "use-based" approach to narrative and narrative arguments. This way the conclusions drawn are empirically informed and the theoretical focus is kept on *how* narratives are commonly used. From this basis, I argue that the use-based approach provides us with the kind of conceptual architecture needed for developing a much-needed intersectional analysis of arguers' identities, their arguments, and the contexts that inform their positions.

2. USE IT OR LOSE IT: A METHODOLOGICAL REORIENTATION TO NARRATIVE

Of those narratologists in favour of abandoning the traditional interpretation of narrative, David Rudrum (2006) suggests that instead of trying to formulate a pithy definition of it, "one would do better to focus on use rather than representation" (p. 201). The emphasis on use not only recalls but is heavily inspired by Wittgenstein's oft-cited maxim: "Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use." This recommendation, in turn, stems from Wittgenstein's (2010) claim that for a "*large* class of cases— though not for all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: 'the meaning of a word is its use in language'" (p. xxiii). And as we know, language, for Wittgenstein, is taken to be a "form of life." If Rudrum is right, the same holds true for narrative: if one wants to know what the meaning of narrative is, she had better be observing how it functions "within a cultural matrix of meanings, beliefs, and normative practices" (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 170).[2] This is no easy task. Because as Danièle M. Klapproth (2004) points out, even what is "*narratable* might vary widely from one culture to another" (p. 10). By overemphasizing the supposed universal features of a preferred definition of narrative, then, we could end up insisting on an

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that sometimes there is an interest (epistemic or otherwise) conditioning a putative theorist's adherence to the constraints of her definitional commitments. On this view, as we will see, self-imposed constraints can come to be (mistakenly) viewed as general constraints of the concept in question.

[2] Within the realm of fiction Wolfgang Iser (1989) has made a similar case by suggesting that the more "fiction eludes an ontological definition, *the more unmistakably it presents itself in terms of its use.* If it is no longer confined to an explanatory function, its impact becomes its prominent feature. Impacts, however, can only be made on or within given contexts, which, in turn, condition the respective use fiction is meant to achieve" [emphasis mine] (p. 267).

understanding of it (and narrative argument) that, at best, fails to capture its plasticity, or, at worst, risks being conditioned on methodologically ethnocentric grounds—a point to which we shall return later.

So, right off the bat it is clear that a use-based approach cannot promise us the comfort and security one gets from an adherence to a positive and concrete definition of narrative. Instead, it saddles us with a complicated question that, for the most part, cannot be answered *in abstracto*: *who (agent) is the narrator and what (act) is she hoping to achieve and why (aim)?* Mercifully, determining the who, what and why of narrative-use does not require us to identify what is common to *all* possible forms of narrative—a project that may very well be doomed from the start given that narratives "form a complex family of many different kinds of language games, all of them mutable depending on the narrative context" (Rudrum, 2006, p. 200). A far more nuanced approach is needed. One where it is understood that searching for "a common set of rules or a neat definition to encapsulate them all is a move that should always be treated with caution and wariness" (ibid.).

But suppose, caution and wariness duly heeded, one accepts the use-based approach as the right way to make sense of narrative and thus narrative arguments; won't some elements *still* need to be deemed essential and nonessential? It seems like it. But if that's the case, then won't we need to insist on some boundaries between these elements even if they are not, strictly speaking, "definitional"? If this answer is "yes"—and it seems like it should be—then we have a problem. Because then one has to admit that the use-based approach is predicated on a devastating contradiction: on the one hand, narrative is said to resist concrete definition; on the other, it is suggested that, essentially, we ought to *define* it in terms of its use. Consequently, the use-based approach appears to be felled by the very problems it was designed to avoid.

Two points are important to emphasize to see why this apparent contradiction has no real legs to stand on: First, definitional constraints need not always be pernicious. In fact, they are a necessary precondition for the possibility of meaningful language (which would otherwise be a chaotic mess without them). Nevertheless, and this is the second point, when it comes to slippery concepts like narrative, the edges between its so-called essential and nonessential elements are easily blurred when formal criteria is introduced into the picture, and, more often than not, such rigid criteria only manages to throw into sharp relief the necessity of allowing back in what had been bracketed out. In this respect, I think Rudrum (2006) is right to suggest that

> *if* one is going to try to formulate a definition of narrative, one would do better to focus on use rather than representation, *but* any such definition, like all definitions, is unlikely to prove satisfactory in the long term. . . . [T]he question of use is not a simple call for a use-based definition of what is . . . indefinite and probably indefinable. It is better understood as a call for a methodological reorientation of the way we go about conceiving narrative, and hence narratology. (p. 201)

Despite the fact that Rudrum is primarily concerned with the direction of narratological studies, we would be well advised to take his advice when appraising

the argumentative value of narrative. If we ignore it, it becomes far too easy to slide into authoritarian, exclusionary, patriarchal, class-based, and other oppressive ways of arguing without even noticing it.[3] The goal is to avoid what Gunther R. Kress (1989) identifies as the colonizing features of discourses that

> tend toward exhaustiveness and inclusiveness; that is, they attempt to account not only for an area of immediate concern to an institution . . . but attempt to account for increasingly wider areas of concern. . . . A metaphor which I use to explain the effects of discourse to myself is that of a military power whose response to border skirmishes is to occupy the adjacent territory. As problems continue, more territory is occupied, then settled and colonized. A discourse colonizes the social world imperialistically, from the point of view of one institution.[4] (p. 7)

Needless to say there is no avoiding this problem completely. But a good start for mitigating these ill effects is by acknowledging and coming to terms with narrative-use as socially and culturally situated.

In fact, Deborah Schiffrin (1994) plausibly suggests that utterances are always situated both *globally* and *locally* where, in the former case, we draw "on our cultural knowledge and expectations about typical courses of action in recurrent situations, we construct story topics, themes and points" (p. 168); whereas in the latter case, "we verbally place our past experiences in, and make them relevant to, a particular 'here' and 'now,' a particular audience, a particular set of interactional concerns and interpersonal issues" (ibid.). Now, I remain unconvinced that this experience is organic and naturally occurs in the process of transforming "personal experience into a verbal performance" (ibid.) More often than not an awareness of these global and local factors has to be *encouraged*, and, for that reason, is perhaps better understood as a regulative ideal.

Admittedly, the very discussion of colonizing discourses might seem rather bizarre to many informal logicians (though certainly not to all of them). But it shouldn't. Especially if we understand colonization as a "discursive practice that functions not merely as a direct power relationship between colonizer and colonized, but as a complex ideology that has been critical to 'educating' subjects and constructing notions of subjectivity, specifically gendered ones" (Hendry, 2011, p. 9). We need to be paying very close attention to any tendencies we might have that may be deemed as "epistemically imperialistic" (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2008, p. 20). Especially since Phyllis Rooney (2010) has offered a compelling case that these tendencies are alive and well in the prevailing "philosophical and logical *conceptions* of argument and argumentation" that uncritically incorporate sexism-informed

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[3] Of course, this is a two-way street. And I agree with Maureen Linker (2011) when she says that "the very best elements of informal logic theory should make their way into social identity theory so that scholars and students can see how many systems of interlocking oppression and injustice are often the result of non-impartial, inaccurate, inconsistent, and non-reflective mistakes in reasoning" (p. 113).

[4] Some might take issue with the discourses-as-war metaphor, but I think it is appropriate at least in this context since it effectively conveys the violence of epistemic subordination that results from these sorts of practices. The familiar argument-as-war metaphor, however, might be more appropriately construed in terms of colonization.

"competition and battle imagery" (p. 225). Indeed, many informal logicians often perpetuate (albeit unknowingly) "a misogyny-inflected cultural imagery" of adversariality that is a direct result of a problematic "historical metaphorical gendering of reason" (p. 211). Throughout this history, Rooney says, there has been a persistent depiction of "the man of reason" who continually battles "aspects of unreason regularly constructed as womanly or 'feminine'—passion, instinct, nature, body, unruly bodily intrusions, or distracting charms" (pp. 211-212). Framed in this light, narrative is casted "as a more 'feminine' type of argument, especially when it is contrasted with the 'masculine' linear, logical, abstract forms of reasoning and argumentation that dominate philosophy's self image" (p. 218). This state of affairs perhaps explains why the topic of narrative argument has been undertheorized and "given woefully little attention in philosophy and informal logic" (p. 216).

With this necessary backstory in place, I can now provide a fuller picture of the use-based approach to narrative argument and discuss its intersectional potential.

3. ACCOUNTING FOR THE DEMANDS OF INTERSECTIONALITY

Undergirding the use-based approach to narrative argument with the support of an intersectional framework has the benefit of encouraging "scholars to recognize how their identities, the interpretations of which cannot be controlled, are implicated in knowledge construction and social interactions" (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2010, p. 44). Michael Gilbert (2007) has already asked this much of scholars in informal logic by turning their attention to "the intersectional matrix that might influence how we proceed in an argument or argument analysis" (p. 5). What we have yet to see, however, is what an intersectional lens has to offer for our assessments of narrative argument—a discussion I will take up in the next section. But first, it would be beneficial to review Gilbert's intersectional approach as it directly relates to the latter project.

Rather than undermine the developments made by informal logicians like Ralph Johnson and J. Anthony Blair, Gilbert (2007) believes that we can broaden the applicability of their theoretical insights by incorporating an "awareness of the importance of examining the matrix of personal characteristics that belong or are applied to a group" (p. 2). "We always think about rules in IL," Gilbert says, "but rarely consider situations in which it is difficult, unnatural or even dangerous to follow them" (ibid.). So while Gilbert would likely agree (though with some considerable hesitation) with Blair (1981) that, at least on some level, we have an "obligation to reason well" (p. 11); or that an arguer, as Johnson (2000) puts it, has certain "dialectical obligations" (p. 278), he would append a significant qualification to both accounts: "maintaining a set of rules that are intended to be useful for all people at all times in all situations is egregiously short-sighted" (Gilbert, 2007, p. 5). After all, "we would not suppose that the same values or beliefs hold in all contexts, so why should the same forms of reasoning, the same rules of assessment hold as well?" (p. 6).

Suffice it to say, any theoretical commitments or moral injunctions premised on a disembodied, timeless model of rationality are a telltale sign that a healthy dose

of epistemic humility is in order; namely, in the form of an awareness that circumstances

> can radically alter the kinds of evidence and rules of reasoning that will be and ought to reasonably be applied in diverse contexts. If we do not, then we are setting up standards, presumably largely designed by white, wealthy, Western, privileged males intended to be used by an enormous range of people from different backgrounds, classes, genders and cultures. (p. 9)

Gilbert's hope is that our epistemic blindspots can be brought out into the open by taking seriously what he dubs as the "the call for intersectionality," which, in a nutshell, is a "a call for letting go of a one-size-fits-all approach to the analysis of argument, and a desire to see all of the significant characteristics that colour a person's identity considered as part of the fit" (p. 5). On top of this, it asks us to consider an

> individual arguer's life and situation, her gender, class, culture, and sexual orientation as epistemological factors that influence how she perceives and relates to the world. In describing as irrational argumentation processes that may be meaningful to the participants for reasons that may not speak to us, we judge by *our* standards actions that might require *their own* standards. The choices that some people living in poverty, living with discrimination, disease and oppression have to make may be strange to us; they are so far removed from the choices we have to make as to truly make them incomprehensible. Therefore, to judge the argumentation used as less than worthy ought to only come after a thorough investigation and understanding of its roots. (p. 11)

Here we can see that Gilbert is not interested in democratizing an understanding of rationality to the point where it is rendered meaningless; rather, he is simply bringing to our attention the factors that are often unceremoniously brushed aside in our discussions of arguers, arguments, and the contexts that inform their positions.

A possible reason why the "one-size-fits-all" approach is so hard to let go of is because the prevailing linguistic paradigm of argumentation rests on an understanding of argument as "*to one degree or another* a product" [author's emphasis] (Gilbert, 2003, p. 14).[5] More specifically, there is the *process* of arguing and the confluence of contextual factors involved therein, and then there is the product fashioned by that process: an argument. For Gilbert, the problem is not so

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[5] From this basis Gilbert (2003) locates a divide between theorists who believe that "arguments and their premises must be linguistically explicable" (p. 2) and those who argue the contrary: that "discursiveness cannot be a requirement for something's being a premiss in an argument, and that there are innumerable instances when we rely on non-discursive communications in order to put forward, respond to, and comprehend an argument" (pp. 1-2). The question at issue, then, is "whether or not we learn most about argument by studying it in isolation from its natural interactive habitat or from examining it in laboratory like isolation" (p. 3). If we adopt the latter approach, Gilbert claims, then we are committed to a standpoint that devalues the non-discursive elements of arguments *tout court*, which, he says, is a needlessly restrictive manoeuvre given that "few arguments ever occur without some parts being implicit" (p. 11).

much the *idea* of conceiving arguments as products (which, to be sure, has its upsides), but that the end product itself is taken to be "*The Argument*" (p. 14) and thus given undue primacy over the contextual features conditioning and framing its very possibility. Importantly, this means overlooking, among other salient features, how the colonizing aspects of discourses may have shaped the discussion and so the arguments therein; or how, as Rooney (2010) suggests, the link between gender and adversariality impacts, defines, and organizes argumentative space.[6]

As Gilbert (2003) sees it, the argument-as-product is fearful of the possibility that "if there is no such differentiation [between process and product], then the argument becomes a morass, a swamp full of all sorts of things that cannot be separated" (p. 14). This, in turn, gives way to a dialectical tension where "allowing non-discursive entities into the idea of what is an argument needs to be avoided, but it cannot. It cannot because we have some instances where we have no doubt that the non-discursive elements are an integral part" (ibid.). No doubt, this is a legitimate concern. And it recalls some of the difficulties we confronted earlier when I suggested that in order to slip by the problems posed by definitional constraints we would need to opt for a use-based approach to narrative that is fluid, dynamic and more congruent with the ongoing construction of our socially and culturally situated identities. This in keeping with the demand made by intersectionality that "we drop broad categories and examine smaller groups in order to investigate the processes actually used there" (Gilbert, 2007, p. 8). Investigating "the processes actually used there" requires some heavy-duty empirical research. And I will only be able to offer a preliminary sketch of how the argumentative value of narrative arises in the context(s) of use, since an exhaustive account would go far beyond the small sample I provide in the next section. But even that, I think, will prove to be a unique step in the right direction given that empirical questions concerning narrative-use operate on the "ground floor" and remain to be rigorously incorporated into analyses of narrative argument.

So: in what lies ahead I will consider Govier and Ayers' account of narrative argument. We will see that it hinges on some of the problematic theoretical foundations I discussed above. My modest suggestion is that any future investigations into narrative argument should be informed by the use-based approach—but that such an approach needs to be a carefully guided by an intersectional framework. In this way, we can render the *uses* of narrative and narrative arguments more plausibly with the aid of empirical results in this area.

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[6] Lorraine Code (2006) makes the important point that such argumentative spaces need to be intricately examined to grasp how they "shape both knowing subjects and the objects of knowledge; how they legitimate and/or disqualify knowledge projects; how they are constituted by and constitutive of entrenched social imaginaries, together with the rhetoric that holds them in place" (pp. 40-41). While this raises interesting questions about argumentative space and its relation to narrative space, I cannot even begin to give that topic its proper due in this paper. Indeed, that is a project I intend to develop at a later date.

4. THE RATIONAL WORLD PARADIGM AND ITS ENEMIES

Govier and Ayers' (2012) take on narrative argument is fundamentally guided by their claim that arguments "are often made in efforts to rationally persuade some audience that a claim or claims are rationally acceptable" (p. 165).[7] This leads them to ask the following question: "Can narrative serve to provide an argument for a claim that can reasonably be taken to be its 'point' or conclusion?" (p. 162). Even in this innocent question, the seeds have been planted for a definition of narrative argument that is limited by the assumptions conditioning its possible uses. Case in point: it does not take Govier and Ayers long to admit that they are primarily interested in seeing whether narrative provides a message that can be understood as offering an argument, which, in their hands, means that if

> we can plausibly derive an argument from narrative such as a parable, we can assess the merits of that argument, and scrutinize it to consider whether the narrative offers good reasons to support its message. If we cannot plausibly derive an argument, or can derive only a very weak argument from the narrative in question, that outcome undermines the view that the parable or story supplies a message supported by good reasons. (p. 163)

Importantly, for Govier and Ayers the prospect of finding "good reasons" hinges on their being "expressed as propositions and as the premises of an argument in which the message of the parable is the conclusion" (p. 185). From this vantage point they examine several parables—which they take to be a "convenient and appropriate form of narrative because they are short and characteristically understood as conveying a serious message" (ibid.)—to determine whether it is an epistemically rewarding endeavour. We do not need to recast their discussion of each and every parable here. Instead, given their definitional constraints (which I will trace out in more detail momentarily), it is enough to focus on the conclusion of their investigation: "Conveying a message in the form of a story is attractive but logically risky and questionable, insofar as the form and interest of the story will often distract us from attempting any task of logical assessment" (p. 188). And while they acknowledge that it takes some "twisting and bending" to pull an argument out of a putative narrative, or parable in this case, and set it into a standardized form, they nevertheless end their analysis on a word of caution: "One can offer arguments through narrative, but doing that has more risks than benefits, from an epistemic point of view" (ibid.).[8]

To see operating conditions underlying their conclusion, it is instructive for our purposes to briefly consider Walter R. Fisher's (1987) description of the

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[7] This formulation of Govier's (2009) claim is a slight improvement over her earlier, less qualified claim that "when you use an argument, you are trying to persuade others of the claim that is your conclusion" (p. 25).

[8] Nowhere is this more apparent than in their analysis of Wilde and the "Parable of Magnets and Filings" where we are supposed to "twist and bend" our brains to such an extent that the premise "Humans are like personified metal filings in that they are physical objects fully subject to physical laws" (Govier & Ayers, 2012, p. 183) is rendered plausible.

dominance of the "rational-world paradigm" in Western thought, which has much in common with Gilbert's linguistic paradigm we discussed earlier (which Govier and Ayers are clearly under the influence of) insofar as it adheres to the following five assumptions:

(1) humans are essentially rational beings;

(2) the paradigmatic mode of human decision making and communication is argument—discourse that features clear-cut inferential and implicative structures;

(3) the conduct of argument is ruled by the dictates of situations—legal, scientific, legislative, public, and so on;

(4) rationality is determined by subject-matter knowledge, argumentative ability, and skill in employing the rules of advocacy in given fields; and

(5) the world is a set of logical puzzles that can be solved through appropriate analysis and applications of reason conceived as an argumentative construct (p. 59).

With this kind of emphasis on rationality, it is unsurprising to discover that Govier and Ayers—situated squarely within the confines of the rational-world paradigm—single out the "logical core" of an argument as being "constituted by its premises (explicit and implicit), indicators of its line of reasoning, and its conclusion or conclusions" (p. 166). These definitional constraints, which demarcate and minimize the supposed "non-core" elements of an argument (see the discussion of Rooney above as a reminder of what those are), naturally have a parasitic effect on their account of narrative argument and the conclusions they draw therein.

To be fair, Govier and Ayers (2012) confess (albeit in a footnote) that "there may be other important elements present when arguments are articulated in discourse" and that they include "emotive indicators; counter-considerations introduced by such terms as 'even though,' 'while,' and 'despite the fact'; introductory material; asides such as jokes or illustrative anecdotes or elucidatory remarks; and attempts to rebut actual and potential objections to the premises, conclusion, or line of reasoning" (ibid., fn. 9). This list, aside from singling out some rather odd features of discourse, says nothing about the fact that not only do "we respond in anticipation of how we wish to be understood, but we verbally locate and position ourselves in relation to discourse contexts, thereby defining ourselves through what we say, how we say it, and to whom we say it" (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 169). As we saw above with Rooney's assistance, it is no coincidence that embodiment—and the phenomenology of bodily experience, feeling, and awareness that is involved and realized in the dynamic interplay between arguers, arguments, and audience—has often been pegged as nonessential as evinced by Govier and Ayers' account of narrative argument.

When we shift our attention to arguments in terms of their use, the type of arguments Govier and Ayers discuss only function within the parameters of what Douglas Walton (2005) describes as a "persuasion dialogue." In these dialogues,

rational persuasion is the end goal and defined as "using an argument where all the premises are accepted by the respondent . . . [which is taken to be] rationally binding by some standard of [the] structural correctness of the argument" (p. 126). In this context, the arguers are aiming to get at the truth of the matter at hand. However, such arguments differ from those that arise in a "negotiation dialogue" where the goal is not so much truth-oriented as it is geared toward dividing up resources or making a deal. Given this, it seems that not all arguments address conflicts and resolution through rational persuasion. This is yet more evidence that not all arguments can be neatly described and defined in terms of rational persuasion in the sense that Govier and Ayers would have it.

But what are we to make of their claim that, when compared to logically stated arguments, "stories tend to be vivid, memorable, and emotionally appealing. From the point of view of logical cogency, there is a trap here: we risk persuasion on the basis of vividness and appeal, as distinct from relevant reasons" (Govier & Ayers, 2012, p. 163). As I hinted at above, this is precisely where empirical results via a use-based approach to narrative might come in handy. Of course, we might have some cause for concern about the particular definition (and thus definitional constraints) of narrative that particular researchers subscribe to. Even so, it is still worth investigating why certain social psychologists, like Sonya Dal Cin, Mark P. Zanna, and Geoffrey T. Fong (2004), have suggested that if "narratives can be persuasive, then we might begin to consider situations in which narrative persuasion may prove particularly useful" (p. 176). Even though research demonstrating how persuasion operates empirically through narrative is in its infancy, the results of some preliminary studies suggest that Govier and Ayers have myopically focused on the risks presented by narrative-use at the expense of a more fruitful consideration of its potential argumentative rewards.

For instance, consider the notion of "narrative transportation" which is typically understood as "a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on the events in the narrative" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701). Some experiments found that the "more readers reported being transported by the narrative, the more they failed to see errors or faulty arguments in that narrative" (ibid.) and that, as a result of this, there is "support to the idea that being transported involves a certain degree of suspension or disbelief or logical inattention" (ibid.). Now, if this is true, then we might be inclined to agree with Govier and Ayers (2012) that narrative arguments are "rarely cogent" (p. 188) and thus their argumentative value epistemically suspect. But this is only half of the story. According to Dal Cin (et al.) narrative transportation can potentially have significant argumentative value as it "may be especially suited to overcoming resistance to persuasion" by encouraging "positive associations with specific beliefs and behaviours" (p. 180) that an arguer might have otherwise ignored or discounted on the basis of, say, irrational prejudices. It is well worth the space of a lengthy quotation to take a closer look at how Dal Cin and her colleagues approach the issue of overcoming these sorts of prejudices through narrative:

> [T]o overcome this type of resistance, it is necessary to avoid close-mindedness on the part of those we are trying to persuade. . . . Using rhetorical means of persuasion,

this may be accomplished by presenting a message that claims to support a generally acceptable position, but that actually supports a more extreme and possibly objectionable position—the so-called "Marc Anthony gambit": After the assassination of Caesar, Shakespeare's Marc Anthony, knowing his Roman audience loathed the dead emperor, began a speech with the words, "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him." He then proceeded to do exactly what he claimed he would not. By not raising the red flags of resistance in his fellow countrymen, Anthony managed to present counter-attitudinal arguments that may have otherwise earned him the same fate as Caesar. We believe that narratives might be ideally suited to this type of "under the radar" persuasive attempt. . . . [as] the counter-attitudinal message in a narrative may unfold so slowly, be so unexpected, be so subtle, that the reader [or addressee] fails to realize that the message falls within his or her latitude of rejection. We argue that to the extent that a narrative challenges an existing attitude without throwing up the barriers of closed-mindedness, we should find attitude change in the direction of the persuasive attempt. (p. 179)

Again, what this tells us is that the potential benefits and disadvantages of narrative are, in practice, going to be largely determined by its use.[9]

Whether narrative poses an epistemic risk or reward, then, depends on how we respond to the question—complete with its sharp particularity—that I raised earlier: *who (agent) is the narrator and what (act) is she hoping to achieve and why (aim)*? If I have made my points clearly, it should be obvious that I do not think we can come up with a worthwhile answer unless we approach it through the prism of intersectional analyses in combination with these sorts of empirical results. Indeed, in some instances utilizing narrative "may be one of the only strategies available for influencing the beliefs of those predisposed to disagree with the position espoused" (Slater, 2002, 175). Imagine the implications this has for those individuals who would otherwise face epistemic injustice simply by virtue of their class, sexual orientation, gender, race, or any combination of those and other characteristics. Narrative may very well equip them with the ability to transform a hostile argumentative space in ways more favourable to their wellbeing (epistemic or otherwise). After all, these are individuals who already spend a great deal of time negotiating their way through oppressive discourse contexts. For as Dal Cin's (et al.) findings suggest: close-minded individuals "have a number of resistance strategies at their disposal, and when the motivation to resist is high, they will engage in a variety of those strategies in their efforts to resist change" (p. 237). In the face of these disproportionate epistemic challenges are we really prepared to say that narrative poses an epistemic risk for marginalized individuals and groups when, in practice, it can allow their arguments to fly "under the radar" and operate as a corrective lens for irrational biases and prejudices that preclude the kind of rational

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[9] In this respect, while there is much to like about Patrick Bondy's (2010) discussion of argumentative injustice and his suggestions for avoiding it "by identifying the identity prejudices that we have" (p. 270), it is, nevertheless, almost totally lacking in plausibility so long as it does not take into account these sorts of empirical results. For it is far from clear how—even if we were to adopt what he describes as a position of "metadistrust" against our more untoward inclinations and prejudices—cognitively ingrained biases can be deliberately held in abeyance in so explicit a manner (sometimes, for example, certain individuals hold downright unseemly prejudices near and dear to their hearts and thus feel no real motivation to be distrustful of them).

deliberation that Govier and Ayers put such a high premium on? I certainly hope not.

5. CONCLUSION

I imagine that an immediate response to my arguments will be that I am just as guilty as Govier and Ayers of overemphasis but in my case I have elected to champion the rewards of narrative while glossing over the potential risks. Is it not true, one might argue, that given the pliability of narrative-use it could be used to further entrench problematic and oppressive features of a given discourse context? Undoubtedly, such risks are real and I do not underestimate them by any means. However, it is not my prerogative to deny their existence. At bottom, what am I suggesting is this: while we ought to be cognizant of the risks and rewards of narrative—especially when assessing its argumentative value—we should make it a top priority to avoid imposing a "partial, relativized view of things" and presenting it from a privileged perspective as though it were "impartial, absolute, and normative" (Daukas, 2011, p. 61). This means we need to let go of certain theoretical commitments, longstanding though they may be, whenever we hang onto them for their own sake. Doing so could obstruct what would otherwise be the fruitful development of an epistemically inclusive enterprise.

In the end, I think Gilbert (2007) is on to something when he says, "I believe the greatest honour that can be paid to those who have worked to advance Informal Logic is to treat it as a pragmatic, flexible, and exploratory undertaking" (p. 18). If anything, it is my hope that what I have proposed in this paper proves him right.

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