Eventfulness in English Narrative Fiction: A Diachronic Perspective

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Abstract – This article is a contribution to the currently expanding field of diachronic narratology, i.e. the research into possible historical and cultural changes in the practice of narration, more precisely the question of how far the various narratological categories (which as such can be considered to be universal) underlie changes in their practical application in different periods and cultures. This article focuses specifically on the narratological category of the *event* analyzing and comparing the practical realization of eventfulness in two periods within the history of English narrative fiction, on the one hand in the Middle Ages (1100-1500) and on the other in the 18th century. It can be shown that the emphasis on eventfulness in narratives varies significantly between these epochs and, also within the medieval epoch, among genres.

Keywords – Event; Narrative; Diachronic Narratology; Medieval English Literature; Early Modern English Literature; Romance; Novel; Tale.

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1. A Diachronic Perspective on Narratological Categories

Descriptive narratological categories like author, narrator, implied author, character, focalization or event as such can be considered as universal and as trans-historically valid but their circumstantial concrete realization in texts from different periods and in different cultures may vary. This problem will be addressed in the present article with respect to the category of *eventfulness* in the historical development of English narrative literature during the Middle Ages on the one hand and the 18th century on the other (Hühn, "Eventfulness in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature").

Narratives represent changes of state ascribed to a character, either an agent or a patient, that is, to a character who actively initiates or passively undergoes a change. However, narrative requires something more crucial than mere succession and change: a decisive, unexpected turn, some significant departure from the established state of affairs: an *event* (Hühn, *Eventfulness in British Fiction* 1-13; "Event and Eventfulness" 159-78). Such a crucial "point" functions as of a narrative, constituting its meaning and contributing to its "tellability" (Ryan 589-94). Eventfulness is context-sensitive and thus culturally, historically, and generically variable. Context-sensitivity concerns the relation of the event, as a decisive change of state, to the social and cultural setting of the narrative as well as to the social and cultural perspective of author and reader (Bruner 14-7).

The most elaborate proposal for a definition of eventfulness is Schmid's (*Narratology* 8-12) list of seven criteria. Schmid names two necessary conditions: reality and resultativity. Changes must actually occur and must be complete in order to qualify as events. And he adds five gradational criteria: changes must be relevant, unpredictable, persistent, irreversible and non-iterative to qualify as eventful.

2. Classification of Events

A narrative text typically presents a character's life and experiences during a period of time in the course of which a decisive change of state takes place or fails to take place (Hühn, *Eventfulness in British Fiction* 201-213; Schulz 159-291). Striving for such an eventful change and its eventual realization (or failure) constitutes the meaning of the story. Changes can be of various types. Fundamental changes concern, first, the character's social status or personal achievement (type A), and, second, establishing a significant interpersonal relationship, especially in love (type B). To these changes in the physical or social dimension a third type can be added: a mental event (Schmid, *Mentale Ereignisse*), the decisive change of a character's attitude or knowledge (type C). Furthermore, one can distinguish between positive events (victory,

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[1] This article is an abridged version of Hühn, "Eventfulness in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature."

success, insight) and negative events (defeat, failure, punishment). One additional aspect is the reason for success or failure: personal qualities (e.g. strength vs. weakness) or the intervention of a superior agent (Fate, Fortune, or God).

3. Medieval Period, 1100-1500

Medieval English non-devotional narrative literature can be subdivided into two broad genres: romance, longer texts with a variety of national settings and thematic orientations—Arthurian, English, French, Breton, Roman, Greek (cf. Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*; Chism; Tether and McFadyen)—and shorter tales (cf. Scanlon).

3.1 Romance

Romance is the dominant genre throughout this period, typically concerned with the identity, self-confirmation, and fate of a protagonist of noble birth, a knight, in martial and amorous adventures (Chism 59, 65).

Both events, winning a position (A) and a spouse (B), feature in the story of King Arthur, the most popular narrative material throughout the medieval period. Arthur's story appears first as the centerpiece within a mainly fictional chronicle of Britain in Layamon's *Brut* (1189-1250) (Pearsall 15-20). Arthur's story is presented as a national epic. At his birth he is prophetically endowed, by Merlin the magician, with superior strength, wealth, long life, and all virtues. Subsequently, these prophecies all come true over the course of a long sequence of changes of state. The major event (A), the winning of his superior status, occurs early on, when Arthur is made king of Britain. But this change of state proves precarious in that his position as king is continuously under threat from hostile foreign forces and through betrayal. Arthur must defend himself against the Scots, the Saxons, the Irish, and the Germans to secure his powerful position. To consolidate his rule and to demonstrate his civilizing code of honor, he establishes the Round Table. Thus, the major event of gaining his superior position as king is embedded as one victory among many in the sequence of Arthur's long career of military triumphs.

The other central event, winning a spouse (B) by marrying Wenhaver (Guinevere), also occurs early on. The significance of both events is reduced by subsequent developments. While Arthur is fighting in Rome, he is betrayed at home by Modred (Mordred), his son by his half-sister, who in collusion with Wenhaver has usurped power in Britain. In the ensuing fight, Modred is killed and Wenhaver flees. Arthur is wounded and brought to Avalon to be healed. The future is uncertain: there is a vague hope that he will return one day to resume his rule in Britain. Thus, in the end, both positive eventful turns (A and B) in Arthur's life are nullified and replaced by two negative events. One continuous feature of Arthur's story is the presence of Merlin's supernatural foreknowledge: he predicts both Arthur's rise and fall. His prophetic pronouncements ascribe to Arthur's two events a superhuman guidance. On the other hand, positive eventful achievements prove to be transient due to the corruptibility of people and the basic instability of conditions in the world.

The matter of Arthur is subsequently taken up in several variations and modifications. The most comprehensive collection of Arthurian legends is Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485) (Mitchell 111-30). It consists of eight books, each focusing on a different protagonist or a different phase of Arthur's career. All the books are characterized by an episodic structure with a broad array of subsidiary characters and inserted narratives. In addition to the topics treated before, Malory narrates the stories of Lancelot (prior to his affair with Guinevere), Gareth of Orkney, Tristram de Lyones, and the Holy Grail. The protagonists' aspirations are overwhelmingly directed at proving their superior prowess in fights with other knights and

thereby winning honor and power, indicative of the self-confirmation of nobility (A). Only rarely does the aim concern a relation to a significant person such as a lover (B). The event structure resembles that of the other Arthurian variants: a great number of intermediate turns and achievements, which do not function as decisive changes of state structuring the narrative sequence. The individual plotlines demonstrate how individual intentions and actions, due to accidental and opaque circumstances, repeatedly lead to unwanted consequences, resulting in negative events, finally in that of Arthur's death. With respect to Arthur's career various pronouncements indicate some kind of supernatural guidance or at least a foreshadowing of the course of the protagonist's life. A pervasive feature of the comprehensive retellings of the Arthurian stories is the downgrading of eventfulness as a result of the episodic structure of these renditions, a feature indicative of the growing disorder of the social world.

One major deviation from these tendencies with respect to the degree and nature of eventfulness occurs in a singular spin-off from the conventional Arthurian romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (ca. 1375-1400). This is a tale about the testing of the chivalric qualities of Gawain, the most exemplary member of Arthur's Round Table. The complex story concerns the challenge by a mysterious Green Knight to Gawain for a deadly "beheading match." In the run-up to the match Gawain's chastity is tested by the Green Knight's wife trying to seduce him. Gawain resists her advances, preserving his chastity and his host's honor but in the end secretly accepts a protective token for the coming fight, thereby partly breaching their agreement. The events in this story consist in Gawain's nearly perfect success in two tests: proving his superior courage as a warrior (A) and his superior morality and courtesy toward women as a knight (B). These are the two prototypical events with a surprising twist to one of them (B): not winning the woman but *refraining from winning her* is the event. This serves as proof of his chastity and moral rectitude, in stark contrast to the prominence of illicit love affairs as the major events in previous renderings of the Arthurian cycle (Lancelot and Tristram).

Both prototypical aspirations (A and B) motivate the protagonist in the romance *Guy of Warwick* (ca. 1420). Guy, the son of a steward, falls in love with the lady Felice, the daughter of an earl and thus of higher social rank than him. As a precondition for marrying him, she demands that he first prove his chivalric prowess. So, he sets out to win glory in a string of victorious fights with monsters, giants, and warriors. When he returns and Felice accepts him in marriage, he has achieved two goals: he has won both his beloved (B) and a high social position (A). But full of remorse for his sins, he leaves his wife and his fortune for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and afterwards becomes a hermit. Thus, the two principal aims (A and B) are first achieved but later renounced owing to the violent means used to acquire them; they are replaced by another type of eventful turn: that of radically changing his attitude by becoming a pilgrim and a hermit – a mental event (C).

Still another romance theme features in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (ca. 1381-1385): the story of the Trojan prince Troilus's love for Criseyde (cf. Windeatt). Of the two prototypical aims only one, love of another person (B), is relevant here. Although the decisive event (the consummation of Troilus's desire for Criseyde) does in fact take place, its significance is radically reduced: it is not brought about by Troilus's own efforts but only engineered by Criseyde's uncle Pandarus. In addition, Criseyde's love proves unstable: she soon forsakes him for another lover. In the end, Troilus is killed and, taken up to a higher sphere, gains a new insight into the "vanitie" of everything on earth, especially that of striving for love: a mental event (C).

3.2 Short Tales

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While eventfulness is not central to romance, short tales are specifically focused on eventful turns, usually highlighting the moral dimension of behavior: correct behavior is rewarded (positive event), incorrect behavior punished by circumstances or by Fortune (negative event).

Another significant feature of this genre is the grouping of tales with analogous event structures into a single collection. One such collection is Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* (ca. 1385), which the author offers as atonement for accusations that he had disparaged womanhood by Criseyde's infidelity in *Troilus and Criseyde*. The tales narrate women's acts of faithful love, combining type-B with type-C events. Examples are Cleopatra, Thisbe, and Dido, who kill themselves out of loyalty to their lovers, and Lucretia, who proves her chastity by her suicide.

John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (ca. 1386-1390) is a collection of tales within a frame: an aging lover ("amans") complains to Venus about the woes of love (Mitchell 69-86). Venus sends her chaplain Genius as a confessor, warning the protagonist against succumbing to the lure of the five senses and committing any of the seven deadly sins. The instruction then takes the form of cautionary tales which illustrate the negative consequences of giving in to temptation stressing the necessity of rational self-control and moral fortitude. The alternative courses of action, succumbing to temptation or resisting temptation, guided by reason and prudence, lead to a negative or to a positive event: punishment or reward. Although some of the stories feature one of the two prototypical aims in life, striving for power (A) or for love (B), the overriding focus is moralistic, illustrating the dangers of lust-driven action and advocating self-restraint (C). The tale of Acteon, e.g., demonstrates the dangers of the lust of looking (at the naked Diana): Acteon is mauled by his own hounds. By contrast, Perseus refrains from looking at Medusa and thereby avoids her lethal gaze so that he can cut off her head. In some cases, the eventful turn comes in steps, as a "staggered event". In the tale about Nebuchadnezzar, e.g., the Babylonian king's vainglorious behavior is punished by his transformation into an ox; and when he has learned humility, he is given back his human shape. This story thus consists in a negative event which in turn triggers a positive one (C).

Other collections of tales with similar event types are Chaucer's "The Monk's Tale" in *The Canterbury Tales* (1386-1400; cf. Windeatt; Edwards), John Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes* (1431-38; Mitchell 87-109) and its continuation, *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559). These tales about the rise and fall of important personages from history, mythology, and the Bible all result in negative eventful turns (A) brought about by Fortune, as punishment for sinning and violating norms, for acting unreasonably, for trusting the invincibility of one's elevated position. Thus, negative type-A events are linked to mental causes (C). These happenings testify (as in Gower's collection) to the existence of a superordinate power controlling developments in the world, endorsing Christian values.

While these tales are characterized by parallel event structures reducing the degree of eventfulness because of their predictability, the majority of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* differ from one another with respect to theme and complexity of plot structure (cf. Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*). But here, too, the overall focus is ultimately moral and mental: the eventful turns in the course of the stories reward observance of the appropriate norms, especially rational self-restraint, or they punish violation of those norms (thus stressing the relevance of the mental dimension, implying type C eventfulness). These tales select short crucial phases in the protagonists' lives, in which the two prototypical pursuits—for love (B) and achievement (A)—act as a dynamic force.

In the beast fable "The Nun's Priest's Tale," e.g., the dominant motivation is pride and striving for superiority. The cock Chauntecleer dreams about a coming danger, but ignores the warning. When a fox invites him to a singing contest, he accepts out of pride, allowing the fox to grasp him. But this eventful defeat (negative type A) teaches him self-critical rational insight (C) and enables him to save himself. He flatters the fox inducing him to sneer at his pursuers.

When the fox opens his mouth to agree, Chauntecleer escapes (A). This is a staggered event, for Chauntecleer's fatal fall out of foolish self-conceit teaches him rational insight and how to use the same trick against the fox. Punishment for misbehavior is followed by a reward for having learned the lesson (C combined with A). The sudden changes of situation are attributed to Fortune, i.e. to the just order of the world.

The Miller's Tale (see Hühn, *Eventfulness in British Fiction* 17-30) is a complex tale based on the desire for love. The three male characters, the carpenter, Nicholas, and Absolon, all desire Alison. The old carpenter, as her husband, has a legal claim to her, but due to his age lacks her erotic response; Nicholas has only a sexual interest in her, which she reciprocates; Absolon's attitude is romantic adoration. Nicholas's success in winning Alison (B) is enabled by the carpenter's foolish behavior. Absolon's adoration is likewise foolish because it is a conventional ritual. Both misguided courses of action are punished by negative events (B): the carpenter is cuckolded in his own bed, and Absolon is induced to kiss Alison's naked behind. Then Nicholas, too, is punished for foolishly wanting to repeat Alison's feat by inducing Absolon to kiss his naked behind. He is punished for this error of judgment by Absolon, who has learned from his mishap and revenges himself by hitting Nicolas's behind with a red-hot plowshare, whose cry for water induces the carpenter, in his foolish belief of an imminent flood, to cut the ropes holding the trough prepared for the emergency; he falls and breaks an arm (a second eventful punishment for a second error of judgment). "The Miller's Tale" thus features three elaborately staggered eventful punishments assigned to the male characters for their misguided behavior (A combined with C). Alison is not punished since she does not act and makes no mistakes. Absolon learns from his mistake and becomes clever (C).

4. Eighteenth Century

Narrative literature in the eighteenth century is characterized by the rise of the novel (cf. Watt). Daniel Defoe's first novel *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (1719) follows the protagonist's life from childhood to old age, a long sequence of changes and reversals in circumstance and achievement. He is captured by pirates and sold into slavery, escapes, settles in Brazil as a plantation owner, sails to Africa to buy slaves, is shipwrecked and survives on an uninhabited island and finally returns to England, reclaiming the profits from his estate in Brazil and spending his old age as a rich man. Of the two prototypical aims in life, achievement and love, only the first is relevant to Robinson. His central motive throughout his career is acquiring wealth and gaining an elevated social position. The eventful turn in Robinson's life occurs in stages. After a few years on his island, he becomes a devout Christian (C). He becomes aware of the miracle of his preservation on the island, attributing it to God's Providence. In this light he then interprets the development of his life, resulting in a position of wealth and security as an event (type A combined with C). This eventfulness can be identified as the (secularized) Calvinist notion that only few men are predestined by God to be redeemed and that economic success is a sign of belonging to the elect. The event is thus sanctioned as a divine gift. In retrospect, the protagonist recognizes the coherence of his life as having been guided by God's "invisible hand".

Defoe's *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722) replicates this pattern of eventfulness for a woman (Kroll 49-62). Moll starts life in the worst imaginable circumstances: born in prison as the daughter of a deported criminal. She then pursues both central aims: an economically secure position (A) and a suitable partner (B). Her career is a chain of constantly changing circumstances: five marriages interspersed with working as prostitute, pickpocket, and shoplifter. In the end, she is arrested and sentenced to death. But the prison chaplain induces her to repent and has her death sentence commuted to deportation together with her "favorite" husband, Jemmy, whom she meets again in prison (B). The novel ends as

a success story. In the colony, Moll and Jemmy build up wealth (A) and finally return to England with honor and riches. Here again the event comes about in a protracted process, starting with the protagonist's repentance (C) and culminating in her resettlement in England. As in *Robinson Crusoe*, the eventful turn is ascribed to God's Providence, his "invisible hand". The main emphasis lies here on acquisition (A), coupled with a significant personal attachment (B).

The plot of *Moll Flanders* shares structural features with two different contemporary types of narrative. With the picaresque novel it shares the episodic structure and the final radical turning away from secular reality; with the criminal biography it shares the plot of a criminal career, resulting in the criminal's execution. Thus, Defoe's novel takes over the plot structure from these earlier texts, but concludes with positive events.

The most influential plot and type of eventfulness in the eighteenth century is the epistolary novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson (see Hühn, *Eventfulness in British Fiction* 63-73). Pamela Andrews, of *petit-bourgeois* origins, works as a servant in the aristocratic household of Squire B., where she is exposed to the sexual advances of her master. The plot consists in the contest between Squire B.'s sexual harassment and Pamela's virtuous resistance, defending her virginity out of a high sense of morality. The eventful turn is prepared for by Pamela's diary falling into Squire B.'s hands, revealing her quiet suffering and the moral basis of her resistance as well as inadvertently her emotional attachment to him. As a consequence, he changes his behavior (C) and in the end proposes to her. The eventful turn is completed with their wedding, which for Pamela means gaining both the beloved person (B) and an elevated social position and wealth (A). This is an event of a high degree, since the rigidity of the British class system usually precludes the crossing of social boundaries.

An eventful social rise partly comparable to Pamela's occurs in Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749; Kempf 74-83). The novel follows the development of the protagonist from the moment he is found as an abandoned baby and adopted by Squire Allworthy. Basically, *Tom Jones* represents an aristocratic counterpart to the bourgeois example of *Pamela*. While Pamela crosses the class barrier from low to high, the foundling Tom Jones is finally discovered to be of aristocratic birth as the illegitimate son of Squire Allworthy's sister, thus being of high status all along without knowing it. In the course of the story, Tom crosses the class barrier twice. The first time is his adoption as a low-class foundling by Squire Allworthy. But he loses this position again when he is expelled by Allworthy on account of slander from envious enemies, exploiting Tom's youthful imprudence. As a consequence, he is forced into an extended confrontation with social reality on the road to London and within London society, through which he acquires a mature personality with insight, prudence, and self-discipline. When Allworthy, having seen through the false accusations, takes him back, Tom has morally and cognitively "earned" his aristocratic status (A), which entitles him also to marry his love (B). Thus, the final eventful turn in the protagonist's life couples the aristocratic principle of descent with the acquisition of middle-class morality and enlightened mentality (C).

An analogous event structure underlies the "courtship novels," notably of Frances (Fanny) Burney. The protagonist, a young woman of aristocratic birth, is introduced into society, in London, seeking and in the end achieving marriage in order to establish her identity (B) together with a respectable social position. To achieve these aims, she has to find her way through a complex net of friendly, antagonistic, seductive, or deceptive persons and relationships. The final eventful marriage is long delayed by intrigues, misunderstandings, and misinterpretations. Burney's first novel, *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), develops this pattern along the following lines. Evelina, abandoned by her father Sir Belmont, is brought up by a guardian. At the age of seventeen she visits a female friend in London and is thus introduced into high society. Ignorant of the social conventions, she first makes a series of humiliating faux pas but gradually acquires self-discipline, the capacity to make ethical judgments and to navigate complex situations. She falls in love with Lord Orville.

But a series of misunderstandings blocks the development of their relationship. In the end, the last obstacle, her status as a rejected daughter, is removed when Sir Belmont finally acknowledges her as his daughter (A). Consequently, Lord Orville and Evelina can marry (B).

The event—Evelina's winning her beloved together with an elevated social position — does not signify the crossing of a class boundary (as in *Pamela*) but the overcoming of barriers within aristocratic society itself—barriers constituted by selfishness in various forms: greed, desire, jealousy, malice, and snobbery. These motives act as factors separating the lovers. Although both aims, love and social status, are intimately connected, the primary emphasis lies on the love element. Basically, the plot is a female initiation story, narrating the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The plot in Richardson's second novel, *Clarissa or The History of a Young Lady* (1747-48), is based on a dynamic and antagonistic configuration of man and woman roughly similar to *Pamela*, but leads to a completely different kind of event. The aristocratic libertine Robert Lovelace desires and tries to seduce beautiful and virtuous Clarissa Harlowe. Socially and in terms of character configuration, the plot replicates that of *Pamela* at a higher social level. Clarissa comes from a rich, but socially rather low bourgeois family ambitious to ascend to the nobility. The family's strategy is to promote suitable marriages for the two daughters: Arabella with Robert Lovelace, heir to an earldom; and her younger sister Clarissa with Roger Solmes, a wealthy man who would help her brother James to become Lord Harlowe. But Clarissa refuses to marry Solmes. Lovelace turns away from Arabella and courts Clarissa, who is fascinated by his charm but repelled by his attitudes and wants to rescue him from his evil ways.

Neither of the two prototypical aims (position and personal attachment) motivates Clarissa. She is not the agent of the development but the passive object and means for other people's aims and plans: for her acquisitive family, she is the means to achieve social advancement; and for Lovelace, she is the object of his desires. When the Harlowes' pressure on Clarissa to marry Solmes increases, Lovelace takes advantage of her fear of a forced marriage by eloping with him. Clarissa, in Lovelace's power, is finally raped by him. She rejects him, finally falls ill and dies in full consciousness of her virtue, forgiving everyone and setting her mind on God. This eventful change (C) in Clarissa's life and attitude, although based on the same unshakable adherence to virtue as in Pamela's case, is more radical: the preservation of virtue despite the physical fact of rape together with the rejection of worldly life in favor of eternity. She refuses to comply with the two prototypical desires and aims of others, her family's and Lovelace's, i.e., social rise (A) and love fulfilment (B). In doing so, she thwarts both in a radical act of rejecting worldly aims altogether in favor of a Christian ideal (C)—a change of state with a high degree of eventfulness on account of its unexpectedness.

Alongside the rise of the mainstream novel, the eighteenth century saw the emergence of two specific subgenres of the crime and the gothic novel. Crime novels narrate the development of criminal careers. Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753) exemplifies features of this subgenre. The story traces, in mock-heroic style, the protagonist's life on the continent and in England. Ferdinand Fathom, the son of an English sutleress, saves the life of the Scottish Count Melvil in a battle and is, out of gratitude, adopted by him and raised as a companion to his own son, Renaldo. Fathom acquires exquisite social skills but totally lacks a moral sense and employs them exclusively for his criminal leanings, striving for the two classic aims in life, love (B) and achievement or status (A), perverted, however, to indiscriminate sexual desire and to avarice and cupidity. He pursues these aims in a chain of changing situations during which he plays various roles, constantly scheming and deceiving. In the beginning he is successful on account of people's gullibility. But his successes in seducing women and cheating people are only short-term achievements and therefore do not constitute events. In the long run, Fathom starts to lose and finally fails completely, because people become suspicious and see through his schemes. His defeat is attributed to Providence. The

novel ends with Fathom's downfall and repentance (C). However, he is forgiven and granted the severely restricted fulfilment of his aims: marrying one of his victims (B) and living on a small income (A). His criminal activities are retrospectively seen as having served to correct people's deficiencies (naivety, credulity, stupidity). Thus, the defeat of the criminal, endorsing the validity of the right moral order, functions as the ultimate event underlying the plot of this crime novel.

The first gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764), is set in medieval Italy. The convoluted plot concerns the ownership of the principality of Otranto, for which two men from two families compete with each other, thereby pursuing one of the two prototypical aims, superior position and status (A): on the one hand, Manfred, the present prince of Otranto, whose grandfather had killed the rightful owner, Alfonso, and usurped the principality; and on the other hand, Theodore, the grandson of Alonso, as well as Frederic and his daughter Isabella, the rightful heirs to the principality after Alfonso's death. Manfred strives to legitimize his claim to the title, first by marrying his son to Isabella and, when his son is killed, by divorcing his wife and marrying Isabella himself. The significant personal relationship (the second prototypical aim: B) is merely utilized by Manfred, but also by Theodore, as a means of achieving the first aim: possession and power (A). In the course of the complex interactions, Manfred is finally defeated and Theodore installed as the rightful prince of Otranto, to be married to Isabella. Thus, the negative event of Manfred's loss contrasts with the positive eventfulness of Theodore's succession to power and wife. But because Theodore had originally been in love with another woman and was obliged to shift his attachment to Isabella for the sake of reasons of state, his political and personal success is somewhat qualified. One significant feature of the plot development leading to the defeat of usurpation and the restitution of lawful order is the supernatural interference by Alfonso, whose murder had been the origin of injustice and disorder.

All these forms of eventfulness in eighteenth-century novels stand in contrast to *Things as They Are or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) by William Godwin. The configuration underlying the plot is the relation between the landowner Squire Falkland and Caleb Williams, a poor orphan, Williams's secretary. Their driving motives differ fundamentally from one another. Falkland's dominant desire is the recognition by others of his high moral and social stature, constitutive of his identity, a variant of the aim of striving for an elevated position (A). Caleb Williams, by contrast, strives for knowledge and truth, for revealing covered-up states of affairs, and for punishing the abuse of power—hence, a moral and judicial achievement (also a variant of A).

The plot development starts with Williams's curiosity about Falkland's past, notably an old conflict with his tyrannical neighbor Tyrrel and the latter's death after a quarrel. Falkland was acquitted on account of his stainless reputation, and two tenants of Tyrrel were convicted instead. Williams starts to spy on Falkland, finally forcing him to confess that he had indeed killed Tyrrel but could not admit his guilt because of his dependence on honor and reputation. Falkland forces him to keep his secret under penalty of death. Thereafter, Williams is subjected to acts of intimidation, despotism, and terror in a long history of persecution by Falkland, which reveals the scope of the latter's tyrannical power and the corruption of legal institutions. At long last, Williams succeeds in taking Falkland to court. In his deposition he both discloses Falkland's guilt and expresses his deep reverence for his nobility. Falkland falls into his arms, confesses his guilt, and praises the greatness of Williams's mind. Soon afterward Falkland dies.

The story of Caleb Williams's life demonstrates the corruption of contemporary society on account of despotism and injustice, both through the malfunctioning of (legal) institutions and the misbehavior of privileged individuals including the inordinate preoccupation with honor and reputation motivating the aristocracy. These driving forces produce conditions of inhumanity and crime. Noble Falkland is almost as despotic in the treatment of his victim as

is Tyrrel. In the corruption of interpersonal relationships and social institutions, no eventful changes are possible, neither through human actions nor through superhuman intervention (conspicuously absent from this novel). Nor is a reformation of the general situation foreseeable. Under these conditions, *no events can occur*: neither Williams's discovery of Falkland's guilt and his escape from persecution, nor his later indictment of Falkland nor his final death are eventful.

5. Summary: Patterns of Eventfulness in Medieval English Narratives and in Eighteenth-century Novels

Eventfulness is not a pervasive feature of medieval narratives. A difference exists between the two broad genres prevalent during the medieval period, romance and short tales. Romance plots, especially from the Arthurian cycle, downgrade eventfulness. Such narratives often form drawn-out episodic sequences with frequent changes and reversals, in which decisive turns (A and B) prove inconclusive and are occasionally superseded by a religious turn (C). *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a singular exception, coupling the rejection of love (B) with the proof of chivalric excellence (A). The instability of events in these cases is indicative of the changeability of the world. At the same time, there are indications of a superhuman force (Fortune, Fate) intervening in human affairs, revealing the existence of a hidden order.

By contrast, the other genre, short tales, is characterized by pronounced eventfulness. The frame of reference for these events is the order of morality. The basic question concerns the appropriateness of behavior, whether a person is guided by reason and moral norms or by his senses and desires. The eventful turn (punishment as a negative or reward as a positive event) testifies to the validity of the normative order. Such turns concern either of the two prototypical motives: desire for achievement (A) and for love (B). There is a difference in degree of eventfulness between the collections by Gower, Lydgate, the *Mirror for Magistrates*, and Chaucer's "The Monk's Tale" on the one hand, and the majority of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* on the other. While those four collections exemplify the positive effects of applying the norms and the negative results of ignoring them, Chaucer's tales demonstrate the witty application and violation of these norms in the form of staggered events, drawn out in a sequence of decisive turns for the protagonist or other characters. While the degree of eventfulness is low in the parallel collections on account of repetitiveness and conventionality, Chaucer enhances the degree through surprising turns in the staggered developments. Eventfulness thus functions as a genre-specific mark of the medieval short tale.

While medieval narrative fiction, with the exception of the short tale, is only weakly eventful, the eighteenth-century novel predominantly features a high degree of eventfulness. Novels show two tendencies: they highlight the eventful turns in the protagonists' lives and they relate eventfulness to the hierarchical English class system. In addition, the achievement of the event is sometimes attributed to superhuman intervention (Providence) as in some of the medieval texts (Fortune, Fate).

The event generally concerns the two prototypical aims in various constellations: reaching a high position in society (A), finding a suitable partner (B). Eventfulness occurs in the lives of both men and women. Three novels deviate from this pattern. Smollett's *Count Fathom* narrates the essential disappointment of both aims because of the protagonist's criminal motivation. Richardson's *Clarissa* abandons this pattern radically, rejecting worldly aims in favor of an otherworldly orientation (C). Godwin's *Caleb Williams* does not feature an event at all, because the rigorous class structure and its corrupting effects on all human relations preclude any kind of positive change.

The social and historical context for the pervasive eventfulness in eighteenth-century novels can be seen in the contemporary social and economic changes in England – the beginning industrial revolution, the growth of the market principle, the expansion of trade, and the establishment of capitalism, triggering an increase in social mobility. A contributing factor may also be the emergence of individualism in the course of the eighteenth century with the growing emphasis on personal achievement and self-confirmation.

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