

Turning Points

spectrum Literaturwissenschaft / spectrum Literature

Komparatistische Studien /
Comparative Studies

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De Gruyter

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Concepts and Narratives of Change in Literature
and Other Media

Edited by
Ansgar Nünning · Kai Marcel Sicks

in collaboration with
Daniel Hartley, Mirjam Horn and Claudia Weber

De Gruyter

ISBN 978-3-11-029694-5
e-ISBN 978-3-11-029710-2
ISSN 1860-210X

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2012 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston
Printing: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen
∞ Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Germany
www.degruyter.com

Acknowledgements

At a time of crisis and revolution such as ours, diagnoses of crucial junctures and ruptures—‘turning points’—in the continuous flow of history are more prevalent than ever. However, one can observe a strong disproportion between, on the one hand, ubiquitous observations of turning points in literature, mass media, economics, psychology and various other fields, and the lack of scholarly research on the concept of turning points on the other. The present volume attempts to redress this imbalance by asking why the turning point is such an attractive cultural metaphor, and by exploring the conceptual implications involved. Analysing literary, cinematic and other narratives, the volume seeks to understand the meanings conveyed by different concepts of turning points, the alternative concepts to which they are opposed when used to explain historical change, and those contexts in which they are deconstructed and unmasked as false and over-simplifying constructions.

The present volume results from a series of lively debates on the topic of ‘turning points’ that took place under the aegis of the European PhD-Network “Literary and Cultural Studies”, a programme funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Building on a concept developed jointly in our bi-annual doctoral symposia, professors, postdoctoral and doctoral researchers of the PhD-Network analysed the construction of turning points in various case studies. A conference on “Turning Points: Crucial Changes in Literary Theory, History and Genres”, held at Rauischholzhausen Castle in November 2010, provided the opportunity to discuss these case studies in great depth and detail, laying the foundations on which to develop a coherent volume on the topic.

We would first like to express our profound gratitude to the DAAD for funding the European PhD-Network. Moreover, we would like to thank all the participating members of the network for their contributions to this flourishing cooperation. Many people assisted in both the managing of the conference and the editing of the volume. We would like, above all, to thank the contributors, who not only submitted their papers in good time, but also were exceptionally receptive to queries, suggestions and ideas for revisions. Last but not least, we would like to credit Daniel Hart-

ley, Mirjam Horn and Claudia Weber for formatting, proof-reading and finalising the articles for the volume.

Giessen, March 2012

Ansgar Nünning and Kai Marcel Sicks

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ANSGAR NÜNNING and KAI MARCEL SICKS

Turning Points as Metaphors and Mininarrations: Analysing Concepts of Change in Literature and Other Media

1. Turning Points: Conceptualising Cultural Change

In recent years, various disciplines—including literary history, cultural studies and historiography—have repeatedly stressed that historical change takes place by means of gradual transformations, consisting of continuities as well as discontinuities. In spite of this observation, however, academic and popular approaches to history continuously talk about crucial junctures and revolutionary ruptures—‘turning points’—in the continuous flow of historical developments. While scholars in the humanities and in the social sciences have been interested in these “peculiarly essential junctures” (Abbott 99), the concept of the turning point itself has received relatively little attention to date. There are a few laudable exceptions to the rule, Andrew Abbott’s perspicacious sociological article, “On the Concept of Turning Point” (1997), being arguably the seminal case in point. However, neither the key features nor the metaphorical implications of this concept have yet been thoroughly explored. This comes as a particular surprise since every concept of cultural or biographical change (‘turning point,’ ‘revolution,’ ‘evolution,’ ‘crisis’ and so on) implies a construction or conceptualisation of time, which is, today more than ever, undergoing fierce debate (see e.g. Gumbrecht, *Unsere breite Gegenwart*).

The disproportion between, on the one hand, ubiquitous observations of turning points in literature, mass media, cinema, literary history and the study of culture, as well as in the history of science, economics, narrative psychology, sociology and various other fields, and the lack of scholarly research on the concept of turning points on the other, forms the basis for the cognitive interest and the aims of this volume. It sets out to analyse how turning points are narrated, what meanings different concepts of turning points convey, to what alternative concepts they are op-

posed when used to explain historical change, and in which contexts they are deconstructed and unmasked as false and over-simplifying constructions (see sections I to III of this volume). Moreover, and building on these premises, the volume is interested in how ‘turning points’ have been or could be used as a theoretical concept in the study of literature and culture, i.e. as a concept that gets to grips with historical change by building upon theoretical and systematical considerations (see sections IV and V).

When conceiving of ‘turning points,’ one might begin with the observation that they do not appear as objectively given, but are instead conceptualised as results of retrospective constructions of meaning. From a constructivist point of view, cultural transformations or life cycles ‘have’ neither structures nor turning points. The latter are imposed or projected onto cultural processes or life courses after the event by an observer who, more often than not, resorts to conceptual metaphors in an attempt to make sense of them (see Lakoff and Johnson; Nünning, “On the Emergence”).

In this context, literature and film appear to be media that make extensive use of the metaphor of turning points on both a biographical and cultural or historical level. While turning points are often used by literary and filmic characters to structure their life-courses, the ‘actual’ explanatory character of these structures may, more often than not, be questionable to readers and viewers (e.g. because the narratives either hint at hidden causes for a character’s development, or offer a wide range of possible stories that result from one single point of origin). In this regard, both literature and film stress the importance of turning points as a sense-making device (as part of a character’s or a community’s cultural memory), while at the same time unfolding the constructive and hence relative character of turning points. Offering complex reflections on the notion of turning points, literary and filmic narratives are thus of particular interest to the volume at hand.

The power of metaphors to structure and make sense of whatever domain they happen to be projected onto is one of the main reasons why the metaphor of the turning point is so ubiquitous in many literary and filmic genres, as well as in the context of non-fictional texts and even scholarly disciplines. Although literary representations of turning points figure prominently in many novels, short stories and plays, they have not yet received the attention they arguably deserve. Drama is the only genre in which turning points have received much scholarly interest; which is why the present volume deliberately refrains from an analysis of the concept of dramatic *peripeteia*. In film, biopics and melodramas are among the most important (though by no means only) genres that draw on the no-

tion of turning points. Finally, the delineation of, and reflections on, turning points are also ubiquitous in many non-fictional literary or filmic genres, such as autobiographies, conversion narratives and news stories as recounted by journalists. Turning points figure especially prominently, for example, in stories referring to the ups and downs of big companies and organisations.

The metaphor of the turning point is usually applied in order to designate those points or decisive moments at which a very significant change occurs, e.g. a change of direction or motion. Cases in point would be, for example, the 'turning point of her/his career' or the turning points in a war. Though the concept of the turning point is actually a metaphor itself, people often resort to other metaphors—e.g. 'watershed'—when trying to talk about, and make sense of, such turning points.

To lay the groundwork for the following articles, the second part of this introduction will briefly sum up some prominent conceptualisations of sudden change, hereby fleshing out the aforementioned ubiquity of observations of radical change. The interdisciplinary survey will focus exemplarily upon the history of science, narrative psychology and literary history. Building upon these disciplines' concepts of historical change, the third part of the article will provide both an exploration of the central role metaphors have played in theories of cultural change and a systematic analysis of the metaphor of 'turning points,' delineating the ways in which it can be conceptualised and what the implications of the metaphorical mappings might be. The fourth part is devoted to an exploration of the functions that metaphors like 'turning points' serve to fulfil and of the possible ways of employing them in future literary studies. In the fifth section we will then provide a brief overview of the articles in this volume. Thereby, we suggest that the articles demonstrate that an approach focusing on the notions and constructions of turning points can open up productive new possibilities for the analysis of various forms of cultural, literary and personal transformations.

2. Interdisciplinary Interest in 'Turning Points of Sorts'

Although the concept of the turning point has not yet received the amount of attention it arguably deserves, scholars working in various fields have displayed interest in phenomena that constitute what one might call 'turning points of sorts.' Before making a modest attempt to come to terms with particular usages of the turning-point concept, we should like to provide a brief introductory overview of some of the areas

and fields that have shown an interest in crucial changes or junctures. We will first of all cast our net fairly wide and then gradually zoom in on the fields covered in this volume, viz. cultural and especially literary studies.

A first (for our volume important) level on which scholars have explored the nature of crucial changes is the history of science and scientific revolutions. As is well known, the nature of scientific revolutions has been thoroughly explored by Thomas Kuhn, though his account of paradigm shifts has also been severely criticised. In his seminal study *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Kuhn builds upon the idea that a “normal science” is not usually interested in producing “fundamental innovations” (Kuhn 35), but rather in truing appearances in accordance with existing explanatory patterns. However, from time to time, one can detect the “emergence of crises that may be induced by repeated failure to make an anomaly conform” (ibid. xi). These crises can lead to major dissatisfaction with the overall epistemological system and then evoke scientific revolutions, upsetting the very basis of scientific knowledge and the rules of its construction. Kuhn refers to Copernicus and Lavoisier as scientists responsible for such major “paradigm shifts” and to the exploration of dioxygen or x-rays as events effecting minor revolutions (ibid. 92–94). Thus, for Kuhn, turning points in the history of science do exist and occur whenever scientific observations collide heavily with existing epistemic structures.

Critical approaches have noted that change in the history of science often follows a constant and continuous shift and that Kuhn’s concept of a ‘paradigm’ is by far too homogenous (see Toulmin). However, Kuhn’s key concept of the ‘paradigm shift’ has been productively applied and tested in various fields. As its title already shows, Fritjof Capra’s book *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture* (1982) is a case in point. When talking about ‘the turning point,’ Capra is mainly interested in “the dramatic change of concepts and ideas that has occurred in physics during the first three decades of the century” (Capra 15). He conceptualises the turning point in question, which he describes in terms of “Crisis and Transformation” (ibid. 19) and even more metaphorically as “The Turning of the Tide” (ibid. 21), by pitting “The Two Paradigms” (ibid. 51), i.e. “The Newtonian World-Machine” (ibid. 53) and “The New Physics” (ibid. 75) against each other. When Capra maintains that we need “a new ‘paradigm’” (ibid. 16) and when he describes the subject of his book as “the various manifestations and implications of this ‘paradigm shift’” (ibid.), it becomes clear that he uses the terms ‘turning point,’ ‘crisis’ and ‘paradigm shift’ synonymously: “The gravity and global extent of our current crisis indicate that this change is likely to result in a transformation of unprecedented dimensions, a turning point for the planet as a whole” (ibid.).

In the broad field of the interdisciplinary study of culture, also known as *Kulturwissenschaften* in Germany, Doris Bachmann-Medick has offered a model that revolves around the notion of ‘turns,’ which is, of course, closely related to the concept of turning points, becoming almost a shorthand version of the latter. In her book *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (2006), Bachmann-Medick shows how, in the field of the study of culture, changes in academic research do not evolve in the course of global ‘paradigm shifts’ or ‘scientific revolutions,’ but through the emergence of new centres and categories of interest that complement rather than substitute each other (see Bachmann-Medick). Her book discusses six ‘cultural turns’ in the aftermath of the groundbreaking ‘linguistic turn’ of the 1960s: the interpretive turn, the performative turn, the reflexive or literary turn, the postcolonial turn, the translational turn, the spatial turn and the iconic turn. However, turns, in Bachmann-Medick’s approach, organise the field of studies in culture systematically rather than historically; her book does not refer to a particular succession of turns. Thus, there is no particular definition of the turn as a concept conceiving of historical change in the humanities. The turns in Bachmann-Medick’s wide-ranging and sophisticated account arise without turning points.

In the field of cultural history, turning points have also played an important role, but the term has neither been well defined nor even properly conceptualised. The same holds true for related concepts like ‘crisis’ and ‘catastrophe,’ which have only fairly recently begun to attract scholarly attention (see e.g. Nünning, “Steps Towards”). In their 2007 volume on crisis, titled *Krisis! Krisenszenarien, Diagnosen, Diskursstrategien*, Henning Grunwald and Manfred Pfister analyse crisis as a discursive mode that is used to explain social and cultural processes rather than an ‘actual’ event (see Grunwald and Pfister 8). Scenarios of crises are always, as Grunwald and Pfister put it, dramatical, theatrical and spectacular presentations, which concentrate on often heterogeneous phenomena without any comprehensible interrelation. However, the notion of crisis implies the assignation of such cultural roles as the ‘alerter to’ or manager of a crisis (see *ibid.* 9).

In media studies, crucial changes in the technology of media have received a great deal of scholarly attention. From this point of view, historical changes appear to be perceived as ‘media revolutions’ (see Schnell): From time to time, the introduction of new media techniques as well as of their new modes of production and reception are accompanied by a discourse that interprets these innovations as fundamental ‘revolutions.’ Thus, “revolutions are not connected to a more or less sudden or radical change, but to its perception, observation, and even description” (Engell

103; our translation).¹ In effect, media revolutions and media evolution are closely associated (see Garncarz), and turning points appear to be effects of a discourse reflecting the history of media.

Similarly, in literary history, the notion of turning points is omnipresent, though both the theory of literary history and the actual writing of it tend to use the concept of *'Epochenschwellen'* (see e.g. Gumbrecht and Link-Heer; Herzog and Koselleck) rather than the term 'turning point.' Temporal 'thresholds' between two periods mark a beginning and an end, and they separate a variety of time periods in the course of history while re-connecting them with others at the same time. Such thresholds, one could say, consist of multiple 'turning points,' since, from the perspective of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's seminal essay on 'literary counter-worlds' (the German title is *Literarische Gegenwelten. Karnevalskultur und die Epochenschwelle vom Spätmittelalter zur Renaissance*), they can only be understood as the result of a "complex systemic evolution" (Gumbrecht, "Literarische Gegenwelten" 142; our translation)² in which social and cultural processes interact.

In the realms of the writing of literary history and in literary criticism, the notion of 'turning points' is sometimes used to chart the development of genres and modes of writing and to pinpoint junctures. David Lodge's famous essay, "The Novelist at the Crossroads," reprinted in *The Novelist at the Crossroads and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (1971), provides a particularly interesting case in point that serves to shed light on the questions of how a turning point can be conceptualised. Lodge describes the contemporary novelist in the late 1960s as a traveller: "The situation of the novelist today may be compared to a man standing at a crossroads" (18). According to Lodge, the "road on which he stands [...] is the realistic novel" (ibid.), which was "the main road, the central tradition, of the English novel" (ibid.) not only in the Victorian Age, but also until well into the twentieth century, but which was no longer the only option for novelists in the 1960s: "[M]any novelists, instead of marching confidently straight ahead, are at least considering the two routes that branch off in opposite directions from the crossroad. One of these routes leads to the non-fiction novel, and the other to what Mr. Scholes calls 'fabulation'" (ibid. 19). Lodge, however, adds a "fourth category" (ibid. 22) to these three options, i.e. the realistic novel, the non-fiction novel, and the fabulation, a category that also illuminates what usually occurs when people find themselves at a crossroads or turning point: "The novelist who has any kind of self-awareness must at least hesitate at the crossroads; and the solution

1 "Auch die Revolution ist deshalb nicht an mehr oder weniger raschen und radikalen Wandel gebunden, sondern an dessen Wahrnehmung, Beobachtung oder gar Beschreibung."

2 "komplexe Systemevolution."

many novelists have chosen is to *build their hesitation into the novel itself* (ibid.; original emphasis). With regard to the topic at hand, this means that reaching a turning point tends to result in, and correlate with, a heightened degree of self-awareness or self-consciousness on the part of the subject in question, an increased awareness that a decision has to be made, a range of several options between which the traveller must make a choice, and a change of path or direction resulting from the choice the traveller has made.

Whereas the disciplines and areas that we have so far briefly surveyed show a clear preference for concepts like ‘paradigm shifts,’ ‘turns,’ ‘*Epochenschwellen*’ and ‘*Umbrüche*’ (‘breaks’), or for the metaphor of ‘crossroads,’ both the concept and the term ‘turning point’ play an important role in a number of disciplines in the social sciences, including sociology and political science, as well as in applied economics, where the focus is on quantitative analysis with an eye to forecasting turning points (see e.g. LeSage; Zellner et al.). In his influential sociological article “On the Concept of Turning Point” (1997), Abbott provides a concise and very informative overview of the uses of the concept in these and other disciplines, including life-writing and criminological literature. Many of his pertinent observations are very helpful for any attempt to come to terms with the notion of turning points, for example the sociological insight that turning points tend to interrupt regular patterns and trajectories in the life-flow (see Abbott 88), “the ‘hindsight’ character of turning points” (ibid. 89), and especially his insistence that “the concept of the turning point is, in Arthur Danto’s language, a ‘narrative concept’” (ibid.), that “turning points are inherently narrative events” (ibid. 95). While acknowledging “its narrative character” (ibid. 96), we will try to explore the metaphorical implications of the concept of turning point, which is arguably both a mininarration and a metaphor (see section 3 of this introduction).

In addition, the disciplines, or approaches, called ‘cultural psychology’ and ‘narrative psychology’ have also displayed keen interest in the concept of the turning point, no longer regarding change on a large—cultural and/or historical—scale, but on a personal level. Jerome Bruner, one of the pioneering scholars in that field, has published a number of articles (see Bruner “Self-Making,” “Autobiographical Process”) in which biographical turning points are not just mentioned in passing but also explored in greater detail and defined thus: Turning points “represent a way in which people free themselves in their self-consciousness from their history, their banal destiny, their conventionality” (Bruner, “Self-Making” 74). According to Bruner turning points have at least three characteristic features:

1. "[T]hese turning points, though they may be linked to things happening 'outside,' are finally attributed to a happening 'inside' – a new belief, new courage, moral disgust, 'having had enough.'" (Bruner, "Remembered Self" 50)
2. "Secondly, they ride into the story on a wave of episodic memory retrieval, rich in detail and color. They remind one of the tumbling return of forgotten episodes during recovery from traumatic amnesia." (Ibid.)
3. "A third feature of these turning points is that they usher in a new and intense line of activity." (Ibid.)

All of these features and the functions that Bruner attributes to turning points can also be found in the literary representation of turning points—whether of a person's life or of a larger course of events—, though, once again, the concept and term themselves are conspicuous by their absence from most major reference works and encyclopedias of literary and cultural theory as well as from glossaries of literary terms. There are, however, a number of other, closely related terms like 'climax' or *peripeteia*, which cover some of the features attributed to the notion of turning points, without meaning exactly the same thing. All of these terms designate a sudden change in narrative structure. Whereas the climax, derived from Greek rhetoric, designates an accumulation or aggregation of narrative conflicts shortly before their solution(s), *peripeteia*, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, is "a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to our rule of probability or necessity" (Aristotle 63). According to Aristotle, *peripeteia*, along with recognition, generates a strong effect in drama. However, while the notion of turning points in Bruner's approach is closely related to individuals and their biographies, climax and *peripeteia* refer rather to the progress of a narration in which individual turning points play an important part.

For a number of classical genres, the function of turning points is a constitutive one, ranging from the said *peripeteia* of a five-act drama to the 'unprecedented event' of the novella. There are some genres that depend so much on the turning point that the latter becomes one of their defining features, with the genre of autobiography, in which "the concept of turning point is absolutely central" (Abbott 102), and especially conversion narratives like the lives of many eminent Christians arguably being the most important cases in point (for other genres which are highly linked to turning points, see the article by Vogt in the first section of this volume). Turning points serve to produce suspense, leading storylines to a climax, or they interfere with reception such that readers reconstruct subplots, or have to look at them in a different light. But literary turning points primarily create order and meaning in the lives of protagonists as in

the narrated worlds, i.e. those imaginary social, political, and economic contexts, in which these life stories are embedded.

Zooming in even more closely on the field of literary studies, the notion (rather than the concept) of turning points has played a central role in the structuralist theory of narrative known as narratology. Although the concepts that are actually used much more frequently are ‘event,’ ‘eventfulness’ (see Schmid; Hühn, “Event,” *Eventfulness*), and ‘kernels’ (see e.g. Prince 48), the defining features of these terms can fruitfully be applied to the definition of turning points, as Ansgar Nünning’s article in this volume serves to show by offering a more detailed conceptualisation of turning points as a narrative device. The only definition that narratologists have proffered for the term ‘turning point’ can be found in Gerald Prince’s useful *Dictionary of Narratology* (1987): “turning point. The *Act of Happening* that is decisive in making a goal reachable or not” (101; original emphasis). At the end of this extremely short entry, which we have just quoted in full, Prince refers the reader to the entry on crisis (“See also *Crisis*”; *ibid.*), which is defined as follows: “The *Turning Point*, the decisive moment in which the plot will turn” (*ibid.* 17; original emphasis). Like scholars working in other fields, Prince tends to use the term ‘turning point’ as an equivalent of crisis and thus as synonymous with the concept of the decisive event.

Although our brief overview certainly has not exhausted the broad range of fields in which the notion or concept of turning point is used, it may suffice to demonstrate that a broad range of disciplines has shown an interest in turning points of sorts, i.e. in the concept of turning point and/or in related terms and notions. Even a selective overview on this topic, however, would be incomplete if it did not take into account mathematics, which has a crystal clear definition of the turning point based on the concept of a single-valued function: “A turning point is a maximum or minimum point in this function, the point at which the slope of the function changes sign” (Abbott 89). In addition to the virtue of clarity, this definition has the added advantage that it lends itself to visualizations (see *ibid.* 90). Moreover, it is also the “operational definition of turning point in the applied economics literature” (*ibid.* 89; see also Zellner et al.).

This overview of the definitions and uses of the concept of turning point as well as of related notions may suffice to show that the notion of turning points not only figures prominently in different disciplines, but that the various uses also have a number of important characteristics in common. Before we explore the metaphorical implications of turning points, we would like to draw attention to two of those features. First, those decisive events or moments that we consider to be turning points

are not something given or natural, but rather a phenomenon that is made or constructed by an observer who wants to highlight particular episodes for reasons that we have yet to explore. What Nelson Goodman said about the modes of organisation and worldmaking that he was particularly interested in applies equally well to the notion of turning points: “[T]hey are not ‘found in the world’ but *built into a world*” (Goodman 14). Second, if turning points are constructed, not given or found, then the interest is shifted away from the completed product called the ‘turning point’ towards the construction process, to the question of how such events and plots that hinge on turning points are produced (see Nünning, “Making Events”); “in particular the genre of discourse *in which* they are constructed, becomes crucial” (McHale 3).

In short: Though the concept of turning points has been largely neglected in literary and cultural studies until now, there has been quite an impressive amount of interest in similar phenomena, which “might be seen as yet another ‘turning point’ of sorts” (Ishiguro 176). In the next section we will try to show that the metaphor of turning points, by virtue of its more or less coherent entailments, provides a systematic way of talking about and making sense of cultural and personal transformations and crucial changes.

3. Turning Points as Metaphor and Mininarration

While scholars in various fields have been grappling with crucial changes, trying to get to grips with them in the various areas, disciplines and fields in question, only few of these approaches use ‘turning points’ as a systematic concept. Most of them, however, constantly make use of the term (besides many others). Moreover, ‘turning points’ are referred to in everyday communication to account for individual as well as for collective transformations. What have all these different usages of ‘turning points’ in common? First, they all share a parallel concern in that they try to come to terms with the structure of (scientific, cultural, literary or personal) transformations (see Schlaeger). Second, they all resort to a metaphor in their attempt to conceptualise critical junctures which seemingly defy direct observation. Looking at the notion of turning points as a metaphor and in terms of the metaphorical mappings involved can therefore serve to shed more light on how the notion of ‘turning points’ is used to understand cultural as well as personal change.

Arguably, it would be wise to begin by looking at the discursive, literary and cognitive sense-making strategies deployed in the attempt to cope with crucial changes because they serve as means of structuring, narrativis-

ing and naturalising cultural transformations. And this is where metaphors come in. Metaphors not only serve to structure how we understand cultural transformations, they also project “mininarrations” (Eubanks 437) onto them, thereby providing ideologically charged plots and explanations of historical changes rather than ‘neutral’ descriptions thereof. It is arguably “the metaphorical concepts we live by” (Lakoff and Johnson 22), to use Lakoff and Johnson’s felicitous formulation that provide the key to understanding the topic at hand. If one accepts Lakoff and Johnson’s view “that most of our conceptual system is metaphorically structured” (ibid. 106), then one might even go so far as to argue that metaphors and narratives are the most powerful tools we have for making sense of cultural transformations, being endowed as they are with the power of reason and the power of evaluation (see Lakoff and Turner 65).

As the brief survey provided in section two has already served to show, metaphors pervade our theories of such radical cultural transformations. As Barnes has observed, the “key forms of thought and argument involved are metaphorical and analogical” (Barnes 57). Though, to our knowledge, no systematic studies of the role of metaphors in theories of cultural change are available, it seems obvious that there has been throughout intellectual history a relatively small body of central metaphors that people have used in order to conceive of various kinds of transformations.

Moreover, metaphors for cultural change are themselves subject to change, and there is arguably something like fashion in the use of such metaphors. As far as nineteenth-century theories are concerned, for instance, cultural change tended to be conceptualised in terms of natural and organic processes. In his brilliant account of the historical semantics of keywords, Raymond Williams succinctly summarised the way in which ‘evolution’ was pitted against ‘revolution,’ delineating their respective meanings and metaphorical entailments:

It was in the confusion of debate about evolution in this biological sense, and the even greater confusion of analogical applications from natural history to social history, that the contrast between evolution and *revolution* came to be made. REVOLUTION (q.v.) had now its developed sense of sudden and violent change, as well as its sense of the institution of a new order. Evolution in the sense of gradual development could easily be opposed to it, and the metaphors of ‘growth’ and the ORGANIC (q.v.) had a simple association with this sense. Ironically, as can be seen in the development of Social Darwinism, the generalized natural history provided images for any imaginable kind of social action and change. (Williams 122; original emphasis)

What these metaphors have in common with the metaphorical notion of ‘turning points’ is that they all serve to structure how we understand and

interpret cultural change, foregrounding particular aspects of such processes while masking others. By virtue of their more or less coherent entailments, metaphorical concepts provide a systematic way of talking about and making sense of cultural change. Lakoff and Johnson (see ch. 2) have emphasised what they call the “systematicity of metaphorical concepts” (ibid. 7) and have spelled out its implications: “The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another [...] will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept [...], a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor” (ibid. 10). Metaphors “form coherent systems in terms of which we conceptualize our experience” (ibid. 41)—as well, we might add, as those crucial cultural transformations that we call ‘turning points.’ Closely associated with the ideas of civilisation, improvement and progress (see Williams 244), evolutionary metaphors serve to foreground organic notions of natural growth (ibid. 227–29) as well as an inherent principle of development from lower to higher forms of life and cultural organisation (ibid. 121, 244), while at the same time hiding or even depreciating other equally metaphorical models of cultural transformation, such as that of ‘revolution’:

Radical change, which would include rejection of some existing forms or reversal of some existing tendencies, could then, within the metaphor [i.e. of evolution; AN/KS], be described as ‘unnatural,’ and, in the contrast with the specialized sense of *revolution*, be associated with sudden violence as opposed to steady growth. (Ibid. 122)

Since the metaphor of ‘turning points’ is much more akin to that of revolution than to that of evolution, everything that Williams so succinctly observes about the implications of the latter also serves to illuminate some of the implications of the metaphor of turning points. Although the “specialized meaning of violent overthrow” (ibid. 273) that the term ‘revolution’ implies is absent from the semantic domain of ‘turning points,’ the latter does include such features as ‘suddenness,’ “fundamental change” (ibid.), “rejection of some existing forms or reversal of some existing tendencies” (ibid. 122). In short, like revolution, turning points tend to usher in “fundamentally new developments” (ibid. 273).

In order to come to terms with the pervasiveness of metaphors in theories and accounts of crucial changes and cultural transformations, it is helpful to take a brief look at some of the theoretical premises and insights of cognitive metaphor theory and at the implications of the metaphor of turning points (see Nünning, “On the Emergence” 62–68). Although we know that cultural transformations do not consist in or lead to any ‘complete change in form, structure, substance or character,’ as is

suggested by the metaphor of metamorphosis (see Schlaeger), we tend to resort to such metaphors as ‘metamorphoses,’ ‘crises’ or ‘turning points’ whenever we try to conceptualise crucial, decisive and far-reaching cultural changes. The main reason for this is not hard to determine:

Because so many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.), we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (spatial orientations, objects, etc.). This need leads to metaphorical definition in our conceptual system. (Lakoff and Johnson 115)

Like abstract political entities which tend to be conceptualised metaphorically, e.g. history, government and the state, crucial changes are a phenomenon of considerable elusiveness, abstractness and heterogeneity, being anything but clearly delineated in people’s experience. Since people can hardly experience such changes in any direct fashion, they often try to comprehend them indirectly, via metaphor (see *ibid.* 85): “we tend to structure the less concrete and inherently vaguer concepts [...] in terms of more concrete concepts, which are more clearly delineated in our experience” (*ibid.* 112). Metaphors allow us to understand the somewhat abstract and elusive domains of crucial changes, both in our personal lives and cultural transformations at large, in terms of much more concrete and familiar domains of experience.

In the case of the metaphor of turning points, people (whether consciously or unconsciously) draw on the basic conceptual metaphor of “LIFE IS A JOURNEY” (Lakoff and Turner 9). By virtue of this general conceptual background metaphor, life is conceptualised as motion along a path, including, of course, a traveller who is on the road towards some goal or other. Against this backdrop, the metaphor of ‘turning point’ implies that someone has reached a critical juncture and that she or he realises that there are “alternative paths through life which lead to different destinations” (*ibid.*). Moreover, both the life-as-a-journey metaphor and the metaphor of having reached a turning point also have ethical and normative implications: “One of our major ways of conceiving of ethical behavior is an elaboration of the life-as-a-journey metaphor: there are paths of righteousness and evil ways” (*ibid.* 10). Lakoff and Turner have done an excellent job in explaining what is involved in metaphorical mappings in general and in the case of the life-as-a-journey metaphor in particular. Therefore their observations deserve to be quoted at greater length:

One of the reasons that this form of understanding is powerful is that it makes use of a general knowledge of journeys. [...] the understanding of life as a journey permits not just a single simpleminded conceptualization of life but rather a rich and varied one. [...]

Two things permit such richness: the structure of our knowledge of journeys and our ability to map from that structured knowledge to a conception of life. [...] We will call knowledge structured in such a skeletal form a 'schema,' and we will use the term 'slot' for elements of a schema that are to be filled in. (Lakoff and Turner 61)

Most of the characteristic features that define turning points can be derived from the conceptual metaphor of "LIFE IS A JOURNEY" and from the metaphoric mappings entailed by it. The most characteristic features that can be inferred from both the source domain and the example of David Lodge's visualised image of the 'novelist at the crossroads,' quoted in section two above, include the notions of:

- a subject or actant that can be envisaged as the traveller,
- motion along a path,
- reaching a critical juncture or crossroads,
- choice among various options or paths,
- heightened degree of self-awareness,
- reflection about the options that are available,
- a sense of the important and problematic nature of the undertaking involved in the decision-making process,
- a decision on which of the options and paths to choose and take,
- a change of direction resulting from whatever decision is made,
- a high degree of eventfulness (see Schmid; Hühn, "Event," *Eventfulness*),
- a sense of the importance of the decision and the changes and effects that it entails.

As this list of the main slots and implications of the metaphor of 'turning points' serves to demonstrate, this metaphor is actually a kernel of a narrative in that it presupposes a very short story in order for the metaphorical mappings to work and make sense. In the preface to his seminal encyclopedia of philosophical metaphors, the editor Ralf Konersmann answers the question of what metaphors actually are by providing a somewhat unusual functional definition: "Metaphors are narratives that mask themselves as a single word" (Konersmann 17; our translation).³ Konersmann is, of course, neither the first nor the only scholar to draw attention to the fact that metaphors can be conceived of as condensed narratives and that they produce a special kind of knowledge. Philip Eubanks, for instance, has argued that metaphors project "mininarrations" (437).

Taken together, the life-as-a-journey metaphor and the metaphor of having reached a turning point project a particular plot upon crucial

3 "Metaphern sind Erzählungen, die sich als Einzelwort maskieren."

changes in either a person's life or in culture at large (hereby, in a questionable manner, conceiving the history of culture in terms of a personal life). The projection of a metaphorical plot like "LIFE IS A JOURNEY" can be understood as an interpretive strategy or cognitive process of the sort that has come to be known as 'naturalisation' (see Culler; Fludernik *Natural' Narratology*), one which makes complex sociohistorical phenomena intelligible in terms of culturally accepted frames. To interpret cultural transformations in terms of such culturally bound plots can be thought of as a way of naturalising changes by giving them a function in some larger pattern supplied by accepted cultural models. Culler clarifies what 'naturalisation' means in this context: "to naturalize a text is to bring it into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural or legible" (138). This kind of metaphoric naturalisation is so much an ingrained part of our cognitive strategies used in dealing with and accounting for cultural changes that, in all probability, we are not conscious of it and hardly, if ever, notice it.

The preceding discussion of the main semantic features and implications of the metaphor of turning points provides a convenient basis to distinguish turning points from related phenomena, but also to explain what this metaphor has in common with, for example, the metaphor of crisis (for a detailed discussion of this metaphor, see Nünning, "Steps Towards a Metaphorology"). Turning points, like crises, can be described as a special kind of event, or perhaps rather non-event, since they—according to their etymology—precisely mark the critical moment at which a decision about the further progress of the incident has to be made amongst a number of possibilities: "At the turning point an old order is lost and a new one has yet to arrive" (Brown 8). Thus, the very moment that marks the turning point does not constitute a particularly eventful incident in itself, but has usually been preceded by one or several important events. Crises are a particular kind of turning point, viz. "a suspension, a hiatus, the summer or winter solstice of the intellect" (ibid.). Speaking of a 'crisis' can thus be conceived of as a certain form of diagnosis or description of a situation which, while being normally preceded by especially eventful occurrences that are considered as significant, marks an ambivalent turning point, an ongoing phase of suspension, in the sense felicitously described by Marshall Brown: "The turning point is both a moment of balance and a moment of unbalance, of decision and of indecision, of determination [...] and of indetermination" (ibid. 10).

While turning points and crises are often used more or less synonymously, not only by such a distinguished literary historian and critic as Brown, but also by the New Age physicist Fritjof Capra and many other scholars, there are some antonyms from which turning points should be

clearly distinguished. The most obvious cases in point are the concepts of emergence and evolution (see Williams), which provide radically different accounts of cultural transformations, emphasising continuities rather than discontinuities. ‘Evolution,’ as has been mentioned above, implies references to constant organic growth and does not refer to individual or collective decision-making processes. Although processes designated by the term ‘evolution’ (unlike those explained by the notion of *entelecheia*) are not predestined by a particular starting configuration, they revolve around a complex interplay of different ‘adaptations’ and do not depend upon reflection about the options that are available. ‘Emergence’ refers to an even more complex process of interwoven factors leading to slow historical change which cannot be explained by any kind of ‘determination’ (see Krohn and Küppers; Clayton).

As we hope to have shown, metaphors of cultural change, far from being mere poetical or rhetorical embellishments, arguably play an essential and constitutive role in characterising the nature and structure of the cultural, scientific or personal transformations that they refer to. One might even go so far as to argue that they create the very realities they purport merely to describe (see Lakoff and Johnson: 145, 156): “[C]hanges in our conceptual systems do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions” (145–46). Offering ways of organising complex experiences and historical changes into structured wholes (see *ibid.* 81), metaphors like ‘turning points’ “not only provide coherent structure, highlighting some things and hiding others” (*ibid.* 139), they are also capable of giving people a new understanding of the respective target domain, playing “a very significant role in determining what is real for us” (*ibid.* 146).

Though we have briefly mentioned the heuristic and cognitive power of metaphor, we have not yet explored the question of what functions the metaphor of turning points can serve to fulfil in detail. The next section will be devoted to an attempt at providing a preliminary answer to this question.

4. The Turning Points Metaphor From a Functional Point of View

What is at least as interesting, in the present context, as the structure and processes that are involved in metaphorical mappings is the question of what functions the latter serve to fulfil. We would like to suggest that the conceptualisation of change in terms of ‘turning points’ fulfils a number of general functions. In the first place, by reducing the complexity and

elusiveness of cultural transformations, the metaphor of ‘turning points’ imposes form and structure upon a chaotic reality that generally does not do us the favour of identifying discontinuities and radical ruptures. The most obvious function of the metaphor is thus to impart some sort of structure to an amorphous phenomenon and to complex cultural changes, thus serving as an ordering and structuring device. What deserves to be emphasised is that the structure metaphorical mappings allow us to impart to a phenomenon “is not there independent of the metaphor” (64), as Lakoff and Turner have pointed out. Metaphors rather represent coherent organisations of complex phenomena in terms of ‘natural’ (or naturalised) categories like the notion of life being a journey and of reaching turning points along the way: These metaphors are “structured clearly enough and with enough of the right kind of internal structure to do the job of defining other concepts” (Lakoff and Johnson 118), such as crucial changes that we find difficult to grasp or to conceptualise.

In the case of ‘turning points,’ cultural change is seen as analogous to personal transformations, i.e. as linear progression coming to a halt in need of a change of direction. In this regard, the ‘turning-points’ approach collides with recent concepts trying to comprehend time not in terms of linearity, but as a ‘broad’ entity constituted by simultaneities and discontinuities rather than by succession and sequentiality. Hence, understanding change in terms of ‘turning points’ serves an ‘ideological’ stance which accentuates agency and subjectivity:

I now believe that [...] the short presence of the ‘historical time’ has become the Cartesian subject’s epistemological habitat. Presence was where this subject – adapting experiences from the past to the present and future – chose from the options offered by the future. This experiential choice from a variety of future options was the precondition and frame of what we call ‘Doing’. (Gumbrecht, *Unsere breite Gegenwart* 15, our translation)⁴

Concepts and narratives of change that adhere to the metaphorical concept of ‘turning point’ might become problematic from this point of view—which might be one reason for many literary texts to deconstruct a person’s or culture’s turning points rather than confirm them—as can be seen in many of the articles in this volume.

However, in the domain of autobiographies and other self-narratives, the retrospective construction of turning points fulfils important roles. In

4 “Ich glaube nun, dass [...] die kurze Gegenwart der ‘historischen Zeit’ zum epistemologischen Habitat des cartesianischen Subjekts wurde. Sie war jener Ort, wo das Subjekt – Erfahrungen aus der Vergangenheit an Gegenwart und Zukunft anpassend – aus den von der Zukunft gebotenen Möglichkeiten auswählte. Diese erfahrungsgetragene Auswahl aus den Möglichkeiten der Zukunft war Voraussetzung und Rahmen dessen, was wir ‘Handeln’ nennen.”

his seminal essays on “The ‘Remembered’ Self” (1994) and “Self-Making and World-Making” (1991), Bruner not only identifies the defining features of turning points (see section 2 above), he also explores the functions that turning points serve to fulfil in the contexts of the stories that we tell ourselves and others about the very ‘self’ that we make through the telling of such stories (see Eakin, *How Our Lives*):

[We] do better to consider them [turning points] as preternaturally clear instances of narrative construction that have the function of helping the teller clarify his or her Self-concept. They are prototype narrative episodes whose construction results in increasing the realism and drama of the Self. In that sense, the narrative construction, whenever it actually happened, is as important as what is reported to have actually happened in the turning point episode. Turning points, in a word, construct emblems of narrative clarity in the teller’s history of Self. (Bruner, “Remembered Self” 50)

For cultural and narrative psychology the central function of storytelling in general and the construction of turning points in particular is thus that these are the most important modes of world- and self-making that we have at our disposal (see Bruner “Self-Making”; Neumann and Nünning; Nünning et al.).

Within the realms of literature and literary studies, all of the functions discussed so far can also occur for the simple reason that literature itself generally functions as a ‘reintegrative interdiscourse’ (Link; Zapf, “Literature as Cultural Ecology,” *Literatur als kulturelle Ökologie*). As aesthetically condensed narratives, literary texts not only illustrate the workings of narratives in general and turning points in particular, they also take an active part in the collective construction of cultural narratives and of models for the stories that we tell about ourselves. Bruner (see *Actual Minds*) claims that individuals make sense of their personal experience by ordering it along the lines of literary genres, including the kinds of turning points that are part of the conventions we associate with them. Such genres—repositories of narrative models or schemata—provide a foundation for our sense of identity, while at the same time making us members of the community that generated them. Given their constructed nature and their dependence upon cultural genres, autobiographical narratives, novels and other literary genres reflect the prevailing notions about ‘possible,’ i.e. culturally acceptable lives that are part of one’s culture. Indeed, as Bruner underlines, “one important way of characterizing a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life” (*Actual Minds* 15). How identity is constructed, therefore, is a question which has to be examined in light of narrative forms provided by particular cultures (see Brockmeier and Carbaugh 10): “The stories that individuals create often strike variations upon a repertoire of socially available narratives,

that, in turn, legitimize the community and guarantee its continued existence” (Hinchman and Hinchman, “Introduction” xvii).

For anyone interested in the literary representation of turning points, these observations have at least four important implications: first any story we tell is always inextricably intertwined with both the conventions and patterns that we associate with particular genres and with larger cultural models; second, turning points always presuppose a larger narrative framework in order to emerge and make sense; third, the projection of turning points serves an important role in the processes that are involved in the construction of the ‘Self’ (or selves) that we make through storytelling (see Eakin, *How Our Lives*); fourth, our notions of what actually constitutes such turning points are not only “culturally recognizable” (Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* 121), but also subject to cultural variation and historical change. Since Bruner does an excellent job at clarifying these complex issues, his pertinent observations deserve to be quoted at length:

The large overall narratives were told in easily recognizable genres – the tale of a victim, a *Bildungsroman*, antihero forms, *Wandering* stories, black comedy, and so on. The storied events that they comprised made sense only in terms of the larger picture. At the center of each account dwelled a protagonist Self in process of construction: whether active agent, passive experiencer, or vehicle of some ill-defined destiny. And at critical junctures, ‘turning points’ emerged, again culturally recognizable, produced almost invariably by an access of new consciousness aroused by victory or defeat, by betrayal of trust, and so on. It soon became apparent not only that life imitated art but that it did so by choosing art’s genres and its other devices of storytelling as its modes of expression. (Ibid. 21)

5. New Horizons: ‘Turning Points’ as a Fruitful Area for Research

This volume explores concepts of personal and cultural change exploited and deconstructed in literature and other media. Most contributions focus on representations of ‘turning points’ as well as on the literary and cinematic affirmation or criticism of the concept (see sections 1 to 3). Other articles concentrate on exploring the concept of ‘turning points’ in new approaches to literary history or the history of literary criticism: by conceptualising literary and theoretical change in terms of ‘turning points’ or by deconstructing the tellability of cultural transformations (see sections 4 and 5). Overall, the volume contributes to a heightened reflexivity of the constructedness and narrativity of crucial change as well as to a differentiated view of diverse narrative and metaphorical modes of approaching radical transformations on a personal and cultural level.

Among others, the contributions refer to the following questions: What are typical turning points in individual lives and how are they staged in a range of literary texts? How do biographical and cultural turning points dovetail with literary texts? How do literary constructions of cultural turning points respond to interpretations of other popular, aesthetic or scholarly media? How are turning points in literary texts marked and performed? In what ways are turning points undermined and deconstructed? Can genre-specific differences in representing turning points be detected? To what extent are readers involved when interpreting an event as a turning point? How can turning points be described and classified narratologically? Is it possible to imagine narratives that do not have any turning points? To what extent can individual literary texts be interpreted as turning points within literary history or as referencing a certain historical transformation such as the medial configuration of a society?

Building on these questions, the first section of this volume investigates turning points as literary and narrative devices from both a systematical and historical standpoint. Ansgar Nünning's contribution, "‘With the Benefit of Hindsight’: Features and Functions of Turning Points as a Narratological Concept and as a Way of Self-Making," delineates the turning point as a narratological tool facilitating the analysis and interpretation of literary and other forms of story-telling. By accentuating central features of narrative turning points—e.g. retrospective construction, contingency, subjectivity and experientiality—Nünning provides a framework for future academic investigations into personal and cultural modes of 'self-' and 'world-making.' Annette Simonis, in her article "Turning Points in the Nineteenth-Century Novella: Poetic Negotiations and the Representation of Social Rituals," returns to theoretical debates on literary turning points in the nineteenth century, which she contrasts with two novellas by Conrad Ferdinand Meyer and Théophile Gautier. The article explores a playful and ironic adaption of turning points in the two novellas, which differ from classical conceptions, particularly from the Aristotelian *peripeteia*. Critical positions towards turning points as narrative techniques are revisited in the articles by Pirjo Lyytikäinen—"Iterative Narration and Other Forms of Resistance to Peripeties in Modernist Writing"—and Vincenzo Martella—"The Missing Turning Points in the Story: Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* Between Ethics and Epistemology." While Lyytikäinen investigates how in Modernist writing—in Proust, Woolf and Hemingway—classical turning-point narratives (employing the *peripeteia*) are regularly substituted by iterative modes of storytelling, Martella focuses on Robert Musil's critique of narrative sequentiality. On the other hand, Robert Vogt's article "‘If the Stranger hadn't been there! ... But he was!’ Causal, Virtual and Evaluative Dimensions of Turning Points

in Alternate Histories, Science-Fiction Stories and Multiverse Narratives” points to the ubiquity and intellectual potentiality of turning points in literary genres which play with narrative expectations and the construction of possible worlds.

The second section discusses the construction of turning points in cultural history as delineated in literary, cinematic and mass media narratives of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Lieven Ameel’s article, “On the Threshold: The Brothel and the Literary Salon as Heterotopias in Finnish Urban Novels,” analyses the relationship between the spatial and temporal order of narratives, particularly between heterotopia and turning points. The case in point is the brothel in Modern Finnish novels, which is constructed as a polyvalent and disturbing narrative space provoking ruptures and crucial changes in the life paths of literary characters. Peter Hanenberg, by adapting cognitive psychological theories for literary analysis, looks at differing constructions of historical change in literature. In his article, “Long Waves or Vanishing Points? A Cognitive Approach to the Literary Construction of History,” Hanenberg revisits the opening passages of Uwe Johnson’s *Jahrestage* and Peter Weiss’ *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* in order to understand how literature comes to terms with historical complexity without referring to simplistic turning-points narratives. Looking at contemporary cases, Diana Gonçalves’s contribution “(Re)Turn to Dystopia: Community Feeling in M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Village*” and Anna Rettberg’s article “Remediating Turning Points for Conviviality and Englishness in Contemporary Black British Literature” analyse fictional representations of the cultural and political turning point of 9/11. Focusing on US (Goncalves) and British (Rettberg) contexts, both texts deal with post-9/11 narratives, which work towards a differentiated view of the continuities and discontinuities leading to and following this historical change at the beginning of the new millennium. Finally, Isabel Capelo Gil’s article “This is (Not) It. Rate, Rattle and Roll in the Struggle for Financial Narratives” historicises recent discourses on crises following the worldwide financial meltdown in 2008, which she reads against the background of filmed dance choreographies from Busby Berkeley to Michael Jackson.

The third section concentrates on turning points in literary and cinematic life-writing, i.e. on the emplotment of biographical narratives and on their concepts of change. Julia Faisst’s article “Turning a Slave Into a Freeman: Frederick Douglass, Photography and the Formation of African American Fiction” observes Frederick Douglass’ auto-biographical approach to his liberation from slavery and the interplay between this outstanding biographical event and the inauguration of African American Fiction as a new literary genre. In Teresa Ferreira’s contribution “Refram-

ing Absence: Masquerade as Turning Point in Du Maurier's and Hitchcock's *Rebecca*," the main female character is analysed with regard to her gradual emancipation from being a sheer double of her role model 'Rebecca' and her transformation into a self-constituting, though hybrid subject. Hanna Mäkelä discusses Woody Allen's concept of biographical turning points in his 2005 movie *Match Point*. Reconsidering the movie's literary sources and intertexts, Mäkelä's article "Player in the Dark: Mourning the Loss of the Moral Foundation of Art in Woody Allen's *Match Point*" focuses on the ethical crossroads confronting the contemporary Western subject in general and the movie's characters in particular. The last three contributions to this section share a focus on life-writing in terms of migration, cross-cultural travel and postcolonial asymmetries. While Elisa Antz' article "Roots, Seduction and Mestiçagem in José Eduardo Agualusa's *My Father's Wives*" investigates the road trip of a second-generation migrant to her assumed home in Angola and the turning points of this journey, Eleonora Ravizza's essay "A Middle Passage to Modernity: Reflections on David Dabydeen's Postmodern Slave Narrative *A Harlot's Progress*" analyses the complexities brought into the concept of turning points by approaching Dabydeen's life-writings from a poststructuralist and postcolonial perspective. Similarly, Linda Karlsson Hammarfelt's article "Becoming the 'Other': Metamorphosis and 'Turning Points' in Katja Lange-Müller and Yoko Tawada" accentuates the ambivalent relation between turning points and hybrid identities by exploring metamorphic processes in contemporary German life-narratives.

In the fourth section, the concept of turning points is itself employed to gain a new and critical view on literary history; the articles at hand thoroughly analyse processes which, in the end, lead to a major transformation of the textual shape of literary genres and/or the processes of their production and reception. Kerstin Lundström's essay "Lay Pamphlets in the Early Reformation: Turning Points in Religious Discourse and the Pamphlet Genre?" investigates the emergence of lay writing and the simultaneous turn to polemics in the sixteenth century. In her contribution "The King Is Dead. Long Live... the Queen: Turning Points in Panegyric Writing—Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-1689)," Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre analyses a crucial change in Swedish panegyric writing released by the enthronement of the first woman emperor, Queen Christina. Also focusing on seventeenth-century literature, Marília dos Santos Lopes' contribution "Writing New Worlds: Eberhard Werner Happel and the Invention of a Genre" explores the invention of the travel encyclopedia by polymath Eberhard Werner Happel. In contrast, Rossana Bonadei's article "Dickens and *The Pickwick Papers*: Unstable Signs in a Transmodal Discourse" not only focusses on new modes of writing introduced by Dick-

ens but also on the changes in the culturally ‘thinkable’ and ‘explicable’ brought forward by Dickens’ literary text. The last two contributions to this section turn to contemporary transformations of literary genres by focusing on the relation between literature and the new media. While Heta Pyrhönen’s article “*Bridget Jones’s Diary*: A Case Study of Austen Fan Fiction” highlights the emergence of new forms of fan writing (and thus translates the discourse of lay and expert literature analysed by Kerstin Lundström to present times), Sabrina Kusche’s essay “New Media and the Novel. A Survey of Generic Trends in Contemporary Literature” analyses the interplay between media inventions and literary history, particularly regarding recent generic trends like the inauguration of E-Mail- or Mobile Phone Novels.

In the fifth section, which concludes the volume, three articles revisit the history of literary theory and philosophy by investigating and deconstructing the turning points leading from one ‘theoretical era’ to another. First, Bo Pettersson, in his article “On the Linguistic Turns in the Humanities and Their Effect on Literary Studies” explores the term ‘linguistic turn’ and proposes a differentiation regarding several ‘linguistic turns.’ Angela Locatelli, in her essay “Turning Points and Mutuality in Literature and Psychoanalysis,” investigates the changing relationship between literary criticism and psychoanalysis, likewise focussing upon ruptures and continuities. Finally, Claudia Egerer revisits philosophical and literary concepts of ‘the animal’. In her contribution “The Speaking Animal Speaking the Animal: Three Turning Points in Thinking the Animal”, she analyses crucial changes in the history of thinking the relationship between animals and humans hereby accentuating the important role of literature in this context.

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I. Concepts of Change in Narrative Theory

ANSGAR NÜNNING

“With the Benefit of Hindsight”:
Features and Functions of Turning Points as a
Narratological Concept and as a Way of Self-Making¹

1. Approaching Turning Points, or: A Ubiquitous Presence in
World Literature vs. a Lacuna of Narrative Theory

Though turning points figure prominently in many novels and short stories, the notion of the turning point is as yet neither well-defined nor widely established as a concept in literary and cultural studies. Anyone who wants to look it up in what is arguably the best, most comprehensive and most up-to-date reference work on narratology, i.e. the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (see Herman et al.), will find out that even this excellent encyclopedia does not have an entry on ‘turning point.’ One also looks in vain for entries on the subject of this volume in other recent reference works in narratology, including the useful *Handbook to Narratology* (2009), edited by Peter Hühn and others but also in those that cover literary and cultural studies at large.

While turning points have been one of the constitutive elements of the ‘rhetoric of fiction’ (*sensu* Wayne Booth) since the beginnings of the novel, and also an integral component of everyday narration, narrative theory has accorded very little attention to such a genuinely narratological phenomenon. Given the fact that one could produce an endless list of novels in which turning points play a central role, both on the level of the story and in the narrator’s discourse (see Chatman), it comes as a surprise that narratology has not yet bothered properly to define this concept or to explore its forms and functions in narrative literature. In spite of its indulgence in theory and terminology, narratology, with only one single, but

1 I should like to thank my research assistants Simon Cooke and especially Robert Vogt not only for carefully proofreading this article, but also for making a number of valuable suggestions for improvement and for drawing my attention to some additional textual examples and to Abbott’s seminal article, albeit, unfortunately, only after I had finished the first draft of the article.

extremely short exception (see Prince 101), has hardly devoted any attention to turning points. Neither in recent overviews or introductions to narrative theory—e.g. those by Martinez and Scheffel (1999), Herman (2006) or Fludernik (2009)—nor in specialist studies like Monika Fludernik's seminal *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (1996), Andrew Gibson's *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (1996) or Michael Kearns' *Rhetorical Narratology* (1999) has the phenomenon of turning points played anything more than a subordinate role. Several seminal collections of essays likewise ignore this topic, with the stimulating books edited by Herman (1999), Grünzweig and Solbach (1999), and Heinen and Sommer (2009) being just three cases in point.

One of the underlying theses of this essay—that the phenomenon of turning points has thus far been a lacuna in narrative theory—is actually confirmed by the few studies that are devoted to this topic or just mention it in passing: They neither attempt to define turning points or to differentiate between different types, nor do they consider what functions turning points could fulfil in individual cases. There is also a lack of studies examining the use of metanarrative forms in the works of individual authors or in given periods of literary history.

This essay takes its cue from this rough sketch of the general neglect turning points have suffered, and it will try to bridge the gap between the importance of turning points in world literature and the scanty attention this phenomenon has been given. It addresses some of the terminological and typological issues pertaining to the concept of turning points, providing a definition and a typology of turning points as well as an outline of the functions they can fulfil in fictional narratives. More specifically this essay stakes out three aims: taking its cue from the reflections about the significance of turning points in his life that the narrator in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) provides, the first part is devoted to the introduction of the notion of turning points and to the discussion of some of the issues surrounding it (section 2). After this brief and bottom-up introduction to the notion of turning points, an attempt will be made to define the term 'turning point,' which has only been used impressionistically and sporadically in narrative theory so far (section 3), while also developing a set of categories for the narratological description and analysis of turning points. This outline can then serve as a basis for a survey of the changing functions of turning points in English novels from the eighteenth to the late twentieth century (section 4). A short summary and a brief look at some of the points that future research might explore will complete this article, which suggests that much more work needs to be done (section 5).

2. Introducing Turning Points, or: Inferring Some of Their Characteristic Features

Although I have taken narrative theory to task for having so far failed to provide a definition for the term ‘turning point,’ I should like to begin, not with a top-down definition, but rather with an example that can tell us quite a lot about the phenomenon generally designated as ‘turning point.’ It is taken from one of the many and digressive ruminations by the highly self-conscious homodiegetic narrator called Stevens, who is also the protagonist of Kazuo Ishiguro’s award-winning novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989; RD), which is arguably a seminal work of art for anyone interested in the phenomenology and narratology of turning points. It deserves to be quoted at somewhat greater length because of the light it manages to shed on some of the central features of the topic at hand:

Indeed, it might even be said that this small decision of mine constituted something of a key turning point; that the decision set things on an inevitable course towards what eventually happened.

But then, I suppose, when with the benefit of hindsight one begins to search one’s past for such ‘turning points,’ one is apt to start seeing them everywhere. Not only my decision in respect of our evening meetings, but also that episode in my pantry, if one felt so inclined, could be seen as such a ‘turning point.’ What would have transpired, one may ask, had one responded slightly differently that evening she came in with her vase of flowers? And perhaps—occurring as it did around the same time as these events—my encounter with Miss Kenton in the dining room the afternoon she received the news of her aunt’s death might be seen as yet another ‘turning point’ of sorts. (RD 175–76)

What does this passage, then, tell us about the characteristic features of the phenomenon we call ‘turning point’? To begin with, it is anything but a coincidence that these reflections are uttered by a narrator who is looking back on his own life, trying over and over again to make sense of what he considers to be the particularly important episodes. The narrator’s reflections imply that turning points are those decisive events or critical moments in a person’s life on which hinges the question of whether or not the future development will be beneficial for the protagonist. Stevens’ reflections about the nature of turning points allow us to infer a number of the defining characteristics of the phenomenon in question. Turning points display the following features (all the textual quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the excerpt from Ishiguro’s novel quoted above):

- Retrospective construction: They are retrospective constructs or judgements that can only be identified “with the benefit of hindsight”; i.e. there is usually a temporal distance between the actual

experience and the recognition that a particular moment constituted a turning point in one's life.

- Contingency: The qualification of an event as a turning point is always a matter of contingency ("it might be said"; "might be seen as yet another 'turning point' of sorts"), i.e. they do not exist as such but result from a constructive process that attributes particular significance to certain events or moments. Contingency also implies that, basically, any event can retrospectively be qualified as a turning point ("one is apt to start seeing them everywhere").
- Subjectivity: The qualification of an event as a turning point is always subjective, depending as it does on the narrator's or observer's point of view as well as on his emotional and cognitive disposition at any given moment ("if one felt so inclined").
- Experientiality: The qualification of an event as a turning point implies, and correlates with, a "quasi-mimetic evocation of 'real-life experience'" (Fludernik, *Natural Narratology* 12).
- Narrativity: The construction of turning points involves narrativisation, i.e. the imposition of a narrative order and structure upon our experiences.
- Importance or relevance: Like the narrator Stevens, we typically qualify as turning points those events that we consider to be especially important and relevant moments because of which our life takes a different turn. Turning points are those moments which determine the future course of events, representing those decisions which "set things on an inevitable course towards what eventually happened."
- High degree of eventfulness: The qualification of something as a 'turning point' implies that it is a particular kind of event that typically displays a number of features associated with a high degree of eventfulness (see Schmid 21–26 and section 3 below).
- Capacity to rule out alternative courses of events: Whatever decision a person may make during an episode that marks a turning point in his or her life, it will rule out a wide range of other possibilities and possible worlds ("What would have transpired, one may ask, had one responded slightly differently that evening she came in with her vase of flowers?").

In addition to these features, Jerome Bruner, in one of the few but seminal articles in which the subject of turning points is addressed at least in passing, has identified three further characteristics of turning points, all of which can also be inferred from the passage quoted above. First, more often than not, turning points do not so much result from something that actually happened but rather from a change in a person's point of view:

"these turning points, though they may be linked to things happening 'outside,' are finally attributed to a happening 'inside'—a new belief, new courage, moral disgust, 'having had enough'" (Bruner, "Remembered Self" 50). Secondly, Bruner metaphorically observes that turning points "ride into the story on a wave of episodic memory retrieval, rich in detail and color. They remind one of the tumbling return of forgotten episodes during recovery from traumatic amnesia" (ibid.). According to Bruner, a "third feature of these turning points is that they usher in a new and intense line of activity" (ibid.). For the sake of terminological clarity, one might want to dub these three features of turning points thus: their interiority, their quality as rich episodic memories, and their potential to generate consequences or enhance activity.

In Ishiguro's novel all of these characteristic features of turning points are brought to the fore by the monoperspectival quality of the narrative and its temporal structure, with the latter juxtaposing the narrator's retrospective point of view and his earlier self's (or indeed selves') experiences. This serves to foreground that both the selection of events and, even more so, of 'turning points' in the protagonist's life, and the ways in which the narrator tries to make sense of them are completely subject to the remembering self's cognitive and, even more so, emotional frame of mind. Quite frequently the narrator even readily admits that he cannot really recall what he thought or felt at the time when the momentous things that he is trying to piece together actually happened: "I cannot remember to what extent I analysed this feeling at the time, but today, looking back on it, it does not seem so difficult to account for" (RD 227).

With the benefit of hindsight, however, Stevens believes that he can identify those central events and decisive moments in his life upon which the future course of developments hinged. He observes, for instance, that the secret conference that was held at Darlington Hall in 1923 constituted one of the real turning points in his life, since it was the event when, he believes or tries to convince himself, he came into his own as a great butler: "In fact, I often look back to that conference and, for more than one reason, regard it as a turning point in my life. For one thing, I suppose I do regard it as the moment in my career when I truly came of age as a butler" (RD 70). What makes him so sure about this is that he is convinced that he played his professional role as a butler to perfection on the night when his father passed away in the same house, without anyone who was present at the time noticing that anything might be wrong with Stevens: "Let me make clear that when I say the conference of 1923, and that night in particular, constituted a turning point in my professional development, I speak very much in terms of my own more humble standards" (RD 110). Gradually, however, the narrator himself begins to realise the

degree of contingency and subjectivity that such retrospective attempts at sense- and self-making inevitably involve: “But then, I suppose, when with the benefit of hindsight one begins to search one’s past for such ‘turning points,’ one is apt to start seeing them everywhere” (RD 175). One of his final reflections on the nature of turning points not only serves to illustrate some of their characteristic features identified above, but also provides a convenient transition to the next section, in which an attempt will be made to come to terms with them and to conceptualise the turning point as a narratological concept:

In any case, while it is all very well to talk of ‘turning points,’ one can surely only recognize such moments in retrospect. Naturally, when one looks back to such instances today, they may indeed take the appearance of being crucial, precious moments in one’s life; but of course, at the time, this was not the impression one had. [...] There was surely nothing to indicate at the time that such evidently small incidents would render whole dreams forever irredeemable. (RD 179)

3. Coming to Terms With Turning Points, or: Conceptualising the Turning Point as a Narratological Concept

Although the term ‘turning point’ has been used in some narratological studies as well as in work done in other disciplines that are concerned with narratives (see especially Bruner, “Self-Making,” “Narrative Construction”), it has certainly not become a common or widespread concept in narrative theory or literary studies at large, let alone a household word of narratology. There are arguably two reasons for this: Firstly, the word (or rather metaphor) ‘turning point’ is so widely used in everyday English that most people do not seem to regard it as a concept. Secondly, in the few contributions in which ‘turning point’ is used as a term at all, it is generally perceived as an equivalent of crisis and thus as synonymous with the concept of the decisive event.

The very short entry on the concept in Gerald Prince’s useful *Dictionary of Narratology* is a case in point, providing the following definition of the term: “*turning point*. The ACT OF HAPPENING that is decisive in making a goal reachable or not” (Prince 101; original emphases). At the end of this extremely short entry, Prince refers the reader to the entry on crisis (“See also CRISIS.” *ibid.*), which is defined as follows: “The TURNING POINT, the decisive moment on which the plot will turn” (*ibid.* 17). This somewhat circular reasoning takes us back to step one, not providing a great deal of enlightenment to the uninitiated. Like other scholars who use the term, narratologists seem to take it very much for granted, regarding it as self-explanatory rather than in need of definition. However, as

Birke has rightly observed, the notion of turning points in some ways "parallels the concept of 'kernels'" (Birke 89), which has, of course, been defined by narratology (see e.g. Chatman 53–56; Prince 48): "Kernels are narrative moments that give rise to cruxes in the direction taken by events. They are nodes or hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one of two (or more) possible paths" (Chatman 53).

Taking my cue from Bruner's observation that "turning points need more study" ("Self-Making" 74), I should like to provide some steps towards a somewhat more elaborate narratological definition and model of the notion of turning point, which is arguably much more complex and interesting than may be suggested by the lack of interest that narratologists have so far displayed in the phenomenon. As the editors have observed in their introduction to this volume, the notion of the turning point is first of all a metaphor rather than a concept. The spatial logic of the metaphor presupposes, as a general frame of reference, the metaphorical notion that 'Life is a Journey,' which is, of course, one of the "metaphors we live by," to quote the felicitous title of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's seminal book (1980).

The inferences drawn in section 2 from the narrator's reflections about turning points in Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* have already allowed us to identify some of the defining features of turning points that we can profitably use in our attempt to define the term 'turning point' as a concept in the framework of narrative theory. In order to come to terms with turning points as a narratological concept, we should first of all remind ourselves that they are not givens, i.e. that they do not exist 'out there' in the real world, but that they are constructed by an observer who tries to make sense of his or her experiences. In doing so, she or he resorts to what Bruner has called "the highlighting or 'marking' of turning points" ("Self-Making" 73). His definition throws more light on what turning points are: "By 'turning points' I mean those episodes in which, as if to underline the power of the agent's intentional states, the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist's story to a belief, a conviction, a thought" (ibid. 73). Three elements already mentioned in section 2 above as defining features of turning points are of particular significance in this definition from a narratological point of view: first, the qualification of an episode as a 'turning point' implies that the event in question is characterised by what narratologists describe as a high degree of eventfulness (see Schmid). Turning points are those important episodes or events to which people attribute a crucial change. They are "peculiarly essential junctures" (Abbott 99) in that they are "particularly consequential" (ibid.).

Second, turning points are characterised by the ‘markedness’ of the events that constitute them, which is the quality that sets them off from the continuous flow of the ‘unmarked’ flow of experiences: “[T]here is within every language at every level a highly elaborated system for distinguishing the ‘marked’ from the ‘unmarked’—what is to be taken for granted as given and what is to be highlighted as new, deviant, special, or interestworthy” (Bruner, “Self-Making” 73). In order to distinguish the ‘marked’ from the ‘unmarked,’ one can fruitfully draw on Abbott’s concept of turning point, which hinges upon this contrast between what he (and other sociologists) call ‘trajectories’ and turning points: “What defines a turning point as such is the fact that the turn that takes place within it contrasts with a relative straightness outside” (Abbott 89). Turning points interrupt the regular patterns of routine trajectories that come before and after them. While trajectories are characterised by “their inertial quality, their quality of enduring large amounts of minor variation without any appreciable change in overall direction or regime” and by “their stable randomness, their causal character, in particular their comprehensibility” (ibid. 93), turning points, by contrast, are “abrupt,” “chaotic,” and especially “more consequential than trajectories precisely because they give rise to changes in overall direction or regime” (ibid.).

Third, the qualification of events as turning points presupposes the retrospective point of view of a narrator who is trying to impose some structure on the sequence of events and to transform them into a coherent story. A character on the level of the story may in some instances realise that a momentous event or decision is lying ahead, but the identification of turning points usually presupposes a superordinate vantage point as well as the benefit of hindsight. In one of the few articles explicitly devoted to the concept of turning point, Abbott also emphasises both the “‘narrative character’” and “the ‘hindsight’ character of turning points—their definition in terms of future as well as past and present” (Abbott 89).

In narratological terms, this means that “the concept has reference to two points in time, not one” (ibid.) and that turning points imply the co-existence of two temporally detached points of view, viz. the limited perspective of the character who is the experiencing I and the narrator’s (or narrating I’s) privileged point of view: “Turning points [...] mark off the narrator’s consciousness from the protagonist’s and begin closing the gap between the two at the same time. Turning points are steps toward narratorial consciousness” (Bruner, “Self-Making” 74). Closing the gap between the protagonist’s consciousness and that of the narrator, turning points are constructed in the process that is called ‘narrativisation,’ which serves