

## Narrative Universals, Emotion, and Ethics

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**Abstract** Some recent writers on ethics, prominently Jonathan Haidt, have seen emotion and narrative as central to moral judgment and behavior. However, much of this work is not clear about the precise nature of emotion and narrative or the relation of the two to each other and to ethics. Research in distinct narrative traditions—a form of comparative literary study—offers a possible solution. The author has argued that a number of prototype-based story structures recur across a broad range of genetically and areally distinct traditions. These structures derive from emotion systems and general principles of emotion modulation and involve ideals that are both hedonic and ethical. We may better understand the complex relations among narrative, emotion, and morality in terms of these story universals, their sources in emotion systems, and their associated ideals, which collectively predict a range of ethical responses to any given situation. In addition, even the usual ethical orientations of emotions and prototypes may be altered through the particularization of stories. In this way, emotional response and initial employment bias ethical response and evaluation, but the former do not simply determine the latter. The author illustrates these points by the sometimes surprising similarities relating European, Chinese, and Indian works.

**Keywords** emotion, ethics, narrative genres, story prototypes, universals

When I mention ethical and literary universals, people almost invariably infer that I am setting out to establish norms for everyone. Antagonists expect some high-handed imposition of Eurocentric conventions on the rest of the world. Supporters anticipate liberatory affirmations of the rights of the oppressed. However, as a descriptive and explanatory project, the study of

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universals has nothing to do with establishing norms, whether oppressive or liberatory. Ethical universals, in this context, do not tell us what “really is” good or bad. They just tell us what principles occur across genetically and areally distinct cultures. One point I keep trying to make is that there is a great deal of diversity in the ethical views of people in a particular society at a particular time. That diversity exhibits patterns, and to a surprising degree, the same sorts of patterns recur in various societies, though not necessarily in similar proportions.

For example, when some of us think about war and peace, we think of hippies slipping the stems of daisies into police rifle barrels and then sharing a vegetarian feast and celebrating free love. Okay, not everyone is a vegetarian or has rifles, but the pattern was not all that different in ancient India. There, the hippies were Tantricists (see, e.g., the “Black Blankets” in Jayánta 2005), advocates of *sādhāraṇadharmā* (universal dharma), with its focus on *ahimsā* or nonviolence, which included vegetarianism. In contrast, the grim-faced soldiers were supported by doctrines of *varṇadharmā* or caste dharma, specifically *kṣatriyadharmā*, the duty of the warrior caste (on dharma theory, see O’Flaherty 1978). Of course, the situations, practices, and ideas are not identical between San Francisco in 1968 and Kashmir in the tenth century (when Jayánta was writing), but then they were not identical for any two people in San Francisco in 1968, or even for any one person at two different times.

In the following pages, I sketch out how we might understand ethical thought and action if we integrate cognitive and affective science with a study of narrative universals. To do this, I begin with Jonathan Haidt’s influential account of morality, which stresses emotion and narrative. I believe Haidt is right in this emphasis, but I diverge from him on the precise nature of the emotions and stories at issue. After orienting this project by reference to Haidt, I turn to some background on comparative literary study and the isolation of literary universals. This leads to further development of the affective-narratological account of ethics introduced in connection with Haidt. Finally, I consider ethics, emotion, and emplotment in some particular literary works from precolonial European, Chinese, and Indian literary traditions. My hope is that the integration undertaken in these pages will suggest that comparative literature, cognitive and affective science, and the study of ethics may be combined to their mutual benefit and that, indeed, comparative literature might make valuable contributions to cognitive science, in this case the cognitive science of ethics.

### Ethics, Emotion, and Stories

Cognitive science in general and cognitive neuroscience in particular seem ubiquitous in today's intellectual landscape. So, too, does narrative. Unsurprisingly, they are often found working together in the same place, contributing to each other's intellectual labors. One of the most influential developments in ethics and cognition has been Jonathan Haidt's account of political morality, which also draws on narrative. Haidt begins with the view (which I endorse) that ethical ideas have consequences for action not because of their logic (empirical adequacy, parsimony, or other theoretical virtues) but because of the emotions they inspire. For me, this is an almost trivial matter. Information-processing systems produce . . . information. Motivation systems produce . . . motivations. In consequence . . . we act on ethical ideas because of motivation (or emotion) systems. Without emotion, we do not act, morally, prudentially, impulsively, or in any other way.

Whether the claim is or is not theoretically banal, the key point—that one is not motivated by reasoning as such—does not appear to be widely recognized. We do often seem to be motivated by reasoning. But something else is happening in those cases. Specifically, the reasoning is affecting our motivation systems or the ways in which we work out just what we should do, given particular motivations. In technical terms, reasoning may impact the *eliciting conditions* of my emotional response as well as certain details of the *actional outcomes*. To take a simple example, suppose I go to the zoo and approach the lion cage. I notice that the gate to the cage is open and the lion is walking toward that opening. My information processing tells me what could result from this. I feel terrible fear and run away. The information affects the way I envision the series of possible events; that imagination in turn constitutes the eliciting conditions for my emotional response. That response, then, leads to my behavior.

Once stated, the point seems clear. Nonetheless, emotion is generally underappreciated in discussions of ethics; thus, it is important to stress its centrality. On the other hand, as the preceding example indicates, this does not mean that reasoning has no role or is only a matter of rationalizing prior, emotional preferences. Haidt (2012: 38) asks, “Do people feel revulsion and sympathy when they read accounts of torture, and then invent a story about universal rights to help justify their feelings?” This overstates the case. Emotion systems do not simply activate on their own; they are not autonomous. Indeed, the phrasing of Haidt's query suggests the contingency of emotion elicitation on one's experience of current conditions and the extension of those conditions in simulation. He refers to “accounts of torture.” One's revulsion and sympathy are inseparable from the details of those

accounts, including, for example, the degree to which the suffering of the torture victims is depicted or the degree to which they are presented as guilty of crimes (with the suffering of the crime victims highlighted).

Consider, again, the example of the lion. What appears to happen in a case of this sort is that I simulate a particular causal sequence in which the lion exits the cage, sees me, and has a hunger-motivated actional response. Thus, I have an initial situation that I understand and reimagine in terms of category prototypes (e.g., the cluster of properties and propensities connected with being a lion) and associated trajectories of action (e.g., what predators are likely to do in the circumstances). As this suggests, we have cognitive structures that select and organize aspects of the current situation to produce the simulations that constitute the eliciting conditions for our emotional response. In the case of a lion, the cognitive structures at issue are fairly simple and straightforward. In the sorts of social situations that face us with ethical dilemmas, the relevant cognitive structures are likely to be far more intricate and equivocal than those involved in the zoo scenario. Moreover, it may be that a number of such structures could potentially apply to any given situation, yielding different results. Thus, there is often considerable complexity and ambiguity in our moral reflections.

Though we might refer to even simple causal sequences as *stories* or *narratives*, the terms apply more clearly to the causal structures found in such convoluted social situations. In each case, the trajectory of actions and events is a sequence that defines the story, the prototypes for the agents (the lion, in our simple case) are in effect character types, and the other aspects of the circumambient conditions are what narratologists refer to as *scene*. Here, too, Haidt makes a similar point. We have already seen a suggestion of this above in Haidt's question about torture, "Do people feel revulsion and sympathy when they read accounts of torture, and then invent a story about universal rights to help justify their feelings?" (38). Despite what one might initially think on reading that question, the storytelling does not begin with the post facto rationalization. Narration is almost certainly there in the "accounts of torture." In any case, Haidt (2012: 330) does stress the importance of narrative more explicitly, maintaining that "grand narratives" serve to "identify and reinforce the sacred core of each [moral] matrix," thus each standard way of thinking and acting ethically.

There is a difficulty here, however. Haidt (2012: 190) has a very capacious concept of narrative, perhaps too capacious, for example, referring to the "conservative narrative that Obama was a liberal universalist, someone who could not be trusted to put the interests of his nation above the interests of the rest of the world." Here, Haidt seems to be speaking simply of a prototype — that liberals are universalists rather than nationalists — defining a character

disposition. It would involve narrative only if it developed into a particular series of events. The simplicity of this example does not help us understand what narrative structures might be deployed in diffuse, practical circumstances or just how they might operate. Haidt gives other examples, such as the liberal narrative that history has involved a struggle for justice and democracy and the conservative narrative that liberals established a welfare state with deleterious consequences. Here, too, it is not clear that the idea of narrative goes beyond the observation that liberals believe that some things happened historically and conservatives believe that other things happened historically.

To think about the operation of narrative structure in ethics and politics, we might consider a particular, recent example, Leeann Tweeden's accusation that Al Franken had sexually assaulted her. As she put it, "He groped me, without my consent, while I was asleep" (quoted in Garber 2017). The case illustrates how different organizations of events through narrative structures and associated emotions may lead to very different moral (and political) responses to ethically complex situations. The centerpiece of Tweeden's accusation against Franken was a photograph of Franken with his hands above her breasts as she slept in military gear, including a protective jacket. One noteworthy feature of the photograph is that Franken is not touching her, as is clear from his left hand in particular. Nonetheless, the photograph was widely referred to as one in which Franken was groping her while she slept. For example, Megan Garber wrote in the *Atlantic* that the photograph was "hard evidence" that showed Franken "groping" Tweeden, such that "the public had no other choice" than to accept Tweeden's accusation. Since the moment captured in the photograph clearly shows us someone who is not touching the apparently sleeping woman, this construal seems likely to have resulted from one of two factors (leaving aside cases where people did not carefully look at the photograph but merely relied on what they had heard).

The first factor involves misconstrual related to cognitive biases and to emotion. Some people probably selectively attended to Franken's right hand. Isolated from the rest of the picture, the position of Franken's right hand is to some degree ambiguous (though, in relation to the left hand, it is clear that it is not touching Tweeden). Such selection shows confirmatory bias, the tendency to select information consistent with a prior belief and to ignore information inconsistent with that belief (see Nisbett and Ross 1980: 238–42). There is also social conformity bias, whereby we reject our own beliefs and affirm whatever everyone else is claiming, however inconsistent that is even with our own direct perceptions (see Biener and Boudreau 1991: 449–51). Finally, these cognitive biases are enhanced by the common emotional ten-

dency to focus on emotion-relevant details. Here, I take it that the emotions at issue are fear, anger, and disgust. On its own, the photograph need not foster any of these feelings, but in the context of Tweeden's accusations and the #MeToo movement generally, fear, anger, and disgust become very likely. All three are highly salient in testimonies regarding, for example, Harvey Weinstein (as of course they should be). Anger and disgust are clear elements in Tweeden's claims about Franken's behavior in particular.

The other likely reason people understood this photograph as an instance of groping is a matter of narrative. They presumably saw this moment as part of a story in which Franken went on to pleasure himself with the inert body of the young woman. The narrative here is the one we find in a range of cases, from Heinrich von Kleist's *Die Marquise von O . . .* to nonliterary instances of rape that involve drugging the victim. This, in turn, is a version of a cross-culturally recurring narrative structure (what I have called the *seduction story*, though it is more appropriately characterized as a sexual violation narrative).

The idea that construal in this case might be guided by disgust and a sexual violation story structure gains added plausibility if we consider the photograph outside the context of Tweeden's accusations. Franken was a comedian, working as a comedian at the time the photograph was taken. He posed for the photograph in an obviously public context, and did so while exhibiting a goofy face for the camera. (Imagine, in contrast, a security camera photograph where Franken, believing himself unobserved, has an intense look of sexual desire.) Outside the #MeToo accusations, the most obvious emotional response to the situation would involve either mild amusement or (as in my own case) mild annoyance at the failure of an attempted joke, and the most obvious narrative would involve Franken moving away from Tweeden after the photograph was taken. I remember in early high school that friends of mine took photographs like this of one another. For example, one friend might pose with a carving knife, as if auditioning for *Psycho*, above another who had dozed off. Personally, I never found such photographs particularly amusing. But the obvious interpretation of the Franken photo is that he was goofily playacting as if he was going to grope her, not that he was groping her. Similarly, it would be very strange to say that the photograph of one friend with a carving knife was a picture of that friend stabbing someone; we would instead say that he was *pretending* to stab the other person.

In sum, moral judgments and ethically relevant behaviors are bound up with narrative and with the eliciting conditions and actional outcomes of emotion episodes. To explore these connections further, we need to consider which emotions are most crucial for ethical thought and action. In addition, we need to determine what narrative structures are particularly prominent in the simulation and evaluation of ethically adjudicable sequences.

### Emotions and Stories

In other works (see Hogan 2003, 2011a), I have argued that some narrative structures are highly prominent, thus particularly likely to guide our thought and feeling, not just in fiction but in such political areas as nationalism (see Hogan 2009). Moreover, I have argued that the organizational structure of such narratives is a function of a few emotion systems that define happiness goals. If this is correct, then it would seem that we may resolve both our quandaries about ethics—emotional and narrative—simultaneously.

More exactly, we may specify the relation between emotion and ethics in the following way. Emotions lead us to envision ideals, which embody the perfection of hedonic conditions or the elimination of aversive conditions eliciting the emotions. Put differently, ideals are the prototypical cases of conditions we would like to sustain in positive emotions or conditions we would like to achieve in a change from negative emotions. The ideal of romantic love, for example, is mutual, secure attachment and attraction; that, then, is what we would wish to sustain. The ideal opposed to physical disgust, which indicates what is wrong with whatever elicits the disgust, is cleanliness or purity. Connected with this, narrative prototypically involves a protagonist pursuing some ideal goal (e.g., mutual, secure, affectionate, and sexual love). Specifically, it involves the pursuit of an ideal that we imagine will, if attained, result in happiness. Indeed, happiness itself has an ideal; that ideal is unmitigated and enduring, as signaled by the formulaic ending of fairy tale romances, “and they lived happily ever after.”

Our ethical response to situations is then inseparable from the ideals implied by emotions and by the narratives we imagine around those emotions. We view some prominent emotions as defining types of happiness, for example, attachment and individual and group pride. In addition, some prominent narrative prototypes recur with those emotions, such as romantic stories (which derive in part from attachment) and heroic stories (which derive in part from individual and group pride). Given the general, psychological operation of emotion and narrative, we would expect that our ethical thought and feeling would often be a function of those emotions, their ideals, and the associated narrative prototypes.

It is important to note immediately that our narrative capacities are necessarily flexible. We are not confined to a small number of narrative alternatives for construing particular causal relations. But we do tend to favor some alternatives over others. Here, as in other aspects of human cognition and emotion, there is a trade-off between particularity and generality, accommodation and assimilation (in Piaget’s [1971: 4, 8n3] terms). We need to be able to recognize the uniqueness of events and conditions. But we also need to be

able to respond quickly to threats and opportunities, before being harmed by the former or missing out on the latter. In consequence, we need to be able to recognize and respond to idiosyncrasy, but we also benefit from categorization, which is not confined to physical objects, such as chairs and cats, but includes story structures, comprising event sequences, scenes, and character roles. In the case of narratives, as in the case of ordinary, material objects, those categories are often based on prototypes or (roughly) standard cases rather than necessary and sufficient conditions (on prototypes, see Rosch 2011). In this case, the prototypes at issue are varieties of story structures, themselves derived from emotion systems.

### Which Emotions, What Stories? The Place of Comparative Literature

This leads us to the issue of just what the relevant story prototypes and associated emotions might be. Clearly, narrative structures and emotions may become more or less salient and efficacious in particular historical contexts or cultural matrices. However, our first concern might reasonably be to isolate the prototypes that are psychologically most powerful, independent of historical or cultural contingencies. One obvious way to determine this is by examining what prototypes recur across cultures. *Prima facie*, we have good reason to expect that the narrative structures that occur prominently across unrelated traditions—thus narrative universals—are particularly psychologically forceful. The reoccurrence of narrative structures in the major works of a wide range of literary traditions suggests that those structures have a particularly important place in the imaginative and affective lives of human beings generally. This seems to be especially likely if these narrative structures derive from the nature and operation of human emotion systems.

If we are going to draw on narrative universals in understanding ethical cognition and emotion, it follows that comparative literature is crucial for its possible contributions to the cognitive and affective science of ethics. However, this is not comparative literature as usually practiced. Specifically, comparative literature is commonly taken to refer to the study of different national literatures or to the study of literatures in different languages. These are, of course, valuable forms of study and should have an important place in work that is cognitive and comparative. However, when I refer to *comparative literature*, I am concerned principally with more strictly segregated bodies of literature, which I refer to as *traditions*, by which I mean a body of literary works that are densely and strongly interrelated, historically and/or regionally (*genetically and areally*, in the terminology of linguistics). In addition, the works of one tradition are, at most, only sparsely and weakly interrelated with those of a different tradition.



National literatures are, of course, more closely interconnected internally than externally. English literary works have more interconnections with English literary works than they have (on the whole) with German works. Nonetheless, the historical and regional connections between the two national literatures are extensive. Historically, both share the Greek and Latin classics, as well as biblical narratives and poems. Regionally, they are linked by translations and bilingual reading.<sup>1</sup> In consequence, comparative literary research on English and German works would not constitute a comparative study of traditions in my sense. In contrast, work on early Persian and Chinese narratives would. Of course, there are complications here; the important point is simply that there are significant differences in what comparative literary study tells us, depending on whether it focuses on national literatures within a tradition or spans different traditions.

But what, then, does comparative literature (in my cross-tradition sense) tell us about narrative? It tells us that there are some genres, some prototypical sequences of events that cluster together in remarkably similar ways across distinct traditions. The most common genres cross-culturally appear to be heroic, romantic, and sacrificial (see Hogan 2003, 2011a). The heroic genre focuses on pride, shame, and anger—to some extent individual but more importantly connected with an identity group. The associated narrative commonly involves the deposing of a legitimate leader and the defeat of a social in-group (e.g., the invasion of the home society by alien forces), thus the devastation of individual and in-group pride. The legitimate leader and the home society, following the common process whereby shame provokes anger, rally their forces and defeat the enemy, perhaps shaming them in turn. An emphasis on individual and social pride, along with a stress on in-group and out-group divisions, tends to be connected with a hierarchical and militaristic ethics—an ethics of loyalty, bravery, and related virtues; it tends to be linked with punitive enforcement of ethical standards and to involve the (often metaphorical) assimilation of a range of ethical problems to military conflicts.

This may be contrasted with the romantic structure. The romantic plot focuses on attachment bonding in combination with sexual desire. It prototypically involves two lovers, whose union is prevented by society, commonly due to identity group oppositions, such as socioeconomic class. The story leads to the comic union of the lovers or the tragic victory of oppressive social norms.<sup>2</sup> An emphasis on attachment tends to foster an empathic response;

1. Of course, there are different degrees of areal connection and disconnection, even with respect to widely intertranslated languages and traditions, as indicated by Karin Kukkonen's article in this issue.

2. Of course, in romantic, heroic, and other genres, particular works will necessarily deviate from prototypes in various ways. Sometimes, those deviations form subgenres or simply

the operation of social norms and identity categories to (tragically) separate the lovers tends to connect the genre with an ethical libertarianism and opposition to identity categorization; the integration of affection with sexual desire commonly removes that desire from ethical censure, sometimes even leading to its celebration as ethically positive. We see an instance of the last point in the 1960s slogan “make love, not war,” a brief phrase that implicitly invokes the large contrast between an ethics based on romantic story structure and an ethics based on heroic story structure.

In contrast with both the preceding prototypes, sacrificial narratives take up sin and the purging of sin from society, often highlighting sexuality and disgust. The basic structure here begins with a communal transgression and punishment, commonly a collective punishment in which the whole society suffers famine or some other hardship. The punishment continues until the guilty community makes a sacrifice—often an innocent scapegoat, though sometimes the guilty parties. This sacrifice returns the society to its prelapsarian well-being. The ethical implications of a sacrificial emplotment seem too evident to require explication.

In its treatment of sexuality, the sacrificial prototype may be connected with a further, somewhat less prominent cross-cultural genre: the seduction or sexual violation genre already mentioned. The sexual violation plot is based on sexual desire and involves a seduction or rape, followed by the abandonment of the victim by the seducer or rapist. This may result in the eventual (highly ambivalent) union of the couple or the purgative death of one or both. (Other less prominent genres include revenge and criminal investigation prototypes, which I consider in the next section.)

In each of these cases, the emotions generate the ideals and narrative prototypes. But the narrative structures, in turn, have consequences for emotional response and the precise formulation of ideals. In other words, there is ongoing interplay among emotions, ideals, and prototypes as stories are elaborated and particularized. The ethical attitudes initially derived from emotions and their ideals may be enhanced or inhibited by subsequent narrative developments.

### **Three Romantic Stories and Three Tales of Revenge**

Romantic narratives provide a fairly straightforward case of the integration of emotion, emplotment, and ethical response. As already noted, romantic

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involve techniques that tend to recur in particular sorts of social and historical conditions. Indeed, such situationally contingent patterns may recur cross-culturally, as suggested by Casey Schoenberger’s article in this issue.

stories involve both sexual desire and, much more important, attachment. In romantic love attachment is linked with what I have called *reward dependency* (Hogan 2011b: 83), the contingency of goal seeking and enjoyment on the presence and reciprocated affection of the beloved. Even in cultures where individual choice in marriage is not the norm, stories of romantic love almost invariably favor the lovers over blocking figures representing society. Moreover, that preference is ethical. As already indicated, when people emplot human relations in terms of affiliative bonding, their strong inclination is to favor individual liberty over structures of authority.

For example, in Christianity a founding commandment is “honor thy father and thy mother” (Exodus 20:12, King James version). Yet, in *Romeo and Juliet*—one of the most widely appreciated works of English literature—the lovers defy their family, winning the sympathy of the audience as well as that of the representative of religion in the play, Friar Lawrence. In India, custom strongly favored the arrangement of marriages. But in the most renowned classical drama of India, *The Recognition of Śakuntalā* (*Abhijñānaśakuntalam*; fifth century CE), the lovers meet and “marry” without arrangement or ceremony (i.e., they have sex). Their enduring union is deferred by a disagreeable holy man but receives strong religious approval in the heavenly scene that closes the play. Finally, filial piety (*xiào* 孝) is a cardinal Confucian virtue. Despite this, *The Peony Pavilion* (*Múdān Tíng* 牡丹亭; 1598), “the masterpiece of Ming-era aristocratic theater” (Knight 2012: 80), treats a man and woman who marry without consulting her parents. Moreover, the father of the woman treats the husband with cruelty that audience members are likely to find horrifying. The father retains our sympathy only because he does not understand precisely what he is doing. In the end, the union of these lovers, too, is celebrated.

Readers familiar with these exemplary romantic stories are likely to be struck by a range of other similarities. One of the most interesting concerns the separation of the lovers. As I have noted elsewhere, romantic stories prototypically involve a separation of the lovers, and that separation is often assimilated to death, even when there is a comic resolution (see Hogan 2003: 101–9). All three of these dramas in some way intensify that connection with death. In *Romeo and Juliet*, I am not referring to the actual death of the lovers at the end of the play—that is unsurprising in tragedy; indeed, its association with tragedy is precisely why it appears in the middle of a comedy. The hint of possible tragedy should serve to make the reunion of the lovers all the more joyful. I am referring, rather, to the staged death of Juliet, which should have allowed the (intensified) comic reunion of the lovers. In the case of

*The Recognition of Śakuntalā*, one of the lovers is assumed into heaven in a scene that involves leaving the mortal world, which ordinarily happens only in death. As a result, the lovers are reunited in a heavenly hermitage. Finally, in *The Peony Pavilion*, one of the lovers actually does die before she is revived by her beloved. I take it that in each case the point of the intensification is to enhance the emotional response of the audience and to increase the authority of the union. Again, in *The Recognition of Śakuntalā*, the reunion is divine. In *The Peony Pavilion*, it is explicitly allowed by an otherworldly court, which judges that the dead lover “share[s] a marriage affinity” with her beloved; she is therefore “release[d] . . . from this City of the Wrongfully Dead” and may “search” for him (Tāng 1980: 133) while her “fleshly body” is “guard[ed] . . . from corruption” (134). In *Romeo and Juliet*, the staging of Juliet’s death also allows Shakespeare to establish parallels between her and Jesus, enhancing the moral approbation of the lovers’ choice (see Hogan 2011b: 91, 96, 106–7).

In short, romantic story structure is principally connected with intense attachment feelings and associated reward dependency. The attachment feelings establish norms for the lovers. These include reciprocation and exclusiveness (these are tested in the love triangle component of the romantic prototype, a component we have not considered). The attachment feelings also establish norms for the larger society, principally a sort of libertarianism and a rejection or at least limitation of social hierarchization and antagonism across identity groups. These norms bear on the conflict between society and the lovers in the main romantic storyline.

All three romantic stories we have just considered intensify the basic emotional and ethical orientations of the romantic genre. But particular stories need not always follow through and extend the emotional and normative biases of the prototypes. They may also involve the inhibition or complication of the tendencies found in a particular genre. Consider the revenge genre, which derives from intense hatred caused by deep personal harm, prototypically to an attachment relation (e.g., the murder of a spouse). As I have argued elsewhere, revenge stories are often highly ambivalent (see Hogan 2011a: chap. 4). However much we may sympathize with the revenger, we often recoil from his or her violence, especially as that violence frequently involves harm to innocents and may initiate cycles of cruelty.

Attachment loss caused by others has three associated ideals. First, there is restoration of the loss, preferably by the perpetrator, insofar as that is possible. Second, there is prevention of future attachment losses. Third, there is some sort of compensatory punishment for the perpetrator and only the perpetrator. In addition to the problems mentioned already, one difficulty

with revenge stories is that the second and third desiderata are incompatible. If Jones kills Smith's son, then killing Jones will actually cause grief to Jones's son, who has done nothing to merit such grief. On the other hand, killing Jones's son would produce parallel grief in Jones but punish his innocent son all the more severely.

The common, social solution to these problems is to turn over the authority for punishment to some civil body (a legal system) that may respond to wrongdoing in a way that, in principle, should minimize the harm to innocents, maximize the deterrence, and define appropriate sorts of compensation and punishment when possible. Thus, the legal system should be able to treat the situation to maximally reconcile the ideals connected with feelings of grief and anger resulting from attachment deprivation. Though the revenge and criminal investigation genres are most often separate, they are joined and contrasted in just this way in one of the most important and one of the earliest works of European drama, Aeschylus's *Oresteia*.

The most famous revenge drama of English literature is undoubtedly *Hamlet*. That play is, I believe, rather less ambivalent than is common in revenge stories. We certainly are not supposed to accept Hamlet's murder of Polonius. However much he may have been confused, this is at best the sort of collateral damage that is common in revenge stories and that violates the norms we have just considered. But Hamlet appears to remain very sympathetic for most audience members, who seem to want him to get on with killing his adoptive father and king, Claudius. (The latter point may be inferred from the critical obsession with why Hamlet delays committing this murder, which seems to suggest that audience members are in effect rooting for the revenge.) This would appear, then, to be a case where the revenge story is developed so as to reduce, rather than increase, its usual ethical orientation against revenge and toward criminal investigation.

Before going further with *Hamlet*, I would like to bring in a famous Chinese drama, perhaps the best-known revenge drama from China, *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of Zhao* (*Zhàoshì gū'ér dà bào chóu* 趙氏孤兒大報仇; thirteenth century CE). In this play, Tu-an Ku, as part of his pursuit of political power, murders an entire clan, except for a single child, who is raised to take revenge for his parents' murderer. The complication is that the foster father of the child, concealing the boy's identity, brings him to Tu-an Ku, who becomes a second adoptive father for the boy. This play is no more ambivalent than *Hamlet* and possibly less so; it at least apparently endorses revenge, though like *Hamlet* it involves the hero murdering a father figure.

The case of *The Orphan of Zhao* might appear to be explained by the high place given to filial piety in Confucian thought and practice. Indeed, *The*

*Classic of Rites* (Lǐjì 禮記 1885) includes the following admonition: “With the enemy who has slain his father, one should not live under the same heaven” (Qū Lǐ I, 70). However, there were always contradictory tendencies in Chinese thought, as there were in Europe, and opposition to vengeance is found in China (as support for revenge is found in the West). Thus, Anne Cheng (2004: 29) explains that “murder carried out by vengeance is problematic and has, in fact, never ceased to give food for thought to experts both on classical sources and on legal texts.” As we would expect, “imperial law . . . prohibit[ed] murder for the sake of social order” (38).

I suggest that the partial mitigation of the problems with revenge has the same source in both plays; moreover, that source may partially explain the success of both plays. Specifically, both works involve not only a personal harm but also a crime against the socially definitive in-group. In *Hamlet*, the murder of King Hamlet is not only a personal loss to Prince Hamlet but simultaneously a regicide that is part of Claudius’s usurpation of the throne. Thus, the play includes one of the two primary story sequences that form the heroic narrative prototype. These are, again, the usurpation and invasion sequences, in which the legitimate authority of the in-group is violated (usurpation) and the autonomy of the group is lost (invasion).

Perhaps the two most important emotions for in-group definition and cohesion are pride and respect. These involve ideals both for the individual feeling the emotions and for the in-group as a whole. The individual ideals, derived principally from respect, would include conformity to in-group norms and deference to the group’s hierarchy of authority. The ideals for the in-group as a whole, derived principally from pride, would include justice of the in-group hierarchy and autonomy of the in-group relative to out-groups (or even dominance over out-groups). The heroic plot depicts threats to in-group hierarchy (usurpation) and autonomy (invasion). The threats are of course perpetrated by villains, including disloyal and rebellious in-group members. In the comic form of the heroic story, the usurpation is followed by a restoration. One common variant occurs when the legitimate leader is killed and the restoration is left to his or her heir. This is of course what occurs in *Hamlet*.

Heroic stories are often to some extent ambivalent. Indeed, they often include a sort of epilogue that recalls and laments the unnecessary loss and pain caused by the conflicts (see Hogan 2003: chap. 4). However, they tend to be far less ambivalent than revenge narratives. This is due in part to the collective nature of the harm: the threat is faced by the entire group. In consequence, the response is not egocentric or selfish; it concerns the well-being of the whole society. Moreover, when the entire social structure is violated, the legal system is typically not a viable alternative for pursuing

the ideals of the associated emotion systems. For example, no such system is available to Hamlet regarding Claudius; thus, a criminal investigation story is not possible. Finally, cultivating loyalty to the in-group and deference to social authority—as well as bravery in opposition to the out-group—are important social functions of heroic stories. In contrast, discouraging individual violence outside the legal system is an important social function of revenge stories. As such, we would expect the former to support social revenge, which is to say, social restoration and retribution, while the latter discourages individual revenge.

*Hamlet* takes up both the individual revenge story and the heroic usurpation story. It thereby renders the former less ambivalent and the latter more personal and, perhaps, more appealing. At the same time, it complicates the heroic story by highlighting its connection with revenge, making that heroic structure more emotionally and thematically complex and ambivalent. The situation is at first slightly less clear with *The Orphan of Zhao*. There is certainly something akin to usurpation by Tu-an Ku when he murders the Zhao clan. However, the murders are done with the consent of the emperor (Chi 1972: 46), who has been deceived into thinking that the Zhaos were involved in a plot to usurp the throne.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the key issue is not the initial harm to the orphan's family but the act of revenge itself. As the play develops, the orphan's revenge coincides with the full-fledged usurpation plot of Tu-an Ku, who conspires to “put the Emperor to death and seize his throne” (69). Thus, the individual revenge of the orphan is justified by the threat to the social hierarchy of the in-group. Moreover, the play eliminates any selfish motivations on the part of the orphan by having Tu-an Ku decide to turn over his own current position to the orphan upon usurping the throne.

Perhaps even more significant, like many Yuan dramas, *The Orphan of Zhao* strongly hints at an allegorical reading. As Jung-en Liu (1972: 10) remarks, during the period of Mongol domination over the Chinese (i.e., during the Yuan dynasty) “the drama was . . . the weapon of the conquered.” As to this particular play, Liu explains that “it has been suggested that the Chao family symbolized the House of Sung . . . conquered by the Mongols, and that the vengeance was the vengeance of the Chinese people upon the Yüan tyrants” (24). A key part of the connection derives from the fact that the surname of the Sung dynasty rulers was Chao (or Zhao). In keeping with this, the Yuan dynasty printing of the play ends with the orphan “filled with a desire to take revenge,” but in the (later) Ming version, thus at a time when the emperor

3. As to the nature of Tu-an Ku's act, it is important to point out that early Chinese imperial law included “collective punishment of kin . . . known by the technical term ‘destruction of the lineage’” (Lewis 2007: 233).

was again considered legitimate, the orphan “reports T’u-an Ku’s planned rebellion to the throne and requests permission to take revenge. . . . When this permission is granted, he proceeds . . . to capture and execute Tu-an Ku” (Idema 2001: 804). Indeed, changes throughout indicate that the Ming version does not condone vigilante-style revenge but affirms “the exclusive power of the state to settle such conflicts” (804).

Thus, in both *Hamlet* and *The Orphan of Zhao*, the partial mitigation of revenge appears to derive from genre mixing, the integration of the revenge story into a heroic story. That integration extends the emotions of the plays, altering the ideals and associated ethical norms. These are particularly striking cases because they involve ethical attitudes that would initially appear to result from culturally defined and thus socially different principles, such as the elevation of filial piety in Confucianism. However, on further consideration it seems that these cases are more effectively analyzed in terms of largely cross-cultural patterns in emotions, ideals implied by those emotions, and story structures connected with the emotions and ideals.

### Conclusion

The preceding analyses indicate that the relations between comparative literature and cognitive science should be bidirectional, with each contributing to research programs in the other. One potentially valuable area of interaction may be found in the relations among narrative, emotion, and ethics. Ethical responses are motivated by emotion systems, which imply ideals, such as constancy in the case of attachment. Emotion episodes result from the engagement of emotion systems in response to eliciting conditions; they lead to actional outcomes which aim to change aversive conditions or maintain pleasurable conditions. The eliciting conditions and the actional outcomes are particular causal sequences or (usually implicit) stories. As such, both the eliciting conditions and the actional outcomes involve the integration of current experiences with cognitive structures that select from those experiences and organize them causally. Those cognitive structures include narrative prototypes, prominently the cross-cultural story prototypes, which in turn derive from emotion systems.

Universal story prototypes embrace default ethical orientations for both the individuals involved and the larger society. Those defaults derive from the ideals associated with the underlying emotion systems. For example, on the part of society, the romantic plot includes a libertarian preference for individual choice in attachment-based love. On the other hand, none of this is deterministic; the default biases of general structures may be resisted through details of emplotment. Moreover, the same situation may be emplotted in



different ways and integrated with different emotions, producing different ethical responses. This variability of emplotment is found across individuals in any given society, and even within individuals, who are often ambivalent about ethical issues. As elsewhere in cognition, the relevant cognitive structures and processes involve tendencies, but these tendencies are both multiple (allowing for alternatives) and flexible (allowing for variable implementation). Further study in both cognitive science and comparative literature should enhance our understanding of the biases and the nuanced variability of those structures and processes. In consequence, both disciplines should contribute to this common intellectual project at the intersection of affective science, narratology, and ethical theory.

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