Complexity, Scale, Story: Narrative Models in Will Self and Enid Blyton

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COMPLEXITY, SCALE, STORY:
NARRATIVE MODELS IN WILL SELF AND ENID BLYTON

Will Self and Enid Blyton are not often mentioned in the same sentence, but this essay reveals that they have an unexpected interest in common: scale. By a happy biographical accident, I am well qualified to expound upon the particular focus of this common interest, which is a rather eccentric model village called Bekonscot. But both writers are also, of course, interested in stories, and that is where my more academic interest as a narrative theorist comes in. Their negotiations with questions of scale in their stories provide a point of departure for my own concern with the distinctive qualities and limitations of narrative form. Narrative is itself a way of modelling, one specifically adapted to dealing with processes; it is highly privileged as such, both culturally and cognitively, yet it models some processes – specifically, complex systemic processes – rather poorly. Scale has a role to play in the context of complex systems, too, and my claim is that we can use it to mediate between complexity and story. By reflecting upon the way the notion of scale bears, respectively, upon complexity and upon narrative form, we can make some progress in understanding their problematic relation to each other.

As a narrative theorist, one of my interests is the problem of the narrative understanding of complex systems and emergent behaviour. I want to frame this problem in relation to questions of scale, in order to reflect upon how cultural forms of narrative negotiate with its limitations as a form of cognition. I am going to do this with reference to a couple of stories that foreground questions of scale, which will involve me in a somewhat implausible pairing of Will Self and Enid Blyton.

I will begin with the opening sentence of a story by Will Self, which was published in a 1993 special issue of *Granta* magazine entitled *Best of Young British Novelists 2*, which is this: 'Some people lose their sense of proportion; I've lost my sense of scale' (Self, 1993, p. 259). The story is itself called 'Scale', and it includes much else that is relevant to my theme, but I want to isolate this sentence for the moment in order to pose the question that immediately presents itself, which is, what is the difference? What is at stake in this distinction between a sense of proportion and a sense of scale? I will offer an immediate, if provisional, answer: a sense of proportion concerns judgements about the relations between elements *within* a given domain; whereas a sense of scale concerns judgements about the relations between corresponding elements of *different* domains. Both proportion and scale are comparative notions, in other words, but while proportions are directly comparable, scale introduces the concept of representation.

Scale, in this sense, is straightforwardly the relation between some measure in a representation and the corresponding measure in the object of representation. It is the *ratio* between equivalent measures in these two domains, and ordinarily that ratio is constant throughout the representation. The measure is commonly a matter of spatial dimensions, as it is in maps or architectural models and drawings. But it might involve some other physical property – mass,

for example, or viscosity. It might also be a temporal ratio, if the representation of a process is involved, as in contexts like weather system modelling or traffic simulation. The relation between measures might also be symbolic, or figurative: a timeline, for example, may represent a temporal measure in terms of a spatial measure, in a ratio such as one centimetre to ten years.

An appropriate choice of scale, then, is a pragmatic matter, involving two related qualities of the representation: its scope and its resolution. Determining the scope of a representation is a matter of deciding upon the boundaries of the object of interest; while determining the resolution is a matter of deciding how detailed it needs to be. For a representation of a given size, and in a given medium (that is, with a given capacity to resolve detail), considerations of scope and resolution together dictate the scale of representation. Other things being equal, a larger scale gives finer resolution and narrower scope, while a smaller scale gives coarser resolution and broader scope.

Consider a doll's house. Its size is dictated by the space you have in mind for it, and your budget determines the quality of the craftsmanship in its construction. Let us suppose that a doll's house of this specification provides a satisfying level of detail, if your interest is in houses; but if your real enthusiasm is for dining furniture, the matchwood dining set that can be accommodated in this doll's house is disappointingly crude. Why not use the whole space for a model of a dining room on a larger scale? You will have narrowed the scope of your representation, but by doing so you can achieve much finer resolution of the interesting details of turned wood and marquetry, the dinner service and the ornate candelabra. Then again, you have always liked formal gardens, and would it not be nice to have the doll's house set in its grounds? It would need to be on a smaller scale, meaning coarser resolution of the detail, but the broader scope would allow it to incorporate all those paths and terraces, the ornamental fountain, the box hedges and the topiary.

What does Will Self's story add to these considerations of appropriate scale? In many ways it occupies familiar Will Self territory: it features extensive improvised drug abuse, alienation from society and mainstream values, and a dry, sardonic humour reliant upon extravagant metaphors, recondite information and occasionally abstruse vocabulary. Its main appeal to me, though, has to do with its setting. The story begins on the M40, travelling westward out of London; more specifically, the approach to junction two, the Beaconsfield exit. Since I spent my own teenage years in Beaconsfield, this piques my interest; and Self has noticed something I also remember about this junction. It concerns the motorway exit countdown signs – that sequence of markers, at hundred-yard intervals, with three bars, then two, then one; or as Self puts it, 'the decline in rank (from sergeant to lance corporal to corporal) that indicates your demotion from the motorway' (p. 259). According to Self, the problem at the Beaconsfield exit is that the gap between the last of these signs and the slip-road itself is much too large. Or rather, it *was*; the story is from the early 1990s, and the M40 signage has long since been updated, including a whole new gantry at junction two. This is unfortunate because my own memory of the problem, which dates from a few years earlier still, differs a bit from Self's, and I cannot now verify either account. But as I recall, the issue with these approach signs was actually that the gaps between them were much too small – much less than the standard 100 yards. This quirk was made ironic by the fact that in the middle of this compressed series of signs was another one – a brown tourist sign, reading 'model village'.

Since the protagonist of Self's story has avowedly lost his sense of scale, I am inclined to think my own account is the correct one; at any rate it is more poetic. The model village, called Bekonscot, is very much on Self's agenda too, though; his protagonist, it turns out, lives in a bungalow right next to the model village, and it features prominently in the story. It is introduced

just a few paragraphs in, described as 'Beaconsfield's principal visitor attraction' (p. 259). Here too it is possible to quarrel, though – if not with Self so much as with Beaconsfield Town Council. Beaconsfield, after all, was the home of Enid Blyton from 1938 to shortly before her death in 1968, which is to say, the 30 years of her greatest fame and productivity as a children's author. It did not occur to the council to acknowledge the fact until 2014, when they finally unveiled a commemorative plaque on Council Green. Of course, there are substantial reasons why Blyton's residence in Beaconsfield has not been a draw for tourists. The first obstacle is that the house in which she lived, called Green Hedges, was bulldozed shortly after her death to make way for a development of ten new homes (which was, however, named Blyton Close). The second obstacle is that Blyton's reputation, already problematic towards the end of her life, was increasingly overshadowed by the pernicious racial, class and gender stereotypes that saturate her work. These issues are dealt with frankly by Bekonscot model village, which has made rather more of the Blyton connection than Beaconsfield Town Council; it currently has a Blyton exhibition in the play area, which notes how her recuperation as a children's author has depended upon extensive re-writing of her work to remove its more offensive elements.

It would be hard to think of two writers with *less* in common than Enid Blyton and Will Self, yet there are affinities here that do not immediately meet the eye. For one thing, like Self, Blyton wrote a story featuring Bekonscot. It is called 'The Enchanted Village', and it was first published in *The Children's Jolly Book* in 1953. It is a very brief and bland piece of writing, simply describing a visit to the model village with John and Mary; judging by the scale of Blyton's literary output during this period, it would probably only have taken about 45 minutes of her time. Still, the fact that she wrote it at all is testament to a close connection with the model village, which was grounded in her friendship with its owner and creator, Roland Callingham.

I am harping on about Bekonscot because, of course, it is highly relevant to my theme: it is a scale model. More specifically, it is a 1:12 scale village including an extensive 1:32 scale railway. Callingham, a London accountant by day, was originally a model railway enthusiast, and it was only when his wife insisted he took his hobby outdoors that he began to develop the potential for larger scale modelling afforded by his extensive gardens (Our History). Bekonscot first opened to paying visitors in 1929, giving it a claim to be the world's oldest public model village (About Bekonscot). It is actually a suite of fictional villages, comprising Greenhaily, Southpool, Hanton, Splashyng, Evenlode & Epwood, and Bekonscot itself, all connected by the model railway. Nonetheless, Bekonscot does also contain broadly accurate models of a number of familiar local buildings, including my old school and the pub where I had my first job.

A model village is primarily a spatial physical model. Although Bekonscot used to evolve in an effort to keep pace with changing times, incorporating new technologies and fashions, in 1992 it abandoned this approach and reverted to a perpetual 1930s setting. But of course a village is also a dynamic environment on an everyday scale, and Bekonscot does represent events in progress: the fire brigade attends a smouldering thatched roof; a leisurely game of croquet is under way; a burglar makes off with his swag, the bobby in hot pursuit. It represents these events, but it does not model them; there is no attempt to simulate their temporal unfolding. The one exception is the model railway itself, which is a highly sophisticated simulation of a rail network: it does not just represent a railway system, it models the system's operation over time.

This brings me to the crux of my own interest in narrative. I started by expressing the concept of scale in terms of representations but now I am distinguishing between representations and models. It seems that all models are representations, but not all representations are models. Narrative, clearly, is a form of representation, but is a narrative a model? My answer is yes – and no. No, a narrative is not a model because it does not maintain consistent relations between its

own features and those it represents; in other words, there is no structural isomorphism between the object of a narrative and the narrative itself. But more obliquely, yes, a narrative is a model in the sense that it is an invocation of narrative logic, which is itself a fundamental cognitive resource and our primary mental model for temporality. My equivocal answer, in other words, distinguishes two different conceptions of narrative. In the first sense, what makes a narrative narrative is the kind of thing it represents: that is, something happening. In the second sense, what makes a narrative narrative is its instantiation of an abstract logic, which is not a feature of events in themselves, but of the way our own cognitive apparatus models events.

If narrative representation is a candidate for modelling anything at all, then, it must be something with a temporal dimension. A narrative is narrative to the extent that it is concerned with what *happens* – which is to say, change – rather than merely what *is*, or what exists. Reading a novel or any coherent extended narrative we can derive a strong sense of a represented world, of course, but this is a by-product of our grasp upon the narrative sequence itself, with its much narrower focus of attention upon delineating certain events. Narrative, in other words, does not establish a three-dimensional spatial representation, like a model village, and then set it in motion. Instead, it addresses itself to motions, or temporal processes, and in the articulation of these it gestures towards the environment in which they occur; about which we can make further inferences, to a greater or lesser extent, as the particular narrative allows and as our interpretative purposes dictate. To take Will Self's story as an example, it begins with the protagonist's disorienting experience of leaving the M40 at junction two, on his way home from London. From there, it relates his return to his bungalow, where he proceeds directly to the kitchen in order to check on his improvised home-made morphine production system and inject himself with the result, drifting off into narcotic dreams. That is the whole of section one of the story; along the way we learn a fair bit about the protagonist's personal circumstances, his attitudes and opinions, and a little about his spatial environment. Some of that environment indexes real world referents – London, the M40, Beaconsfield – and so has quite specific connotations. Most of it is generic, though; a bungalow, a kitchen, an oven, a soluble tartrate of raw morphine granules. Since this is fiction, these probably do not have specific real-world referents, but even if they did, these details only emerge in an incidental and fragmentary way, so we do not have much basis for a conceptual realisation of the spatial environment that is not largely arbitrary.

More importantly, though, we also do not have a basis for extrapolating the represented temporal dimension of the story in any detail. There are a few explicit temporal markers – 'Arriving home from London, late last night' (p. 259); 'I had left a baking tray in the oven that morning' (p. 260); and some actions are narrated quite specifically – 'I used a steel spatula to scrape the material up and placed it in a small plastic bowl' (p. 260). But none of this allows us to reconstruct the course of events with any temporal accuracy; and as the story goes on it only gets worse. Subsequent sections narrate events with no definite temporal position relative to the opening, or to each other; and the story ends with an epilogue set in a future of electric cars and a universal 15mph speed limit, in which the aged protagonist has become a published authority on motorway service stations.

The premise of the story is that its protagonist has lost his sense of scale, so perhaps this temporal indeterminacy is not surprising. But the same point could be made about Blyton's story, which aims only to recount a trip to Bekonscot. It does this in such a plodding, literal way that it manages to become tedious despite being only about 1,000 words long. But although we get the sequence of events and the exchanges of dialogue clearly enough, it is impossible to infer the temporal structure of the whole visit, even in its broad outlines. How long does it last? How long between the remarks about the castle and those about the zoo? How long spent

contemplating the golf course? No legitimate answer is possible, because the narrative does not model time in this way.

Perhaps the problem here is not narrative, but language. It does not provide for the kind of correspondence I am talking about because it is a symbolic medium, rather than an iconic medium. That is, words do not resemble the things to which they refer. Then again, mathematics is symbolic, and it is rather good at modelling; and narratives come in other media than language. Consider a story in a primarily iconic medium like film or theatre, in which a direct, point-for-point correspondence between the representation and its represented events is indeed practically possible. A one-scene play, for example, featuring a man washing up a baking tray; a mini kitchen sink drama. Let us say it is non-fictional, so that there is a specific event to which it corresponds; and let us say that it is performed in slow motion, so there is even an interesting temporal scale to the representation. Now, we can certainly extrapolate from the play to the events it represents, and we can readily translate between the temporality of one and the temporality of the other, assuming that this has a definite scale (eight seconds per second, say). Is that not a direct narrative model of the sort I have denied?

I suggest it is not, because just to the extent that it reproduces, on whatever scale, the phenomena it represents, it is not a narrative but a simulation. In other words, there are two distinct ways of understanding this performance. In one, it is an equivalent for the phenomena it represents, as transformed by the affordances and limitations of its means of representation. In this case, it is a simulation, a process which models another process. We can make narrative sense of what happens in the simulation, just as we can make narrative sense of the event itself; but that is narrative cognition, a sense-making frame we bring to it, not something it provides. Or, understanding the performance the other way, it is itself a communicative, sense-making act, which articulates an understanding of the phenomena it represents by appealing to the shared cognitive frame of reference between performer and audience. In particular, as a representation of action, it appeals to the shared logic of narrative cognition. In this case, the performance is not just an event of which we make sense in itself (and in its analogies with a prior event), but a way of meaning that we understand in relation to narrative logic, and *via that logic* gain an understanding of the represented event. It is a narrative, and its intelligibility is a matter of formal coherence, not correspondence.

The sense of narrative logic I am invoking here is very basic. It bears little resemblance to the sophisticated resources of storytelling with which we are familiar in novels and films, or even in news reporting and narrative history. The cultural forms of narrative are thick with accumulated devices, conventions and traditions, through which we have developed rich and many-layered elaborations of the fundamental principle of narrative; but that fundamental principle itself is simply a product of the prevailing cognitive pressures during the evolution of an intelligent social species. Narrative cognition is a form of attentional focus – put most simply, it is just the principle of sequence. More formally, narrative cognition is the *semiotic articulation of linear temporal sequence*. I will not dwell upon this definition except to note that it characterises a specific cognitive logic that underlies some very basic notions, including agency, event, causality and teleology (see Walsh, 2017). The key point here is that this elementary narrative logic constitutes our primary mental model of process, of change, of things happening. It is primary in the sense that it is a fundamental cognitive disposition upon which we rely, often unreflectively, as the means by which we make sense of temporal phenomena; and it takes a great deal of cognitive effort to think otherwise about how such phenomena unfold.

The problem, of course, is that temporal phenomena very often *do* unfold otherwise. The narrative logic of linear sequence is a highly efficient mode of cognition, and an effective

way of understanding and predicting – especially in the domain of human behaviour, where it is also a factor in the intentionality of the behaviour itself and therefore becomes almost self-verifying. But its heuristic value does not obscure the fact that upon careful inspection, many processes turn out not to be sequential, but systemic. That is to say, the appropriate model for what is happening in such cases is not a sequential narrative line, but the multiple, simultaneous, reflexive interactions of a network. In such cases narrative thinking is a substantial barrier to understanding the process, even while it remains the benchmark for what *counts* as understanding a process. This is why I am interested in the relation between narrative and complex systems. It throws into clear relief a hard limit upon narrative cognition, in the form of a double bind: the behaviour of complex systems, as behaviour, is something happening, for which our innate mode of understanding is narrative; but the behaviour of complex systems, as systemic, is entirely misrepresented by any narrative account of it.

Nowhere is this double bind better exemplified than in relation to emergent behaviour. A propensity for emergence is, roughly speaking, the defining quality of complexity in systems; it is the capacity to manifest global attributes or behaviours that are in some sense qualitatively distinct from the attributes or behaviours of the elements of the system; in the Aristotelian phrase, the whole is something other than just the sum of its parts. In the case of emergent behaviour, this means in effect that we can distinguish between two different kinds of things happening: the behaviour of the elements of the system and the emergent behaviour of the system as a whole. And we can succinctly define emergent behaviour as behaviour that becomes narratable at a level of representation distinct from that of the system elements themselves.

So, a village is a system. We can represent threads of what is going on in that system in narrative form: the station porter assists an elderly gentleman with his luggage; the guest house landlady shins up a ladder to clean her windows; the blacksmith, at the crease on the village green, knocks a short ball for six into the duck pond. Or we can represent, in the form of a model village, the spatial structure of the whole system in a frozen moment, sometime in the 1930s. We can even hypothetically animate that model village to represent the whole system as it unfolds in time. If we do so, though, we have created a simulation, not a narrative. All the concurrent, reciprocal interactions between all the elements of the system are far too entangled to be given coherent narrative form, even in principle. What remains possible is to make narrative sense of the simulation by representing the behaviour of the system as a whole: a steady rise in car ownership creates pollution and congestion on the narrow streets; health care resources become stretched under pressure from the increased needs of an ageing demographic; the fishing fleet declines as the local economy shifts gradually towards tourism. These are all plausible narratives of the systemic behaviour of the village, but there are two key points to note about them. Firstly, the vocabulary of these narratives is notably general and abstract; they are cast in quite different terms from the narratives of events within the system. Secondly, these narratives represent the effects of a complex of systemic interactions, in a form that is divorced from the structure of those interactions themselves. Narratives of the emergent behaviour of the system obscure the systemic nature of the behaviours that produce it. Narratives of emergent behaviour, then, are not really explanatory.

This is not to say that narratives of emergent behaviour have no value, but it does raise the question of their authority. Do they capture anything about the way the system works at all, or are they merely wilful projections of our cognitive bias towards a narrative mode of understanding? The conception of emergence in terms of levels begins to look problematic, even circular; the emergent phenomena of a system are defined as those that appear at a higher level of representation, while this level of representation is defined as that at which emergent phenomena appear. Is emergence a property of the system itself, or an effect of its observation? Fortunately,

there have been some helpful attempts to define emergence more rigorously, in terms of scale, scope and resolution (Bar-Yam, 2004; Ryan, 2007). This approach to emergence does not supersede the level model, but it does provide the means to conceptualise the relations *between* levels, or between the microstates and macrostates of systems. It enables us to differentiate between properties that are objective features of these relations, and those that are contingent qualities of the act of representation. So, for example, the scope of a doll's house is fixed by the decision that the system of interest is a house, rather than a dining room or an estate, and the scale of the representation is an objective property of the relation between the size of the model and the size of the represented house. The resolution of the model, however, remains a contingent fact of the act of representation – what it does and does not notice; the quality of its craftsmanship, if you like.

How does this bear upon the problem of the narrative representation of emergent behaviour? It gives us cause to reflect upon the difference between the very basic logic of narrative cognition and the elaborate forms of narrative with which we are culturally familiar. Our dependence upon narrative cognition as a constraining condition upon our ability to understand processes presents narrative as a problem, to which narrative is the only available solution. How well has our capacity for narrative creativity risen to the challenge? One central notion, for the adequacy of cultural forms of narrative to the way things go in the world, is the notion of realism. In some conceptions of it, realism is narrative on the human scale; it is, according to one critic, the perspective of the 'middle distance' (Stern, 1973). This is a view of realism quite close to the basic affordances of narrative cognition; it accepts the parameters of that frame of reference, saying that the real is what makes sense to us, and concentrating upon questions of coherence, or proportion, within that frame. It is not the only possible view of realism; other views emphasise different scales, from the breadth of social formations in their totality at one extreme, to the much more intimate scale of psychological and phenomenological immediacy at the other. But also, more generally, what counts as an expression of the real in narrative has been, throughout history, a continually moving target; a question of narrative craftsmanship that is posed anew for every author. One of the ways in which we can characterise the cultural history of narrative is as a constant testing and problematising of its own limits as a mode of representation. Realism, in the broadest sense, is a standing criterion of narrative mimesis; it holds narrative to account principally by repudiating artifice and convention in the name of truth. In this sense it is a form of negation: a refusal of the easy comforts of narrative form in the effort to remain responsive to the complexity of the real. But this effort of self-critique requires continual vigilance, as the strategies through which we pursue such a refusal and complexification themselves inexorably degenerate into conventions, and become part of the problem. We are in a perpetual arms race with our own inveterate narrative reductionism, and so the cultural evolution of narrative is also a history of self-consciousness, of recursive cycles of reflexiveness.

I have been using a broad analogy between questions of scale and level in relation to the emergent behaviour of systems and the same questions in relation to scale models, in order to draw out the ways narrative is implicated in both contexts. Returning to the stories by Will Self and Enid Blyton, there is no lack of evidence for a self-conscious complexification of narrative in Will Self's story, at least. Sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph and section by section it continually stretches the limits of narrative coherence and violates our expectations of mimetic intelligibility. In these respects it is representative of trends in much contemporary literary fiction. One of its more idiosyncratic features is its relentless punning upon different senses of 'scale'. So, as well as the sense associated with model villages and the like, we get references to kettle scale, to bathroom scales, to the scales of a lizard, and to scaling a wall (it is actually quite an annoying story). Puns are, of course, self-conscious disruptions of the representational relation between the narration and its subject matter. In that respect their

function is common to many defamiliarising devices, but the notable prominence of puns on 'scale' in this story about scale is intriguing, because it turns out that puns are also a prominent feature of Bekonscot – and indeed, possibly because of this precedent, they are a traditional feature of model villages in general. So, the shops and businesses of Bekonscot include Miss A. Stitch, the dressmaker; Ivan Huven, the baker; Dan D. Lyon, the florist; Sam and Ella, butchers; Chris P. Lettis, greengrocer, and many others.

Is there some particular affinity between puns and questions of scale? Perhaps. A pun is a kind of impropriety, a breach of decorum not so much within a frame of reference as between discrete frames of reference, or frames that *ought* to be discrete. In that sense it correlates not with a crisis of proportion, but with a crisis of scale. It goes along with the direct transgression of hierarchies of scale that occurs in Self's story when the protagonist, in the grip of an opiate-induced nightmare, enters the model village and discovers a model of his own bungalow – which he enters, only to discover, on the sun porch, another model, also of the bungalow, which he also enters. This cycle repeats several more times, until he finds himself, as he says, 'standing on a sun porch for which a double-glazing estimate would have to be calculated in Angstroms' (p. 267). He makes his way back to his own home, an epic journey of increasing difficulty as the enlarging environment at each level progressively dwarfs his now diminutive form, and this violation of his sense of spatial scale has a reciprocal effect upon his sense of the temporal scale between dreamtime and waking reality: 'It took me three months to ascend […]' (p. 267).

By contrast, the disruptive potential of narrative negotiations with scale is kept very much under control in 'The Enchanted Village'. For one thing, Blyton would never stoop to the vulgarity of a pun; in her hands, language is a perfunctory instrument of imaginative transportation, and her use of it does not stray from literal mediation any further than the occasional simile. More specifically, there is a direct parallel between a moment in Blyton's story and Self's account of his protagonist's vertiginous descent into the model village, yet its implications are exactly the reverse. One of the children, young John, exclaims at a certain point, 'I don't know which would be more fun – to be giants like this, and tower above everything – or to be small enough to play with the farm animals and ride in the trains'. John's imaginative engagement with the model village here extends no further than simply cancelling out its salient feature, the discrepancy between its scale and his own. To be small enough to play with the farm animals and ride in the trains would be to have negated the very idea of a model village in order to immerse yourself in a rather crude and non-functional equivalent of reality. It is a mere disregard for the discreteness of scales and levels upon which the significance of the representational relation depends. Nor is this just John's imaginative limitation – similar sentiments are expressed by Mary, and by Blyton herself as the first-person narrator.

I just called the narrator of 'The Enchanted Village' 'Blyton herself,' but there's a wrinkle in that thought. In the case of Will Self's story, it is clear enough that the narrator-protagonist is not Self himself, even though there are some notable points of correspondence between the two. But Blyton's story begins in an explicitly autobiographical mode: 'Would you like to come with me and visit a village so small that you will tower above the houses? […] Well, I live quite near to a little village like this – it is so close that I can see it from my bedroom window. Shall I take you there? It's a real village, called Bekonscot, and it is in the town of Beaconsfield'. This opening leads to the one point of dislocation in her narrative, the only respect in which this story acknowledges, if only implicitly, the duality of relations of representation. It has to do so, because although she offers the young reader an opportunity to join her on an actual visit to Bekonscot, of course that cannot literally happen. The transition immediately follows, like this: 'Are you ready to come with me? Let's go then. Down the road we go, to the entrance of the village. We shall find plenty of other children there, gazing in delight at the miniature village!

Here we are, John and Mary and I – and almost at once Mary cries out in joy!'. In the course of these sentences, we cross the threshold into fiction. John and Mary suddenly appear, as generic proxies for the reader (both genders catered for, though alas, only one social class); in the same moment, Blyton's 'I' becomes that of a fictional surrogate. It is done with practised efficiency, and it is not meant to be dwelt upon, but nonetheless if you do not grasp the fictive rhetoric here, however intuitively, the move is unintelligible. Fictionality, too, is a kind of modelling, with its own repertoire of rhetorical transformations between the form of representation and its real-world communicative relevance.

This threshold moment in the narrative frame of Blyton's story is her only concession to the need for discrimination between levels of narrative representation, and the questions it raises about the parameters of the relation between them, questions of scale, remain entirely implicit. Blyton's story is quite assured of its own sense of proportion; it is oblivious to the reflexive relevance of the problem of scale raised by its subject matter. Nonetheless, unbeknown to Blyton herself, her relation to Bekonscot has come to embody the disorienting recursive logic of representation in an even more substantial way than the drug-induced confusion of scale experienced by Self's protagonist. In 1997, to mark the centenary of Blyton's birth, the modellers of Bekonscot installed a model of her house, the long-since demolished Green Hedges, in a prime location within the village. And there in the garden, sitting on her favourite bench, is Blyton herself, no doubt working on a story about scale, and tapping out the limpid sentences of 'The Enchanted Village'.

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