Groundhog DAG
Representing Semantic Repetition in Literary Narratives

The teaser...

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Some basic points

- ▶ Formal versus semantic repetition
- ▶ Literary narratives aren't just stories...
- ▶ Beyond linearity: it's not just one thing after another...

An illustration: the film *Cast Away*

The basic plot: Chuck Nolan (played by Tom Hanks) loves a girl, gets lost on a desert island, learns to survive, finally escapes, sails across the ocean to return to civilisation, but the girl has remarried, so he must resume his life without her. He delivers the one package he had kept unopened, to a lady welder.

Some basic repetitions in the text

(1) an artistic lady welder lives on a ranch, orders a part from FedEx

(2) the package is on Nolan's plane that crashes onto a desert island

(3) Nolan keeps the package unopened

(4) after escaping the island, Nolan delivers it with a note that it 'saved his life'

Or again...

(1) the artistic welder has wings as the logo for her studio

(2) Nolan draws wings on the makeshift sail used to propel his raft off the desert island

Very nice, but a literary colleague would probably say: "but that's not the interesting bit: there's more. **Find more patterns**."

- Nolan leaves his girlfriend behind on the **ground**
- Nolan makes it to a desert **island**
- He escapes on a **raft**

- Nolan works for FedEx, using **planes** to deliver parcels
- the welder has **wings** as the symbol of her studio
- Nolan uses a **sail** to escape the desert island

- the lady artist is a **welder**
- Nolan learns how to light a **campfire** and survive

- Nolan's plane crashes into the **ocean**
- Nolan is trapped on the desert island by the **surf**
- Nolan's girlfriend has remarried; their final goodbye in the **rain**

The elements form a system

Fire
: the friend and ally and goal; a source of meaning and joy

Air
: the exciting but changeable element that can serve but harm as well

Earth
: the saving support, but only for survival, not for joy

Water
: the enemy: it can isolate, make sad, harm, and kill

Two conclusions

(1) semantic repetition exists at the intersection of the text and the reader

(2) semantic repetition is not ordered by the text alone: it depends on an abstract structure 'behind' the text, that we represent using a Directed Acyclic Graph.

To see this applied to the movie *Groundhog Day*, check out the poster...