

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document:                   BRITISH MODERNIST NARRATIVE  
  MIDDLES

*Michael Eli Rosenberg, Doctor of Philosophy,  
2013*

Directed By:                           Professor Brian Richardson, Department of  
  English

Middles play a key role in shaping narrative form. However, while Edward Said has shown how beginnings shape the novel and a wide range of intellectual endeavors in *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, and Frank Kermode has explored the pull of the ending on Western narrative in *The Sense of an Ending*, there has been no comparable study of the middle. Defining the narrative middle as a central piece of text that has a transitional or transformational function, *British Modernist Narrative Middles* draws attention to the ways narrative middles have been used to construct distinctly modernist narratives through transformations of narrative form and technique. The various techniques employed in modernist narrative middles are demonstrated through close readings of three canonical modernist texts: Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*, and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*; as well as three British neo-modernist texts: Rayner Heppenstall's *Saturnine*, B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*, and Brigid Brophy's *In Transit*. While the first five texts use

narrative middles to alter their narrative form within a modernist poetics, *In Transit* employs a narrative middle that transforms the novel's poetics from modernist to postmodernist. While not all modernist texts employ prominent narrative middles, when they do, these middles can be crucial to our understanding both of these novels' narrative form and how they grapple with the major thematic and poetic concerns of modernism.

BRITISH MODERNIST NARRATIVE MIDDLES

By

Michael Eli Rosenberg

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2013

Advisory Committee:  
Professor Brian Richardson, Chair  
Professor Peter Mallios  
Professor Christina Walter  
Professor Lee Konstantinou  
Professor Valérie Orlando

© Copyright by  
Michael Eli Rosenberg  
2013

## Dedication

To my wife Pat, my dissertation project manager and a lover of stories.

## Acknowledgments

Brian Richardson, who believed in this project from the beginning, provided exceptional commentary, encouragement, and support through the end. Caroline Levine provided pre-publication drafts of the introduction as well as her contribution to *Narrative Middles*. Jennie Wellman took the time out from her own studies to read and provide incisive comments on a few chapter drafts. A few chapters also owe a significant debt to Linda Kauffman and the students of her dissertation workshop. Any faults, errors, and omissions are, of course, my own.

## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: “The Plague Spot”: Finding the Modernist Middle in Joseph Conrad’s <i>Lord Jim</i> .....	32
Chapter 2: Modernist Points of View: A Middle Without Text in Henry James’s <i>The Golden Bowl</i> .....	67
Chapter 3: “Time Passes”: The Middle as Corridor in Virginia Woolf’s <i>To the Lighthouse</i> .....	105
Chapter 4: Spirituality and Delusion: The Middle as Rupture in the Consciousness in Rayner Heppenstall’s <i>Saturnine</i> .....	170
Chapter 5: A Noun-Like Narrative: The Middle as Unfixed Memory in B.S. Johnson’s <i>The Unfortunates</i> .....	220
Chapter 6: Indivisible Form, Divided: The Middle as Leap from Modernism to Postmodernism in Brigid Brophy’s <i>In Transit</i> .....	267
Conclusion .....	317
Works Cited .....	322

## Introduction

Narrative middles are a sort of ever-present, yet rarely interrogated concept in narrative theory. Aristotle writes in the *Poetics* that a story should be “a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, middle, and end” (1459a). Since that time, a great deal has been written about beginnings and endings, but the middle remains largely unexplored and undefined. While Edward Said has shown how beginnings shape the novel and a wide range of intellectual endeavors in *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, and Frank Kermode has explored the pull of the ending on Western narrative in *The Sense of an Ending*, there has been no comparable study of the middle. J. Hillis Miller comes closest, devoting several chapters of his *Reading Narrative* to middles, but here the middle must share space with the beginning and the end. Miller’s primary concern is the narrative line, and his analysis of the middle is primarily an analysis of the role of digression in that line. In this slippage—in which the middle stands for the whole of the narrative—we find the central problem of the middle. While it is relatively easy to point to the beginning or to the end of a novel, it is much more difficult to point to the middle. The common statement that one is “in the middle of reading” a book is similarly defined by its indefiniteness, and often carries a note of evaluative or interpretive uncertainty. All books, all narratives, have middles, but we are uncertain as to what they are or what they mean.

Aristotle’s notion of a causally unified plot in the *Poetics* is grounded entirely in beginnings, middles, and ends, prompting the following definition: “Now a whole is that which has beginning, middle, and end. A beginning is that which is not itself



necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something else after it; an end is that which is naturally after something itself, either as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it; and a middle, that which is by nature after one thing and has also another after it” (1450b). Aristotle, then, insists on the naturalness and necessity of the existence of beginnings, middles, and endings, as well as their relationships to one another. Kermode, on the other hand, argues that this relationship is not necessary or natural, but instead a product of human psychology and social arrangements. Kermode suggests that life takes place entirely “in the midst,” and that to make sense of this muddled middle, people “need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems” (7). What was naturalness and necessity in Aristotle, then, becomes a set of artificial constructs in Kermode. Nevertheless, while for Kermode beginnings and endings are fictive, the middle is real. Without beginning and ending, the middle becomes all of reality. Kermode turns our attention to middles almost as much as endings, but in so doing he perhaps expands the middle so far as to negate the possibility of making the middle an object of study.

Where Kermode focuses on the power of endings to shape meaning, Said turns to beginnings, and in so doing, makes the middle almost invisible. Said defines the beginning as “*making or producing difference*” (Said xiii). Said ties the beginning closely to the intention, “an appetite at the beginning intellectually to do something in a characteristic way” (Said 12). That is, the beginning is for Said the beginning from the writer’s perspective—the beginning of writing or conceiving of a text—rather than the beginning of the text itself from the reader’s perspective. However, Said

shares with Aristotle the connection between beginnings and a discrete (if not necessarily whole) text. Said's concept of difference at the beginning resembles Aristotle's assertion that the beginning is that which does not necessarily come after anything else. However, whereas Aristotle views the separation between the beginning and everything that comes before it as natural, for Said this separation is produced by the beginning itself. The narrative with a discrete beginning, middle, and end is not quite, as it is for Kermode, artificial, but it is created rather than chosen in accordance with natural order.

This very sense that the beginning of a text must be produced becomes for Said a key element of modernism: "one of the chief characteristics that Joyce, Yeats, Conrad, Freud, Mann, Nietzsche, and all the others share in common has been a necessity *at the beginning* for them to see their work as making reference, first, to other works, but also to reality and to the reader, by adjacency, not sequentially or dynastically" (Said 10). The modernists, then, create their beginnings in large part out of pre-existing material, but reject teleology in this relationship—that is, their beginnings reject the idea of a natural beginning. Teleology and hierarchy—the ways in which Aristotelian beginnings, middles, and endings, form natural narrative, and by which Kermode's fictive beginnings and endings produce meaning for the middle—are struck down in Said's modernism. If, as Said argues, the intention produces a characteristic way of doing or thinking, then I would argue the middle is where this intention is continued or carried out. Yet, if the modernist text suggests that there is no hierarchy to this intention—that the text is adjacent rather than subordinate to or "after" its predecessors, the middle may be similarly adjacent to the

beginning. That is, a modernist middle may not follow in an ineluctable narrative logic from the initial proposition of the beginning, but instead may stand beside it, a disjunction or disruption of the beginning. From the reader's perspective, then, the modernist middle may multiply or revise our sense of the beginning intention, reshaping the text in its own image. Therefore, we are perhaps as likely to find a modernist text's intention—the key principle which structures the narrative, its meaning, and its dominant poetic concerns—in the middle of the text as at the beginning or the end.

With *Tristram Shandy* rather than modernism as his model of non-traditional narrative, Miller, too, disputes Aristotelian necessity, and along with it any clear means with which to choose beginnings and endings: “Is there really ever a beginning of a play that does not itself follow anything by causal necessity? Or is there is [*sic*] an ending that nothing follows? Are all the middle elements ever connected by a clear causal necessity to what comes before and after?” (Miller, *Reading Narrative* 9).

Whereas Kermode asserts the reality of the middle, Miller asserts the importance of the middle to narrative. In stark contrast to Aristotle, Kermode, and Said alike, Miller even asserts the middle's independence from the beginning and ending. However, much like Kermode's concept of “the midst,” Miller's concept of middles is really an attack on the notion of a complete, meaningful, natural Aristotelian narrative, rather than an examination of the middle as a distinct component of narrative.

Miller's exploration of middles, then, is really a discussion of causality. As such, Miller's definition of the middle is modeled closely on Aristotle's, simply removing

the causal element: the middle is “that part of narratives that comes after the beginning and before the end” (Miller, *Reading Narrative* 61).

Aristotelian causality—at least in its strong form—is dead, and, without it, Miller’s middles threaten to become infinite: as causal and thematic connections multiply, “[a] narrative tends to continue forever as an indefinitely displaced middle” (107). That is, if we imagine beginning and ending as points defining a narrative line, the line itself is the middle—yet that line defines a narrative trajectory that need not be confined by beginning and ending. Miller’s infinite middles, however, highlight a further problem with Aristotle’s definition: beginnings and endings as Aristotle defines them do not actually require middles. Imagine beginning and ending, instead of being two infinitesimal points, as instead two connected line segments. In Aristotle, these segments are actions, but we can also imagine each as a chapter, a scene, a paragraph, a sentence, even a word. Two such segments may be connected without a similar segment comprising the middle. Cause and consequence, as well as narrative segmentation, requires only two parts. The middle, to the extent that we still insist on retaining the concept, becomes, rather than the something between two points, the point of division between two somethings. Once again, however, the middle is of an entirely different nature from beginnings and endings. It always threatens to expand until it consumes the entire text and beyond, and to contract into nothing.

However, despite this tendency to subordinate the narrative middle to beginning and ending or to conflate it with the text as a whole, the narrative middle seems ready to emerge as a distinct object of study. More recently, Caroline Levine

and Mario Ortiz-Robles have brought greater attention to the middle with a collection of essays entitled *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Where Said and Kermode often seem to conflate textual or formal middle with the middle as a concept (philosophical, social, even existential), Levine and Ortiz-Robles helpfully distinguish between formal and conceptual middles: on the one hand, there is the novel's "formal middle—the bulk of its narrative space" and on the other "the problem of middlingness—the middle class, the unheroic, the ordinary" (Levine and Ortiz-Robles 3).

There are problems, however, with both parts of this formulation. Their definition of the formal middle, while it does not make of the middle the *entirety* of the narrative, as does Miller, does make the middle *most* of the narrative. By this definition of the formal middle, a study of middles very easily may become indistinguishable from a study in narrative sequencing or narrative itself. Levine and Ortiz-Robles' definition of the conceptual middle, on the other hand, seems to me to be tied very closely to nineteenth-century British novels, whose authors, Levine and Ortiz-Robles argue, "dwelling lengthily and lovingly on the middle, were absorbed in the experience of middleness per se" (7). What happens, then, to novels—even long novels (and thus those with a long formal middle)—from other places or periods? Do they lack a conceptual middle? Are their formal middles inevitably at odds with a poetics or thematics that is not interested in the experience of middleness? And why is this conceptual middle so different from Kermode's "middest"?

I would argue that there is little, if any, inherent connection between Levine and Ortiz-Robles' conceptual middle and formal middle. Instead, both definitions are

fitted to the subject of nineteenth-century novels. We can see this problem again in Levine and Ortiz-Robles' discussion of the center, which they argue is one particular way of approaching the middle: "Is there a midpoint, a heart of the novel, that holds everything together?" they ask (Levine and Ortiz-Robles 9). The editors of *Narrative Middles* argue that the answer is increasingly "no," and they point to the "waning power of centrality" in the nineteenth century (Levine and Ortiz-Robles 10). In an argument for the de-centering of the text and a more democratic middle, Levine and Ortiz-Robles point to narrative techniques such as free indirect discourse, which Levine and Ortiz-Robles argue "illustrate the centrifugal forces at work in the middle as narrative authority is multiplied, curtailed, and undermined by experiments in focalization" (Levine and Ortiz-Robles 10). The argument here, however, has nothing to do with the middle or the center of the text. Instead, what is highlighted by experiments in focalization is a source of narrative or textual authority, a single reliable point of view, which is multiplied, curtailed, and undermined. Here, "in the middle" seems to stand for "in the text," or "in the nineteenth-century British novel." There is much to admire in *Narrative Middles*, but I would argue that its approach is both too diffuse (in its definition of the middle) and too particular (in its attempts to bind a concept of the middle to the social concerns of nineteenth-century Britain) to bring us much closer to understanding middles as a distinct component of narrative.

I will argue, therefore, for a more literally-minded approach to narrative middles. *Narrative Middles* does provide a model for this approach; among the narrative middles it explores are individual scenes or events at the center of the text, such as the interrupted wedding in *Jane Eyre* and Hyacinth's vow in Henry James's

*Princess Casamassima*. The former is an individual scene, while the latter takes place between the volumes of the New York Edition of the novel. In both of these cases, a single event in the center of the text re-shapes the novel's plot and plays a key role in shaping the meaning of the entire novel. However, the narrative middle does not necessarily comprise a single event, but may also comprise a large set of events. In *Middlemarch*, for example, the text late in Part 3 and early in Part 4 (of six parts) largely concerns Casaubon's illness, the terms of his will, and his death in Chapter 48 of 86 numbered chapters. This represents a significant transformation in Dorothea's circumstances, as she is simultaneously released from a stifling marriage, yet forbidden to marry Will Ladislaw. During this middle, too, Dorothea increasingly concentrates on charitable endeavors. That is, in addition to moving the plot forward in arguably unexpected ways, this middle creates for Dorothea an independent space to pursue her goals and identity outside of the marriage plot. In all of these Victorian narrative middles, there is a plot development that plays a key role in structuring the novel as a whole and serves as a plausible transition between beginning and ending.

The existence of key, central narrative middles in many texts suggests that these middles might deserve attention similar to that afforded beginnings and endings. It might be noted that even a quick perusing of the internet turns up multiple lists of famous beginnings and endings of novels. These concepts hold sway, hold our memories, well beyond the walls of academia. Kermode and Said are both, in this sense, certainly right: meaning is generally formed, or created, from beginnings and endings. If we are, as Miller argues and Kermode implies, to take the middle seriously as more than a by-product of beginning and ending, it would perhaps be

useful to attempt, as some of the essays in *Narrative Middles* do, to examine how middles produce or create narrative form, meaning, and difference—and, what’s more, to examine them as *distinct* middles—separated as much as possible from the rest of the text, as beginnings and endings are separated from what is not the text. Said’s discussion of modernist beginnings, I have argued, implies that the middles of modernist texts may be more likely than others to exhibit this sort of difference. However, where Victorian narrative middles operate primarily by developments at the level of story, modernist narrative middles, as I will define them, operate primarily by changing the way the narrative discourse operates. While it is not the case that every modernist text contains a modernist middle, many modernist texts do contain prominent narrative middles. Just as Victorian narrative middles structure novels by reshaping the story’s plot, so do modernist narrative middles structure novels by reshaping the application of modernist devices such as stream of consciousness technique.

While narrative middles are this study’s primary object, then, modernism both guides my selection of texts and informs how I read their middles. Modernism, if not so hazy a concept as the middle, is nevertheless highly disputed in both its historical timeframe and formal definition. Further complicating the matter is modernism’s status as something of a pan-cultural concept, covering a wide range of cultural and artistic productions, movements, and manifestations. Since this study is primarily concerned with the middle as a formal, rather than conceptual, object, and one related specifically to narrative, I find it most useful to work with Brian McHale’s definition of modernism, which is likewise primarily formal and specific to narrative. My



choice of McHale's definition is pragmatic confined to the particular purposes of this study, rather than a prescriptive attempt to return modernist studies in general to a formalist framework. That is, I am interested in this study in narratives with the formal and thematic characteristics which McHale attributes to modernism—and how these characteristics are reflected and challenged in these narratives' middles. I am not particularly invested in whether "modernism" is the best possible word for such texts or whether McHale's definition is the best possible definition of modernist fiction for the field of modernist studies as a whole. In both cases, it is almost certainly not. Nevertheless, I believe McHale's definition has some particular characteristics that make it both compatible with some developments in modernist studies and of continued relevance for the study of modernism as the field continues to evolve and expand.

McHale defines modernism according to its dominant, the element which focuses and provides coherence to its structure, much like Said's beginning intention. According to McHale, modernism's dominant is *epistemological*, and as a result "modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as [...] 'How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?'" (McHale 9). Modernism doesn't simply ask epistemological questions: it deploys strategies, or "practices a poetics of an epistemological dominant" (McHale 10). In this way, McHale distinguishes modernism from detective fiction, which asks epistemological questions, but does not employ epistemological poetics. McHale's definition of modernism serves three major purposes in its original context in *Postmodernist Fiction*. First, and most obviously, McHale defines modernism in

order to clarify how postmodernism is different from and develops out of modernism in the context of “literary-historical change” (7). That is, McHale distinguishes modernism and postmodernism on a formal level while grounding that formal definition in the historical development of both styles. McHale’s distinction between modernism and postmodernism is thus both historically grounded and applicable to texts outside the primary geographical and temporal limitations of these movements. The ability to distinguish between modernism and postmodernism as distinct movements with a definition that nevertheless can be applied to periods and geographies outside of the original historical context, I will argue, remains highly relevant to modernist studies. Second, McHale’s definition distinguishes the poetics of modernist fiction from popular and traditional fictions originating from the same time and place—even those with similar thematic concerns. This remains highly relevant as modernist studies attempts to distinguish between *any* text produced under the conditions of modernity and a specifically modernist text. Finally, in order to provide a coherent account of postmodernism’s development out of modernism, McHale’s definition of modernism synthesizes common stylistic and thematic elements of modernist fiction under a single coherent concept, the epistemological dominant. McHale contrasts his synthesizing use of the dominant with “catalogues,” lists of stylistic or thematic features of a text (McHale 7). Even for critics and theorists who reject definitions of modernism that are rooted in the formal features common to canonical Anglo-American modernist texts, McHale’s definition provides a systematic account of the formal properties of modernist fiction to which different definitions of modernism—or different modernisms—can be more clearly contrasted.

In examining modernist middles, I will use the tools of narrative theory to examine the ways in which texts employ an epistemological poetics in their narrative middles. I will also examine ways in which middles structure and re-structure texts in ways that foreground epistemological concerns. However, I am not interested only in how modernist middles exhibit the poetics of the epistemological dominant. This study will also examine ways in which these middles deepen, alter, reconfigure, or disrupt this dominant. McHale's definition of modernist fiction therefore provides a clear framework in which to discuss the ways the middles under discussion here engage with a key set of formal, stylistic, and thematic tropes. McHale's definition, however, does not pretend to apply to modernism broadly, but only to modernist narrative. It is specifically adapted for discussions of narrative texts, and especially for narratological discussions of those texts. Since that is my purpose here, it is a particularly useful definition—one which I contend remains useful even in light of developments in modernist studies over the last 25 years.

To highlight the continuing value and relevance of McHale's definition, I would like to turn to two relatively recent competing and contrasting definitions of modernism by Susan Stanford Friedman and Fredric Jameson. Friedman's definition is associated with the new modernist studies. The new modernist studies, beginning approximately with the founding of the Modernist Studies Association in 1999, has been characterized by what Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz in their seminal survey of the field in *PMLA* refer to as an "expansion" along temporal, spatial, and vertical lines (Mao and Walkowitz 737). That is, modernist studies has moved beyond the study of early twentieth-century (temporal) European and Anglo-American

(spatial) high art (vertical). In sympathy with this expansion, Friedman proposes a “planetary modernism” that facilitates our expanding notions of modernity, yet is still bound enough to be useful (Friedman, “Planetarity” 473). Friedman goes on to define modernity according to a “dynamics of change” (478). Modernism, in turn, is for Friedman “the expressive dimension of modernity” (Friedman, “Periodizing Modernism” 432). This definition, Friedman argues, allows for “multiple modernisms” while avoiding a “Eurocentric diffusionist ideology” and also avoiding a too-diffuse definition of modernism (“Periodizing Modernism” 427, 429). Friedman asserts that grounding a definition of modernism in this definition of modernity lends it enough specificity to be useful, yet I remain skeptical that modernism defined as “the expressive element of a historical dynamics of change” really does have much utility for applied work. This is particularly true for studies such as this one that are interested in the formal and stylistic properties of modernism. I am sympathetic to Friedman’s project of expanding the field of modernist studies without viewing early-twentieth-century Europe (and the United States) as the ultimate source of all modernisms. However, I am not convinced that Friedman’s definition is adequately specific, even for her purposes. In any case, when studying any particular modernism, definitions such as Jameson’s and McHale’s help us to define the particular features of *that* modernism in regard to the particular research interests of the study.

Like Friedman and other contributors to new modernist studies, Jameson is arguably more interested in defining modernity than in defining modernism. However, Jameson rejects the notion that there are multiple modernities. For Jameson, to assert that different nations, cultures, or times have their own modernities

“is to overlook the other fundamental meaning of modernity which is that of a worldwide capitalism itself” (Jameson, *Singular Modernity* 12). Jameson spells out the particularity of that meaning in contrast to postmodernism as follows:

where modernity was a set of questions and answers that characterized a situation of incomplete or partial modernization, postmodernity is what obtains under a tendentially far more complete modernization, which can be summed up in two achievements: the industrialization of agriculture, that is, the destruction of all traditional peasantries, and the colonization and commercialization of the Unconscious or, in other words, mass culture and the culture industry. (*Singular Modernity* 12)

For Jameson, modernity occupies the middle in the narrative of capitalism itself. It is this narrative, and not the narratives within modernist texts, that Jameson is primarily concerned with. Nevertheless, Jameson’s definition suggests that modernity, like the nineteenth-century British world as described by Levine, Ortiz-Robles, and their collaborators, has its own particular relationship to the concept of the middle. The middle of modernism is dynamic—the middle of transition. Despite Jameson’s objections to Friedman’s pluralizing of modernism, he too grounds his definition of modernity in a notion of change. Jameson’s modernism, then, is a sort of ideology of change, “passionately committed to the eruption of the genuinely, the radically, and, dare one even say, the authentically New” (Jameson, *Singular Modernity* 4). In traditional narratives of modernism, Jameson argues, modernist texts create the new out of a “realist core,” where “realism is grasped as the expression of some commonsense experience of a recognizably real world” (Jameson, *Singular*

*Modernity* 120). We can see in this definition the roots of McHale's: modernism is epistemologically dominant because access to the realist core (presumably, for Jameson, grounded in the elements of social and economic organization that have not become fully capitalist) has been complicated, problematized, and changed—but not excised completely.

Jameson's own definition of modernism is also compatible with McHale's notion of the epistemological dominant. Jameson argues that, in contrast to late modernist theorizers of modernism, who were concerned with the status of art, the high moderns as such were reflexive or self-conscious about representation itself. Most often they allowed representation to follow its own semi-autonomous course, according to its own inner logic: that is to say that they allowed it to separate itself from its content and its object, and as if it were to deconstruct itself. They were content to foreground what we may call the arbitrariness of the signifier (rather than that of the sign), releasing the signifying material to demonstrate its own dilemmas and internal contradictions [...] (Jameson, *Singular Modernity* 198)

That is, for the high modernists, the signifier, in the case of narrative, the narrative discourse itself, is subject to self-conscious innovation, while the content and object remain anchored in some notion of reality. The innovations of modernism are epistemological, rather than ontological: the world remains stable (or, at least, recognizably a singular, changing world) as the signifier is destabilized. While Jameson's notion that a definition of modernity must be singularly connected to the

evolution of capitalism strikes me as asserted rather than properly argued,<sup>1</sup> his account remains a compelling and perhaps indispensable one for students of high modernism. However, Jameson is more interested in the “why” of modernism than the “what.” For those like myself who are interested in exploring the stylistic and formal elements of modernist narrative texts, a definition like McHale’s offers a useful supplement or substitute that nevertheless connects in important ways to Jameson’s account.

It is telling that, despite their starkly opposing definitions of modernism, both Jameson and Friedman maintain the importance of modernism’s formal engagement with modernity in a way that ends up looking a good deal like McHale’s definition. Just as Jameson objects explicitly to the proliferation of modernisms in new modernist studies, Friedman herself acknowledges the continuing pull of the long-canonical modernist texts, and in particular their formal and stylistic features, as the core of her concept of modernism: “I find it hard to call a novel like *Brick Lane* ‘modernist.’ But I think this is my problem, not the problem of the more capacious understanding of modernism as the expressive domain of modernity I proposed earlier” (Friedman, “Planetarity” 476). Despite Friedman’s best efforts to move beyond her instinctual definition of modernism, which might follow something close to McHale’s formulation, she nevertheless turns to a text that exhibits traditional modernist stylistic features and even an explicit lineage with a canonical modernist

---

<sup>1</sup> Friedman herself engages Jameson directly on this point: “Such a reductionist view limits the nominalist definition, even more radically than Giddens does, to a set of one: capitalism. Jameson’s notion of singularity impoverishes what needs to be a complex approach to the overdeterminations of history and the enmeshments of different systems of power in understanding modernity” (Friedman, “Planetarity” 480).

text when she moves to apply her expanded definition of modernism. Friedman holds up the Sudanese author Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* as an example of postcolonial modernism that does not merely copy or echo the features of Anglo-American modernism. Yet, *Season of Migration to the North* is a sort of re-writing of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Friedman's description of both texts' stylistic features resembles McHale's account of modernism:

Even more than Conrad's novel, *Season of Migration to the North* is a narrative of indeterminacy; of mysteries, lies, and truths; of mediating events through the perspectives of multiple embedded narrators; of complex tapestries of interlocking motifs and symbols; and of pervasive irony. Stylistically speaking, Salih's novel is "high modernist," having moved even further than Conrad from the conventions of realism." (Friedman, "Periodizing Modernism" 435-436)

Friedman names Conrad and Salih's texts as "high modernism," that is, belonging to a particular modernism which she argues is not the only modernism. (She does not offer here a contrasting reading of a text belonging to a different modernism.) What makes these texts high modernist is the stylistic and thematic dominance of a catalogue of concerns which could be summed up by McHale's definition of modernism: an epistemologically-dominant poetics.

Thus, even in a field of plural modernisms, McHale's definition remains useful in describing a particular type of modernism. In addition, McHale's definition of modernism is flexible enough that it can be applied to texts outside of its initial



spatial and temporal confines. On the subject of whether this is the only type of narrative text which should be called modernism, I am agnostic. There are clear advantages to a broader, planetary range of modernisms, and there are advantages to grounding our definition of modernism in the features that initially piqued Friedman's interest in modernism as well as my own. There are even advantages in abandoning the term "modernism" altogether; it is, even when deployed with care, a term that causes confusion for the layman. However, like Jameson, I believe we are stuck with the word modernism. Tying the term to the stylistic features of canonical modernist texts at least gives lends it a certain shape and continuity, even as the field of modernist studies expands.

Just as I have chosen McHale's definition of modernism in part because of its usefulness for narratological inquiry, so too can classical narratology provide further clarification about the nature of modernist poetics as defined by McHale. *British Modernist Narrative Middles*, by looking closely at how six British modernist texts construct their own middles, examines many of the different functions and forms of the central narrative middle. The primary theoretical tools employed are those of classical narrative theory, especially the work of Gérard Genette. Genette's distinction between story, "the signified or narrated content" and narrative discourse, "the signifier, statement, discourse, or narrative text itself" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 27) may help clarify the distinction between the epistemological poetics of modernism and the epistemological plots of detective fiction, as well as to distinguish the epistemological dominant of modernism from the ontological dominant McHale associates with postmodernism (McHale 10). Epistemological problems—questions

of meaning and knowledge—are perhaps most evident in the gap between story and discourse—between what happens in the story and the rules of the world in which it takes place, and the medium through which the reader gains knowledge and perspective on the story. Many prominent modernist texts, from authors such as Joyce, Woolf, Mansfield, and Proust, adhere to certain level of stability, verisimilitude, and even a sense of the ordinary or undramatic when it comes to the story. That is, the events narrated in *Ulysses* or *Mrs. Dalloway* take place in a stable world resembling our own. However, the discourse, through techniques such as focalization, symbolic structures, and particular attention to the consciousnesses of characters, rather than outward events, tends to disrupt, limit, and multiply ways that the story is understood and interpreted. However, in modernist texts, the story itself remains singular and stable. In popular detective fiction, by contrast, the story of detection itself is rendered mostly unproblematically in the discourse—the epistemological problems are confined primarily to the story. In postmodernist fiction, on the other hand, the story itself becomes problematic and unstable. It is not simply that we do not *know* precisely what happens in a postmodern narrative, or are confronted with multiple or conflicted meanings for the same events, but instead these events and the worlds in which they occur may be multiple or unstable. An examination of modernist middles, then, is an examination of middles that pose epistemological questions primarily through their discourse.

This study will explore the epistemological poetics of modernism as it is found and altered in various modernist narrative middles. Located near the center of the text, modernist narrative middles may, as in the gap between Molloy and Moran's

narratives in Beckett's *Molloy*, contain no actual discourse, but may simply mark a division of a text into two parts. They may also, as in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, consist of a central segment of the narrative text—a short transition between parts one and two of a two-part text, or the middle part of a three-part text. In one case, B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*, I even explore a narrative middle that takes up most of the text between beginning and end. This is, however, an extreme case, where, because of the text's randomization of the narrative discourse between beginning and ending, there cannot be a single central middle of the narrative discourse, while the structure of the text nevertheless highlights the narrative middle as a distinct narrative space. The goal of this exploration is not to establish single, totalizing theory of the narrative middle, or even of the modernist narrative middle, but to start from a working definition of modernist narrative middles that can provide a new way of looking at modernist texts and highlight particular ways modernists have used the narrative middle to structure their texts and develop key narrative techniques and explore epistemological concerns.

Sometimes, as in the above cases, clear divisions in the text create one or more possible middles. In some cases, such as Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, chapters proliferate without any larger-scale division which would clearly mark the middle. In these cases, and in novels which provide no visually obvious structural divisions to their readers, it is more difficult to say what "the middle" is. Nevertheless, when we find a shift in narrative direction or technique, with a chunk of text either standing out as different from what comes before and after, or when we can identify a difference between what comes before and after, we have found a middle. The section of text

which marks this difference most prominently (if there is one) is the middle of the text. When the middle accomplishes this difference largely through a shift in narrative form or technique, rather than strictly through a crisis, revelation or other high or low point in the plot, it is a modernist middle.

If narrative middles are my primary object of study, while modernism is a key focusing concept in both my selection of texts and reading of those texts, the qualifier “British” is less essential to the core aims of this project, but nevertheless provides it with a certain focus which makes room for another relatively novel contribution of this study: extended readings of British late modernist or neo-modernist literature. Even as I have adopted a definition of modernism that pre-dates the new modernist studies, and an approach that is largely formalist in nature, I consider *British Modernist Narrative Middles* to be affiliated with the expansionist aims of Mao, Walkowitz, and Friedman. In restricting this study to British modernism (as well as its focus on formal issues related to the narrative middle), I am mindful of Friedman’s assertion that the expanded reach of modernist studies requires a division of scholarly labor (Friedman, “Planetary” 492). Thus, just as my adoption of McHale’s definition of modernism does not imply a rejection of other definitions of modernism appropriate to other methodologies or objects of study, the restriction of the present study of modernism to British modernism is not meant to imply a sense of priority. Instead, it is a restriction that provides both focus and a particular avenue for expansion.

This study includes close readings of the narrative middles of six British modernist texts from the fin de siècle to 1973, when the deaths of Ann Quin and B. S.

Johnson mark an end to Britain's neo-modernist movement of the 1960s. This movement, as well as its antecedents in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s is, with the exception of Beckett, who is often studied in the context of Irish, Continental, or international literature, has received perhaps even less attention than narrative middles, and it is another aim of this study to restore some of these writers to the general discussions on modernism and British literature in general. While experimental literature from many countries during and after World War II, whether it goes under the label of late or neo-modernism, postmodernism, *nouveau roman*, or postcolonial literature, has been the subject of a great deal of attention, this is not the case for British experimental literature of the same period. Nevertheless, even in the face of the collapsing British publishing industry, a number of authors continued to write experimental literature under the explicit influence of the modernists. By restricting its field of vision to British literature, this study opens up room for a more thorough accounting of this British neo-modernism, which remained more often within McHale's definition of modernism than its counterparts elsewhere. Thus, the British literature of the twentieth century is particularly fertile ground for exploring a wide variety of modernist middles.

In addition to the goal of bringing attention to British neo-modernism, I have been drawn to British modernism by the particular role of British nationalism in these texts, as well as the position of Britain as a sort of middle space between the United States and continental Europe. Pericles Lewis argues that national consciousness in an era of international competition is a particularly potent force in modernist literature. Lewis relates the force of nationalism specifically to a McHale-like view of modernist

narrative, in which subjectivity relates in shifting and uncertain ways to a stable external reality: “the modernist novel does not reject external reality entirely; rather, it concerns itself with the relationship between the individual consciousness and the external reality that it confronts” (Lewis 4). I am also mindful of Patricia Chu’s argument that “increasing governmentalization” is one of the key aspects of modernization reflected in modernist texts, and particularly in their attention to form (Chu 17). For the purposes of this study, therefore, I have defined “British” according to governmental bureaucracy—that is, an author counts as British if she has been a British citizen at some point in her life. This definition is not perfect, but it allows for the inclusion of authors with varying relationships to British national identity, relationships that are differently shaped by a key aspect of modernity.

British national identity is important in a number of the works discussed in this study, from Joseph Conrad and Henry James’s adopted Britishness, to the anxieties about a declining Britain’s position in the world expressed by Rayner Heppenstall and the changing relationship to nationalism expressed by the protagonist of his novel *Saturnine*, to B. S. Johnson’s anxiety about the position of experimental literature in post-war Britain, to Brigid Brophy’s (and her protagonist’s) mixed Anglo-Irish identity. In *The Golden Bowl*, England even serves as a sort of middle space, where Americans and continental Europeans meet and marry. Britain’s particular history in this period—explicit imperialism, its longer and more devastating involvement in the wars, and decolonization—make for a highly contrasting set of challenges to national identity and a received notion of reality than faced by the United States. From center of the English-speaking world, Britain becomes in this

period somewhat peripheral, a particular problem for a national literature. In examining British modernist middles, I therefore considered how these middles might represent transformations in a British national consciousness, or how they might reflect changes in Britain's position on the world stage. However, while I believe, for example, that England remains an important signifier of the center in contrast to the periphery in *Lord Jim*, I have not found particular ways that Britain-as-middle connects to these novels' narrative middles, nor ways that the narrative middles of these novels are particular sites of contestation for British national consciousness. That is, if this study was undertaken under the hypothesis that Britishness might be particularly important to these narrative middles, my initial findings are that this hypothesis was incorrect. A study of modernist narrative middles could therefore, without a great impact on my argument, be expanded to include American or Irish literature. Nevertheless, British modernist literature strikes me as more devoted to a particular stream of consciousness tradition of modernism than its American counterpart, giving a certain degree of focus to this study. This focus on a particular stylistic tradition—much like the focus on modernism itself—has allowed me to explore its variations in the narrative middle more deeply.

While close reading and narrative theory are the primary tools I use to investigate these texts, I will invoke other types of readings when I believe they help to illuminate the ways these modernist middles mark themselves as different from or transforming of the text that surrounds them. More importantly, I believe this sort of formal work to be a starting place, a groundwork upon which more historically, politically, or sociologically-oriented work on the two underexplored subjects of

middles and British neo-modernist texts may proceed. In short, I believe a formal approach to be useful in narrowing and focusing the scope of inquiry, as much as I consider narratological concerns to be a worthy of study in and of themselves. It is my hope that others who share different sets of concerns and approaches will take up these neo-modernist texts, as well as the subject of (modernist) narrative middles.

Beginning with questions of how we find the narrative middle of a text, Chapter One explores multiple middles in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*. *Lord Jim* is famously a novel of two distinct halves: a sea-tale with an air of mystery exploring the guilt and wanderings of Jim following his abandonment of the leaking Patna with its cargo of pilgrims, followed by an exotic adventure tale as Jim attempts to redeem himself on the remote island of Patusan. With this shift in genre (and attendant approaches to meaning, tense, mood, and voice), the narrative middle would be the section of text that effects a shift between these two halves—or may be read as different from both of them. However, *Lord Jim* does not have a neat formal division into two Books to mark its halves. This chapter, then, is in part an examination of how readers might construct the middle of a text, as it discusses possible middles in *Lord Jim* before settling on an interpretation of the novel's most prominent short middle: the much-discussed passage in Chapter XX in which Marlow meets with the merchant Stein, who offers Jim the job in Patusan. Stein's key act is not monetary, but interpretive in nature. By re-reading Jim as a Romantic, and setting the terms of that Romanticism, he sets down a narrative goal and structure which is met by the Romantic adventure tale that follows. In so doing, he also shifts the narrative from one that is oriented around beginnings (the Patna episode and its meaning) to one that



is oriented around endings (Jim's ultimate fate on Patusan and its meaning). Stein—and the middle which he dominates—not only binds together two disparate genres, but creates a complete story with beginning, middle, and end, thus transforming epistemological questions into narrative form. Ultimately, then, it is this middle—an act of re-interpretation specifically narrative in nature—that structures this novel.

Whereas *Lord Jim*'s middle is as much about a shift in the story as it is a shift in the narrative discourse, Chapter Two moves us more clearly into modernist territory, as well as a more clearly marked middle, with Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*. *The Golden Bowl* is divided into two Books, The Prince and The Princess, with Prince Amerigo and Maggie Verver, respectively, taking on the role of primary focalizer in each part. The middle of this novel—defined primarily by the blank space between the two parts and secondarily by the surrounding chapters which frame this textless middle—thus marks not so much a turn of the screw in the plot (though the consummation of Amerigo's affair with Charlotte Stant at this point is certainly important) but a shift in narrative point of view. Furthermore, the middle marks not only a shift of the narrative's attention to Maggie's consciousness, but a shift in Maggie's consciousness itself. In contrast to Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, which bases its two-part structure on a gap in time between "Poverty" and "Riches," James's novel is not only concerned with shifts in the social world, but primarily in the inner world. At first glance, this shift in *The Golden Bowl* appears to be perfectly balanced, leaving the middle as the fulcrum of a perfectly aligned scale in which beginning and end weigh on either side. However, whereas the Prince is the focalizer in less than half of his chapters, Maggie dominates her Book. The middle of *The Golden Bowl* is an

invisible shift not only in narrative point of view, but in narrative form, from a social novel that seeks to examine a situation through many different consciousnesses to a novel where the development of a consciousness is the primary subject, so much so that the plot itself becomes largely determined by that consciousness. The middle, absent, unspoken, but highly prominent, binds these two halves into a single novel, while interrogating the mood of each half.

If the middles of *The Golden Bowl* and *Lord Jim* exist primarily in relation to the halves of the novels which they shape, the middle of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* takes on a life of its own. "Time Passes," the second of three sections in the novel, is as much contrast as transition between the beginning of "The Window" and the ending of "The Lighthouse." Chapter 3 explores the ways "Time Passes" both bridges and separates "The Window" and "The Lighthouse." By creating a middle that is extremely prominent in the novel's structure, but also in its stylistic and technical differences from the rest of the novel, Woolf connects two slice-of-life episodes into a novelistic whole, but also creates textual space between them. Meanwhile, by challenging and exploring the limits of the modernist conventions of time, focalization, and story established in the outer parts of the novel, "Time Passes" creates a fissure not only in the text of the novel, but in the reader's understanding of the text's relationship to reality, foregrounding as well as reconfiguring the epistemological problems associated with modernist narrative.

Like *The Golden Bowl* and *To the Lighthouse*, Rayner Heppenstall's *Saturnine* explores issues of focalization. *Saturnine*'s first-person focalizer is highly autobiographical, and his story is grounded in a world which closely resembles the

real world, yet the novel explores its subject at a time of psychological instability, blending a naturalistic world with a highly subjective world of delusion or spirituality. Chapter 4 examines both *Saturnine*'s long middle, in which a series of apparent delusions culminating in a near-death experience pepper an episodic Picaresque tale, and its short middle, a chapter in which the narrator and protagonist Frobisher follows a man who turns out to be himself. While both middles help lend the apparently episodic narrative structure while creating sometimes unresolved epistemological problems for both the reader and Frobisher, this short middle in particular dramatizes the split in consciousness at the novel's halfway point. This split is complicated by the narrator's position, exploring fundamental modernist epistemological questions related to the self, reading, and narration. Both middles add to these modernist questions nascent postmodernist ontological questions, as the epistemological problems associated with Frobisher's narration and consciousness spill into ontological questions about the status of the real world, as it is blended with both the fictional world of narration and the possibility of a spiritual realm. *Saturnine*'s short middle poses these questions in their most ambiguous and unresolved form, following almost exactly Freud's description of the double in "The Uncanny" and haunting the apparent resolution provided by the death and resurrection that marks the end of the novel's long middle.

If *Saturnine* stretches the limits of modernism by using the consciousness to access realms beyond the physical world, B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* instead suggests postmodernism in its own physical form, a series of unbound episodes presented to the reader to be taken from the cardboard box that contains them and

read in any order. Chapter 5 explores how *The Unfortunates*' apparently random long middle—the beginning section is marked “First” and the ending marked “Last”—creates an almost entirely stable *fabula*, in which a narrator who bears no apparent differences from Johnson himself remembers his encounters with a friend who has died of cancer. Instead, the novel's radical form affects only the novel's *syuzhet*, while perhaps limiting to some degree the reader's knowledge of the order of the *fabula*. In addition, the entire physical form of the novel becomes a metaphor for memory—accessed largely at random, but consisting of largely discrete events which can be to varying degrees verified against reality. This chapter uses cognitive linguistic theory to examine how the novel relates the act of remembering with the linguistic process of creating (and reading) a novel. In writing *The Unfortunates*, Johnson seeks to objectify his memory, to change what has been a temporally-accessed process (verb-like) into a solid thing (a noun). In the middle, the reader re-creates the verb, but, in doing so, finds *The Unfortunates* to be a stable noun. By creating stability out of apparent randomness, Johnson re-focuses the apparently postmodern structure of an unbound novel into epistemological modernist questions of the relationships between memory, reality, and representation.

Chapter 6 at last takes this discussion of modernist middles over the edge that divides the epistemological and the ontological, and into postmodernism. If *The Unfortunates* and *Saturnine* suggest in different ways the ontological problems of postmodernism while remaining mostly within the epistemological poetics of modernism, Brigid Brophy's *In Transit* uses its middle to transform a modernist novel into a postmodernist one. Like *The Unfortunates* and the second half of

*Ulysses*, the second half of *In Transit* features highly prominent deviations from the focalization in ordinarily-formatted prose of most modernism—including a splitting of the text into two separate columns. But unlike these two novels, and also unlike *Saturnine*'s more ambiguous splitting of the self, once *In Transit* has passed its middle, the stable story that characterizes much of modernism as well as realism is gone. After the middle, various ontological disruptions occur, as the main character's male and female selves walk off into their own stories, and the novel engages in various genre parodies. A short section in *In Transit*'s middle dramatizes this leap from epistemological uncertainty into ontological multiplicity. The middle of *In Transit* also marks the boundary between modernism and postmodernism. As in *Lord Jim* and *The Golden Bowl*, the middle holds two very different approaches together into a single novel, creating both continuity and disjunction between the dominant experimental modes of twentieth-century fiction.

Modernist middles, and middles in general, are a varied breed. In long-form narrative in particular, they are subject to the various constructions of both author and reader. However, middles in general—and in particular the prominent modernist middles read here—also serve to structure narratives for both readers and writers. Any definition of middles must be both provisional and tentative, but I argue that a middle is not simply the piece of a narrative between beginning and end, but that prominent piece or gap between beginning and end that structures the narrative, transforming or redefining it in plot and form, and bridging, separating, and binding—even creating—the beginning and ending, thus making a single story of the often disparate and incongruous elements of narrative.



## Chapter 1: “The Plague Spot”: Finding the Modernist Middle in Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim*

All narratives have beginnings, middles, and ends. This we all know, or at least have known since Aristotle. This knowledge may be purely tautological, but it is in some sense indisputable: every narrative act must begin and end somewhere (whether these points are determined by narrator or recipient), and there must be something between these points. Yet, these three dimensions of narrative, unlike dimensions in space, are not equal: we have, after all, two points and a “something,” the space or content between those points. I begin to read, I read, I end reading. Beginnings and ends have definition but no content; the middle between them has content, but no definition. Any discussion of middles tends therefore to collapse into a discussion of its defining terms, beginning and ending (typically in relation to causality, as in Frank Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending*), or instead to expand (as in Hillis Miller’s *Reading Narrative*) to cover everything but beginnings and endings. Beginnings and endings constitute distinct topics of discussion; the middle, on the other hand, is the text. In order to pursue the middle as a definite, distinct object of study, I have argued for a more precise sort of middle: a central piece of text that has a transitional or transformational function. As I have discussed in the Introduction, in traditional narratives, this transition or transformation occurs primarily in the *fabula*: that is, there is a crucial change in the story. In Victorian novels in particular, there may be a marked change in the material and social circumstances of the characters.

Modernist texts may also contain middles that serve a transitional function for plot and character; however, a truly modernist middle reflects the epistemological dominant of modernism by changing how the story is interpreted or how the reader acquires knowledge of the story. In most cases, this means a significant change in the relationship between *fabula* and *syuzhet*, or in other aspects of the narrative discourse.

However, identifying a modernist middle is not always a simple matter. Not all modernist texts necessarily contain a modernist middle as I have defined it. Even texts that contain a modernist middle will not necessarily offer the reader a clear guide to this middle's location. Structural markers, such as volumes, chapters, or books, may identify an obvious middle, as may obvious differences in the narrator's point of view, such as a change in focalization. However, the absence of such markers does not necessarily mean the absence of a modernist middle. Moreover, few texts isolate transitions in epistemological poetics from transitions of plot or character. *Lord Jim* represents a challenge on both of these fronts. Its chapters are not divided into parts or books, and Marlow narrates the tale from near the novel's beginning to near its end. Despite the absence of clear textual markers, critics (most famously Frederic Jameson) have consistently divided the novel into two distinct parts, suggesting the presence of a narrative middle as I have defined it. However, this middle is in large part plot-driven: there is a significant change in Jim's circumstances, as he ends his wanderings in favor of a more permanent post in Patusan. Nevertheless, I will argue that this middle is as much a transition in meaning, a re-interpretation of Jim and his story, as it is a change in the story itself. This change in meaning is largely effected by a change in literary genre, a system that



combines both plot and epistemology. I will argue that the transition at the plot level of *Lord Jim* is effected by a transition in epistemology, both through an active re-interpretation of Jim and his story in the novel's middle, and through a shift in the systems of meaning that accompanies a shift in genre. In *Lord Jim*, plot and epistemological questions are deeply embedded with each other, marking this novel as a transitional text between Victorian and modernist middles.

Critics have found different middles for *Lord Jim*, corresponding to different ways of dividing the text and different ways of interpreting that division. For Guerard, "The major break comes not with the introduction of the Patusan material (Chapters 21, 22) but with the end of Marlow's oral narrative (Chapter 35). The important question is whether the novel and its reader are violated in a serious way" (167-8). Lothe, too, focuses on "the tripartite division of the novel's narrative: with an omniscient narrator (chapters 1-4), with Marlow speaking (chapters 5-35), and with Marlow writing (chapters 36-45)" (138). For Watt, meanwhile, the "central section" begins with Marlow's story and ends with Stein (265). Wendy Perkins, on the other hand, provides a more segmented approach in which small "chapter group[s]" provide irreconcilable interpretations of Jim and his story (28). Perkins opposes Conrad's method to the strict causal chains of the traditional Victorian novel: "The classic realist text has trained us to expect to find a problem revealed in the beginning of the novel; solutions posed and avoided (along with possible detours) in the middle; and a denouement in the final pages that will end equivocations, resolve the problem, and—in Roland Barthes' phrase--bring the 'vast hermeneutic sentence' to its close" (10-11). If we define the beginning as the omniscient narrator's section (the first four

chapters), and the end as Marlow's written narrative (Chapters 36-45, the episode of Gentleman Brown), can we read *Lord Jim* as conforming to this pattern?

The problem posed by the first four chapters seems to be a problem of facts: "What had happened?" (Conrad 20). As Guerard observes, Marlow's entrance serves not to resolve that problem, but to extend it: "the first narrator could not have justified much longer such a refusal to explain. But Marlow has a good reason not to tell his listeners that the *Patna* didn't sink" (Guerard 135). Marlow thus serves to extend the middle. Yet his purpose is not to pose and avoid solutions to the initial epistemological problem, but to reject it entirely: "They wanted facts, Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!" (Conrad 22). The great middle embarked upon by Marlow is the result of a rejection of the initial hermeneutic sentence, to be replaced by an endless inquiry into Jim's character and, by extension, the character of the colonial enterprise and all of its participants. The very first chapter has provided what seems to be a neat solution to the problem even to the why of Jim's jump—it has something to do with the influence of his father, as well as his daydreaming and reading of adventure fiction. Yet the middle continues, as Lothe, Watt, and Perkins, among others, have observed, constantly re-reading Jim, never satisfied with an end to interpretation.

In searching in particular for a modernist middle, Lothe's approach has a certain obvious appeal, since marks a clear difference in the narrative voice. We may sympathize with the hearers of Marlow's oral narrative in *Lord Jim*—a narrative middle of sorts that threatens to overwhelm the text as well as, famously, the realistic

limits of a night of storytelling.<sup>2</sup> This is the middle of Conrad's novel, defined both by Marlow's speech and by the absence of the knowledge of Jim's origins we get from the initial, apparently impersonal or heterodiegetic narrator, as well as the knowledge of Jim's death we get from Marlow's written correspondence. Here, "Marlow speaking" constitutes the middle of the novel (Lothe 138). In the first five chapters, an apparently heterodiegetic narrator relates Jim's early career as a water-carrier, the circumstances of his life that led him to that profession, the incident on the *Patna*, and subsequently when Jim and his superior officers stand trial for abandoning the ship. Marlow then narrates his own encounters with Jim at the trial and in the following years. The end of Jim's tale, including his death, are related again by Marlow, but this time in a letter, which relates not Marlow's first-hand knowledge of Jim, but instead contains what Marlow has been able to piece together from "fragmentary" information (Conrad 203). We therefore have a plausible modernist narrative middle, which has different epistemological claims from the beginning and ending, as well as a different narrative voice.

However, variations in narrative voice, including multiple narrative levels, do not necessarily indicate modernist technique. In H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), for example, the Time Traveller's oral narrative is a second-degree narrative, contained within the homodiegetic narrator's story about meeting the Time Traveller. This metadiegetic narrative takes up most of the novel. The use of homodiegetic narrators, and particular the metadiegetic oral narration of a fantastical story, could

---

<sup>2</sup> Conrad defends the verisimilitude of the length of Marlow's oral narrative in his 1917 Author's Note to the second English edition of *Lord Jim*, contending that Marlow's narrative "can be read through aloud, I should say, in less than three hours" (Conrad 5).

potentially be used to highlight epistemological issues. An extremely skeptical reader might read the Time Traveller's tale as madness or fraud, or the first-level narrator as the Time Traveller's dupe or a teller of tall tales himself. However, the novel gives us no clue as to what particular alternate point of view one might take on the events related by the Time Traveller. Instead, the first-level narrator authenticates the Time Traveller's story. Much as Marlow invokes the tales of the comfortable "after-dinner hour" at the beginning of his oral narrative (Conrad 25), the first-level narrator of *The Time Machine* provides at the novel's beginning a degree of verisimilitude by creating a familiar setting, an after-dinner fireside conversation, for the Time Traveller to explain his theories and reveal his machine. Professional personages such as the Psychologist and the Medical Man serve as skeptical voices: "Wait for the common-sense of the morning," the Medical Man says, highlighting the power of the right atmosphere to lend credence to the absurd (Wells 15). The narrator himself calls the Time Traveller "too clever to be believed" (Wells 17). That is, the professionals object on grounds of verisimilitude. Their very objections, however, ground the narrative as a whole in a world of professionalism and probability. The Time Traveller's tale initially seems to violate the norms of this world. Yet, when the narrator returns another night to hear the Time Traveller's tale of his travels through time, the oral narrative and its embodied teller are cited by the narrator as authentication of the story's intensity, if not its veracity: "You read, I will suppose, attentively enough; but you cannot see the speaker's white, sincere face in the bright circle of the little lamp, nor hear the intonation of his voice. You cannot know how his expression followed the turns of his story!" (Wells 26). The narrator places the

reader in an inferior epistemological position to himself in a way that, rather than creating doubt or ambiguity around the narrated events, is meant to remove doubts. The Time Traveller tells his story without the skeptical interruptions that characterize the beginning of the novel. That is, a well-told, coherent tale, delivered with conviction, is given greater epistemological weight than abstract theories. The Time Traveller's story, then, is introduced as a narrative space in which we can set aside our doubts.

When the Time Traveller's story is completed, the Editor nevertheless remains skeptical, exclaiming, "What a pity it is you're not a writer of stories!" (Wells 146). That is, the Time Traveller's narrative exists in an epistemological binary at the first narrative level: for the narrator, the Editor, and the others who hear the tale, it must be either wholly true or wholly fiction. However, this skepticism ultimately serves to authenticate the tale. Skeptical voices are heard, but the narrator is a witness to the Time Traveller's unexplained appearance at the novel's end, and he bears "two strange white flowers" as physical evidence of the veracity of the Time Traveller's tale (Wells 152). These flowers serve a similar function to the "gleaming metal cone" of "unbearable" weight that is found near the end of Borges' "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius": physical evidence of an ontologically, rather than epistemologically, different story world. However, where Borges' story presents the relationship between Tlön and our world as something of a puzzle (an epistemological, then ontological, problem), *The Time Machine* presents no such puzzle. The naked fact of the flowers as well as the narrator's story of the Time Traveller's disappearance, serves to resolve, rather than open, the mystery (irrelevant, in my view, to the novel's

middle) of the veracity of the Time Traveller's tale. To the extent that epistemology is at issue here, it is the Victorian epistemology of suspense, modeled on scientific experimentation, as defined by Caroline Levine: "the experiment always implied a narrative of suspense: experimenters might mobilize the most convincing hypotheses about the hidden facts of the world, but they were always required to wait to see how the world would respond" (Levine 6). This is, then, the epistemology of the detective story, plot-driven and subject to resolution. The Time Traveller's oral narrative is thus a sort of anti-modernist narrative, a complete fantastical tale that must either be accepted or rejected in its whole by the characters in the first-level narrative—and preferably based on concrete evidence. Furthermore, their skepticism exists primarily to anticipate and refute objections to the Time Traveller's oral narrative. If there is a modernist poetics at work here, it is in the beginning and ending, rather than the middle—and the power of that middle largely serves to override the epistemological problems, such as they are, of beginning and ending.

*Lord Jim's* oral narrative has greater claims to a modernist poetics than *The Time Machine's*, yet it remains a relatively weak candidate for a modernist middle. From the beginning of his oral narrative, Marlow calls Jim's tale "mysterious," and this mystery is not resolved by the "naked fact" of Jim's abandoning the *Patna*, but instead created by it. We may contrast the objections to the verisimilitude of the Time Traveller's story to John Attridge's interpretation of *Lord Jim*, in which Jim's leap from the *Patna* violates both standards of professional conduct and "classical verisimilitude"—that is, it cannot be connected to a maxim that connects his actions to a standard causal explanation, creating "the modernist opacity at the heart of the

narrative” (Attridge 285). In dispute in *The Time Machine* are the basic facts of the tale, whereas the facts established at trial in *Lord Jim* are never under serious dispute. Instead, in dispute is the causal system of meaning that can place these facts in a comprehensible narrative. The question of connecting facts to a system of meaning is at the heart of *Lord Jim*’s modernist poetics. The mystery of *Lord Jim*, then, is a mystery of interpretation, which cannot be resolved by material evidence. By the end of the oral narrative, this mystery remains: Jim is for Marlow “a vast enigma” (199). However, at the end of the novel, Marlow still insists that Jim is “inscrutable at heart” (246). There is also little if anything in the text to indicate that any of the facts of the narrative are more or less subject to doubt depending on whether they are given by the first-level narrator in the novel’s beginning, by Marlow as witness and oral narrator in the novel’s long middle, or by Marlow as editor and written narrator at the novel’s end. Instead, the reader faces different challenges in processing Jim’s story—the immediacy and confusion of the *Patna* episode in the beginning, are replaced with the challenges of various anachronies, multiple levels of narration, and the weight of Marlow’s voice as interpreter in the middle and ending. To the extent that these shifts in the narrative discourse create different points of view, different epistemological problems, or different ways of engaging the reader with the same epistemological problems, Marlow’s oral narrative is indeed a modernist middle: a distinct segment of text that re-configures the novel’s epistemological poetics. However, these differences do not directly address *Lord Jim*’s central epistemological problem: the problem of the interpretation of Jim and his actions. A modernist middle that addresses these problems re-configure the narrative’s approach to the meaning of

Jim's actions within a causal narrative system. As I shall argue, there are better candidates for this function than Marlow's oral narrative.

In addition to the search for a middle that re-configures the text's central epistemological concerns, I have stated a preference for centers when searching for a modernist middle—smaller segments of text that are roughly equivalent to a segment of text that we may think of as a beginning or ending. A long middle like Marlow's oral narrative very easily becomes an Aristotelian or Millerian middle: everything between beginning and end. In this context, the beginning becomes a frame, setting up the background for the story, and the written narrative an epilogue, informing us of Jim's death and providing a certain degree of plot closure. Indeed, Marlow's oral story is a complete story within the narrative level that it occupies. Marlow's oral narrative has some of the characteristics of a modernist middle, and we should not completely dismiss it as such, but it would be better to search for a smaller section of text that nevertheless provides a strong transition in the way the novel approaches the epistemological problems surrounding the mystery of Jim: that is, the transition from Jim's peripatetic life at sea to his life on Patusan. This transition has the added benefit of being a more traditional narrative middle, similar to some Victorian texts: there is a significant change in the protagonist's circumstances which moves the plot in the direction of its ending. While it is possible to separate modernist narrative middles from Victorian or other plot-based narrative middles, it would perhaps be best to avoid this sort of complication in favor of a single narrative middle, which may have both traditional and modernist aspects.



The division of *Lord Jim* into two parts—and the denigration of its latter half—is a longstanding one, and the frequent recognition of this division is perhaps the best case for locating the novel’s middle in the transition between the two parts, rather than in the whole of Marlow’s oral narrative. However, this does not resolve the problem of finding the novel’s middle. In terms of pages, Marlow’s meeting with Stein in Chapter 20 occurs at the center of the novel—and we may take this chapter, or the entire episode with Stein, as the novel’s middle. Indeed, I will argue that the Stein episode is the best candidate for the novel’s middle. However, while one of the key structural features of *Lord Jim* is that it seems to contain a narrative middle that divides the book into two parts, the precise location of this middle is not easy to identify. In discussing the multiple interpretations of *Lord Jim*’s middle, I will show not only the importance multiple critics have placed on the division at the middle of the novel, but I will also discuss some of the various critical approaches that hang on this middle. These approaches both affect and are affected by not only recognition that *Lord Jim* is a novel divided, but by the particular place at which that division is made—that is, by the location of the middle.

In terms of chapters, Chapter 23, in which Jim goes to Patusan, is the novel’s center. The middle quickly shrinks to a point, becoming the division between the novel’s two parts. Conrad himself, in a letter to Edward Garnett on Nov. 12, 1900, refers to this division as “the plague spot” (Conrad 306). The middle is not, in Conrad’s view, a discernible chunk of text, but an illegible mark of disease that threatens to destroy the bodily unity of the text. However, it is worth noting that an early review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* places the point of division not at Jim’s journey

to Patusan midway through the novel, but at the end of the account of the events of the *Patna* about a third of the way through the novel—making of both Patusan and Jim’s wanderings “an afterthought” (“Phantasmagoria” 281). The *Gazette* review objects to the absence of an Aristotelian unity of action. In this view, the problem with the novel is that it *has* a middle: a transition that divides the text, creating a whole that is in a classical sense unnatural. In this view, further transitions or divisions in the text become irrelevant, and there is little point in looking for a center. With the first violation of the unity of action, the text has ended. That is, a middle as I understand it is an ending as the *Gazette* reviewer understands it—the ending of a proper narrative. This is essentially the opposite view to Hillis Miller’s: where for Miller digression is at the heart of what makes a novel a novel, for the *Gazette* reviewer digression is anathema to narrative. The middle is, in this dichotomy, either all or none of the narrative. The *Gazette* review, nevertheless, points to a plausible narrative middle as I have defined it. However, Jim’s wanderings following the *Patna* incident are one of multiple shifts in Jim’s fortune and in the narrative’s action, and it is neither located near the novel’s center, nor is it the most often-cited division in the text.

The *Gazette*’s division of *Lord Jim* also suggests a larger, displaced middle to the text (a middle that ends at the text’s mid-point or center), beginning around Chapter 14 with the inquiry’s verdict and including both Jim’s wanderings and the encounter with Stein. It is quite possible that an erasure of this middle—*Patna* followed immediately by Patusan—would have satisfied this early reviewer, making the latter episode less of an afterthought and more of an immediate consequence of

the *Patna* incident. The presence of this middle, however, looses the bonds of necessity. Jim's jump from the *Patna* does not clearly cause his jump from imprisonment in Patusan, and Jim's final submission to execution by Doramin is less clearly the completion of his submission to the *Patna* inquiry's justice because the text contains too much middle. Ian Watt is able to recover such causal and thematic connections to the extent that he views the second part as "a concluding thematic variation" (348). There is much debate as to just how tight the connection is between the *Patna* and Patusan episodes. Whereas in the first half of the novel connections are immediate—we move from episode to episode by what Watt calls "thematic apposition"<sup>3</sup> (280)—Patusan is removed from the *Patna* episode not only by the temporal and spatial distance within the world of the text, but by the temporal and spatial distance within the text. Textual space and reading time delay the connection of the text's major episodes, and this delay takes the form of a plausible narrative middle. Time and space reduce the likelihood that the reader will make causal and thematic connections—a problem intensified by the very different nature of the Patusan episode itself.

However, a division of the novel into two parts, rather than three, has been the primary way that critics have viewed *Lord Jim*'s structure. While the *Gazette* review provides an early precedent, this division has largely been framed by F. R. Leavis' dismissal of "the romance that follows" the novel's earlier events in *The Great Tradition* (1948) (Leavis 190). Leavis identifies the division in *Lord Jim* not only as a

---

3 Similarly, Hillis Miller refers to the novel as "a pattern of eddying repetition," in which the novel's repetitions of events both provide and deconstruct the novel's formal unity, as well as the unity of plot and of the subject ("Repetition as Subversion" 449).

violation of the unity of action, but as a violation of Conrad's narrative method in favor of genre writing. Leavis is somewhat vague as to the exact point at which the "good Conrad" of the first part gives way to the romance of the second part (Leavis 190), but later critics have been more willing to identify the beginning of the Patusan episode, rather than the ending of the *Patna* episode, as the novel's dividing point. When we begin to consider the Patusan episode as distinct from the rest of the novel, the middle is squeezed to a point or spot, a fissure in the text that can only be detected by examining what lies on either side. Accounts of the nature of this fissure have been varied. Albert Guerard, in 1958, is already able to speak of *Lord Jim*'s "alleged formal weakness: its apparent break into two separate novels, with the second one inferior to the first," countering that "[t]he most remote place and unrelated circumstance discovers, in us, the character with which we set out" (167). For Guerard, then, what can be characterized not only as a break between parts of a novel, but a break between novels, is unified by character—and the disjunction itself serves to confirm this unity of character. The break here is primarily a break in the action. Regardless of the persuasiveness of Guerard's argument that *Lord Jim* is a unified artistic object by virtue of being a character study, it is clear that Guerard, like Leavis, is motivated to read into the novel the formal unity demanded by New Criticism. Once again, we are reminded of the importance of Miller's approach to middles, which helps us to read the digressions and differences in the text's middle as something other than a challenge to the unified textual object that must either be resolved through analysis or condemned as an irredeemable flaw in the object. I would argue, however, that *Lord Jim*'s status as a unified textual object—one that is

conceived, marketed, disseminated, and printed as a single novel (usually a physical book)—is less a product of a particular critical approach than the ground on which both Miller’s and Guerard’s approaches are founded. That is, once we view *Lord Jim* as a single narrative text, we can read that text as composed of varying degrees of unity or digression. Tautologically, *Lord Jim* is a single novel because it is a single novel, with a middle that connects beginning and ending. When we divide a novel into two or three parts, a narrative middle creates both digression and unity. That is, the middle is what transforms these parts into a particular narrative text. Rather than textual unity being created by the unity of Jim’s character, the unity of Jim’s character as a source of textual unity is instead created by the unity that already exists as soon as we consider *Lord Jim* as a single text. Once we view *Lord Jim* as a single text, a central disruption that divides the novel into two parts becomes the middle of a single novel, rather than a division between two separate texts.

The most famous reading of the division of *Lord Jim* into two parts, however, comes from Jameson, who, like Leavis, views the break as generic. In Jameson, we have a clear articulation of *Lord Jim*’s middle as a re-configuration of the narrative’s modernist poetics. He registers

a tangible “break” in the narrative of *Lord Jim*, a qualitative shift and diminution of narrative intensity as we pass from the story of the Patna and the intricate and prototextual search for the “truth” of the scandal of the abandoned ship, to that more linear account of Jim’s later career in Patusan, which, a virtual paradigm of romance as such, comes before us as the prototype of the various ‘degraded’ subgenres into

which mass culture will be articulated [...]. (Jameson, *Political* 206-207)

*Lord Jim*'s middle is for Jameson the break between two opposed cultural products of capitalism: the modernist novel of epistemology which attempts to resist commodification even as it reifies aesthetic experience (thus making it available as a commodity) and the openly commodified genre fiction of mass culture—or, on the other hand, the postmodernist fantasy that parodies such genre fiction. Thus, in Jameson's view, the break goes even deeper—each half of *Lord Jim* is not merely a separate narrative, but a separate (if interdependent) type of novel, and the break comes to represent a break not in the textual object alone, but in capitalism, its cultural productions, and their ideological work. The fissure made by capitalism is between activity and value, and Conrad creates the fissure in his novel in an attempt to repair that fissure in capitalist society:

the union of activity and value, of the energies of Western capitalism and the organic immanence of the religion of pre-capitalist societies, can only block out the place of Jim himself. But not the existential Jim, the antihero, of the first part of the novel: rather, the ideal Jim, the 'Lord Jim' of the second half, the wish-fulfilling romance, which is marked as a degraded narrative precisely by its claim to have 'resolved' the contradiction and generated the impossible hero [...]

(Jameson, *Political* 255)

Although Jameson is speaking of the unity of two abstract concepts, it is worth noting that the unity Jameson finds here inheres in a character, the ideal Jim. However, as

Jim becomes an ideal unity, he destroys his unity as a character (and the text's unity as a work with the traditional verisimilitude associated with realism). Jameson's view of the break turns out to be almost the opposite of Guerard's: *Lord Jim* is completed not by distant action which proves the unity of character, but by completion of a thematic system that destroys the unity of both character and action. Unity of character does not provide unity of theme; rather, unity of theme destroys unity of character. The fissure runs straight down the middle not of a text or of a plot, but of the capitalist subject.

*Lord Jim*'s middle, then, brings together two contradictory responses to capitalism in a single text, through a differing set of narrative conventions. These contradictions are reflected in character, action, and poetics. Under Jameson's reading, *Lord Jim* is half modernist, half popular modern pop culture. The middle that divides two such halves is thus different from the middles of traditional narratives, which produce difference in the narrative primarily through plot developments—that is, differences in action and character. What Jameson clarifies that previous critics only seemed to sense is that differences in action and character are bound up in differences in the novel's approach to the problems of modern capitalism—in part by abandoning the epistemological dominant of modernism. Jameson's reading thus produces a half-modernist middle: a middle that transitions the novel away from modernism, and that does so through story as by discourse. Jameson, however, unifies the text, somewhat ironically, around his own particular critical concern: the contradictions of capitalism and the text's unconscious expression of those contradictions. Rather than accept or reject such a reading, I would argue that

Jameson shows how the difference between the novel's two parts itself creates epistemological complexity. For example, whether we are interpreting the character of Jim as a cultural commodity or as a "real" person within the world projected by the text, we must interpret him as the product of these two separate genres, just as Marlow does—as both the "ideal" romantic Jim of Patusan and the mystery of the *Patna*. The result is either more mystery—how can two such different people be one?—or a complex, fragmentary view of character. That is, once we read the novel as composed of two parts with differing poetics, genres, or approaches to the challenges of capitalism, we are inevitably presented with the epistemological problems associated with modernism.

It is worth noting that Jameson's division of the novel between modernism and wish-fulfilling romance is not necessarily followed, even by other critics who note the middle as a site of generic transformation. For Robert Hampson, *Lord Jim* does not divide into high culture and low culture genres, but two mass-culture genres: "It is now generally accepted that Conrad structures the narrative of *Lord Jim* by reference to light literature: in the first part of the novel, he produces a counter-version of the sea-life romance; in the second part of the novel, in Patusan, he re-creates the colonial world of adventure romance" (129). The echoes of the contrast between modernism and mass culture or postmodernism remain only in the contrast between a counter-version and a re-creation. For Lissa Schneider, however, gender is the key difference: "Structurally, *Lord Jim* does divide into two distinct parts: the 'masculine' sea tale of Jim's experiences aboard the *Patna* and the 'feminine' domestic drama detailing his romance with Jewel and his self-imposed banishment to



the isolated community of Patusan” (109). Schneider’s emphasis here is on what Marlow calls “the story of his love,” that is, Jim’s love for Jewel, that begins in the middle of Chapter 26. Marlow is indeed insistent on this generic designation, telling his audience in the middle of a paragraph in the middle of Chapter 31, “Remember this is a love story I am telling you now” (Conrad 177). Generic designation justifies the description of “a beautiful night” (177). Both of these interpretations, like Jameson’s, are plausible. Indeed, there is a strong case to be made that *Lord Jim* is a generic hybrid throughout, including the Polish literary tradition and Medieval Romance (Pospiech 57). However, it seems obvious from both the critical history and my own reading that these generic influences are re-configured at the novel’s middle. The particular genre of each of the parts of the novel is less important to my approach than the fact of this difference, which produces a unity out of contradiction. It seems to me, based on this variety of readings, that neither beginning or ending is able to gain priority as the ultimate arbiter of meaning in *Lord Jim*. Instead, the framework by which the novel is interpreted is displaced onto the middle, onto the division itself, creating a sort of epistemological uncertainty that extends from the true nature of Jim, which is Marlow’s concern, to the generic framework by which the novel itself should be read. This framework—which guides both plot and interpretation—is not simply hybrid or multiple, but specifically divided, fragmented, thus foregrounding the problems of making sense of *Lord Jim* both as narrative and as cultural-political object.

Differences in genre are not merely implicit, but also explicit in the text. The “love story” genre in particular suggests that the novel is composed of multiple

genres, connected by multiple middles. Furthermore, genre awareness is identified as critical to the hearer's (or reader's) correct reaction to the tale, as well as the teller's correct telling. Marlow delays the story of love by noting its hearers' relation to its genre: "We have heard so many such stories, and the majority of us don't believe them to be stories of love at all. For the most part we look upon them as stories of opportunities: episodes of passion at best" (165). Marlow is prepared for the cynical male's reaction to feminine genre fiction and counters with a declaration of difficulty: "To tell this story is by no means so easy as it should be—were the ordinary standpoint adequate" (165). The difficulty comes from the "melancholy figure" of Jewel (165). Genre, then, must be both identified and countered—the sea-going romance by the difficulties of Impressionism, the adventure or domestic romance by the recognition of the humanity of the commodified woman. Domestic romance and adventure romance are thus not a unified genre in the Patusan episode, but two competing genres—with the love story taking place in the middle of the Patusan episode. Such a complex generic understanding of the Patusan episode, in combination with Hampson's observation that the first half of the novel also has its roots in a popular romance genre, tends to soften the break between the novel's two parts. However, Marlow's association of the Patusan episode with a feminine genre indicates that even within the broad generic class of "romance," different frameworks create different interpretations of events. In particular, the gendering of genre disrupts an ethic in which Jim's honor is constructed out of exchanges between men and his actions defined in terms of his ability as a white man to protect Muslim males in a system of paternal colonialism. Jewel emerges, then, as an alternative subject in

transactions of honor—Jim swears oaths to her (184), and she is in turn able to declare him “false” (208). Furthermore, Jewel may be seen as an alternative parallel to the pilgrims: on behalf of the Malays, Jim takes the incorrect action, but it is Jewel whom he abandons, as he did the pilgrims. This incomplete reading of the role of Jewel and the tale of love in the Patusan episode as well as *Lord Jim* as whole is not meant to be in any way definitive. It serves instead to illustrate the great complexity of the relationship between the first and second halves of the novels, one of the many ways by which the text marks the different ways in which narrative and its meaning can be constructed, even as the “facts” of the narrative are not under dispute. Furthermore, making Jewel the key figure in the novel’s transitional middle focuses that middle on a figure marginalized and commodified by gender. This suggests that each half of the novel is in itself a gendered commodity—and it should be unsurprising that the second half gained its poor reputation under male critics, while it is generally female critics such as Schneider who attempt to rehabilitate it. *Lord Jim* is thus a novel of multiple middles, which can be produced depending on one’s critical approach. This also reveals how the exact interpretation of the difference between the two halves of the novel both shapes and be shaped by the selection of a central middle, a key section of the novel’s text that guides interpretation of the differences and unities produced by the division of the novel.

Meanwhile, the potential interpretations of the novel’s central middle that divides *Patna* from Patusan continue to multiply, particular in critiques informed by postcolonial theory. For Padmini Mongia, the Patusan episode is an “imperialist romance” (182). Here, the generic shift acquires a political-ideological edge, much as

it does in Jameson's reading. However, there is another element to the break in the middle that is highlighted most strongly by a postcolonial perspective. Scott A. Cohen argues that, "[i]n addition to the significant shift in form and tone that occurs midway through the novel, this break registers most loudly in terms of space" (374). For Cohen, the Patusan episode highlights Jim's attempt to escape the globalizing colonial space. The first part of the novel is characterized by movement and commerce, or "traffic," as Cohen puts it (386). Patusan, on the other hand, is characterized by "the violence of colonial reconciliation" as well as "proto-postcolonial" potentiality, unresolved from Marlow's (and the novel's) imperial metropolitan perspective (393). In Cohen's reading, the two halves of the novel are unified by the problem of imperial and colonial spaces: their extension, their movements, their boundaries, but characterized by a different chronotopic perspective on those problems. Marlow illustrates Jim's spatial status in these two chronotopes with geometric metaphors. First, in flight, Jim "did after a time become perfectly known, and even notorious, within the circle of his wanderings (which had a diameter of, say, three thousand miles), in the same way as an eccentric character is known to a whole countryside" (Conrad 119). The circle—to be drawn on a map—encases both Jim's wanderings and the public knowledge of those wanderings. It is, of course, an Eastern circle, and Jim is encased in the middle of colonial space—here easily distinguishable from London, the center of that space. Meanwhile, in Patusan, he has found "his new sphere" (Conrad 164). Cohen is most interested in the edges of Jim's circles and spheres. For my purposes, however, the metaphors suggest that Jim is encased in the middle of a circle or sphere. As Kermode suggests that life takes place

entirely “in the midst,” and that to make sense of this muddled middle, people “need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems” (Kermode 7), *Lord Jim* suggests that, spatially as well, life always takes place in the middle. The bordering encasement may expand and contract, may stretch itself out two-dimensionally on a map or three-dimensionally on a small kingdom, but we are never anywhere but in the middle of our own circle or sphere. Narratives, too, may throw out one chronotopic sphere for another—and they may do so, as in *Lord Jim*, nearly instantaneously. Nevertheless, even postmodernist texts—as the Patusan episode is occasionally characterized—remain in the middle of their spatial spheres so long as they have space at all. We are always in the middle of time; we are always in the middle of space. The edge of colonial reach in Patusan is the middle of Jim’s own colonizing project—and, with this project, he brings the reach of colonial space with him. That is, narratives, even master-narratives such as the colonialist narrative of expansion and progress, like narrative texts, create their own middles within a narrative space. The narrative space both defines, and is defined by, the middle.

Exploration of colonial boundaries in *Lord Jim* can also lead us back to older concerns about causation. Laverne Nishihara, in an article that discusses the boundaries of both space and stereotypical characterization, argues that both Conrad and his critics use the language of fate to link the novel’s two episodes (Nishihara 59), but that, “[a]lthough Conrad struggled to endue his narrative with the unifying quality of inevitability, he conceived of incoherence as fundamental to his narrative, perhaps more important than any ordering principle” (54). Thus, the very insistence on causation in the form of fate is the result of the greater prominence of chaos in the

text, since only a vast rupture requires such insistent bridging. Nishihara thus highlights the crucial importance of the middle to both *Lord Jim*'s structure and its poetics. That is, the middle is the part of the text that insists that incoherence is coherence, that a violation of ordering principles can itself be a fundamental quality of the narrative. The middle holds these contradictions together. While I have so far largely explored this middle as an invisible and even unfixed division between two halves, a division of the text rather than a segment of text, I will argue that *Lord Jim* actively works to shift the direction and genre of the narrative through a particular act of interpretation: Stein's analysis of Jim as a romantic, an act of interpretation that results directly in an attempt to shape Jim's narrative through action. That is, Stein models the epistemological problem of *Lord Jim* (and Jim himself) as a single text, serving as the primary diegetic agent for the simultaneously divisive and unifying action of the novel's middle.

Marlow's interview with Stein, then, is an episode at the novel's center in terms of chapters, which not only provides the plot-level mechanism that moves the novel's action to Patusan,<sup>4</sup> but it also is directly concerned with the shaping of a narrative and its system of meaning in the middle. Before moving to a discussion of this episode, however, I would like to take one last look at the novel's multiple absent middles (that is, transitions that have no textual content of their own) by way of examining Jim's jump from the *Patna* itself. Jim hears a call from the boat, "Geo-o-o-o-orge! Oh, jump!" (Conrad 69). Jim then describes his assessment of the ship's state:

---

<sup>4</sup> Baxter sums up the Stein episode's importance as a transition, with a nod to the prominence of this view in the critical literature: "Jim's itinerancy is brought to an end through Marlow's consultation with Stein. This consultation is often and rightly seen as providing a pivot between the first and second parts of the novel, moving Jim from a life at sea to a life inland" (110).

“She was going down, down, head first under me. . . .” (69). These words of Jim’s are followed by a description of Jim by Marlow: “He raised his hand deliberately to his face, and made picking motions with his fingers as though he had been bothered with cobwebs, and afterwards he looked into the open palm for quite half a second before he blurted out—” (69). Then Jim speaks again: “ ‘I had jumped . . .’ He checked himself, averted his gaze. . . . ‘It seems,’ he added” (69). The jump itself is an absent middle, the unnecessary, unrecoverable term between cause and consequence—filled up, as the novel as a whole is, by Marlow’s voice. Watt, in fact, finds the cause of Jim’s jump complete in this passage: “it can most plausibly be explained as a reflex action” (Watt 313). Thus, we have in the sequence the cause of the reflex action (the command to jump) and the result of that reflex action (had jumped), but we do not have the action itself. Marlow speaks to Jim, at least in part, to get beyond the facts of the inquiry—but, at the most crucial moment, Jim can provide only disconnected facts, for which Marlow, his hearers, the readers of the novel, must all provide causal connections. There are no sense impressions of the jump, so Marlow provides his own, gestural moments to the face, reflexive motions again that seem aimed at removing the impediment to the impressions of the senses. If the absence from the record of the cause of the *Patna*’s bulging hull points to a concern in *Lord Jim* with beginnings, and questions of fate, as well as Marlow’s need to provide the Patusan episode as coda to Jim’s life (and the Gentleman Brown episode as coda to the Patusan episode) points to a concern in *Lord Jim* with ends, Jim’s missing jump points to a concern with middles, particularly in their capacity to disappear from sight, to escape both comprehension and narrative necessity. Similarly, we do not

actually see Jim make the deal with Stein to go to Patusan. The actual decision that divides the novel in two is absent, leaving a fissure that has puzzled critics since the novel's publication. Crucial actions that shape the relationship between cause and consequence are absent, leaving only the possibilities of fate and chaos.

Stein's role in the text is largely to assert the primacy of order in Jim's narrative as well as in the world as a whole. Yet the forcefulness of his intervention itself reveals chaos. That is, he acts to assert a unified narrative for Jim, but this action itself produces difference. It is this simultaneous production of order and chaos, of a text unified and divided, that makes the Stein episode such a powerful narrative middle for *Lord Jim*. It actively seeks to bind together his narrative through re-interpretation, while also shifting the narrative action as well as its meaning. Thus, John Peters argues that this narrative middle serves as a sort of center of meaning, placing it at the heart of the novel's mediation between order and chaos, with Stein desperately clinging to the former:

His assertion that the 'mighty Kosmos' is ordered is a denial of a chaotic universe. In refusing this possibility, Stein attempts to show predictability (or at least probability) in the occurrence of events; otherwise human existence and future events become haphazard and worse—unknowable. And if the universe is one of chaos rather than order, then human beings have no control over their existence and are, consequently, subject to the whims of chance. (Peters 50)

Peters's interpretation of Stein and his obsession with order and classification, for which his insect collecting serves as both metaphor and metonym, resembles



Kermode's account of life in the midst. Human beings, faced with an untethered middle, seek to tether it to a divine order, to a causal chain, to beginnings and ends. They seek to make Jim's jump not an unknowable reflex, an action created only by the word jump, but instead an action both explainable and correctable.

However, even Stein himself is not without his contradictions. Jameson observes that Stein's life is divided in two—the colonial adventures of his youth and the sedentary collecting of insects and wealth in which we find him (Jameson, *Political* 238). For Jameson, of course, Stein's story does not simply reflect the novel's bifurcated structure, but “is the story of the passing of the heroic age of capitalist expansion; it marks the end of the era when individual entrepreneurs were giants, and the setting in place of the worldwide institutions of capitalism in the monopoly stage” (237-238). Jim moves back in time, as Marlow does in *Heart of Darkness*, not to a primitive world outside of European capitalism, but into the past of European capitalism. It may be only Stein's privileged status as an embodiment of the history of the colonial project that makes the chance in Patusan significantly more agreeable than the earlier chance of the guano island offered by Chester and Robinson. To lord over coolies or to lord over Malays and bushmen—either case in isolation, either case in extreme danger—and, in the case of Patusan, much of the danger comes from Stein's unfinished business with Cornelius.

In either case, Jim is being set up, but Stein shrouds himself in the ameliorative garb of philosophy and romance. As Baxter argues, Stein and Marlow set Jim up to live out the romantic adventures stories that had initially shaped his view of sea life, holding him to a new, romantic standard of conduct—or framework

for interpreting his own life and the meaning of his actions—to replace the professional code of conduct that shaped interpretations of Jim’s actions in the first part of the novel (Baxter 112). Stein provides in Patusan, then, a setting that as closely as possible mirrors romantic adventure narrative—sets Jim up to play a prescribed role in a pre-determined narrative. In this sense, Stein actively creates the shift in the novel’s genre. Stein attempts to remove the framework of professionalism that, when combined with Jim’s actions failure on the *Patna*, resulted in the epistemologically-dominant modernist narrative of the novel’s first half. Yet, this new romantic framework ultimately results in more epistemological problems, as it cannot be completely isolated from the rest of *Lord Jim*. Furthermore, as Baxter shows, Stein only succeeds in putting a separate code of conduct—and thus a separate narrative framework—into conflict with the facts of Jim’s life: “If Jim undermines for Marlow the strength of shared ‘fidelity to a certain standard of conduct’ for the merchant marine in the first part of the novel, he finally undermines the power of fidelity to a certain romantic egoism in the second part of the novel. Jim fails the test of each, the practical and the romantic” (Baxter 115). Stein’s narrative middle re-frames Jim, from failed professional to striving ego, arresting one story at the middle and asserting a new one. Yet these stories have a common modernist interest in the inadequacy of these narrative frameworks to produce narratives that satisfactorily embed events in a system of causality and meaning.

As Bruss notes, the prominence of Stein in the critical literature derives not only from his active role in shifting *Lord Jim*’s narrative genre, but also in part from his position at the center of the narrative text (Bruss 502). That is, the narrative

middle as I have defined it—a segment of text or transitional moment close to the literal center of the text—has a certain amount of priority in terms of guiding interpretation of a text that may not generally rise to the level of beginning or ending, but is nevertheless greater than the long middle that includes all text between beginning and ending, or other locations of narrative segmentation, such as the end of the *Patna* episode. This middle of the novel is also the center of the plot: “the Stein interview comes at the structural centre of *Lord Jim*: Stein is sought out by Marlow in a final attempt to find a genuine solution to Jim’s problem, and the interview immediately promotes the Patusan venture which constitutes the second half of the novel” (Lothe 162). It is also the middle in the sense that it moves us from a narrative focused on beginnings—the *Patna* episode, its mysteries, its meanings, as the driving narrative force—to a narrative focused on ends—the Patusan episode, Jim’s actions, Jim’s fate.<sup>5</sup> Stein’s words, partaking of Biblical narrative, mark this shift, though the remarks refer to Stein’s own adventurous past: “That was the way. To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream—and so—*ewig—usque ad finem*” (Conrad 130). The repetition here echoes Jim’s wanderings, but, while Jim’s movements had been motivated by flight—escaping from what was behind him—Stein demands a life motivated by what is ahead—the unattainable end.

However, Chapter 20 has its concern with middles as well. Soon after he has identified Jim as a romantic, Stein announces a “cure” from the self (Conrad 128). Marlow responds, “the question is not how to get cured, but how to live,” which

---

<sup>5</sup> Watt writes, “In the first nineteen chapters, Conrad’s narrative focus tended to centre our attention on Marlow’s discussions with Jim, rather than on Jim himself. [...] This changes completely with Stein; events, characters, themes, and narrative devices all converge to propel *Lord Jim* into a single and unchecked forward movement to its end” (305).

garners an enthusiastic response from Stein (128). Marlow redirects Stein's attention from ends to middles, from purpose to process. Stein, in turn, modifies Shakespeare's most famous line to conform: "How to be! *Ach!* How to be" (128). The rejection of ends in favor of middles results also in a rejection of binary thinking—also the thinking of the colonial adventurer: to jump or not to jump, to attack or not to attack—and of the formal processes of judgment—to submit to judgment or not, to condemn the judged or not. The Manichean language which suffuses *Lord Jim* is soon invoked by Stein in his account of man: "He wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil" (Conrad 129). Here, the shift from "or" to "and" keeps the binary of ends away, even as the binary language seems to restrict the more open-ended possibilities of the question "how," and of Stein's declaration that "[w]e want in so many different ways to be" (Conrad 128). This is one of the great puzzles of Stein and of *Lord Jim* as a whole: to what degree can middles be unyoked from ends—and, in particular, from extreme, definitive, culturally pre-packaged ends? Marlow may succeed in unyoking Jim's character from the saint/devil binary, but he cannot resist extending his narrative until Jim's death. Indeed, the whole of *Lord Jim*, at least from the beginning of Jim's wanderings, is an extension of middles in search of traditional narrative endings. The novel cannot find its end in the sea-adventure, so it searches through other genres, searching for a place that Jim can re-enact his submission to the tribunal—what should have been his end, but turned out to be his middle or even his beginning. At Doramin's hand, Jim at last faces the logical conclusion not of the Patusan episode, but of the *Patna* episode. In a romantically ordered world, the hero's failure results in his death, but Jim must contend instead with how to live, and *Lord*

*Jim* therefore looks to Stein to extend the narrative with a shift in how the narrative discourse creates meaning from the raw material of the story.

As Marlow ruminates on Stein's ends-directed view of life, his desire to follow the dream, Marlow sees the middle as a place of disconnection from ends:

Yet for all that the great plain on which men wander amongst graves and pitfalls remained very desolate under the impalpable poesy of its crepuscular light, overshadowed in the centre, circled with a bright edge as if surrounded by an abyss of flames. When at last I broke the silence it was to express the opinion that no one could be more romantic than himself. (Conrad 130).

Here, at the center of *Lord Jim*, a center which seems to shine a new light on Jim by overtly identifying him as a romantic and by using Stein to express a romantic philosophy, Marlow defines the center as a place of darkness. Here in the center, the light of the dream is completely shut out. When one is most assuredly in the middle, narrative loses its guiding direction, purpose and causation overshadowed by—what? There may be an overshadowing object—the sheer weight of life, perhaps, of middle age, or of those graves and pitfalls—but the rest of the passage suggests not a shadowing object, but simply a distance from the edge whence the light comes. The metaphor also seems to defeat any notion of origins, or any clear path. This is not Marlow's river leading to the heart of darkness, but a directionless plain encased by the light of death. One passes, perhaps at the middle of one's life, but also perhaps at any time in one's undirected wanderings, through a center (for all except for death is in the middle) from which the ends cannot be seen. Once again, life is figured as a

circular encasement, which has the effect of destroying a linear conception of time and narrative and replacing it with a planar conception.

The end of Chapter 20, then, offers attempts to repair this directionless middle. Marlow offers the belief that he “saw only the reality of [Jim’s] destiny, which he had known how to follow with unfaltering footsteps, that life begun in humble surroundings, rich in generous enthusiasms, in friendship, love, war—in all the exalted elements of romance” (Conrad 131). In other words, Marlow shuts his eyes to all but fate, clinging to concept of romance so conveniently provided by Stein to restore narrative comprehensibility to Jim and his story. At the beginning of Chapter 21, Marlow precisely figures Patusan as an escape from the circular encasement of life which he had so recently provided as his great existential metaphor:

there’s many a heavenly body in the lot crowding upon us of a night that mankind had never heard of, it being outside the sphere of its activities and of no earthly importance to anybody but to the astronomers who are paid to talk learnedly about its composition, weight, path—the irregularities of its conduct, the aberrations of its light,—a sort of scientific scandal-mongering. Thus with Patusan.  
(Conrad 132).

Patusan is thus both an exotic oddity of interest only to specialists and outside of the sphere of the earth itself. It is, indeed, outside the human scale of causation.

Nevertheless, this destiny will be played out in the form of popular genre-writing.

Indeed, Marlow’s language suggests that the unearthly (and thus, in this context, the

exoticized other) can be comprehended only in terms of the familiar. We learn about the irregularities and aberrations of stars, not their conformities. And we are interested in their conduct, an anthropomorphization, and in their light—literally the light of a star, but also echoing the light of the dream. There is no reason to expect the Patusan episode to conform to Western genre narratives—especially after Marlow insists again on the difference of what is to come: “had Stein arranged to send him into a star of the fifth magnitude the change could not have been greater” (Conrad 132). The key here, though, is the arrangement: Marlow and Stein have arranged for an end for Jim, and that end, like any journey into a star, can only be death. Wandering aimlessly in the center of the circle, Jim is at last given a purpose, but Marlow allows no end-purpose other than an abyss of flames. The middle of *Lord Jim*, then, is a conspiracy between Stein, Marlow, and Conrad to arrange an end for Jim and for the novel. As arranged by human characters, this end must feature the blunter generic narrative that follows.

*Lord Jim*'s narrative middle, then, is deeply bound up in its shaping of the novel's ending and its disruption of a narrative that had been motivated by beginnings (Jim's biography, the *Patna* episode). This chapter has sketched out a reading in which Jim's submission to execution by Doramin completes the action of the *Patna* episode. None of this, however, solves the initial problems of the text: what happened on the *Patna*, and why? To these—and to Marlow's inquiries into Jim's character—there can be only simple answers or no answers. The problems cannot be solved to the satisfaction of the text that has been built up in Marlow's oral narrative. Instead, it answers the questions posed in the Stein episode: what will become of Jim? The

text's initial questions are beginning-directed, but the middle abandons the search for origins and causes, preferring ends and consequences. Thus, what might have been a tight causal chain—Jim fails on the *Patna*, and is therefore doomed to die in Patusan—is disrupted by Marlow's interventions, as well as by a beginning that asks questions primarily of beginnings. To go with this beginning interested primarily in beginnings and an ending primarily interested in ends, we have a middle which is strongly connected to neither. I hesitate to argue definitively that this is a middle primarily about middles—since the causal chain with its beginnings and endings rears its ugly head so often—yet it is at least a middle that tries to be primarily about middles, to engage as much as possible with the question of how to live when beginnings have failed and endings are nowhere in sight. Gentleman Brown and the final episode in Jim's life in this reading represent not a return of Jim's repressed past, or of the repressed evils of the colonial project, but a return of the repressed need for endings, of the middle's dependence on the points between which it lies for its very existence.

Yet, *Lord Jim* also reveals how these beginnings and endings can be shaped by middles. Furthermore, it reveals—and is even centrally concerned with—the flimsiness of simple causal narratives, which prescribe clear motives and consequences for actions. Narrative epistemology itself—the production of knowledge through the embedding of events within a narrative—is revealed at the novel's middle to be arbitrary and inadequate. Whether we view Stein's intervention as shifting the novel from modernist text to romantic genre narrative, or from one type of romantic genre narrative to another, the effect of this intervention itself is to



produce a narrative text that is divided into two parts. The division of the text into two parts is in large part defined by Stein's assertion of a system of meaning associated with a romantic narrative—and he supplies a setting and cast of characters to match. However, though the Patusan episode echoes romantic novels, shifting the narrative genre, there is nothing in the text to suggest that it occurs in a different level of reality than the novel's first half. Narrative middles as I have defined always provide a transition or a difference in the text. If *Lord Jim* had a postmodernist narrative middle, the shift to Patusan would raise questions about the nature of the reality in which Jim exists, perhaps by indicating that Patusan is diegetically a fictional land which Stein or Jim had read about in an adventure novel. If *Lord Jim* were a traditional nineteenth-century narrative, its middle might provide Jim with a similar change in fortunes, but it would not embed this change of fortunes in a different system of meaning, nor would it incite critics to entertain the idea that the two halves do not properly belong in the same novel. Instead, *Lord Jim*'s narrative middle is precisely a modernist middle because it challenges us to interpret two disparate parts as a single narrative, reimagined, redirected, and reinterpreted, fragmented yet by the very fact of its existence complete.

## Chapter 2: Modernist Points of View:

### A Middle Without Text in Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*

Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* has, in some ways, the most conventional middle in this study. Although its structure has been the subject of a good deal of scholarly discussion, *The Golden Bowl*'s reputation as an early or proto-modernist classic lies primarily in the late James style, with its labyrinthine sentence structures, heavy abstraction, and, most importantly, its restricted point of view which, coupled with an obsessive attention to the details of mental processes, creates a modernist Impressionism that often borders on a stream of consciousness style. Where *Lord Jim* introduces a new character to forcibly arrest the novel's narrative direction and genre in a pivotal scene, *The Golden Bowl* builds to a crisis in the plot at the novel's structural middle, which clearly identified by conventional markers.<sup>6</sup> The novel's forty-two chapters are divided among six Parts, which are in turn divided evenly among two Books. The chapters generally narrate a scene, or a few closely connected scenes, and they generally take the point of view of one (and occasionally two) characters in that scene. Longer scenes may take up more than one chapter. Significant events or lapses in time take place between the Parts.

So far, there is nothing unusual here: the two-volume novel may have been less common than the three-volume novel in the nineteenth century, but Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, for example, used the two-volume format in an apparently similar manner to *The Golden Bowl*. Both novels even title their Books. However, the titles

---

<sup>6</sup> Wilson offers an acute summary of the function of the novel's middle in terms of the novel's outward plot: "Book First will set out the origin and development of the crisis, Book Second will trace the course and nature of its resolution" (60).

offer an essential clue to what makes *The Golden Bowl* a modernist novel in structure as well as style. Whereas *Little Dorrit* contrasts “Poverty” with “Riches,” separating its books both by time and material fortune within a well-defined contemporary social structure, *The Golden Bowl* offers “The Prince” and “The Princess,” titles which suggest, combined with the contrast of the novel’s contemporary setting, a certain timelessness and a long-gone or even mythical social structure. It is the tie of the mythic and timeless to the contemporary and specific, as well to the minds of James’s characters, that makes this a modernist, rather than a postmodernist, move. The Prince of Book First is Prince Amerigo, a poor Italian of aristocratic heritage and the primary focalizer of his Book. The Princess and primary focalizer of Book Second is Maggie Verver, the American heiress of the wealthy American art collector Adam Verver; she marries Amerigo early in the novel. Book Second, meanwhile, takes place not after a lapse in time from Book First; instead, its beginning overlaps Book First’s ending, offering, for the first time excepting a partial glimpse during Adam Verver’s Part Second, a rendering of Maggie’s consciousness just at the moment it begins to awaken.

This is, not coincidentally, roughly the moment of Amerigo’s consummation of an affair with Maggie’s friend and Adam’s wife, Charlotte. Warhol associates what she calls a “practice of [...] narrative refusal” in James’s *The Spoils of Poynton*” with the relegation of the marriage plot to the background. In *Poynton*, this is achieved through disnarration, or saying you did not say something, and unnarration, or narrating what did not happen (Warhol 259). *The Golden Bowl*, by contrast, avoids the marriage plot largely by displacing it to before the novel’s beginning. But, just as

it seems that the marriage plot is to be replaced by a tale of a scandalous love affair, *The Golden Bowl* engages in its own startling act of non-narration. The middle of *The Golden Bowl*, a textless gap between Books, is thus a modernist gap: not a temporal ellipsis but a paralipsis. This paralipsis not only omits crucial information from explicit scenic narration, but alters the novel's established order by which both reader and the novel's characters understand the diegetic world. This paraliptic middle effects a shift in the novel's narrative consciousness, as Maggie Verver not only becomes almost the novel's sole focalizer (whereas Amerigo is focalizer for less than half of his Book's chapters), but also in the relationship between focalizer and narrative, as Maggie takes a more active role in shaping her destiny than the largely passive Prince.

*The Golden Bowl's* middle, then, serves as a hinge in the novel's narrative structure. This structure is articulated not only by a traditional narrative method—a crisis in the plot—but by a re-ordering of narrative form through a shift in focalization. As Robyn Warhol argues, James's method makes the choice of focalizer crucial to a poetics that emphasizes epistemological concerns:

According to this theoretical model, when narration is filtered through the consciousness of a single focal character (as is so often the case in James's impressionist novels), the thoughts and motives of all the other characters can only be read through their words, gestures, and actions. [...] This is the expected procedure of literary impressionism as practiced by James, Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford (and, in earlier iterations, Emily Brontë and Jane Austen herself), and it

inevitably leads to the kind of complex narrative undecidability that gives the form much of its aesthetic value, from a new-critical point of view. (Warhol 263)

However, while Warhol emphasizes the sorts of knowledge James's choice of focalizer denies the reader—knowledge about thoughts and motives of multiple characters. This approach emphasizes thought as instrumental to outward drama: a source of knowledge which can clarify the plot and relations between various characters. However, James himself argued that the choice of focalizer was crucial, not because it created narrative undecidability in the plot or outward drama, but because it opened up a different sort of drama entirely. Especially later in his career, James argued that the central drama of his novels was to be found the consciousness of his main characters. In the Preface to *Roderick Hudson*, James writes, "The centre of interest throughout *Roderick* is in Rowland Mallet's consciousness, and the drama is the very drama of that consciousness" (*Critical Muse* 460). That is, the focalizer's consciousness is not a source of knowledge about an outward drama; instead, in a reversal of figure and ground, the outward plot is source of knowledge about the drama of consciousness.

James further demonstrates this principle in the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, by narrating a drama within his own consciousness: " 'Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness,' I said to myself, 'and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish. Stick to *that* – for the centre; put the heaviest weight into *that* scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relation to herself'" (*Critical Muse* 489). James repeatedly insists not only on

centering his novels within his protagonists' consciousnesses, but on placing the drama and tensions of his novels within the chosen consciousness. The close association in these passages between center and consciousness has led many critics, as William B. Thomas points out (108), to make "center of consciousness" the Jamesian term for focalizer.<sup>7</sup> But the emphasis in James's Prefaces is not *who* is the center of consciousness, but the placing of a novel's central drama as well as its central narration *within* a consciousness. *The Golden Bowl's* middle specifically refuses to narrate the consummation of an affair not only to avoid narrating what standards of propriety would forbid narrating, but also to put the entire outward narrative of the affair into the background, in favor of the drama of consciousness.

In *The Golden Bowl*, the choice of the center of consciousness is not made at the beginning, but in the middle. Superficially, if we look to the titles of the two Parts as guidance, this shift appears to be nothing more than a switch from one primary focalizer to another. If it were, this would be enough to mark the middle of *The Golden Bowl* as an important point for modernism, anticipating, for example, the shifts in focalization in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* or *The Sound and the Fury*, as well as, in its male/female contrast, the dramatic shift to Molly Bloom's stream of consciousness at the end of *Ulysses*. However, since the Prince is not a simple primary focalizer, this middle also enacts a choice for consciousness in which the novel's center will be placed. Faulkner, as well as James's own short story, "The Point of View," often accords equal or near-equal status to several focalizers. *The Golden Bowl*, however, switches between centers of consciousness in its first half.

---

7 See also Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology, Revised Edition*, whose entry for "central consciousness" cites James alone.

Amerigo begins as primary focalizer, but focalization shifts to Charlotte Stant and Adam Verver. The novel's structure suggests balance in focalization, and thus a novel balanced at its center, but in truth there is no balance. *The Golden Bowl's* structure is, among other things, a drama of focalization. The moment of choice, dramatized in the Preface to *The Portrait* after the novel's writing as an event that occurred before the novel is written, is, in *The Golden Bowl*, dramatized within the novel itself. James's Prefaces argue that this choice is crucial—what makes a novel a novel of consciousness is not simply the rendering of consciousness, but the centering of the drama within a consciousness. In the first half of the novel, the choice has not been made, so by James's theory, there is no drama of a consciousness with itself—or, at least, not at the level of the novel or its first half, "The Prince." Center and consciousness go together, but they do not go together automatically. Instead, the novel tries out, in more or less isolated chapters or scenes, the drama of consciousness for three of the novel's leads—Amerigo, Charlotte, and Adam. Part First, then, rather than a drama of consciousness, serves as a sort of testing or probing the consciousnesses of these principles, a search for a drama of consciousness in the arrangement of the four principles. These three focalizers, however, are discarded at the novel's middle, particularly when the former two choose to make their narrative the ordinary story of an affair between two old lovers.

Maggie, on the other hand, does not receive so much as a tryout in the first half of the novel. She possesses, up until the middle of the novel, a consciousness even less interesting to the narrator than her fellows. The middle of *The Golden Bowl* represents not only a shift in focalization, but a shift from multiple, de-centered to

singular, centered focalization—a shift from a drama that that is seen through consciousnesses to a drama centered in consciousness. Even more, the middle represents the emergence of a consciousness worthy of being a center. And Maggie is not only worthy of being the center, she actively asserts her own centrality. As S. Salina Jamil argues, however, the shift in focalizers is also a shift in narrative authority, an authority which Maggie exerts to a much greater degree than Amerigo (Jamil 112). This shift in authority moves from male to female, from author to character, and from group to individual. The last is perhaps the most important if we are to understand *The Golden Bowl* as a modernist examination of the individual consciousness. In its very structure, *The Golden Bowl* announces the end of the Victorian social novel and announces that the novel will be ruled by individual mental processes. James makes this shift not with a piece of transitional narrative, but with an unnarrated middle, the space between Book First and Book Second. *The Golden Bowl*'s middle marks a shift in narrative form more than of plot. The narrator, then, is absent at the very moment in which he cedes many of the traditional grounds of his authority: his ability to shift between characters at will and his control over the story, as Maggie's mental processes take increasing control of both action and narration.

*The Golden Bowl* is not James's first novel structured around a crucially absent event at its middle. *The Princess Casamassima* is structured around a vow that the reader never sees. The novel's protagonist, Hyacinth Robinson, vows to commit an act of violence, later revealed to be an assassination, to the shadowy revolutionary leader Hoffendahl. As Kent Puckett argues, the placement of this crucial event, which



shapes the sense of suspense as well as Hyacinth's internal tensions until the novel's ending, makes it the purest of possible middles: "The scene is, because of its absence, the novel's middle in a way that something coming at the end of the first part or the beginning of the second never could be" (Puckett 84-85). In *The Princess Casamassima*, James uses what Puckett calls the "absent middle" (85) to structure plot and psyche. Crucially, this event is not an action—it is a word—a word that is spoken by Hyacinth, but one that is not written in the novel. There is therefore in *The Princess Casamassima* a priority of the spoken word over the written word, over actions, and of the psychic work of judgment that both Hyacinth and the reader must make.

By contrast, *The Golden Bowl* for most of Book First seems to be building to the middle—the culminating action to which the plot has been building in the novel's first half. After Hyacinth's vow, we wait for the moment at which he must act upon his vow. Narrative momentum proceeds from the middle to the end. But in *The Golden Bowl*, the plot of Book First reaches its culmination with an affair and the breaking of two marriage vows. By this narrative logic, in *The Golden Bowl*, action takes priority over spoken words. However, Charlotte and Amerigo's rendezvous does not actually take place during the novel's absent middle. Instead, it takes place in the space before the final two chapters of Part Second—or perhaps even during those chapters. Before the final two chapters, Charlotte and Amerigo make their plans. Lady Castledean has sent all her other guests away from Matcham, leaving Charlotte and Amerigo behind as cover for her own affair. Charlotte, having concluded that Castledean wishes to be left alone, has made arrangements at a nearby

inn. The lovers will return to Charlotte and Adam's home in Eaton place later in the evening, on the pretense of visiting some local cathedrals. The novel leaves us with James's assent, but before Part First ends, there are two chapters set later in that same day and evening, consisting mostly of Fanny Assingham's conversations with her husband Bob. Not only are Charlotte and Amerigo likely to have consummated their affair during this time, but Fanny has guessed that they have done so. Furthermore, Fanny narrates Maggie's actions that evening (for Bob's benefit, but also for the reader's): Maggie has decided to return home to Portland Place rather than remaining with her father at Eaton Square, as had been her custom. Fanny concludes from this not only that Charlotte and Amerigo have had an affair, but that Maggie has begun to suspect the existence of this affair, and that this suspicion is connected to a change in Maggie that will make her the driving force of the novel's plot.

Therefore, while Charlotte and Amerigo's rendezvous at the inn remains unnarrated at the novel's absent middle, and this unnarrated action may be foremost in our minds during the middle, the action has been slightly displaced from the absent middle itself. It has also, before the absent middle, been paired with an action of Maggie's, which, unlike Charlotte and Amerigo's rendezvous, is given to us by Fanny as fact. Since we leave Fanny and Bob late in the evening, it seems likely that any accompanying change in Maggie's consciousness that evening has also occurred before the absent middle. So both Charlotte and Amerigo's action, and Maggie's occur before the novel's second half, but we do not have direct narration of their actions. Maggie's story, however, is related in the novel's second half, including both a detailed account of her waiting up that evening for Amerigo and the shifts in her

mind as she does so. These events are, however, narrated retrospectively, from a point ten days later, when Maggie has further come to understand her own actions and motivations as well as Charlotte's and Amerigo's. When Book Second begins, therefore, we have jumped from an evening in which crucial events have taken place, to a day when Maggie reflects on those and subsequent events. Thus, Charlotte and Amerigo's affair remains the key unnarrated action once we have passed the absent middle, but the narrator has shuffled it off to the side. The narrator's shift in focalization, indeed, makes it impossible to narrate this action retrospectively. The absent middle has skipped over this crucial moment not through a leap forward in time—for not only have we already passed the moment before the middle, but the narrator's access to characters' memories assures the reader that a moment of the *fabula* so missed may yet be recovered in the *syuzhet*. The tools of modernism, with its access and obsession with thoughts, memories, and reconstructing the past, would still leave this moment open to narration. To close it off, then, James shifts the rules by which these tools are deployed. James's rendering of consciousness, which in the novel's first half serves to give the reader access to multiple impressions of the novel's situation, with Fanny's speech to further fill in the gaps, in Book Second is used to close us off from objective knowledge of most of its characters' thoughts and actions. Instead, these are all filtered through Maggie's consciousness. In contrast to Warhol, however, I argue that we should not consider this simply as an epistemological problem for the reader attempting to analyze the main drama. Instead, this method gives the reader a more complete view of the drama within Maggie's consciousness, to the point where many critics have argued that Maggie's

consciousness itself seems to control the narrative. I will argue, instead, that Maggie's consciousness is the narrative's primary setting, that the story is no longer so much about the arrangement of the principle characters, but about the development of Maggie's thoughts on that arrangement. From this perspective, however, even access to the Prince and Charlotte's thoughts would not represent the events of the absent middle. That is, if we view the story of *The Golden Bowl* as occurring in the primary narrative frame—that is, in the minds of the characters that recollect past events, rather than in those events themselves—then *fabula* and *syuzhet* are in concordance, producing a linear narrative with a temporal ellipsis between Book First and Book Second as well as a shift in focalization.

At the beginning of Book Second, Maggie has already begun to realize that her friend and husband, and the world at large, may be less than worthy of her trust. If this were a simple epistemological problem—Maggie gathers enough impressions to make an observation about the world—*The Golden Bowl* would resolve in Book Second rather neatly in a story of detection and social maneuverings: epistemological problems about the outside world, ontological problems about how to use that knowledge to effect change. Indeed, Jonathan Freedman offers a brilliant analysis of Maggie's (and, to a lesser extent, Charlotte's, Amerigo's, and Adam's) social maneuverings in the context of game theory. In Freedman's reading, Maggie eventually wins back her husband because she “possesses both the epistemological and financial power [...] to change the rules of the game” (Freedman, Jonathan 109). As regards the *fabula* of Book Second, Freedman's reading is stunning in its depth explicatory power, as concepts such as the prisoner's dilemma make Maggie's murky

maneuverings more readily understandable even as they build more thoroughly to a tragic ending which serves also as a critique of financialized capitalism and the commodification of social relationships. However, one might suppose, contrafactually, that such a tale might have been more readily served by a more straightforward omniscient narrative. If Part Second turns *The Golden Bowl* into a game of cards, why not show us more clearly each player's move? Why linger on, for example, the famous image of the pagoda that stretches across the early pages of Book Second? Jonathan Freedman's suggestion of why Maggie succeeds gives us a clue: "while they play, she *thinks*" (Freedman, Jonathan 102). While Part Second is not uninterested in Maggie's social maneuverings, it is much more interested in the thoughts that determine the play, rather than the play itself. The crucial drama of Book Second is not the social drama of the game, but the drama of Maggie's mind, which is both its primary setting and its subject. It is the drama of Maggie's consciousness that begins in the novel's absent middle. This division between Book First and Book Second, between a drama of multiple points of view and a drama that takes place within a single consciousness, structures the novel as a whole, both separating two different approaches to an epistemological poetics and binding these disparate halves into a single story. In his illuminating book-length study of *The Golden Bowl*, Wilson argues against earlier critics who place Maggie consistently at the novel's center, arguing that Book Second must be read in the context of Book First, and that Maggie is no more the novel's protagonist than any of the others (Wilson 64). Pick modifies this approach of reading continuity in *The Golden Bowl* grounded in Book First, converting Wilson's idea of multiple authorial stances

created, in part, by the use of multiple focalizers, into a continuous tale of evolving ethics: in Book First, “characters remain wholly and intimately open to one another” in a state of “polygamy”; in Book Second, there is an “emergence [...] of a social order” and “the birth of the order of justice. [...] The order of ‘justice’ in Book Two is derived by necessity from the so-called injustices of Book One” (Pick 118). That is, in Pick’s reading, we have a single plot, centered around not a single consciousness, but around social order. In Wilson and Pick’s readings, Book Second serves as a sort of fulfillment of the multiplicity of consciousness or point of view in Book First: *The Golden Bowl* as essentially a social novel, problematized by the epistemological isolation of its protagonists.

Wilson’s approach contrasts with Freedman’s, which, in emphasizing Maggie’s playing of the game in Book Second, inevitably makes her the protagonist. In Freedman’s reading, and, I would argue, those of most others who emphasize Maggie’s role, Book First is a sort of extended introduction: the setting up of a problem that the single protagonist (Maggie) must solve. I will analyze this later using a simplified version of Propp’s functions. Others who emphasize Maggie’s role in the novel notably include Norrman, who in discussing James’s use of symmetry emphasizes not the symmetry between the multiplicity of focalizers or centers of consciousness in Book First with the singular focalizer of Book Second, but the way Maggie in Book Second combines both passive and active roles in the drama (Norrman 210). However illuminating these sorts of readings may be, they are in some sense unbalanced, emphasizing endings rather than beginnings. They do, however, reveal the degree to which a single focalizer can become the center of the

novel, even when that focalizer is confined to the novel's second half. Others, such as Schor, however, emphasize the disruptive force of the middle: "in the middle of the novel, James pulls the rug out from under us" and asks that the reader re-assign allegiance (Schor 241). I am not so confident that Charlotte and Amerigo ever have the reader's allegiance (for my own part, I find that Fanny Assingham holds mine throughout Book First). There is not, in this novel, simply one side and then the other: there is the side of multiple focalizers, and the side of a single focalizer. As the various readings of the novel suggest, there is no thoroughly convincing way to resolve the tension between Book First and Book Second—nor even to determine whether the middle represents a fundamental disruption of the novel's plot and technical approach, or rather a sort of tipping point in a continuous evolution. However, if we are to consider *The Golden Bowl* as a whole, it is clear that this middle is of prime importance. *The Golden Bowl* is both a single novel, and a novel in two books. While James's prose, and his technical approach to representation in any particular chapter, show little if any change from Book First to Book Second, the switch from multiple focalizers to a single focalizer nevertheless has a drastic effect, one which has been read differently by different readers. Both approaches have been commonly used in modernist literature; by structuring this novel around a modernist middle, James is able to combine them into a single novel. By combining the epistemological problems of single and multiple points of view, James emphasizes that these approaches themselves are points of view. By using the middle to structure his novel around this contrast, James poses for his readers a third, irresolvable

epistemological problem: how do these two Books make a single novel, a single story?

James uses middles as a structuring device not only for the novel as a whole, but for its subdivisions as well. He does so through narrative mode, contrasting events which move the plot forward with both private thoughts and dramatic scenes (those dominated by dialogue or staging—that is, the positioning and lines of sight between characters in a defined space). Interweaving these modes are contrasts in the mode of narration, through shifts in focalization, as well as often unnarrated shifts in the narrative—that is, major developments in the plot often take place between chapters of the novel.

Book First of *The Golden Bowl* consists of three Parts, with the gaps between each Part marking a gap in time and a marriage. Between Part First and Part Second, Maggie and Amerigo are wed, spend time in New York, have a child, and return to Fawns in England. Between Part Second and Part Third, Adam and Charlotte marry, and two years pass. As James rotates the situation between his characters, he also rotates the point of view. Part 1, consisting of six chapters, is dominated by the Prince's point of view; he is the focalizer for the first three chapters as well as the fifth. Chapter four consists of a conversation between Fanny and Bob Assingham. These characters, in the dramatic dialogues which punctuate much of the novel, serve as a somewhat unreliable two-person *ficelle* in the sense James describes Maria Gostrey in the Preface to *The Ambassadors*: they are there to give the exposition without disrupting the scenic nature of the novel—that is, the *ficelle* gives the summary within the scene, avoiding the need for the narrator to engage in summary



directly.<sup>8</sup> They also serve as something of a Greek chorus, commenting on the events with the voice of communal values, which are notably split along gender lines. There is little to no thought narration in their chapters, making the drama both interpretive (rather than action-oriented) and external. They also frequently appear, as here, in a middle of sorts, reshaping our understanding of a narrative in progress. In Part First, they are followed by a return to the Prince as focalizer. However, the end of Part First, which also forms a transition with the beginning of Part Second, moves to Charlotte's consciousness. The Prince leaves her in an antique shop as she examines the titular golden bowl. Charlotte, alone, is tempted by the bowl, but decides both it and an affair with the Prince would come at too high a price: she observes in her subsequent interactions with Amerigo "the effect of their having, by some tacit logic, some queer inevitability, quite dropped the idea of a continued pursuit. They didn't say so, but it was on the line of giving up Maggie's present that they practically proceeded—the line of giving it up without more reference to it" (88). But, whereas her decision not to buy the bowl is both financial (she is too poor) and tied metaphorically to her relationship to the Prince, the Prince's statement is at the same time more material and more superstitious—not based on the particular relationships between particular people and particular things, but on particular observations tied to general laws: "I saw before I went out," he says. "It was because I saw that I did go out. [...] I saw the object itself. It told its story. No wonder it's cheap. [...] A crack is a crack—and an omen's an omen" (89). That is, for the Prince, direct, trained

---

<sup>8</sup> James writes that Gostrey's "intervention as a *ficelle* is, I hold, expertly justified. Thanks to it we have treated scenically, and scenically alone, the whole lumpish question of Strether's 'past'" (*Ambassadors* xii).

observation leads immediately and indisputably to predefined narratives. To Charlotte, however, the bowl is an object with its own beauty, tied not to the general narratives she dismisses as superstitions, but to the particular relations between herself, Maggie, and Amerigo. For the Prince, we act our parts within a defined narrative—if the bowl is cracked, we do not buy it, and we know what will happen if we do. For Charlotte, we act according to our desires, our means, and our interpretation not of general signs, but of the unspoken relations between individuals. At this early transition, James is already defining contrasting and gendered concepts of narrative. These concepts of narrative, and not the characters of Maggie and Amerigo, or the archetypal figures of the Prince and Princess, are what truly define the two Books of the novel. And these Books themselves are defined by the novel's middle, just as their theories are initially put forth in this earlier transition.

There is so much packed inside of the absent middle and the chapters that surround it, that it is worth thinking about the function of each of these elements in terms of the narrative as a whole. Emma Kafalenos has produced, for her readings of *The Ambassadors* and Kafka's "Before the Law," a useful distillation of Vladimir Propp's narrative functions, devised for an analysis of Russian fairy tales, as they apply generally to traditional narratives. In brief, Kafalenos/Propp's functions are changes in the narrative situation, each brought about by an actant. In a sense, all functions are narrative middles, because they move us from one narrative state to another—the two states making up a beginning and an ending. For Propp, however, functions do not stand alone to make a narrative. A complete narrative sequence takes us from one state of equilibrium to another by means of several functions. Kafalenos

adapts a total of eleven functions; out of these eleven, six (marked by a star) are mandatory for the completion of a narrative sequence, while the middle seven are undertaken by a single character, the C-actant:

\*A (*or a*) disruptive event (*or* reevaluation of a situation)

B request that someone alleviate A (*or a*)

\*C decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A (*or a*)

\*C' C-actant's initial act to alleviate A (*or a*)

D C-actant is tested

E C-actant responds to test

F C-actant acquires empowerment

G C-actant arrives at the place, or time, for H

\*H C-actant's primary action to alleviate A (*or a*)

\*I (*or I<sub>neg</sub>*) success (*or* failure) of H

\*K equilibrium

(Kafalenos 119-120)

In Kafalenos's reading of *The Ambassadors*, the reader is forced to constantly re-evaluate the functions of the narrative, as the primary narrative sequence evolves from one involving external action (the rescue of Chad Newsome) to one concerned with Strether's personal growth. What emerges is a narrative that is modernist in at least two senses: it is incomplete (that is, we do not reach function K, but stop at function F), and it is inwardly focused. The result is a set of narrative actions that are "resonant in psychic impressions but utterly ineffectual in altering the external world" and thus "characteristic responses of modern man's ironic reflections on his own

ineffectiveness” (Kafalenos 125). Strether learns something of the world, but he does not complete his mission, and he does not attain an equilibrium.

This turn to the incomplete narrative of a psychic journey is, however, anticipated formally from the beginning with *The Ambassadors*’ use of Strether as sole focalizer; and it is only completed, in Kafalenos’ reading, by a final re-interpretation of narrative functions at the novel’s end. That is, the modernism of *The Ambassadors* is primarily a product of beginnings and endings—even as the novel itself seems to end in a sort of narrative middle. Additionally, the stable focalizer who also clearly serves as the novel’s protagonist leaves us with a clear C-actant. *The Golden Bowl*, by contrast, uses Maggie only briefly as focalizer, in chapters 9 and 10 of Book First, and then only in tandem with her father Adam. Yet she dominates Book Second nearly as much as Strether dominates *The Ambassadors*. *The Golden Bowl*’s absent middle, then, is the location of multiple key narrative functions which must be interpreted and re-interpreted at the novel’s middle not only with respect to the object of the narrative, as in *The Ambassadors*, but also in terms of the narrative’s subject, the C-actant.

Let us begin with the Prince and Charlotte’s infidelity. This action (which is, at least, clearly an action, and thus most amenable to Propp’s formulation) can be, as the title of Book First suggests, from the Prince’s point of view. In this case, we may read Charlotte’s arrival as function A, a disruptive event that disturbs the Prince’s stable engagement, itself the conclusion of an unseen action to alleviate instability in his family’s finances. At the outset of the novel, the Prince thinks of his engagement as a successful pursuit, though one that nevertheless leaves him uneasy: “There was

nothing to do as yet, further, but feel what one *had* done, and our personage felt it while he aimlessly wandered. It was already as if he were married, so definitely had the solicitors, at three o'clock, enabled the date to be fixed" (4). Fixity and aimlessness suggest the end of a goal-oriented plot, the marriage plot that precedes the novel. But Charlotte's arrival provides a new disruption: "A handsome, clever, odd girl staying with one *was* a complication" (33).

The Prince makes various attempts to alleviate the situation, through hiding his past relationship with Charlotte, through various hints that, perhaps, it might not be the best idea for Adam to marry Charlotte or for Maggie to leave Charlotte and himself alone. As Amerigo's efforts gradually shift from avoiding or hiding Charlotte's disruptive presence to pursuing an affair, the question comes whether the object of the narrative in which Amerigo is the actant is the consummation of the affair or the preservation of his marriage. Sent off to accompany Charlotte at Matcham, the Prince places himself as the actant who will determine the course of the situation in which he has been placed: "Being thrust, systematically, with another woman, and a woman one happened, by the same token, exceedingly to like, and being so thrust that the theory of it seemed to publish one as idiotic or incapable—this was a predicament of which the dignity depended all on one's own handling" (245). That is, for the Prince at this moment, the goal is neither to consummate nor avoid an affair: it is to preserve dignity, and for that either action may serve. When Charlotte reveals that she has anticipated Amerigo's plan of leaving on the pretense of visiting a cathedral in Gloucester, and that she has "wanted everything," Amerigo's response is to anticipate that H will stabilize the narrative situation: "Well, it was all right. 'You

shall *have everything*” (266). In this version of the narrative, the novel ends at Book First. The Prince has faced the problem posed by Charlotte’s disruptive presence and resolved it. From Charlotte’s point of view, as well, the narrative concludes at the novel’s middle: Amerigo’s marriage is the disruption to her life, both bringing him back into view as an object of desire and denying her possession of that object, which she sets out, through various actions, to alleviate in Book First, and which she succeeds in alleviating at that Book’s conclusion. The middle, as Charlotte sees it, is the end, the completion of “everything.”<sup>9</sup>

However, we may also interpret this moment for Amerigo as function E, the actant’s failed response to a test. In this interpretation of the narrative sequence, Amerigo’s object is to defend his marriage from the disruption posed by Charlotte. In this interpretation, the novel’s middle represents the exact middle of the Kafalenos’ narrative sequence. Amerigo is later empowered by Maggie. He eventually acts to side with Maggie, restoring to equilibrium both his marriage and his finances. The C-actant does not come off particularly heroic in this sequence, but he does follow a complete, traditional narrative sequence, composed mostly if not entirely by discrete social actions. Finally, where Amerigo is concerned, we may consider, as in Kafalenos’ interpretation of *The Ambassadors*, that both Amerigo and the reader

---

9 Sarah Campbell examines the use of the words “nothing” and “everything” in *The Golden Bowl*, arguing that “everything” “stands for consummation—this time, the intimate ‘knowledge’ that is the extramarital relationship between Charlotte and the Prince” (Campbell 105). Furthermore, this knowledge of “everything” marks the beginning of Book Second and “inaugurates a new phase in Maggie’s experience, that part of her education in which speech acts as the means by which she finally and successfully manages what she knows.” (Campbell 108). Campbell’s interpretation not only highlights how James’s use of words with vague or multiple meanings emphasizes epistemological concerns, but also emphasizes how outward sources of knowledge—speech acts—inform the reader about the drama of Maggie’s consciousness.

regularly re-evaluate the object of his narrative sequence, so that the middle, which may seem to both Amerigo and the reader like an ending, is gradually re-conceived as the middle. That is, we have the same process Kafalenos reads in *The Ambassadors*, but the incomplete narrative sequence is applied not to the novel as a whole, but only Book First. That is, Amerigo's narrative, initially perceived by the reader as a one-volume novel, becomes a two-volume novel. Notably, however, in this two-volume novel, Amerigo is not the central consciousness.

The Prince's final appearance as focalizer, near the end of Book First, casts a heavy shadow on the novel's middle. In chapter XXII, Charlotte reveals to the Prince that she has made the final arrangements for their rendezvous, having secured a room for the two of them at an inn in Gloucester. The chapter concludes with the Prince's famous assent to Charlotte, "You shall *have* everything." The sexual euphemism, like many throughout the chapter, is comical in its obviousness, particularly when read aloud. James's narrator is, in effect, in a position similar to Strether's—loathe to confirm absolutely the existence or extent of an extramarital affair, physical act unseen—no matter how obvious the social or verbal cues may be. That is to say, standards of propriety and standards of proof conspire to deny James's readers epistemological certitude on the affair. The night at the inn is a gap that we might easily fill in, that Amerigo's words beg us to fill in with *everything*. This seems to be the perfect setup for the novel's absent middle—a crucial moment, unwritable by standards of decency, strongly implied to the point where it becomes an inside joke that the author shares with the reader. We can see here why D.H. Lawrence was once considered a central figure in modernist narrative—James teeters up as closely as he

can to the sheer unspeakable narrative power of sex in Victorian narrative, pointing with both the novel's structure and his characteristically euphemistic dialogue at the power and absurdity of it all. We are ready, it seems, to leap from Amerigo's decision and the words that seal the act, straight over the act itself, to the story of Maggie's thoughts trained upon that empty middle action.<sup>10</sup>

However, Book First does not conclude with Amerigo and Charlotte. Instead, standing between *The Prince* and *The Princess* are two chapters featuring the Assinghams. In these chapters, time continues to move forward. Fanny and Bob are apart for most of the day; when Fanny at last speaks to Bob, it is with an antithetical echo of Amerigo's words: "We were all wrong. There's nothing. [...] Between Charlotte Verver and the Prince" (269). Eliding Bob's prompt, as I have done here, emphasizes that we are still in the world of overloaded sexual euphemism here. There is Fanny's intended euphemism—vaguely connoting an inappropriate relationship which may range from mere flirtation to an outright sexual affair—and then there is James's euphemism for the sexual act itself, with literally nothing between Charlotte and the Prince's bodies. And this dialogue takes place at a plausible moment for the sexual act—midnight on the very same night. And, indeed, James seems to obliquely warn his readers about the follies of making assumptions, as Fanny insists, "I *have* seen," precisely when both Fanny and the reader do not see (269). Indeed, Fanny's

---

<sup>10</sup> Early in Book Second, Maggie attempts to understand the look on Amerigo's face as he checks in on her upon his return; the meaning of this look seems for Maggie "the key to everything" (308). For Campbell, Maggie's pursuit of the knowledge of "everything" initiates the novel's second volume and "inaugurates a new phase in Maggie's experience, that part of her education in which speech acts as the means by which she finally and successfully manages what she knows." (Campbell 108). Yet this initial management of "everything" is not through speech acts, but through narrated thought.



dialogue in chapter XXIII repeatedly refers to what she and the four main characters do or do not see, including a declaration that both Maggie and Adam are “blind” (271). Fanny comes very near to parodying the concept of focalization, declaring, “it was as if I were suddenly seeing through their eyes” (272). This, then, is Fanny’s evidence, what she has seen: a focalized vision, leading her to the opposite conclusion to what the novel’s own use of the Prince as focalizer has led us.

From sight, the dialogue eventually turns to thought—Fanny dismisses the relevance of her own thoughts, but Maggie’s seem more crucial. Fanny wishes to protect Amerigo and Charlotte “from a sudden scare. From the alarm, I mean, of what Maggie *may* think” (273). Fanny is less certain that Maggie sees nothing than she is that Maggie *thinks* nothing. Here we have a clue to the novel’s fulcrum: the crucial questions of the novel have shifted from not only from Amerigo and Charlotte to Maggie, but from epistemological questions surrounding vision, including point of view and our ability to observe discrete actions or behaviors either present or absent, to questions of thought. The problem that will be posed through the novel’s absent middle, Fanny suggests, is not what we can see and what we cannot, nor from whose perspective we can see it—but instead a problem of what one particular mind can think. And thoughts are, for Fanny, dangerous things: “I perpetrate—in thought—crimes” (273). Thought, then, is equivalent to action, in a way that vision is not.

By the end of the chapter, Fanny seems to have reversed herself. Rather than being confident that Amerigo and Charlotte will studiously avoid an extramarital affair, she is struck with an “inner vision” she vows to deny: “Whatever they’ve done I shall never know. Never, never—because I don’t want to, and because nothing will

induce me” (277). Fanny, then, refuses to convert vision into knowledge. But it is crucial that, particularly, this is an inner vision. The suggestion is that thought and contemplation lead to sight that is truer than that available through observation and even focalization. Fanny comes to this vision by contemplating Maggie—and Maggie’s thoughts first of all. She then leads herself through Maggie’s actions throughout the evening. And here, again, what might have been a crucial action to fill the novel’s absent middle is narrated before the end of Part First: Fanny recalls that Maggie, unusual for her, drove Fanny home—that is, left her father’s before she was accustomed to. This thought, in turn, leads Fanny to contemplate the possibility that Charlotte and Amerigo would not return home that evening. With one chapter remaining in Part First, Fanny has already informed the reader that Maggie has behaved unusually, and traces this action back to a further reminder of the unnarrated, but perfectly obvious, action Charlotte and Amerigo have taken. Both of these actions are, before the middle, distinctly in the past, and the site of little if any epistemological uncertainty. Epistemological uncertainty, and narrative suspense, is moved from Charlotte and Amerigo’s actions to Maggie’s thoughts.

Chapter XXIV continues to prepare the reader for a transition to Maggie as the novel’s sole focalizer, with thoughts rather than actions the crucial elements of the drama. Fanny analyzes Maggie’s manner, slowly growing more confident that Maggie has begun to undergo a change. While R. B. J. Wilson’s argument that Maggie’s role as focalizer in Part Second does not reduce the reader’s interest in the three other principals is admirable, Fanny seems to be preparing us for more than a change in the novel’s point of view: “She’ll carry the whole weight of us” (279).

Fanny's vision is not simply a tale of four or six persons balanced on one of those persons—but a tale of a single person: “We might have pitied her before—for all the good it would have done her; we might have begun some time ago. Now, however, she has begun to live” (281). But Maggie's “triumph” will not contain a simple action: “It isn't a question of recovery. It won't be a question of any vulgar struggle” (281). Instead, “her sense will have to open [...] [t]o what's called Evil—with a very big E: for the first time in her life. To the discovery of it, to the knowledge of it, to the crude experience of it” (282). And as Maggie gains this knowledge and experience, she will attempt “[t]o keep her father from her own knowledge” in order to “save” him” (283).

As Fanny reviews the events of Book First, she rewrites the narrative with Maggie as the driving force: “Before she knew, at any rate, her little scruples and her little lucidities, which were really so divinely blind—her feverish little sense of justice, as I say—had brought the two others together as her gross misconduct couldn't have done. And now she knows something or other has happened—yet hasn't heretofore known what” (290). Fanny speaks a tangled web of thoughts, actions, vision, and knowledge. There is an allusion to blind justice—ideas without vision—conceived of as worse than ill-intentioned actions. Knowledge—the very knowledge Fanny herself in chapter XXIII explicitly refused—is here conceived of as crucial. Yet, knowledge is a tangled thing for Maggie: Maggie “knows something” but doesn't know precisely what she knows. The problem for Maggie, Fanny argues, is not working out what has happened, but working out what she already knows. That is, it is not an epistemological problem of vision, which would sit between the mind

and the objective world. Instead, Maggie's epistemological problem is a problem of thought—set between the mind and itself.

Having established the new prominence of Maggie's thoughts, Part First concludes with a series of statements on what will *not* take place in Book Second. First, Fanny declares, this will not be a tale of actions: "Nothing—in spite of everything—*will* happen. Nothing *has* happened. Nothing *is* happening" (294). This declaration goes beyond a euphemism demanding silence regarding a sexual act. *The Golden Bowl* seems to parody at this moment, through Fanny's mouth, its length, its structure, its plotting. In a Jamesian novel of the major phase, Fanny says, echoing any number of bored readers, nothing happens. If you expect that the novel is about to get moving, for action to speed it to a denouement, you will be disappointed. But Fanny goes further still. What action that seemed to occur in Book First did not, in fact, occur. Small wonder that so many readers seem to regard Book First as mere prelude in Maggie's story, then, when the novel's *ficelle* herself declares Book First null and void. Having erased both past and future, Fanny is still unsatisfied: not only does *The Golden Bowl* lack past and a future, but it lacks a present as well. One of the classical epistemological problems associated with modernism, and particularly with stream of consciousness technique—the problem for the reader of determining what is happening in the novel's objective world when that knowledge is filtered through a particular character's consciousness—is also null and void. There is no present action *to* know. Indeed, Fanny declares, "We know nothing on earth" (294). Taken directly, of course, this series of nothings is merely a vow of silence between the Assinghams, and Bob himself points this out—nothing is happening, Bob says, "For *us*" (294). We

aren't to understand that *The Golden Bowl* literally has no plot, no objective world in which actions take place. Nevertheless, we are told that this world, and particularly Charlotte and Amerigo's place in it, are increasingly irrelevant. The novel's stakes are now stakes about knowledge—or, more precisely, signs of knowledge. Fanny insists that Maggie will watch her father “[f]or the first faint sign. I mean of his noticing” (295). Fanny herself is confident that Adam has not noticed because she has been watching Maggie—and sees no sign in Maggie that she has seen a sign from her father: “Nothing—from him—*has* come” (295). Once again, the driving force and epistemological question posed is not one about the state of the objective world. Instead, this is a recursive epistemological problem about knowledge and thought. It is not even that Adam must be kept ignorant—but that Maggie must receive no sign that he is anything but ignorant. Knowledge, thoughts, and the social cues that communicate them are the keys to Book Second. Fanny announces, then, that Book Second will pose epistemological problems about thought. The mind, then, rather than the external world, becomes (if it was not already) the setting for *The Golden Bowl*'s story.

In the final line of Book First, Fanny underlines how much objective reality and its plot elements have become subsidiary to subjective consciousness and its internal drama. Fanny asserts to Bob her certainty that Adam has given no sign that he knows anything of his wife's infidelity:

‘Nothing—from him—*has* come.’

‘You're so awfully sure?’

‘Sure. Nothing *will*. Good-night,’ she said. ‘She’ll die first.’

(295)

Death, then, is no longer the potential ending that drives the action forward. Instead, death is, like Athena in Euripides’s *Ion*, a *deus ex machina* whose purpose is to stop the plot’s primary motion, to deny the characters the knowledge they are about to attain. *Ion*, however, has more traditional epistemological concerns: the eponymous character seems poised to learn that he is the son of the god Apollo, who raped his mother. Athena denies him the knowledge and sends him on his way to found the Ionian people. Fanny, by contrast, promises that the narrative logic of the novel dictates that death will intervene not before Adam knows about the affair, but before he signals his knowledge to Maggie. The impossibility is no longer knowledge of infidelity—it is knowledge of knowledge. The stakes of this meta-epistemological plot, Fanny insists, are so high that the tragic denouement would be short-circuited by what is either incongruous objective plotting (that is, fate intervenes and causes the death) or wholly sentimental plotting (Maggie somehow senses that a sign is about to come from her father, and dies or wills herself to die as a consequence). That is, *The Golden Bowl* will prioritize the psycho-social stakes of its meta-epistemological plot over any adherence to objective realism or plot logic.

The dialogues between Fanny and Bob that conclude Part First, then, set up the structure and themes of Part Second. They also, crucially, create a middle that is not driven by traditional questions of plot—either suspense (forward-looking) or epistemological (backward-looking). While two key objective events—Charlotte and Amerigo’s night in an inn and Maggie’s return home—are important to understanding

*The Golden Bowl*'s absent middle, they are by this middle already in the novel's past. Rather than a plot development, what has happened in this empty space is a change in narrative form and interest. In Book First, *The Golden Bowl* is a novel of multiple points of view, building our knowledge of four characters and their relationships as it builds to a single act of infidelity. Book Second might have centered itself with reference to this infidelity, now in the novel's past, playing out its consequences on multiple characters. It might even have become the story of Maggie-as-detective, and there are still elements of this particular plot. However, by delaying the novel's middle until after the infidelity has occurred and been discussed, and after Maggie's possibly-simultaneous decision to return home that night, James fills the absent middle not with actions but with thoughts. Fanny may speculate about these thoughts—but we do not know yet how they have developed in Maggie's mind. And we anticipate a plot driven by what she thinks of what her father thinks. The absent middle, then, contains a shift in the novel's form that allows us to shift from epistemological concerns about the objective world to epistemological concerns that occur within and between consciousnesses. Rather than a sexual act, there is a shift between Books First and Second not of consciousness. This is a shift both in Maggie's consciousness and in the novel's consciousness, as it rearranges its form and point of view, rewriting Book First in the process, and plunging deeper into modernist concerns with consciousness and epistemology.

The beginning of Book Second marks clearly the change that has happened in both the novel and in Maggie Verver:

It was not till many days had passed that the Princess began to accept the idea of having done, a little, something she was not always doing, or indeed that of having listened to any inward voice that spoke in a new tone. Yet these instinctive postponements of reflection were the fruit, positively, of recognitions and perceptions already active; of the sense, above all, that she had made, at a particular hour, made by the mere touch of her hand, a difference in the situation so long present to her as practically unattackable. (299)

Maggie's mind has already begun to open to the possibilities associated with a broader, deeper understanding of "the garden of life" (299). Maggie, like Amerigo and Charlotte, has done something in the closing chapters of Part Second that is unusual, upsetting the stable world of habit that characterized, for her, the world of Part First. Confirming and clarifying Fanny's account of the evening, Maggie recalls that she had gone home to wait for her husband's return from Matcham, rather than to her father's house. But she has also heard an inward voice, speaking where the novel offers only silence. Unlike Hyacinth's words, though, Maggie's inward voice does not bind her to a cause, a future action, or to a human being. And while we can discern, if not the exact words of Hyacinth's vow, at least the general character of the promise to fulfill an obligation that will drive the plot of that novel inevitably towards its conclusion, Maggie's inward voice is more indistinct. We might guess more of Maggie's inward voice than she does at the moment—that it is tied to her husband's infidelity—whereas Hyacinth knows more of his vow than we do. But this knowledge



ties the inward voice not to the novel's ending, but back to the middle from which it originates.

It would be a mistake, however, to think of Maggie's mind primarily in terms of a "voice." Alan Palmer's work on the narration of fictional minds provides a useful framework for thinking about just what it means for a story to be primarily concerned with the mind. While Palmer is primarily concerned with revising our narratological approach to narration of the mind in order to open up greater concern for non-verbal thought, his model suggests that we might think of the narrated mind as a setting. Following Dorrit Cohn's work on psycho-narration, which he calls thought report, Palmer emphasizes the importance of the narration of the mind that includes more than the representation of verbal thought. Thought report, Palmer argues, should not be considered a more distant representation of conscious verbal thought than direct or free indirect thought. A narratological framework that models the narration of thought on the narration of speech results in the "impression that characters' minds really only consist of a private, passive flow of thought" (Palmer 32). Instead, Palmer argues, thought narration may represent non-verbal aspects of the mind, including the social context of thought. For our purposes, one of the implications of Palmer's observation is that the mind may be represented like any other environment—that is, narrative discourse may dramatically represent language within the mind, but may also narrate abstract events in the mind, describe the scene of the mind, and otherwise narrate a story that occurs within the mind. *The Golden Bowl*, particular in scenes of characters in contemplation, is often radical in how directly it presents the mind as a scene in

which a story unfolds, and perhaps nowhere more so than at the beginning of Book Second.

The famous image of the pagoda is notable not only for its exoticism (in a novel concerned entirely with Western high society) and its elaboration, but also for how it places the very plot of the novel (the “situation”) in Maggie’s mind, which is figured explicitly as a setting. This rendering of the mind as a setting is accomplished by rather elaborate thought report:

This situation had been occupying, for months and months, the very centre of the garden of her life, but it had reared itself there like some strange, tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful, beautiful, but outlandish pagoda, a structure plated with hard, bright porcelain, coloured and figured and adorned, at the overhanging eaves, with silver bells that tinkled, ever so charmingly, when stirred by chance airs. She had walked round and round it—that was what she felt; she had carried on her existence in the space left her for circulation, a space that sometimes seemed ample and sometimes narrow; looking up, all the while, at the fair structure that spread itself so amply and rose so high, but never quite making out, as yet, where she might have entered had she wished. (James, *Golden Bowl* 299)

The pagoda, though exotically Orientalized (it is later figured as a Mosque), is contained at the center, specifically, of Maggie’s life. It is her garden the pagoda occupies. Maggie is no longer a figure in the plot of the novel—the plot of the novel is a figure in her life. And all of this is contained within her consciousness:

If this image, however, may represent our young woman's consciousness of a recent change in her life—a change now but a few days old—it must at the same time be observed that she both sought and found in renewed circulation, as I have called it, a measure of relief from the idea of having perhaps to answer for what she had done. The pagoda in her blooming garden figured the arrangement—how otherwise was it to be named?—by which, so strikingly, she had been able to marry without breaking, as she like to put it, with her past.

(James, *Golden Bowl* 300)

The image here is referred to is not actually the static visual image. Instead, it is a scene suggested by the narrator, complete with action—and with figurative language nested again within the scene: “She had knocked, in short—though she could scarce have said whether for admission or for what; she had applied her hand to a cool, smooth spot, and had waited to see what would happen. Something *had* happened; it was as if a sound, at her touch, after a little, had come back to her from within; a sound sufficiently suggesting that her approach had been noted” (300). A change in Maggie's consciousness is figured as an action within an image. And within that action, there is not so much a sound as a further layer of Maggie's consciousness, as the Maggie within the image imagines a sound, or has an experience that to the narrator suggests a sound. And this whole elaborate image is itself a way of describing Maggie's consciousness as she thinks back on the last few days: her mind contains not only the plot of the novel, but contains its own evolution.

When Amerigo arrives, Maggie's contemplation of her situation ends—but only in the retrospective timeline. The action described remains within Maggie's consciousness. Dorrit Cohn, in a brilliant analysis of the first two chapters of Book Second, notes the “dual narrative situation” and “dual time scheme” at play here: the novel has jumped forward ten days and narrates Maggie remembering the night of Amerigo's return from Matcham (Cohn, “First” 6). Amerigo's arrival marks “the final sharp extinction by the outward” (308). The narrator at this point fills us in on what happened that night: Maggie's return home to Portland Place to surprise Amerigo; Amerigo's return; his initial surprise at her presence, shifting quickly into an eager embrace; his insistence on changing alone before dinner; and a second embrace upon his return. In this sense, what we have is a narrative of Maggie's contemplation of the novel's absent middle.

Maggie's mind, then, begins to contain the entire situation of *The Golden Bowl*, which amounts almost entirely to the relationships between four people. But just as Maggie's mind consumes the situation, so too is it consumed by the situation. Just as her mind takes over the novel, her mind seems to be nothing but the novel. Whether she is a master of game theory, an arrogant plutocrat, an enlightened moralist—the compass of her mind scarcely penetrates beyond the arrangement of these four people. It may even be her lack of interests that gives her advantage. As the others sit down to play cards, which “were as nought to her,” Maggie thinks of “the sharp-edged fact of the relation of the whole group, individually and collectively, to herself” (467). She has scarcely a thought even for her son: for example, when she looks upon her napping son in chapter 39, Maggie's thoughts are primarily for the

crib which holds her son and her father, who sits behind him (521). The Principino, then, serves primarily as a symbol around which the four principles rotate. Even more so, though, Maggie's mind as represented in the novel seems to consist of few thoughts beyond the arrangement of the novel's principles—that is, the understanding and manipulation of the story.

The story Maggie chooses to for herself, then, is the realization of a delayed marriage plot: securing for herself a husband. To do so, she determines that she must leave her father—her life can contain only one man. Furthermore, this arrangement involves the sacrifice of Maggie's most significant friendship with another woman (Charlotte) and leaves her friendship with Fanny (more of a surrogate mother to her than a peer) strained, impersonal, and dishonest. Freedman reads the Amerigo at the end of the novel as Maggie's automaton, but, with Adam out of the picture, Maggie no longer has her father's financial power with which to control her husband (Freedman, Jonathan 113). She has bought herself a traditional marriage, sacrificed the power of an unusual arrangement to nab a husband. When Isabel Archer discovers her husband's illicit plotting with another woman, she turns away from him, reasserts her interests outside of the marriage even if she is unwilling to leave the marriage. Maggie discovers an illicit affair and decides she wants her husband. And nothing else. From a feminist perspective, this makes the novel deeply depressing, even if we do not consider Maggie's actions. She simply cannot imagine anything other than her husband that she could want. Maggie has learned how to manipulate the people closest to her, but she has not learned how to see beyond them. One leaves *The Portrait of a Lady* wondering what will become of Isabel Archer, what she will

accomplish, who she will meet, what she will read, how she will navigate her difficult situation, what she will be like when she reaches Mme Merle's age. The ending of *The Golden Bowl*, however, leads us only back to its middle, where Maggie's mind expanded to take in a world, and the world shrank to fit inside her mind. In the ending, as in the middle, the sexual consummation of a new arrangement of people remains outside the narrative, beyond both narrative proprieties and, perhaps, James's method of thought report to represent.

*The Golden Bowl's* middle has multiple structural functions that encompass both traditional plotting and modernist poetics. The middle may be read, as Wilson has argued, as the crisis in a fairly simple plot, in which an unusual arrangement of the four principle characters, developed over the novel's first half, leads to an extra-marital affair that destabilizes the situation until its final resolution in the novel's end. The middle is also the sexual consummation of that affair itself: an empty space for the unnarratable. However, the middle is also a transition between narrative methods: between a Book First that includes multiple focalizers to a Book Second that includes only one. The use of multiple focalizers in Book First poses particular epistemological questions, as we understand particular developing events through the point of view of Amerigo, Adam, Charlotte, and (briefly) Maggie. The emphasis, then, is on the incomplete knowledge and varying motivations of each, as well as on the reader's task of constructing a sequence of events from a narrative discourse that consists mostly of dialogue and the narration of subjective thought. In Book Second, by contrast, Maggie is the sole focalizer, and the implications of James's internal focalization become quite different. Rather than an extra-diegetic narrator

representing multiple points of view, the extra-diegetic narrator represents a single point of view, which in turn constructs the multiple points of view. The story, as I have argued, is encompassed by Maggie's mind, so much so that it is useful to think of Maggie's mind as being the primary setting of the story, and its development the narrative's plot. Yet, Maggie's mental development seems to consist entirely of her developing thoughts about the narrative's external plot. Thus, the shift in the narrative discourse in *The Golden Bowl*'s middle represents a sort of collapse of the internal and the external, multiple points of view and the single point of view, the mind and the world. Book First reminds us that the world is populated by multiple minds, each attempting to understand and manipulate that world through a partial point of view. Book Second reminds us that no single point of view is static, that the mind itself is a developing, dynamic thing, not simply a focalizer through which the world may be narrated, but a world unto itself. Book Second, however, is also an exploration of the limits of narrative's power to represent multiple points of view. For the reader of *The Golden Bowl* is, like Maggie, only a single mind; any attempt to cross the chasm that separates that mind from the world and the other minds that occupy it occurs ultimately within that single mind, as a second-order point of view. This is a middle that, by re-arranging the modernist representation of the mind, highlights both its powers and its limitations.

## Chapter 3: “Time Passes”: The Middle as Corridor in Virginia

### Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*

With Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927), we have arrived at a sort of middle for modernist narrative itself: high modernist stream of consciousness narrative. This vaguely defined category has itself largely defined modernist narrative, centering our history of modernist narrative in the 1920s. In Peter Nicholls’ study of different types of modernism, narrative becomes central to his discussion only with the high modernist novels and narrative poems of the 1920s. Woolf represents one branch of high modernist narrative, defined by stream of consciousness, “characterised by an interest in the contents of consciousness and the self’s labile existence in time” (Nicholls 254). More generally, Woolf’s novels, along with *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, and other defining works of 1920s high modernism, are “concerned primarily with the new rather than with the original, with the reconstituted rather than the immediate” (Nicholls 253). That is, high modernism stands in a sort of middle: new, yet reconstituting the past; in time, yet not fixed. It is perched, on high, at the middle of things. In the case of *To the Lighthouse*, that means that both novelist and reader approach the narrative from a position after World War I. The war itself takes place in the novel’s middle, “Time Passes.” In this middle, Woolf challenges and reshapes the very conventions of high modernist stream of consciousness narrative which the novel’s beginning and ending helps to codify. During composition, Woolf described “Time Passes” as “the most difficult abstract piece of writing—I have to give an empty house, no people’s characters, the passage



of time, all eyeless & featureless with nothing to cling to” (*Diary*, April 18, 1926). Familiar characters and familiar consciousnesses leave the scene, the labile consciousness replaced by an accelerating forward movement of time. Stream of consciousness, such as it is, is still new, yet no longer original, and not completely adequate for reconstituting a traumatic past. The self’s labile existence in time becomes, in this case, a complete novelistic narrative only when held together by a contrasting middle which holds its own, contrasting view of time. “Time Passes” is also the most prominent middle discussed in this study: it is its own section, in a sense coequal with beginning and ending. Its difference is a cleavage in both senses, separating and binding beginning and ending. At the middle of modernist narrative, then, the modernist middle is at its most visible: the peak that defines the landscape which surrounds it.

*Lord Jim* (1899-1900) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904) occupy a different sort of middle, the literary-historical transition from the Victorian era to the modern(ist), with assists from the powerful arbitrariness of the turn of the century and the brief Edwardian period, ending just before the First World War. While both of these early modernist novels feature middles marked by sharp structural changes in narrative and point of view, in both cases these changes are at least partly motivated by the core component of traditional narrative, as suggested by Aristotle and later systematized by narrative theorists such as Vladimir Propp and Claude Bremond: a human, or human-like, protagonist, takes an action, producing a change in the narrative situation. In the case of *Lord Jim*, Stein redirects the narrative with the intent of restoring the principles of Romanticism—an attempt to reverse the historical-

narrative force towards modernist moral and epistemological doubt. In the case of *The Golden Bowl*, Charlotte and Amerigo arguably make a similar attempt to turn their own narrative back in time. By consummating their affair, they not only revisit their own personal history, but frame their marriages in a European aristocratic norm of assumed marital infidelity that, though the novel's fairy-tale framing of "The Prince" and "The Princess," echoes back to Medieval ideas of courtly love. But that middle is even more dominated by Maggie's own mental action, which ultimately shapes the narrative, arguably through a more modern financial-capitalistic view of human relations. In both cases, human agents face the transition to modernism from within, actively shaping the narrative from its middle, though with limited control of its end.

In addition, *Lord Jim* and *The Golden Bowl* maintain the unity of the traditional narrative even through their disruptive middles by avoiding any highly marked changes in prose style or overly-explicit markers of narrative difference. In *Lord Jim*, the middle is produced primarily by the differences between what comes before and after, and secondarily by the re-centering power of its exegetical discourse. It occurs approximately at the center of the text, but it has no obvious markers—and, indeed, *Lord Jim*'s structure offers several possible alternative middles. *The Golden Bowl* maintains a formal sense of unity through its disruptive middle through, on the one hand, a stylistic unity and, on the other hand, through formal parallelism: Book First: The Prince is echoed by Book Second: The Princess, and the two Books are approximately the same length. Thus, neither middle explicitly calls attention to itself as a disruptive narrative force or as a disruption of traditional

narrative form. Though they disrupt narrative point of view, genre, and the direction of the plot, these middles are themselves hidden: Conrad's by the absence of formal markings, James's by the absence of the middle itself.

*To the Lighthouse*, on the other hand, identifies its middle through a clear three-part narrative structure, so that the reader is able to identify the middle even before she begins to read. Woolf described the novel's form as "Two blocks joined by a corridor," accompanied by a drawing resembling an outlined letter "H" with a single stroke below (*Holograph*, Appendix A 48). Woolf's phrase and diagram are highly suggestive of Todorov's description of the two types of narrative episodes, "those which describe a state (of equilibrium or of disequilibrium) and those which describe the passage from one state to the other" (Todorov 111). These are, respectively, the adjectival and the verbal. Given Woolf's choice of the word "block" to describe the stative beginning and ending, we might also associate the adjectival with the nominal phrase in a narrative predicate. If narrative, as in Woolf's diagram, consists of two dimensions (or, in Todorov's theory, two parts of speech) the beginning and ending primarily provide one of these two dimensions, while the middle provides the other. Woolf's underline emphasizes that these parts combine to create a narrative whole. Without "Time Passes," then, *To the Lighthouse* would not be a narrative—but instead two unconnected descriptive episodes. Put more modestly, "Time Passes" does the work of turning modernist adjectival episodes into a single novelistic narrative. "Time Passes" makes the narrative both unified and two-dimensional.

Even as “Time Passes” serves an important function in the novel’s overall narrative structure, it also represents a certain level of emancipation of the middle from beginning and ending: a middle that exists in some ways apart and by itself, a prominent and distinct textual object. “Time Passes” is clearly different in style and content from the surrounding text. If *Lord Jim* and *The Golden Bowl*’s middles shift the form or direction of the narratives that come before into the different forms or directions that come after comes after, it is “Time Passes” that is different both from what comes before and what comes after. This difference, along with its greater prominence as a separate section of the text, invites readers to examine “Time Passes” not only as a corridor joining beginning and ending, but as a substantial narrative episode—if not a complete narrative. The title, “Time Passes,” in itself meets Abbott’s simple definition of a narrative: “the telling of an event” (261).<sup>11</sup> By contrast to this complete clause, the titles of the opening and closing sections of the novel, “The Window” and “The Lighthouse,” consist of nominal phrases that refer to objects—like the vertical blocks of Woolf’s “H.” The titles in and of themselves do not suggest a narrative, and may be interpreted as subjects or objects of narrative actions—or of any other sort of discourse. “Time Passes,” on the other hand, suggests a narrative function for the novel’s middle, a change of state compatible with the idea that this middle constitutes a narrative function. However, more restrictive definitions of narrative require not only an the telling of an event, but an event involving human agents: “where there is no implied human interest (narrative events neither being

---

<sup>11</sup> Prince’s definition is similar to Abbott’s, if a bit more complex: “The representation (as product and process, object and act, structure and structuration) of one or more real or fictive events communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) narrators to one, two, or several (more or less overt) narratees” (58).

produced by agents nor experienced by anthropomorphic beings), there can be no narrative, for it is only in relation to a plan conceived by man that events gain meaning and can be organized into a structured temporal sequence” (Bremond 390). The use of an abstract subject in the title of “Time Passes” suggests a middle that exists outside of the traditional narrative realm of action taken by human agents. It does not simply shift the point of view among a largely existing cast of characters; instead, it vacates the scene and the novel itself of these characters. The result is a middle that not only disrupts the novel’s status as a traditionally unified narrative, but disrupts the basic building blocks of traditional narrative itself. Some critics have even interpreted “Time Passes” as poetic, rather than narrative, discourse. Nevertheless, its position in the middle of a novel means that it is inevitable if many, if not all, readers will interpret “Time Passes” as narrative. As Abbott argues, when we label a text a narrative, “[n]arrative tolerates non-narrative, because the latter can sit on top of it. Narrative operates as a platform” (Abbott 261). That is, it is incorrect to argue that “Time Passes” is not a narrative because we can identify part or all of its discourse as non-narrative. Instead, its departures from traditional narrative discourse can (perhaps even must) be read as challenges to or expansions of the traditional bounds of narrative.

This disruption of the human center of narrative at the novel’s middle is made starker by the novel’s historical and technical position at the center of modernism (rather than at the middle of a transition into the modernist period). In making Woolf and *To the Lighthouse* central to his seminal study of the “stream of consciousness” technique, Robert Humphrey not only makes Woolf central to perhaps the defining

technique of modernist narrative, but also makes the human mind central to Woolf's technique, even as that same technique mutes the importance of action: in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*, "the search for reality is not a matter of dramatic external action. [...] the search, thought Virginia Woolf, is a psychic activity, and it is the preoccupation (it surrounds us) of most human beings. The only thing is that most human beings are not aware of this psychic activity, so deep down is it in their consciousness" (Humphrey 13). If, as Humphrey argues, the goal of this stream-of-consciousness technique is specifically to reveal the search for reality within the human psyche, a middle that nearly eliminates human characters for large stretches and limits the reader's access to their psyches is at least equally disruptive to Woolf's modernist narrative form as it is to the traditional narrative featuring easily identified human agents engaging in clearly identifiable actions. Furthermore, this narrative innovation takes place largely during, though spatially separate from, World War I. Fussell argues that "the masters of the modern movement," including Woolf, left war to "lesser talents—always more traditional and technically prudent" (Fussell 314). Even more, he argues that the title of Woolf's posthumous novel, *Between the Acts*, invokes the trope of war as drama to suggest that novel's inter-war setting, while making no mention of *To the Lighthouse* (Fussell 230). *To the Lighthouse* doesn't go so far as to narrate the fighting of the war, but its very difference suggests that war, or its trauma, creates a different sort of wartime that affects even a spatially distant narrative, and one that extends beyond the temporal bounds of the war itself to its prelude and aftermath. Furthermore, here it is wartime that is between the novel's beginning and ending acts, which, is not dramas themselves, are at least more easily

imagined as traditional dramas than “Time Passes.” This wartime disruption of a seminal modernist technique is, rather than a sign of the end of modernism, or a desire to move beyond modernism, essential to modernism. For the modernist mode is the mode of the epistemological dominant, probing and questioning the means by which knowledge is attained, exploring multiple points of view, including literary technique. A stable literary technique is itself a sign of epistemological stability—a single point of view. That is, formal experimentation may be more essential to modernism than any particular formal technique. At modernism’s middle, Woolf maintains modernism by disrupting the very modernist techniques she had so recently developed, allowing Woolf to narrate war, or “history” writ large, from a new point of view.

Pushing against the highly disruptive, yet paradoxically unifying, nature of “Time Passes,” the apparent simplicity and unimportance to the plot announced by this title given to the middle section of *To the Lighthouse* disguises the crucial importance of the middle of this novel to its narrative form. Whereas the romantic narrative intervention of *Lord Jim*’s middle serves to create the possibility of narrative fulfillment; “Time Passes,” cuts off most possibilities of narrative fulfillment. It has often been noted that *To the Lighthouse* replaces traditional narratives—for example, the marriage plot—with non-traditional and more symbolic narratives. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis observes, “Time Passes” is critical to Woolf’s ability to move beyond the traditional endings available to women in traditional fiction: “By the midpoint of the novel, both of the traditional endings—marriage and death—have occurred, a sharp critical statement on Woolf’s part that clears the

ground of any rival solutions to Lily's plot. The third part of *To the Lighthouse* surpasses these classic resolutions, moving beyond the endings they propose, to brother-sister links, to male-female friendship, and, even more, to a vision that overwhelms all the binary systems on which the novel has been built." (DuPlessis 96). "Time Passes" destroys (often by fulfilling) any number of more traditional narrative possibilities. When Prue Ramsay is married, and then dies "in some illness connected with childbirth," both events noted in a reporterly manner in brackets, in the span of about a page. Meanwhile, Mrs. Ramsay's death comes early in "Time Passes," quickly quashing any expectations that she will take her son to the lighthouse. Indeed, from the moment "Time Passes" slips from a narrative of the night following "The Window" into a more rapid movement through time by ruminating at the opening of its third section, "But what after all is one night?" (127), Mrs. Ramsay's promise of a journey the next fine day has receded from a possibility of near-term fulfillment. "Time Passes," by taking the reader to the moment of fulfillment ten years later, implies that personal, impersonal, and world events have taken the possibility of the next fine day out of the temporal scale of what can broadly be termed the stream-of-consciousness tradition. The passage of time eliminates many conventional narrative possibilities, leaving the more symbolic narratives (the journey to the lighthouse, Lily Briscoe's attempt to paint a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay) as possibilities.<sup>12</sup> In this non-teleological narrative universe, a complete narrative is produced through connections that are produced between temporally disparate events:

---

12 Humphrey describes the form of *To the Lighthouse* and Woolf's other stream-of-consciousness narratives as "symbolic design" (102). The overall design is effected, however, not by stream of consciousness proper, but by its disruption in "Time Passes," as extreme internal focalization is mostly replaced by zero and external focalization.



a reconstitution across the middle, rather than a forward movement from beginning to end.

“Time Passes” represents one of Woolf’s solutions to the problem of making a coherent long-form narrative out of the stream of consciousness. In preparing to write what would become *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf offers a critique of “conventional” novels that echoes Henry James’ famous charge that the large, history-spanning narratives exemplified by *War and Peace* are loose, baggy monsters:

Say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea. Waste, deadness, come from the inclusion of things that don't belong to the moment; this appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional. Why admit any thing to literature that is not poetry—by which I mean saturated? Is that not my grudge against novel[ist]s—that they select nothing? (*Diary* Vol. 3 209-10)

Here, Woolf links a preference for poetry over prose, truth over convention, and the heightened moment over the passage of time. In this poetic moment, Woolf includes the internal (thought), the external (the voice of the sea), and the mediation between the internal and the external (sensation). The external, moreover, is also figural: rather than include a social and a natural world in the moment, Woolf gives the natural world a voice. In doing so, she is able to elide the social world that is the primary concern of realist novels. Furthermore, Woolf rejects temporal rhythms of conventional novels, what Genette calls “the connective tissue par excellence of novelistic narrative, whose fundamental rhythm is defined by the alternation of

summary and scene” (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 97). Woolf rejects these conventions not only on formalist terms (they select nothing) but also realist terms (it is false, unreal, merely conventional). Woolf, mounts, then, an attack on the traditional narrative subject as well as the very basis of narrative: the flow of time. This flow of time can be found not in the presence of a beginning and an end, but in the “getting on” from one to another. Instead of a connective tissue of alternating rhythm, Woolf uses the middle to create a different narrative rhythm. “Time Passes” thus returns the flow of time to modernist narrative, but in a way particularly suited to Woolf’s concern with individual “moments of being,” reconnecting these moments to the flow of time even as it disrupts and reconfigures the way that flow of time is represented and how it shapes our understanding of the narrative.

Woolf would later utilize other techniques for incorporating the flow of time into her novels which rely less on the prominent middle. *The Waves* would cope with the linked problems of middles and the passage of time by alternating frozen descriptions of the natural world at different stages in the sun’s passage across the sky with monologues of six characters at various stages of life. Similarly, Woolf’s final novel, *Between the Acts*, alternates scenes from a play depicting discrete stages of history with scenes involving the viewers and producers of the play. The repeated pattern of alternation creates a certain level of balance from segment to segment of the text, reducing the prominence of one particular middle. Nevertheless, the noontime sun and the death of the speakers’ friend, the charismatic young imperialist Percival, both mark the middle of *The Waves* and make it the point of crisis in the plot. *The Waves* uses the space between its sections to solve the problem of getting

from lunch to dinner (or, more properly, from sunrise to sunset and from birth to death) but the problem of the middle remains. The middle serves to give structure to the plot and to the novel's form, which, through the rise and fall of the sun and a shifting of its characters' lives from a focus on the future to a focus on the past (and, simultaneously, from life to death), achieves directionality as well as segmentation. *The Waves*, though it does not solve the problem of the artificiality of plot and the way that plot implicitly defines events in the flow of time as beginnings, middles, and endings, does, through its pattern of alternating segments, largely separate the problems of the passage of time from the problem of middles.<sup>13</sup>

*To the Lighthouse*, however, completed months before the above-quoted diary entry was written, directly links middles with the passage of time. "Time Passes" links two days, set ten years apart in the same summer house in Scotland. Here, the appalling narrative business of getting from one moment to another is tackled not with the Jamesian ellipses of *The Waves* or even, as Woolf suggests in *Orlando*, "by the simple statement that 'Time passed' (here the exact amount could be indicated in brackets) and nothing whatever happened" (69). In refusing to simply skip over the passage of time, Woolf engages with the conventions both of traditional narrative and with the modernist conventions she establishes in the beginning section, "The

---

13 For D.A. Miller, the ending is false. However, beginning, middle, and ending are linked concepts: if one is arbitrary, all are. That is, the middle is the middle of something. The middle always sits arbitrarily between arbitrary beginning and arbitrary ending. In praising the digressive middle as a distinct, truer concept than the arbitrary ending, Miller vacates the concept of the "middle" of any meaning. In *Reading for the Plot*, Miller offers a compelling study of digressive and non-teleological narrative. His use of the term "narrative middles" in this study is at best superfluous and at worst misleading. What he means to emphasize is a different sort of relation between middle, beginning, and ending. But the very term "middle" implies the finitude of narrative, and thus makes the middle as arbitrary as any ending.

Window,” and the ending section, “The Lighthouse.” While these sections are concerned primarily with the consciousnesses of a select group of well-educated bourgeois characters—the Ramsays, largely based on Woolf’s own family, and their guests and neighbors at their summer vacation home—“Time Passes” depicts the same space as it is evacuated of these consciousnesses. Woolf’s moment is replaced with time accelerated and re-interpreted, so that ten years pass over the course of about twenty pages. These ten years, however, are also figured in “Time Passes” as a single night, as the consciousnesses of the novel’s main characters pass into sleep in its early chapters and awake as “Time Passes” ends.

On any given page in “Time Passes,” it is often impossible to tell when in time the narrative is placed and how fast time is passing. Even the ontological status of some narrated events is slippery, as when the narrator insists of the housekeeper Mrs. McNab, “Visions of joy there must have been at the wash-tub, say with her children” (131). That is, as the narrative’s relationship with the passage of time becomes less glued to the moment, the epistemological relationship between consciousness, narrator, and diegetic reality dissolves. Nevertheless, the narrator maintains an interest in thought, sensation, and the voice of the sea. In the absence of the novel’s primary characters, however, the narrator turns to inanimate objects, the working-class people who maintain and repair the house, and, above all, a greater willingness on the narrator’s own part to interpret the world. The result is a narrative form radically different from the rest of the novel even as it strives to maintain Woolf’s narrative of the moment in the face of the passage of time. “Time Passes” challenges the conventions of Woolfian stream of consciousness and extends the

conventions of modernist narrative by examining what is left out of that narrative form. Nevertheless, in seeking out focalizers and attempting to distill the passage of time into metonymic or imagined moments, narrator also works to maintain the novel's dominant mode.

Meanwhile, the very act of getting from the dinner of "The Window" to the breakfast of "The Lighthouse" suggests a return to traditional narrative. As I have already suggested, however, in the context of the entire novel, this rapid resumption of "getting on" in the middle of the novel is an alternative to, rather than an affirmation of, the traditional flow of time in the novel as described by Genette: the regular alternation of summary and scene. Comparing *To the Lighthouse* to Forster's claim that the novelist cannot completely abolish time, even if the philosopher might, Ann Banfield argues that the very title of "Time Passes" "affirms the realist position" (475). However, the mere passage of time is not adequate to affirm the realist position, except in the broadest sense. That is, as a work of modernist fiction, *To the Lighthouse* generally affirms a stable ontology for its diegetic world, even as epistemological problems, such as our perception of the flow of time, shape the novel's poetics. Time exists, then, but we do not fully understand it, and the ways we might perceive it—and its effect on the rhythms of narrative—may vary greatly. There are further problems with Banfield's assertion that the title of "Time Passes" affirms the realist position. "Time Passes" vacates the human subject of the traditional narrative episode. We can go even further—the title "Time Passes" extracts everything but the flow of time from the traditional elements of narrative. As I shall discuss later in more detail, even this flow of time is given a non-traditional

presentation in “Time Passes.” In this title, not only is there no human or human-like subject, but there is also no suggestion of causally-linked events—or even specific events at all.

Nevertheless, what we may think of as traditional narrative events do occur in “Time Passes,” and with them some broader notion of large-scale personal and national history. However, these events are largely confined to the briefest summary. Passages contained in brackets inform the reader of the deaths of major characters and set the passage of time within the context of World War I. Susan Stanford Friedman echoes Woolf’s definition of the poetic in her contrasting definitions of lyric and narrative: “Narrative is understood to be a mode that foregrounds a *sequence* of events that move dynamically in space and time. Lyric is understood to be a mode that foregrounds a *simultaneity*, a cluster of feelings or ideas that project a gestalt in stasis. Where narrative centers on *story*, lyric focuses on *state of mind*, although clearly each mode contains elements of the other” (“Lyric” 164). In this sense, “Time Passes” serves as narrative against the surrounding lyric moment. For Friedman, then, in “Time Passes” “the power of time, death, of linear narrative horrifyingly reasserts itself” within the broader lyrical structure of the novel (“Lyric” 173). However, if traditional narrative consists of a sequence of causally-connected events with human subjects (if not agents), it is worth noting just how disconnected the bracketed events are—both from each other and from the bulk of “Time Passes.” With the exception of an early mention of Carmichael late at night, they all occur far away from the house (to whose environs the rest of the narrative is confined). And the causal connection is not between the particular events, but between each individual

event and the passage of time. By suggesting that the passage of time is the only link between events, “Time Passes” implies that narrative events are not causally linked to each other, and that their selection is arbitrary. “Time Passes” emphasizes the sequential, temporal aspect of narrative that is de-emphasized in “The Window” and “The Lighthouse,” and makes a space for large-scale traditional narrative events in *To the Lighthouse*. But it also atomizes these narrative events, making a parody of traditional narrative’s drive to connect events into a causal sequence. In containing most of the novel’s forward flow of time to a brief, disruptive middle, *To the Lighthouse* fundamentally undermines the claims of realist narrative. The sequence of events is no longer the whole of narrative: it is a middle framed by the heightened moments of consciousness that surround it. The sequence of events no longer has a beginning, middle, and end: instead, the sequence of events is defined as a middle in relation to the modernist narrative’s beginning, middle, and end. A parodic summary bereft of the human agency that is traditional narrative’s other defining element, the sequence of events is utterly transformed to serve its binding function in *To the Lighthouse*’s modernist form.

In constituting its narrative in the middle, *To the Lighthouse* reflects traditional forms and theories of narrative. As Meg Jensen notes, the novel’s tripartite structure echoes traditional Victorian three-volume novels (Jensen 119). It also echoes Claude Bremond’s concept of the elementary sequence, in which each action or narrative process contains three stages, or functions: first an action or event is expected; second, the action or event takes place; and third there is an “attained result” (Bremond 387). In Bremond’s theory, then, the middle is always the place

where things happen. Events are made narrative by being surrounded by expectation and result—which are the beginning and the end, respectively, of the elementary narrative sequence. But action or event itself—including both the passage of time and a change of state—is contained entirely in the middle. Similarly, “Time Passes” includes the actualization of events—both historical and personal—while “The Window” and “The Lighthouse” primarily look forward towards and backward at these events. The minimal narrative action contained in “The Window” and “The Lighthouse” set the highly eventful “Time Passes” into sharp relief. In this sense, “Time Passes” is both the most narrative section of the novel and a Bremondian middle for the overall narrative of the entire novel. By setting this middle off so starkly from the beginning and the end, Woolf reveals the essential importance of the middle to narrative and also reveals the non-eventful nature of the beginning and the end of Bremondian narrative.

Even as “Time Passes” reveals the middle as the location of traditional narrative events, it disrupts these events’ role in a causal chain as well as traditional novelistic rhythms. Not only are these events shorn of most of the vestiges of agentive action and narrative causality, but they are to a very small duration, even within the “Time Passes” section. Genette considers the problem of duration a tricky one, since “no one can measure the duration of a narrative” (that is, the *syuzhet*) in order to compare the duration of the story itself (the *fabula*). Nevertheless, relative judgments are easy to make, as twenty pages for ten years can be easily contrasted with 120 for ten hours. Genette’s taxonomy of duration effects can further help emphasize the cramped *syuzhet* into so much apparent *fabula* has been squeezed. *The*



*Golden Bowl* reduces key narrative events to zero, leaving what Genette calls an “ellipsis,” or “infinite speed” (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 93). “Time Passes” does not go quite so far, but occupies the more traditional category of summary. According to Genette, before the twentieth century, summary was “the most usual transition between two scenes, the ‘background’ against which scenes stand out, and thus the connective tissue par excellence of novelistic narrative, whose fundamental rhythm is defined by the alternation of summary and scene” (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 97). When we consider that Aristotle wrote about beginnings, middles, and ends in the context of dramatic productions that were quite literally nothing but scenes, we can begin to see the disruption “Time Passes” poses to the fundamental rhythm of the nineteenth-century novel. Ten years of events are compressed into a brief summary at the novel’s middle, the most seemingly crucial of those events confined within brackets—exiled from the narrative proper and the dominant narrative voice. In *To the Lighthouse*, events are not the scenic meat of the narrative, but the connective tissues that hold the scenes—even the scenes within “Time Passes”—to the bones of the novel’s form.

What may be considered the basic plot suggested by the novel’s title also reflects this three-part narrative movement. In the first section, “The Window,” half a day or so passes in a professor of philosophy’s summer house in Scotland. The book begins with Mrs. Ramsay, the professor’s wife, promising her favorite son, James, that, if the weather is good, they will go to the lighthouse the following day. Mr. Ramsay objects—the weather will not be good enough to go to the lighthouse. By the end of “The Window,” Mrs. Ramsay has conceded the point to Mr. Ramsay, but she

has promised James that they will go to the lighthouse “the next fine day” (115). In the second section, “Time Passes,” night falls, seasons pass, Mrs. Ramsay (among others) dies, the first world war begins and ends, and the house is prepared for the return of the Ramsays and their guests. In the third section, “The Lighthouse,” Mr. Ramsay and James at last make the journey to the lighthouse.

In this bare plot, the window is the beginning—both a beginning location and a frame through which the goal of the lighthouse is viewed; the lighthouse, both a location and a broadly symbolic goal, is the end. The movement from beginning to end can be viewed, quite simply, as a movement from the window to the lighthouse. This movement from window to lighthouse is paired at the textual level with the movement from “The Window” to “The Lighthouse.” But, while the most obvious middle for a narrative that describes a journey in space from window to lighthouse is the journey itself (the journey suggested by the novel’s title), this journey occurs entirely in “The Lighthouse.” Instead, the plan of the novel suggests that the spatial and symbolic journey from window to lighthouse has as its middle not a spatial act by human agents (movement through space), but the agentless passage of time.

Nevertheless, “Time Passes” is in some ways more lyrical than the rest of the novel, as is suggested by its figurative, rather than literal, importance in the overall plot of the journey to the lighthouse. What seems to be the central story of *To the Lighthouse*, as announced by its title and by the titles of its sections, stretches nearly to the breaking point Bremond’s definition of a story by removing most human agency. “Time Passes” mostly drops the free indirect discourse which typifies the narration of the rest of the novel as it flits from mind to mind. Instead, it adopts the

position of a disembodied narrator confined to the house and its environs: zero focalization, but with a confined point of view. This narrator, nevertheless, seems to be in search of a human-like subject, if not a focalizer. It follows “certain airs,” breezes that flit about the house, as well as shadows and light. It reports marriages and deaths parenthetically. When the housekeeper Mrs. McNab finally appears to restore the house, she is viewed externally. With the bourgeois agents of the other two parts absent, the narrator observes non-human agents, then the housekeeper, with zero focalization arguably moving to external focalization and then, briefly, internal. Mitchell Leaska’s stylistic analysis of *To the Lighthouse* identifies 76% of the discourse of “Time Passes” with the omniscient (nonfocalized) narrator, as opposed to 17% in “The Window” and 10% in “The Lighthouse” (Leaska, *Virginia* 208). Bette London associates this narratorial voice that dominates “Time Passes” with a feminist lyrical freedom that extends beyond the limits of individual embodied consciousnesses: “the voice of this interlude embodies a pulsating rhythmic life. It offers a fluid, all-encompassing narrative matrix to oppose the characters’ bounded texts. It is a voice marked by uncensored digressions and lyrical effusiveness. Collective in number and colloquial in tone, the voice dispenses with the masculine monologic mode” (146). In London’s reading, “Time Passes” creates a sort of collective lyricism, as it asks questions on behalf of “any sleeper” (*TTL* 129) and questions and interprets the meaning of the empty house. By concentrating on different aspects of “Time Passes,” London is able to come to the opposite conclusion as Friedman: “Time Passes” is the lyric section of the novel.

For Lucio Ruotolo, however, this narratorial voice's abandonment of Flaubertian detachment for lyrical effusiveness carries with it not an all-encompassing inquisitiveness, but a tyrannical attempt to end the collective questioning of readers: "The threat of a world deprived of Mrs. Ramsay's governing influence moves Woolf's narrator to deploy language as a means of softening the shock of non-being" (132). The absence of human order is figured in particularly human terms as, for example, when "divine goodness, twitching the cord, draws the curtain" (*TTL* 128). Ruotolo accuses the narrator of affecting a "baroque and sentimental idiom," including a "personification of the seasons" (133). Meanwhile, the section as a whole is dominated by a clichéd romanticism: "Like an early Keats poem or the succulence of Mrs. Ramsay's Boeuf en Daube, such offerings seem designed to tease us out of thought. Ironically, a no-less-romantic allusion serves to interrupt the narrator's monologue" (Ruotolo 134). This allusion is to "Mrs. McNab, tearing the veil of silence," who is figured as "a ship at sea" (*TTL* 130). The stylistic lyricism and zero focalized narration of "Time Passes," then, carries with it the potential for questioning and collective voice, but it also carries with it the worst possibilities associated with lyricism: pretty language re-creating and enforcing stale, collective figurations that hide, rather than reveal, the true nature of the world. The stylistic lyricism of "Time Passes" reflects DuPlessis' sentiment that "*To the Lighthouse* [...] both idealizes and criticizes romance" (48). It is Woolf's narrator herself, then, who opens and then swiftly shuts the curtain.

This same reliance on images (received or otherwise) moves the lyricism of "Time Passes" beyond the stylistic level, undermining the narrative's ability to tell a

series of events within time. That is, regardless of the merits of the narrator and its sentiments, and the relative importance of temporal flow and narrative voice to the concept of lyricism, “Time Passes” is notable for the presence of a great deal of non-narrative discourse. Thus, Ralph Freedman calls the entire section an “extended prose poem” (234). Rather than a narrative in which events occur within the linear order of time, “Time Passes” turns the passage of time itself into a lyrical moment:

“Anticipating *The Waves*, it depicts the moment through images, transforming it finally into a larger image of time itself. Freed from dependence on human beings, it renders, in a more abstract form, the interrelation between the inner and outer worlds of protagonists on the one hand and a symbolic world on the other” (Freedman, Ralph 233). In this sense, “Time Passes” does not offer a traditional narrative counterpoint to modernist lyrical narrative, but radically encases some elements of traditional narrative—the passage of time, the presence of events—within a radical lyricism. That is, within “Time Passes,” non-narrative discourse is given a prominent, even dominant, position, while the restoration of some elements of traditional narrative are compensated by the removal of others. The absence in many places of bourgeois or even human protagonists removes “Time Passes” even further from the realm of traditional or even modernist narrative. Bremond defines narrative as follows: “All narrative consists of a discourse which integrates a sequence of events of human interest into the unity of a single plot” (390). In *To the Lighthouse*, the middle provides the sequence of events, while the beginning and the end provide the human interest. While beginning, middle, and end all contain some of each element of Bremondian narrative, they also each minimize a key element. Further, only

beginning, middle, and end together form the unity of a single plot. "Time Passes" is both narrative and poetic because it contains parts of a traditional narrative, so that, combined with the parts contained in the beginning and end, a full narrative is formed not only in sequence but in terms of the elements that would be present throughout a traditional narrative.

The close reading of "Time Passes" that follows will flesh out the ways the middle of *To the Lighthouse* offers a different set of challenges to traditional narrative than the rest of the novel. "Time Passes" challenges *To the Lighthouse*'s own modernist conventions while using aspects of those conventions to challenge realist conventions. The passage of time returns the novel to the realm of eventful narrative, but the acceleration and jumbling of the passage of time threatens to remove the novel from the realm of narrative entirely by, to paraphrase Woolf, giving us nothing to cling to. Meanwhile, as the narrator grasps for lower-class and nonhuman focalizers through which to narrate the world, it seems to extend itself beyond the limited point of view of the bourgeois novel, whether modernist or realist. Simultaneously, though, the narrator reveals its limitations, as it anthropomorphizes the natural world and maintains a bourgeois view of its working-class characters.<sup>14</sup> "Time Passes" asks what is left out by traditional and modernist narrative forms, but its ability to get beyond these forms and to include what has been left out is limited.

---

14 As Tratner argues, Woolf's presentation of Mrs. McNab and other working-class women is mixed: "they are not seen as replacing 'us,'" but there is "a genuine sense of having gained something from them, of having followed their lead in moving toward something new" (Tratner 65). We can see the narrator enact this ambivalence with the shift from external focalization to a brief internal focalization: a narrator that is exploring these characters rather than being guided by their thoughts.

Just as “Time Passes” is both lyric and narrative, a challenge to and a confirmation of the limits of literary conventions, it is both separate from the rest of *To the Lighthouse* and the binding force that creates the novel as a single narrative whole. I have already argued that the use of summary in “Time Passes” marks that section of the narrative as a sort of connecting tissue. Other critics have emphasized the between-ness of this connecting tissue, its function of filling the gap between dramatic scenes. Louis Kronenberger, in a 1927 *New York Times* review of *To the Lighthouse*, calls “Time Passes” an “interlude” (Majumdar 197). More recent critics have picked up the term (Abel 52; Briggs 131; Freedman 234; Leaska, *Virginia* 63). The *OED*’s first definition of “interlude” reflects the word’s Latin etymology, “between play”: a drama “usually of a light or humorous character” given between the acts of a more serious morality or religious play. The second definition is more general: “the pause between the acts, or the means (dramatic or musical) employed to fill this up.” Both of these definitions suggest a middle whose role is to fill the temporal space between parts of a larger whole through contrast and relaxation. The *Grove Dictionary of Music*, however, suggests that the interlude serves as a link as well as a break and a contrast: “In instrumental music an interlude is usually a short connecting episode between movements rather than a movement in itself,” while “In a theatrical performance an interlude consists of an instrumental item between acts [...] or, on a more elaborate scale, an entertainment [...]. Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* and Berg’s *Wozzeck*, for example, include important interludes that are dramatically related, indeed essential, to the whole design” (*Grove Music Online*). In both instrumental and dramatic music, then, the interlude is both separate from and

integral to the musical and dramatic whole. It both contrasts and connects—not only or necessarily by providing a lighter form of entertainment, but by differing in form.

The interlude is, however, not a complete unit unto itself: while a single instrumental movement might be played separately from the larger piece of music of which it is a part and completes, in a sense, its own musical story, the interlude assists in the completion of the larger story. Julia Briggs emphasizes the prominence of the interlude in music to connect “Time Passes,” as well as its very narrative engagement with changes both personal and public wrought by the passage of the years, and especially by World War I, to the most abstract of art forms: “In ‘Time Passes’, the concept of cultural break is reworked as a quasi-musical, or even cinematic interlude” (Briggs 131). It is precisely this aspect of “Time Passes” that I wish to emphasize: its power to combine the abstract with the concrete, the timeless with the historical, the narrative with the poetic, the integral with the separate. “Time Passes” is both the binding force that holds *To the Lighthouse* together as a single narrative and a break from its personal narrative of momentary saturation. It both confirms and rejects modernist and traditional narrative alike, opening up a new space for the middle while at the same time deepening the middle’s dependence on the beginning and the end. It is an interlude: the brief play that by its difference of form and content both separates and connects.

“Time Passes” consists of ten sections, covering a period of ten years, from the fall of darkness on the day of “The Window” to the moment Lily Briscoe wakes up the morning after a September evening return to the Ramsays’ Scottish summer home. The first section is narratively continuous with “The Window,” as it follows an



evening conversation between William Bankes, Andrew and Prue Ramsay, and Lily Briscoe. All the lights except that of the poet Augustus Carmichael are turned off. The mode of the novel has not obviously changed: the section is dominated by dialogue between already-familiar characters, and the lyrical mode<sup>15</sup> as well as the rapid passage of time which dominates much of “Time Passes” is absent. This continuity in both subject and mode of narration binds “Time Passes” to “The Window.” Although “Time Passes” later establishes its radical narrative differences from the rest of the novel, in the beginning its difference lies purely in the natural conditions of the narrated world: nightfall. This suggests that, rather than night serving as a metaphor for the passage of time, war, and the absence of the conscious bourgeois human mind, instead the meditations and subjects of “Time Passes,” including the passage of time itself, are suggested—if not determined—by the narrative problems of narrating the night. Daylight, by contrast, brings with it conscious thought and the possibility of scenic narration in a stream-of-consciousness mode. It is the *absence* of light and consciousness that enables the narration of historic and major life events, which proceed, unlit, in summary. The interlude suggested by “Time Passes,” then, is not the purely formal interlude of a contrasting piece of music between two fully-developed movements. Instead, its formal elements

---

15 Ralph Freedman describes the lyrical nature of “Time Passes” as follows: “Anticipating *The Waves*, it depicts the moment through images, transforming it finally into a larger image of time itself. Freed from dependence on human beings, it renders, in a more abstract form, the interrelation between the inner and outer worlds of protagonists on the one hand and a symbolic world on the other” (234). Susan Stanford Friedman, by contrast, does not consider “Time Passes” to be lyrical, though she considers *To the Lighthouse* to be lyric in its overall structure (173). She defines narrative and lyric as follows: “Narrative is understood to be a mode that foregrounds a *sequence* of events that move dynamically in space and time. Lyric is understood to be a mode that foregrounds a *simultaneity*, a cluster of feelings or ideas that project a gestalt in stasis” (164).

spring from the narrative problem of representation of the night, when the tools of vision and consciousness no longer provide access to the scene. While the challenges “Time Passes” takes upon itself and, in turn, creates for the reader, are both formal and representational in nature, it announces the object to be represented as the foundational principle of its existence. In this sense, “Time Passes” remains true to the modernist epistemological dominant: the problem is how a narrator gains access to a darkened (though ontologically stable) world, and how knowledge of that world may be transferred to the reader.

This act of representation becomes difficult in the second section, when all of the story’s characters are asleep. Although there is not yet a rapid acceleration in the passage of time, the narrative mode established in “The Window” is already greatly strained. A narrative which has concerned itself primarily with representing conscious minds finds difficulty to maintain the narrative mode itself. Instead, the second section is a meditation on the darkness: “Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers” (125-26). Although the narrator seems to be narrating specific events, the narrator initially must resort to the Biblical metaphor of the flood to provide a narrative framework—and she does so with little certainty. Indeed, the events that are narrated here are quite vague, without a clear temporal ordering or even a sense of what this “profusion of darkness” might be as an agent. In the absence of human agents, the narrator takes an interest in inanimate objects. The very desire to narrate the darkness

as an agent—rather than to narrate, with greater accuracy, the absence of light, indicates the narrator’s continued desire to maintain the comprehensible form of traditional narrative: absence of light is understood as presence of water both because it provides an agent, and thus easier narratability, and also because it makes the night—an iterative natural process—understandable as a singular, meaningful event with particular resonance.

Here, the “certain airs,” considered by some to be focalizers<sup>16</sup> for much of “Time Passes,” are introduced. They are introduced, however, in this same speculative mode:

“Only through the rusty hinges and swollen sea-moistened woodwork certain airs, detached from the body of the wind (the house was ramshackle after all) crept round corners and ventured indoors. Almost one might imagine them, as they entered the drawing-room questioning and wondering, toying with the flap of hanging wall-paper, asking, would it hang much longer, when would it fall?” (126)

In contrast to the narrator’s focalization on Mrs. Ramsay and other human characters in “The Window,” then, the airs as conscious subjects are explicitly fictional. This is not a narrator who enters into the minds of inanimate objects. Instead, it is a narrator

---

16 See for example David Sherman (169) and Madeline Moore, who identifies the “certain airs” as one of four points of view in “Time Passes,” along with the sleeper(s) or mystic, Mrs. McNab, and the bracketed voice (76). Moore therefore minimizes the importance or even possibility of an independent point of view for the narrator, while Leaska emphasizes the dominance of an omniscient narrator (Leaska 42). My own view is that, while there are few passages that can clearly be ascribed only to an omniscient narrator (many if not all of the musings can be ascribed to the sleeper/mystic), there are also few which can be ascribed clearly to a focalizer, as the free indirect style is rarely if ever clearly tied to a particular scene. Furthermore, it is perhaps simplest to view the sleeper as well as the airs as false focalizers—conceits drawn up by the narrator, whose voice therefore dominates almost the entire section.

who creates a mind for inanimate objects. It is through the very will to narrate in human terms the inanimate that “Time Passes” substitutes the lyric mode for the narrative mode. Instead of an attempt to narrate the night objectively, the narrator insists on a subjective mode of narration. In the absence of human characters in the story to serve as subjects for an internally focalized stream of , the narrator provides subjective ideas and impressions of her own, though she still attempts to efface herself with impersonal pronouns. Section two is ultimately the narrator’s impressions of the night—but, reluctant to openly state her impressions, the narrator devises the narrative framework of the certain airs. But this framework ultimately reveals the lyric mode behind the apparent narrative: the narrative of the airs exists primarily not as a series of objective events in the story-world (even the idea of such airs as objects is generated by the narrator’s will to narrate) but instead as a figurative construct created by a subjective observer (the narrator) to understand a basically non-narrative occurrence. In showing a narrator so determined to create subjects and events to narrate, Woolf reveals the arbitrariness of all narrative, as the narrator portions up the nightfall into a set of discrete objects and events which often have no clear existence outside of the narrator’s ability to constitute them. Without human subjects to provide thoughts and interpretations of the world, the narrator reveals her own subjectivity and, in doing so, begins to collapse narrative itself as agents and events occurring through time give way to meditation, figuration, and speculation on the vaguely temporal object of nightfall.

To counter the narrator’s increasingly subjective and lyrical mode, the second section of “Time Passes” also introduces a more rigorously objective form of

narration. At the end of the section, the novel uses brackets for the first time: “[Here Mr. Carmichael, who was reading Virgil, blew out his candle. It was midnight.]” (126). The brackets, which for the rest of “Time Passes” are used to briefly narrate events taking place outside the vicinity of the house, in this first instance indicate a separation of the primary narrator from the characters that dominate the rest of the novel. Though Carmichael is still present in the house, he is in some sense outside the range of the narrative: his actions are a secondary punctuation against the actions of the certain airs and the house itself which immediately precede the brackets: “At length, desisting, all ceased together, gathered together, all sighed together; all together gave off an aimless gust of lamentation to which some door in the kitchen replied; swung wide; admitted nothing; and slammed to” (127). Rather than a human consciousness directing the narrative, here a human consciousness seems to be directed by inhuman, though anthropomorphized, forces. Time, however, is still clear, coordinated, and, if flowing a little faster than in “The Window,” still on a familiar narrative scale. What’s more, the brackets provide the reader with a clear temporal location. They provide a contrast, therefore, both to the primary narrative subject of “Time Passes” and to its primary narrative mode. “The Window” and “The Lighthouse” generally provide a balance between subjective and objective narration through the use of focalizers. In “Time Passes,” we have a primary narrator who, rather than filtering subjective judgments through one of the novel’s characters, is increasingly willing to engage directly in subjective judgment and essayistic reflection—that is, in non-narrative discourse. Meanwhile, “Time Passes” also contains a secondary narrator who seems to be purely objective, rendering neither its

own thoughts nor that of any character. In its narrative modes, then, “Time Passes” provides multiple contrasting alternatives to the mode established in “The Window” and resumed in “The Lighthouse.” In doing so, it lays bare the strengths and limitations of certain modernist techniques, even as it establishes itself as an experiment in modernist technique in its own right.

In the second section, the narrative moves away from familiar human consciousnesses, but it maintains its grounding in the arbitrarily-chosen day of “The Window.” The third section, however, eliminates not only the grounding in a particular temporal location, but the idea that time can be reliably measured: “But what after all is one night? A short space, especially when the darkness dims so soon, and so soon a bird sings, a cock crows, or a faint green quickens, like a turning leaf, in the hollow of the wave. Night, however, succeeds to night. The winter holds a pack of them in store and deals them equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers” (127). If the second section of “Time Passes” disrupts the narrative mode and focalization technique that the novel has worked to familiarize its readers to throughout “The Window,” the third section disrupts the novel’s established chronotope. Mikhail Bakhtin defines the chronotope as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. [...] In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history” (Bakhtin 84). More than a setting in time and space, the chronotope is defined by the rules of the world the novel projects and in turn defines

its genre (Bakhtin 85). “Time Passes” holds the spatial axis of *To the Lighthouse*’s staunchly realist chronotope in place, but unmoors the temporal axis completely. Rather than define a new flow of time and a new set of plot and narrative genre rules to match, the third section of “Time Passes” suggests that any set of narrative rules set up to fabricate the flow of time is inherently arbitrary: the medium of language neatly conflates the darkness of a day (night) with the darkness of a year (winter). “Time Passes” suggests that language makes the single, thought-out Bakhtinian chronotope an unstable proposition at best. Arguably, this is a new sort of chronotope, but this goes beyond Bakhtin’s definition of a unified whole—a fragmented, multiple chronotope, if any at all. If, as Genette writes, no one can measure the duration of narrative, the duration of the narrated story is as easily lost, unless the narration devotes itself entirely to setting up temporal markers. Add in the metaphorical slipperiness of language, and the chronotope becomes, rather than an anchor, an intractable epistemological problem.

Furthermore, the narrative quickly conflates a singular night with the plural nights, undermining not only the ability of the narrative to distinguish discrete units of time, but also the precision with which “The Window” attends to each individual moment. There are no unique moments, this section suggests, and, despite the sense suggested by the title of “Time Passes” that Part 2 of *To the Lighthouse* will track the flow of time between narrative episodes, time in this section does not flow. Instead of day giving way to night, as in the first section of “Time Passes,” night gives way to night: time does not flow, but it skips, associatively. Time is not literal, but metonymic and metaphoric, comprehensible only by the limited capacities of

language, and thus subject to the commonplace poetical associations of language. “Time Passes” thus refuses to establish for itself a stable temporal axis for its chronotope. It is questionable whether an unstable temporal axis can produce a chronotope, and thus whether it can produce narrative. It is not only because of prose style, then, that critics call “Time Passes” “lyrical” (Leaska, *Virginia* 121; Moore 78; Naremore 112). Much of “Time Passes” shares with lyric poetry an atemporality that undermines or even eliminates the possibility of narrative. This third section of “Time Passes,” furthermore, takes on a form reminiscent of a sonnet in order to reduce this unstable, poetical temporality: three paragraphs of moderate length develop the premise of the flowing nights, followed by a bracketed sentence in which the reader learns of Mrs. Ramsay’s death. This pivotal moment occurs precisely when the narrative has been unmoored from time, the reader left as disoriented as Mr. Ramsay: “[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]” (128). The specific moment narrated in the brackets contrasts sharply with the unspecified nights with which the section has been primarily concerned. However, Mr. Ramsay’s confusion echoes the confusion of the unspecified “sleeper”: “The hand dwindles in his hand; the voice bellows in his ear. Almost it would appear that it is useless in such confusion to ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore, which tempt the sleeper from his bed to seek an answer” (128). Mr. Ramsay seems to be specified as the sleeper, and his confusion at the loss of his wife seems to echo the confusion of all who sleep, but the brackets maintain the separation between specific event and lyric. However, unlike



Mr. Carmichael's midnight candle-blowing, neither Mr. Ramsay's confused moment nor Mrs. Ramsay's death can be specifically placed in time. The indeterminability of time in "Time Passes" overwhelms its remaining traditional elements of narrative, leaving them cast as islands in a sea of unstable time.

The fourth section continues to follow the "certain airs" through stillness and storm and into the middle of the night, where the housekeeper Mrs. McNab is introduced: "Then again peace descended; and the shadow wavered; light bent to its own image in adoration on the bedroom wall; and Mrs. McNab, tearing the veil of silence with hands that had stood in the wash-tub, grinding it with boots that had crunched the shingle, came as directed to open all windows, and dust the bedrooms" (130). When a human presence enters the stage (the stable house-and-environs topos of the unstable chronotope), narrative immediately attaches itself to that human presence: it bends to its own (human) image as the light on the bedroom wall. "Time Passes" thus attempts and deliberately quashes the idea of a nonhuman narrative (a project which Woolf would attempt on very different terms in *Flush*). The title of this middle part promises intransitive action (passing) by a nonhuman agent (time), but it cannot represent this action directly. Instead, it grasps at light and movement—of air, of doors—and ascribes to nonhuman objects agency and human-like narrative moments. When a human enters the stage, she immediately becomes the focus of the narrative. The narrator of "Time Passes," then, operates as something of a narrative detector, with narrative defined roughly in Bremond's terms: change from one state to another through time by a human agent. To the extent that "Time Passes" attempts to understand or fill in the nonhuman elements left out by "The Window," "The

Lighthouse,” and narrations of the passage of time as specifically human history, it runs into the same problem faced by Shelley in “Mont Blanc”: narrative, just like poetry, can comprehend the nonhuman only with reference to the human.

Even Mrs. McNab’s human presence, however, leaves the narrator’s poetic voice and its attendant narrative vagueness in a dominant role. In the fifth section, Mrs. McNab is the central figure though, as Anna Snaith and Pamela Caughie as well as Tratner have noted, the narrator remains at a distance from her (Caughie, “Wo(o)lfish” 75; Snaith 77). Mrs. McNab is here a symbol for her class and for the nonhuman other which “Time Passes” and its narrator have been unable to comprehend. Makiko Minow-Pinkney argues that Mrs. McNab refigures Mrs. Ramsay as Culture to her Nature (Minow-Pinkney 101). Although in section six McNab is figured as a tropical fish, to Mrs. Ramsay’s drowning sailor, here Mrs. McNab’s nonhumanity is not part of a simple Nature/Culture opposition. She is compared explicitly to “a ship at sea,” “leering,” “swinging sideways,” “creaking and groaning” (130-31). Mrs. McNab stands between humanity and nature: a humanly-produced object taking the damage of the years upon herself. Margaret Tudeau-Clayton argues that Mrs. McNab represents “redemptive labor,” but she is also “associated with the natural forces of degeneration and destruction that she works against” (Tudeau-Clayton 305). This association, however, is perhaps a bit weak: neither tropical fish nor creaking ships are forces of degeneration or destruction. Instead, the ship and the fish alike navigate the storm. Mrs. McNab’s redemptive work takes place in the larger context of great natural forces; thus her place in “Time Passes.” She bends, but does not break, as a ship takes on the motions of the sea,

particularly in a storm. Her voice, meanwhile, “was like the voice of witlessness, humour, persistency itself, trodden down but springing up again” (130). Mrs. McNab, rather than an individual agent, to the narrator represents survivalism: she represents humanity (or elements, tasks, and abilities associated with the working class), but she too bound up in her work to produce the sort of sophisticated consciousness that might arrest the narrator’s full sympathy merge their voices.

In its early sections, then, “Time Passes” keeps a balance between the human and the nonhuman: gusts of wind are treated as human agents, while human agents are treated with a sort of mystified distance. This serves, in part, to maintain the novel’s poetic stance and unfixed temporality: Mrs. McNab has a symbolic role to play in mediating between humanity and nature, but both her actions and her thoughts are unfixed and nebulous. This blending of the human and the nonhuman not only contributes to a destabilizing of the narrative events associated with consciousness, but it also, as Hermione Lee notes, destabilizes character itself: “Through death and absence, character is merged with nature, and becomes the stuff of folklore and legend in the myth-creating minds of Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast” (Lee 130). The class distance noted by Snaith and Caughie, which marks the narrator as similar to the Ramsays and others who populate the ends of *To the Lighthouse*, and thus gives even this slippery narrator a sort of continuity with the narrator of those more conventional sections, also creates the radical difference in the middle sections of “Time Passes.”

That is, the same de-humanization of Mrs. McNab that allows us to mark the narrator’s conventional bourgeois position also works to maintain the temporal instability of “Time Passes.” Mrs. McNab is necessary for the narrative at this point

in so far as her presence helps the narrative maintain momentum and contact with the human world—but that same humanity which the narrative needs also threatens the nebulous passage of time. “Time Passes” needs to maintain its difference from the parts that precede and follow it, both because this is what marks it as a middle, and because this is what allows it to serve its function. In order to link two segments of modernist narrative, “Time Passes” maintains its difference both from the conventions of modernism established in “The Window” and from the conventions of traditional narrative—but it can only stray so far. Its ability both to link, and to investigate what is left out by both traditional and modernist narrative modes, is dependent both on its distance from those modes and on its ability to maintain a connection to those modes. Thus, it must investigate the nonhuman while maintaining an anchor in the human, just as it destabilizes the temporal element of the chronotope while maintaining the spatial element.

Section six, the second-longest of the sections, and positioned approximately in the middle of “Time Passes” both in terms of the number of sections and in terms of volume of text, contains the heart of the war. Bracketed sections, at their most plentiful here, announce the marriage and subsequent death in childbirth of Prue Ramsay, as well as the death in war of Andrew Ramsay. This section seems to fit Friedman’s reading of a “Time Passes” in which “the power of time, of death, of linear narrative horrifyingly reasserts itself” (Friedman, “Lyric” 173). However, even as certain elements of traditional narrative reassert themselves—and it should be noted that these sorts of events are among the elements of narrative largely suppressed in “The Window” and “The Lighthouse”—this middle of *To the*

*Lighthouse*'s middle continues to scramble temporality through the layering of multiple scales of the passage of time (day, season, historical and personal event) as well as through the use of discourse that is lyrical both in its atemporality and in its use of rhetorical and metaphorical language.

The section is framed primarily by the passage of seasons, which does not have a clear relationship to the passage of years or the bracketed events that constitute the continuity of the section with the narrated world of "The Window" and "The Lighthouse." Section three has introduced the winter, which seems to share metaphoric space with the night. Section six, however, begins with the spring: "The spring without a leaf to toss, bare and bright like a virgin fierce in her chastity, scornful in her purity, was laid out on fields wide-eyed and watchful and entirely careless of what was done or thought by the beholders. [Prue Ramsay, leaning on her father's arm, was given in marriage. What, people said, could have been more fitting? And, they added, how beautiful she looked!]" (131). Spring here appears to be both a particular spring in which Prue has been married, but also a metaphorical spring: the renewal of nature made consonant with the renewal of the traditional family and its attendant narrative. Spring is also, notably, anthropomorphized roughly in the manner of a Renaissance allegory. This very narrative act of anthropomorphization—which makes spring comprehensible in the conventional language of narrative—is used to emphasize the season's distance from human minds. This is explicitly not the figuration of any particular person or group of persons—but a figuration unaware of human consciousness. Nevertheless, nature's very ignorance of human thought is re-humanized by the narrator—not only in the sense that this ignorance is figured in an

anthropomorphizing narrative—but in the sense that it becomes *ex post facto* a metaphor for Prue Ramsay on her wedding day, laid out for human viewers (and later by her husband) in a ritual presentation of her body. Spring is simultaneously virginal and sexual—and this is mirrored in marriage’s simultaneous celebration of prior virginity and future fertility. However, the seasonal narrative provides a further clue to the mixing of the virginal and the fertile in the figure of spring: Prue seems to be married in the spring and dies in childbirth in “that summer” (132). This aspect or section of the narrative has the chronotope of a masque or allegorical narrative, but this chronotope is at most suggested rather than fully established. That is, the narrator engages various generic or discursive modes, but these are more rhetorical allusions than fully establishes chronotopes. This chronotopic sketch is echoed in a sketch-like accounting of narrative events themselves. The seasonal narrative and its relationship to the bracketed narrative is vague enough that Prue’s pregnancy at the time of her marriage is more suggested than defined. However, Woolf is able to use the multiple levels of narrative, as well as the lyrical mode of its primary narrator, to at least suggest the violation of—and the violation inherent in—the traditional, optimistic marriage plot.

“Time Passes” does not stay long in the spring—in the very next paragraph (and sentence), “summer neared, as the evenings lengthened” (131). The movement from spring to summer is associated not with light and day, but with lengthening evening: paradoxically, the decreasing nighttime seems to increase, if not the night itself, at least the anticipation of the night. “Time Passes,” even as it explores seasons and scenes of daytime, is at pains to remind the reader that this is essentially a story

of the night. Seasonal narrative, even as it seems to contradict the narrative of a single night, attempts to conform itself to the night's logic and to the basic metaphors of fear and destruction which night commands. Initially, however, the late spring is still a time of optimism, cementing collectively the consonance between nature and humanity suggested by the juxtaposition of the spring with Prue's marriage. The mystic or visionary introduced in section five, asking existential questions on the beach, gives way to a mass of "the wakeful, the hopeful, walking the beach, stirring the pool" (132). For these anonymous visionaries, the "mirrors" of nature seem to provide "the strange intimation [...] that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules" (132). Although Prue's death and the end of spring seem to break the confluence of nature with optimistic human narrative, they do not (initially at least) break the connection between seasonal and human narrative. If anything, this connection strengthens, as spring "seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind" (132). Once again, spring anticipates bracketed events: the next sentence contains the first sorrowful individual event of *To the Lighthouse*: "[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said, everything, they said, had promised so well.]" (132). Not only does spring's knowledge of sorrow foreshadow Prue's death, but Prue's death is explicitly related to attempted heterosexual reproduction. The disruption of the relationship between the narrative of the seasons and the narrative of human events is initially one of defied expectations, rather than a complete break between the levels of narration.

In the initial description of summer, this confluence continues: summer is described as tumultuous and destructive, mirroring both Prue's death and the unnarrated beginning of World War I. Summer mirrors winter as "the wind sent its spies about the house again" (132). The narrator continues to emphasize the night, as the lighthouse shines inside the otherwise-dark summer home of the Ramsays. This light is initially figured as a "loving caress," but even so it proves destructive (133). This destruction is not narrated, as earlier, in terms of the overall wear and tear on the house, but in terms of the loosening of a shawl and the falling of a rock from a mountain, both introduced in section four's description of the middle of the night. This repetition of particular metonyms for decay, destruction, and chaos further undermines their status as actual narrated events. In section four, "one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro" (130). Under the lighthouse's caress in section six, "another fold of the shawl loosened" (133). Then, "later in the summer ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt, which, with their repeated shocks still further loosened the shawl and cracked the tea-cups" (133). While it is possible that three discrete incidents of shawl-loosening are being narrated here, the shawl's symbolic aspect takes on increasing prominence. The shawl retains its improbable capacity to continue to loosen as the narrator needs a concrete object and event to symbolize the destruction of the human order by the passage of time. Similarly, the fall of the rock from the mountain remains vague, initially introduced not as a real event, but as a metaphor for the unfolding of the shawl. In short, the narrator may or may not be narrating events that actually occur in the story-world, but it is their lyric, not their narrative importance, that is foregrounded. In section six, this



lyric importance once again serves as a foreshadowing of actual narrative events in brackets, but also as a way to bind the narrative of the house through the years to the cyclical seasonal narrative that is superimposed upon this linear narrative.

Meanwhile, the narrative conceit of a single night remains—and all of this maintains a connection to specific narrative events (whether associated with Mrs. McNab, who briefly appears “looking like a tropical fish” in section six, with nonhuman events such as the unfolding of the shawl, or with the bracketed events concerning the characters introduced in “The Window”) and to the broad historical events of World War I.

I will say more about the general effects of the superimposition of different levels of narrative time later in this chapter. At this point, it is worth noting the specific re-calibration in the relationship between the seasonal narrative and the human-scale narratives brought on by World War I. If Prue Ramsay’s death inverts the expected relationship, World War I eventually destroys it. In the summer night, “the thud of something falling” is immediately juxtaposed to a battle scene: “[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]” (133). Once again, the brackets mix objective reportage with the viewpoint (“mercifully”) of the community, though here the community is no longer marked off from the objective narrator by the reporting clause “they said.” This is the only mention of World War I in “Time Passes” until the primary narrator’s assertion in the final section that “peace had come” (142). Instead of directly narrating the destruction created by the war, the narrator returns to “those who had gone down to pace the beach” (133). This time,

they find “something out of harmony with this jocundity and this serenity” (133). Seasonal specifics are notably gone here—and, instead of summer storms, there is a calm beauty to the natural world of the beach. The pacers on the beach ask questions which seem directed to an optimistic confluence of natural and human narratives but ends with a repudiation of the possibility that observation of nature can relate in any way to human goals and human narratives:

Did nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal complacency she saw his misery, his meanness, and his torture. That dream, of sharing, completing, of finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was then but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath? Impatient, despairing yet loth to go (for beauty offers her lures, has her consolations), to pace the beach was impossible; contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken. (134)

This passage suggests a break not only between man and nature, but a break between a specific object and broader human events. The narrative has shown nature not only happily mirroring hopeful human narratives, but also mirroring human disappointment and destruction. Furthermore, in later sections, the chaos of nature mirrors the chaos of World War I. These confluences are here revealed to be matters of selective choice: the narrator makes the seasons (which, after all, pass ten times over the course of “Time Passes”) match up with human events. The correlation of the Ramsays’ house and environs with broader events, meanwhile, is also revealed in

this passage to be a matter of metaphorical selectivity. Storms sometimes rage on the Isle of Skye, but not always. At the moment of greatest despair, the location to which the primary narrator is confined appears most out of step with broader events in Europe. Narrative events are not causal, but arbitrary. "Time Passes," pointedly refuses to narrate the battles of World War I, even as this and other narrative events return with a vengeance. These events are still confined to the occasional bracketed passage and the realm of poetic inference. Instead, the narrator of "Time Passes" insists on continuing to look at the broken mirror of nature, while also maintaining the novel's limited geographic scope. The novel marks the limits of its narrator's capacities for representation in a modernist stream-of-consciousness framework, but also transcends this framework with new narrative strategies, including non-narrative discourse. Similarly, the section ends with the collective return to lyric comforts in the face of representational failures: "[Mr. Carmichael brought out a volume of poems that spring, which had an unexpected success. The war, people said, had revived their interest in poetry.]" (134). The seasons return, and so do their traditional metaphorical connotations: spring is renewal. But here, metaphorical renewal is related only to a renewal of metaphors.

Section seven continues the return of the seasons, but they lack their previous narrative solidity. Instead, the various levels of narrative are mashed together into a vision of chaos:

Night after night, summer and winter, the torment of the storms, the arrow-like stillness of fine weather, held their court without interference. Listening (had there been any one to listen) from the

upper rooms of the empty house only gigantic chaos streaked with lightning could have been heard tumbling and tossing, as the winds and waves disported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason, and mounted one on top of another, and lunged and plunged in the darkness or the daylight (for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together) in idiot games, until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself. (134-35)

On the one hand, the relationship between natural and human narrative is as strong here as at any point in "Time Passes." The chaos of the war is mirrored not only in the specific actions of anthropomorphized inanimate objects in the house, but also in the very jumbling of the various natural cycles which have served as both metaphors for and alternate orders of the passage of time. The universe battles just as much of humanity battles. On the other hand, the attempt to mirror in nature the historical events of World War I results in a destruction of narrative altogether. Where previously the passage of time in "Time Passes" was difficult to follow and proceeded on multiple levels (day, season, years), at varying speeds, here that passage, along with the symbolic order constituted in it, is explicitly destroyed. Day, night, and seasons lose their specificity, and thus their ability to signify lyrically in an independent manner. Without the ability to follow the passage of time, the narrator announces her incapacity to narrate. Instead, there are only metaphors for chaos. Instead of the return of history, of concrete historical events, with or without narrative

cause and consequence, World War I is narrated as the complete absence of history. After Andrew Ramsay's death, nothing specific happens. Time does not pass, but instead "ran shapelessly together." Battle does not occur through time, but instead time itself battles. The war, in short, consumes time, while narrative is only possible when time and event are comprehensible as distinct aspects operating at different levels of comprehension. With the melding of time with the war, history exists in "Time Passes" as presence beyond not only scenic narration, but direct narration in summary as well, instead narrating them metaphorically. The narration remains anchored in a particular place, without direct access to these major historical events. It remains, then, a sort of stream of consciousness, though without any particular consciousness as an anchor.

In order to maintain a sense of narrative in the face of lyrical and real-world chaos, in sections eight and nine of "Time Passes," the narrator largely abandons the seasonal narrative and heavy figuration of the middle sections of "Time Passes" for human focalizers. In part, this marks a gradual return to the normal narrative mode of *To the Lighthouse*. However, there is a difference in these sections from the parallel earlier sections featuring Mrs. McNab which provides a deeper challenge to the class orientation of the novel and narrator as a whole. Mrs. McNab, along with Mrs. Bast, who joins her in preparing the house for the Ramsays' return, receives the same sort of focalization characters do in "The Window" and "The Lighthouse."

The first of these sections narrates a particular occasion in which Mrs. McNab cleans the house and shuts it up. Section eight ends, "The rain came in. But they never sent; never came. Some of the locks had gone, so the doors banged. She didn't

like to be up here at dusk alone neither. It was too much for one woman, too much, too much. She creaked, she moaned. She banged the door. She turned the key in the lock, and left the house alone, shut up, locked” (137). Mrs. McNab here has a voice, as well as a particular grammar which marks her class position. She is also both opposed to nature and the effects of the nonhuman passage of time and a symbol of those effects. She desires more help to stop the creaking of the doors, to maintain the house’s status as a protective zone for human activity. This opposition to nature continues in section nine, as nonhumanity again dominates the house: “What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature? Mrs. McNab’s dream of a lady, of a child, of a plate of milk soup?” (138). Yet, Mrs. McNab is herself like the decaying, nonhuman house: creaking and moaning (wordlessly) like the door as she comes into contact with it. The fertility of nature, too, is like the fertility of Mrs. McNab and her fellow workers as they seek to scrub nature from the household: Attended with the creaking of hinges and the screeching of bolts, the slamming and banging of damp-swollen woodwork some rusty laborious birth seemed to be taking place, as the women, stooping, rising, groaning, singing, slapped and slammed, upstairs now, now down in the cellars. Oh, they said, the work!” (139).

Work itself resembles to this narrator the workings of nature. Yet, at the same time, the presence of Mrs. McNab, and later Mrs. Bast and her son, is licensed by the Ramsays as work against nature and provides the narrative with human focalizers. Working-class people, and the work that they do, is invisible to the narrator in the presence of bourgeois narrative possibilities, as for example, when Mrs. Ramsay orders a silent, undescribed maid to “Yes, take it away” during dinner (87). Only the

emptying out of all other humanity makes them visible to a narrator sensitive to any narrative possibilities. What Minow-Pinkney calls “the formerly excluded Otherness” emerges not only, as she argues, with the figurative breaking of the mirror through which the seekers on the beach hope to see humanity reflected in Nature, but with the removal from the scene of a familiar bourgeois humanity to be reflected (Minow-Pinkney 100). It is the nonhumanness of the narrative of “Time Passes,” and of its fixed location, that makes the inclusion of the working class possible in *To the Lighthouse*. At the same time, the working class is available only as an agent of the bourgeois against nature and as a symbol for the bourgeois of nature. This is true both on the level of the narrator, who repeatedly positions working-class people in relation to nature, and also on the level of the story, in which Mrs. McNab, Mrs. Bast, and her son appear only at the behest of the Ramsays. The stable location of *To the Lighthouse* is owned by the bourgeois whose consciousnesses serve as the narrative’s model. Working class people enter the narrative space only when permitted by its bourgeois owners, and only to maintain the space as a bourgeois space, as a refuge from chaotic nature, from death, from work, from war. Thus, with the arrival of Lily Briscoe at the end of section nine, the working class figures disappear from the narrative. They have served their transitional function: bringing day to night, nonhuman space to human space, indeterminate time to the modernist time of human consciousness.

The transition is completed in the final section of “Time Passes,” as the narrative intermingles the methods of sections one and two. The tenth section announces, “Then indeed peace had come” (142). This refers, on the one hand, to the

armistice, but it follows so immediately upon Lily's return that it also signals the narrative peace afforded by the return of bourgeois minds to the novel's narrative space. This final section of "Time Passes" flirts with the section's poetic pose as it follows its bourgeois subjects through one definite night before Lily awakens at the end:

the sigh of all the seas breaking in measure round the isles soothed them; the night wrapped them; nothing broke their sleep, until, the birds beginning and the dawn weaving their thin voices in to its whiteness, a cart grinding, a dog somewhere barking, the sun lifted the curtains, broke the veil on their eyes, and Lily Briscoe stirring in her sleep. (142-3)

Here, again, the nonhuman has humanlike—and, particularly, benevolent—agency, which is only ceded, outside of parenthetical asides, to Lily as she nears consciousness. Mr. Carmichael, however, is given full waking narration which parallels his bracketed actions in section two: "And it all looked, Mr. Carmichael thought, shutting his book, falling asleep, much as it used to look" (142). The return of Lily and Mr. Carmichael, the sleeping and waking, the folding in and lifting of the darkness, returns the narrative, strengthens the narrative's connection to the beginning of "Time Passes." As a narrative of a single night, then, "Time Passes" both erases its own middle—in which time is destabilized, characters die, war rages, and ten years pass—and also its status as a middle for all of *To the Lighthouse*. It suggests, in other words, that not much time has passed, that there is no temporal chasm that must be bridged between "The Window" and "The Lighthouse." The chronotope, too, is the



same: we are in the same place, with some of the same characters, and it can be narrated in the same fashion. A single night, this transition suggests, may seem the same as ten years; nothing is different, and everything is different.

On multiple levels, “Time Passes” includes what is excluded in “The Window” and “The Lighthouse.” It gives attention, and then voice, to working class characters, thus challenging the parameters of the bourgeois novel of manners and ideas. It gives attention, and even focalization, to the nonhuman, thus challenging the human basis of narrative. It gives space for its narrator to expound separately from the mind of any character, challenging the modernist allegiance to narrative objectivity and the stream-of-consciousness devotion to the narrative rendering of subjectivity. An anonymous “mystic” or “visionary” on the beach quickly becomes plural, “asking themselves ‘What am I,’ What is this?’”, challenging not only the humanist unity of character, but also the objectivity of the narrative event and the reliability of a seemingly omniscient narrator (131). Finally, within short bracketed passages, events are narrated—often major, often traumatic, often far away from the Ramsays’ summer home—in a reporterly tone, challenging the spatial, dramatic, and narratorial unity of the text.

“Time Passes” also shows how closely matters of voice are related to story as well as discourse . The absence of bourgeois guests in the house necessitates strategies of voice other than the primary mode of “The Window” and “The Lighthouse”: indirect discourse rendering bourgeois thought. Conversely, focalization through Mrs. Bast and the “certain airs,” as well as the various modes of heterodiegetic discourse (that is, originating from outside the story-world) taken on

by the narrator, allow a world unpopulated by the Ramsays and their ilk to be narrated, while the bracketed narrator further allows the world outside the summer home and its immediate environs to be narrated as well. Shifts in voice and in story content are thus inextricably paired. *To the Lighthouse* thus reveals many of the narrative limitations of the bourgeois modernist voice as represented in “The Window” and “The Lighthouse.”

Most of these challenges to the narrative voice of the first and third sections of *To the Lighthouse*, however, can be understood within Genette’s basic model of narrative voice, in which the novelist must choose “between two narrative postures [...]: to have the story told by one of its ‘characters,’ or to have it told by a narrator outside of the story” (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 244). Genette adds in a note that “in fiction nothing prevents us from entrusting that role to an animal [...] or indeed to an ‘inanimate’ object” (*Narrative Discourse* 244n). The narrator of “Time Passes” remains clearly outside the story, while its focalizers shift between the animate and the inanimate. This is why Leaska is able to assign, at least provisionally, every word in *To the Lighthouse* to a particular voice, “omniscient” or otherwise, within Woolf’s “multiple-point-of-view method” (Leaska, *Novels* 142). Although “Time Passes” does, through the narrator’s uncertainty and its recourse to a largely Romantic poetic discourse in the absence of human agency, challenge that narrator’s claim to omniscience, the narrator remains solidly heterodiegetic.

However, though it remains a relatively simple task to define the voice of “Time Passes” within Genette’s scheme, it is more difficult to define this voice’s relationship to the story-world. When the narrator describes, for example, the emptied

house, it is difficult to tell where concrete description stops and metaphor begins: “Now, day after day, light turned, like a flower reflected in water, its sharp image on the wall opposite. Only the shadows of the trees, flourishing in the wind, made obeisance on the wall, and for a moment darkened the pool in which light reflected itself; or birds, flying, made a soft spot flutter across the bedroom floor” (229). The paragraph initially invokes both a specific time (now) and an iterative (day after day), thus blending specific event with a repetition of similar events. The second sentence initially offers a narration of exclusivity—no other shadowing events occur. It then, to use Brian Richardson’s term for when “a narrator denies significant aspects of his or her narrative that had earlier been present as given,” denarrates this exclusivity to offer another possibility (Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* 87). It is also difficult to tell whether these possibilities are mutually exclusive—or whether the trees or birds might cast shadows.

There is an additional possibility: that none of the above passage is a narration of specific events, repeated or otherwise: instead, the play of shadow and light is a metaphor plucked not from the narrator’s knowledge of events in the story-world, but from the narrator’s imagination. The mystic on the beach presents a similar set of problems: events of uncertain frequency, involving an uncertain (and even altered) number of agents, which might even be the purely hypothetical concoctions of a narrator seeking to narrate the unnarratable. This same phenomenon permeates much of “Time Passes” and is deeply connected to the features which have resulted in many critics labeling the section “lyric” or “poetic.” It puts into question the narrator’s reliability—and even the terms on which we might establish that reliability.

Furthermore, passages like this fundamentally undermine the traditional narrator-story relationship as described by David Herman: “According to standard accounts, narrative is by and large factive in nature. Narratives characteristically (re)produce, from a stance of relative certainty, chains of singular and past events” (Herman, *Universal* 87). The narrator of “Time Passes” is often so divorced from traditional “events,” so willing to give narrative focalization and human meaning to animals and inanimate objects, and so invested in metaphorical language, that its relationship to a factive world is highly mediated, if not fundamentally challenged.

The effect is similar to that of the “Circe” episode of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, in which the discourse takes the form of a dream play. This dream-play discourse represents a story with fantastical elements (a hobgoblin), speaking roles for inanimate objects (the pianola), and other manifestations of characters’ subconscious minds and elements from other parts of the novel (William Shakespeare). However, none of these unrealistic elements have actually taken place in the story-world of *Ulysses*—instead, the reader is meant to infer from the episode itself, as well as information presented in subsequent episodes, that a more ordinary drunken trip to a brothel has taken place. “Circe,” then, contains two levels of story for one level of discourse. The situation in “Time Passes” is not as extreme, but is in some ways more complex. The highly metaphorical, speculative discourse that dominates much of the section creates a veil between story and discourse. It produces narratives that may or may not have occurred one or more times in the story-world, narrates events that may or may not have happened, but that are meant to represent, in a general fashion, the passage of time and its effects on the summer-house, the beach, and a general or

hypothetical consciousness (the mystic, people in general, the narrator itself) which is placed there. Beyond the beginning and the end of the section (when the Ramsays' guests are still around), the scenes involving Mrs. McNab, Mrs. Bast, and her son, and the bracketed passages, there are no solidly factual events in "Time Passes." Yet, neither is the section completely unmoored from the factive world: it is simply that the form of narration of the section rarely narrates the factive world directly—largely, if not entirely, because there is nothing there which can be the subject of traditional narration.

This leads me to the greatest challenge "Time Passes" poses to traditional narrative analysis, as well as its most fundamental difference from the sections which precede and follow it: its treatment of time. Genette analyzes time in narrative with regard to three major elements: order, duration, and frequency (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 35). Frequency I have already mentioned briefly when discussing the (possibly) iterative nature of certain events in "Time Passes." While "Time Passes" often narrates in a way that makes frequency indeterminate, this does not create significant problems in and of itself, since events that may or may not repeat (or may or may not happen in a particular way) serve only to generally represent the passage of time: we understand that this is the sort of thing that happens. Order, meanwhile, is not a significant problem in "Time Passes." The section contains few obvious anachronies, or passages in which the order of events of the discourse is different from the order of events in the story-world (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 40).

This is a stark contrast to the rest of the novel, whose structure highly anachronic. Dorrit Cohn describes the novel's primary mode of indirect discourse

(“narrated monologue”) as “a choice medium for revealing a fictional mind suspended in an instant present, between a remembered past and an anticipated future” (Cohn, *Transparent* 126). What Cohn calls “narrated memories” abound in “The Window,” as Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, and other characters recall past events (Cohn, *Transparent* 128). Meanwhile, the novel also repeats scenes or snatches of time from multiple perspectives, most famously the juxtaposed final scenes of Lily Briscoe completing her painting and the Ramsays reaching the lighthouse. “Time Passes” has no focalizers to launch such anachronies, with the exceptions of Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, whose memories tend to be general (“They lived well in those days.”) or non-immersive (“The young gentleman was dead.”), at least for the reader, who is told that Mrs. McNab is “wantoning in her memories,” but is not given unfettered access to these unfettered memories (140). The narrator uses Mrs. McNab as a focalizer, following her eyes to “the old gentlemen, then entering narrated monologue: “He never noticed her. Some said he was dead; some said she was dead. Which was it? Mrs. Bast didn’t know for certain either. The young gentleman was dead. That was sure. She had read his name in the papers” (140). While this is clearly free indirect discourse, it is ambiguous whether this is narrated internal monologue, or whether it is spoken dialogue. Here we see one of the limitations of “Time Passes” as an antidote to the socially-limited view of the rest of the novel: even when it accesses the minds of working-class people, those minds do not open completely and unambiguously.

Yet it has been easy for critics to overstate the limitations here, and to ignore the narrator’s growing sympathy for Mrs. McNab, and the move toward internal

focalization and even free indirect discourse. The early *New York Times* reviewer, in praising “Time Passes,” is able, in the same sentence that mentions the “forlorn women caretakers,” to state that “for ten years the house itself never received a human guest” (*Critical Heritage* 197). Cohn argues for a sort of guilt-by-association: the very inclusion of working-class characters in “Time Passes,” with its refusal to engage in the anachronic mode of the novel’s other sections, enables (even if it does not encourage) this sort of dehumanization, as they are included among the nonhuman and the anti-narrative, while being excluded from the web of narrated monologues (Cohn, *Transparent* 118). I have already shown an ambiguous case of Mrs. McNab’s narrated monologue. Later in the day, the case is less ambiguous, with the narration of Mrs. McNab’s mind shifting from summary to free indirect discourse to direct quotation of her thoughts: “She watched her son scything. He was a great one for work—one of those quiet ones. Well they must be getting along with the cupboards, she supposed” (*TTL* 141). By the end of the day, then, the narrator’s sympathy for Mrs. McNab seems to have increased—the narrator has edged closer to what Tratner calls “something new.” “Time Passes” may not be a web of narrated monologues, but it certainly uses Mrs. McNab as an internal focalizer, and it contains her narrated monologue. The differences by which “Time Passes” marks itself thus include and excludes these marginalized figures. The narrator notices and even focalizes on them, while at the same time its refusal of anachrony limits this focalization. However, these limitations may easily be overstated. McNab and Bast engage the past through conversation, and the absence of anachronies in the narrative while McNab is the focalizer may be attributed to the lack of idleness. In addition,

Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast are arguably not part of a web of narrated monologues because that web is also a web of social relations from which they are excluded. Finally, the house, where the narrator is located, is their place of work. The absence of anachrony may be more of a representation of a state of work, and a particular social web, than it is a limitation to the narrator's growing sympathy with the working-class figures. The narrator is limited by a literal place than it is limited by sympathy or capacity for focalization.

Nevertheless, the absence of clear anachronies makes "Time Passes" linear to an almost unusual degree. Its duration, or speed, "the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length (that of the text, measured in lines and in pages)" on the other hand, is highly varied (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 87-88). Genette identifies four speeds at which narrative texts conventionally operate: the descriptive pause, in which the time of the story stops while narration continues; the scene, in which, usually through dialogue, a conventional equivalence is achieved between story-time and discourse-space; the summary, in which story-time moves faster than it does in scene; and the ellipsis, in which time passes in the gaps in textual discourse, as between chapters in *The Golden Bowl* (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 93-94). Genette offers a further possibility: "a sort of scene in slow motion" which covers space between pause and scene (*Narrative Discourse* 95). As a whole, "Time Passes" is a sort of summary, since ten years pass in the space of about twenty pages. Meanwhile, much of "The Lighthouse" and "The Window" takes place in a sort of slow motion, as characters' thoughts



expand within a limited amount of story-time.<sup>17</sup> So, while most of *To the Lighthouse* is scene, and the modernist scene as it is slowed by the rendering of thought, “Time Passes” is an experimental expansion of the words that comprise its title—an expansion that nevertheless maintains the mode of summary.

However, “Time Passes” begins much in the mode of the preceding section, as the guests come in and turn out the lights. It then accelerates rapidly, as the night passes into seasons, which pass into years. At the end, “Time Passes” returns to the pace of most of *To the Lighthouse*, so that its duration has a symmetrical form: an acceleration from scene to rapid summary (ten years in twenty pages), followed by a deceleration back to scene. As we have seen above, however, at the level of discourse, this rapid passage of time is not always rendered precisely by summary: rather, the summary is often inferred from the rendering of iterative or metaphorical scenes. It is also punctuated by hypothetical scenes, as when the narrator proposes, “should any sleeper fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts, a sharer of his solitude, throw off his bedclothes and go down by himself to walk on the sand, no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul” (128). The sleeper is later mirrored in (or returns as) the mystic, followed by “those who had gone down to pace the beach” (133). When those on the beach ask, “Did Nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began?” it is

---

17 For example, the opening section of “The Window” includes dialogue which seems as though it should fall one line immediately after another, but which is instead punctuated by long paragraphs of thought and description: “ ‘Yes, of course, if it’s fine tomorrow,’ said Mrs. Ramsay. ‘But you’ll have to be up with the lark,’ she added” (*TTL* 3). A paragraph intervenes. “ ‘But,’ said the father, stopping in front of the drawing-room window, ‘it won’t be fine’” (4). Another intervening paragraph. “ ‘But it may be fine—I expect it will be fine,’ said Mrs. Ramsay” (4). Etc.

unclear whether time flows forward, whether we have a single or an iterative scene, or whether this is a representation not of actual trips to the beach, single or multiple, but of a general state of mind to which the narrator, the sleeper, the mystic, and those on the beach give voice (134). Meanwhile, the narrator's musings often seem to stop the flow of time entirely as, for example, when the narrator says of an anthropomorphized divine goodness hidden behind a curtain, "our penitence deserves a glimpse only; our toil respite only" (128). Such discourse, according to Genette, does not even qualify as narrative, but is another sort of pause, a "commentarial excursion" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 94n). Just as it is possible to view "Time Passes" on the whole as a summary, it is also possible to view it as a non-narrative or lyric section which does not narrate the passage of time, but instead offers commentary on the idea of the passage of time. Finally, "Time Passes" is punctuated by more conventional narrative scenes when Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast arrive. The section is therefore a complex structure in which accelerating and decelerating summary is both punctuated and bookended by scene, and in which the speed as well as the frequency and even story-world existence of any particular passage is likely to be unclear. We are approaching, then, the equivalent for duration of Genette's achrony, in which "temporal reference is deliberately sabotaged" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 35). Herman is skeptical that indeterminate temporal order is truly achrony, preferring the term "temporal indefiniteness" (75). Following Herman, it seems best to say that, where the duration cannot be determined, "Time Passes" has an indefinite speed.

However, it is not simply the case that we cannot tell how fast (or whether) time is passing at any moment in “Time Passes.” Rather, “Time Passes” overlays multiple levels of summary, all moving at different speeds. First, there is the section’s initial conceit: the passage of ten years is the passage of one night. It is this basic conceit that binds the novel together: because they are figured as an evening and the following morning, “The Window” and “The Lighthouse” obey the Aristotelian unity of time. We are allowed to see the whole of the novel as one dramatic action—except for “Time Passes,” which is outside that action, an interlude that by its very betweenness enables that unity of action. Second, there is the conceit of the passage of seasons: “Time Passes” moves through winter, spring, summer, and back to early fall. In this conceit, one year passes. Third, there is the real passage of story-time, the ten years between “The Window” and “The Lighthouse.” Since so much of “Time Passes” is concerned with the narration of the passage of a night or the passage of the seasons, these slower speeds cannot be easily dismissed, even if they must ultimately be deemed metaphorical. Rather, they are metaphorical only within the novel as a whole: within “Time Passes” and its unique discourse space, they are narrated. “Time Passes,” therefore, while it contains passages of indefinite speed, and otherwise varies its speed throughout, as a whole is composed of three orders of speed operating simultaneously. As Herman argues that novels which encourage the reader to imagine multiple temporal orderings of the same events are polychronous, I suggest that “Time Passes” should be considered a polytempic text (Herman, *Universal* 75).

“Time Passes,” therefore, serves as both a linking and dividing middle which, through its differences from the text which surrounds it, challenges not only the

conventions of modernist and traditional narrative, but the very foundations of narrative itself. It does so by challenging three basic components of narrative: the presence of human agents (which are absent for much of the section), the occurrence of actions or events (which, where human agents are absent, are frequently nebulous or even non-existent), and, most fundamentally, by multiplying and disrupting the very flow of story-time, which distinguishes narrative from other modes of discourse. Perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this project, though, “Time Passes” establishes itself as a text in and of itself within the larger text of *To the Lighthouse*: a middle distinguished by its own narrative laws and presence.

The very title of “Time Passes” suggests its inconsequentiality to the rest of the narrative, while its mode of narration—which challenges the limits of narrative itself—marks it off as something separate from the rest of the novel. In both its difference and apparent inconsequentiality, “Time Passes” resembles traditional interludes from music and theater. Yet the space of the interlude opens up new possibilities. “Time Passes” seeks to include in the middle what is excluded by the narrative conventions of the beginning and the end. It alters and destabilizes the chronotope of *To the Lighthouse* in order to move both beyond a narrative of bourgeois consciousness, and beyond the limitations of narrative within a focus on human agency through definite time. Yet, at each moment, its inclusions are only partial: it does not narrate the nonhuman on anything but human terms. It does not narrate the working class without reference to the bourgeois. It does not narrate events of great political or personal consequence within its primary narrative voice: the brackets set off these events in their own narrative space and mode, deploying the

rhetoric of newspapers rather than encompassing large-scale historic events into the same voice that narrates individual consciousness. Each attempt to include what is unnarrated in “The Window” and “The Lighthouse” comes up against some sort of barrier or limit.

On the one hand, these limits might be read as failures of bourgeois modernism or of Virginia Woolf in particular. In this sense, “Time Passes” serves primarily as a critique of the still-developing conventions of modernism, and an acknowledgment of the limitations that came with Woolf’s own privileged perspective. “Time Passes,” with its remarkable narrative agility and the collage-like intrusion of bracketed narration, compellingly gestures to what is beyond the novel’s primary mode of stream-of-consciousness narration. In so doing, it suggests the epistemological limitations of any particular mode of narration. As such, it is both an extension and a self-critique of this particular mode of modernism. Its function as critique, rather than solution, to the limitations of narrative, is consonant with much of modernism which, even in the hands of revolutionaries such as John Dos Passos, was geared more towards critiquing the modern world than providing it a positive direction. “Time Passes,” then, on multiple levels, cannot escape the limitations of either modernism or narrative.

On the other hand, we can see the limitations of “Time Passes” as the limitations not of modernism, but of the middle. “Time Passes” struggles both to establish its independence as a narrative unit and to maintain its status as the middle of a larger narrative. As a middle, it necessarily comes between the beginning and the end of the novel. It challenges the very vagueness of that Aristotelian definition of the

middle by making itself markedly different from the beginning and the end. It also, however, challenges the weakness of that definition by insisting that the middle is not simply between the beginning and the end, but that it bridges the narrative gap between beginning and end. Despite the stark division provided by the part's title, "Time Passes" transitions gradually from beginning to end: without that title, we would perhaps find the beginning of the middle of *To the Lighthouse* in section two or three of "Time Passes." "Time Passes," as middle, is both distinct from and melded to the beginning and end. It is marked by its difference from the narrative of beginning and end, but it cannot separate itself completely from the narrative conventions already established. Its locational fixity both marks its similarity from the beginning and the end (it shares a location) and its difference (it maintains this location even when all other narrative elements have left).

Fundamentally, though, the middle both separates and holds together the narrative. It provides a gap between "The Window" and "The Lighthouse" in both reading time and story time. But it also, as James Naremore notes, closes a ten-year gap by imagining the gap as a single night: "the section begins with the characters coming in from outside and preparing for bed, and ends with everyone reluctantly waking up to a new day" (Naremore 116). Paradoxically, by including multiple temporal frameworks, Woolf is able to give a novel which takes place over a ten-year period a temporal as well as spatial Aristotelian dramatic unity. This unity is achieved, however, only through the great lyrical force of the middle. It is the ten-year gap narrated by "Time Passes" that holds the beginning and the end together conceptually as a narrative: only the passage of time allows us to read "The

Lighthouse” as the flawed realization of the human-lifetime-scaled expectations of “The Window.” Similarly, the greater prominence given to the war and to death in “Time Passes”—the attention to catastrophic events—gives broader narrative license to the dwelling on bourgeois consciousness of the beginning and the end. Because “Time Passes” looks upon such consciousness as both insignificant in the face of the nonhuman passage of time, and sees such consciousness as the only available model for narrative, the middle of *To the Lighthouse* serves as a guide for reading the minds of Lily Briscoe and the Ramsays within a specific historical and political context. “Time Passes” attempts, but ultimately fails, to narrate the war and the nonhuman passage of time, and it has limited success in providing space for working-class consciousness within modernist narrative.

“Time Passes” does, however, put its beginning and end, in which the anxieties of the bourgeois play out over seemingly inconsequential events, within the context of what they do not narrate. It suggests, ultimately, that what holds the beginning and the end together is the middle, and what holds the narrated together is what it does not narrate. “Time Passes” is a middle of what is passed over—a fleeting suggestion of what is left between the beginning and the end, what is obscured by the finitude of narrative. In doing so, it suggests that the finite acquires both shape and meaning from the infinite, that the seemingly narrow focus of the modernist mode of “The Window” and “The Lighthouse” depends upon its broader historical and existential context. The moment of being, the slice of life, however small, exists only in the broader flow of time. It is this broader flow of time, then, that makes of these moments narrative. “Time Passes,” therefore, not only falls between *To the*

*Lighthouse*'s primary narrative parts, but produces *To the Lighthouse* as narrative. It contains the Bremondian change of state for the novel and, even more importantly, sews together these two sections of beginning and end. It is an interlude in the sense not only of something different that comes in between, something that can potentially be ignored if we are interested only in the primary narrative, but in the sense of something that makes *To the Lighthouse* a whole work rather than a pair of contiguous movements. It mediates between beginning and end through a careful balance of contrast and similarity: it is narrative that gestures toward the non-narrative and the non-human, while at the same time it is the very engine of narrative. It is both wholly disposable and indispensable; it is both completely dependent on its position within the novel and unreadable as a part of that novel. Woolf responded to the baggy middles of Victorian novels with a middle that was a great deal shorter, even easier to ignore, and even more essential to the full meaning and narrative capacity of the novel. "Time Passes" is, in many ways, the middle pushed as far as it can go—a compression of middleness in its paradoxical essential disposability. It is, as Woolf described, a corridor: a functional passageway, but also a place in itself, and one which enables a new set of narrative perspectives.



## Chapter 4: Spirituality and Delusion: The Middle as Rupture in the Consciousness in Rayner Heppenstall's *Saturnine*

World War II arguably marks the end of modernism as a historical movement in literature, with postmodernism emerging around the same time in many accounts.<sup>18</sup> This makes the war itself a sort of middle in the history of experimental literary movements in English language literature. While this study of modernist middles is primarily formal, rather than historical, in nature, McHale notes the importance of the history of such movements to his formal definitions of modernism and postmodernism, which is not merely a sequential, but a causal, history: “Postmodernism follows *from* modernism” (McHale 5). This causal element is actually what allows McHale to move from the historical to the formal: instead of simply following temporally from modernism, postmodernism also follows logically from postmodernism. Thus, we have the ontological dominant following from the epistemological dominant. This is all a roundabout way of saying: World War II does not mark an end of modernism, but rather, a sort of middle, after which it is no longer associated with the most influential experimental novelists. In Britain in particular, postwar modernist and experimental literature would generally be either ignored or subjected to ideological contempt, as realism became the resurgent standard for English literature (Green 99). It is worth considering, too, that World War II had a powerful, lingering economic effect that, beyond any direct effects on the culture,

---

18 The *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, for example, places Modernism “in England from early in the 20<sup>th</sup> c. and during the 1920s and 1930s,” (Cuddon, “modernism”), while postmodernism begins in “the 1940s and 1950s” (Cuddon, “post-modernism”). Notably, Calinescu tracks the first American use of the term “post-modernist” to Randall Jarrell in 1946 (Calinescu 267).

served to marginalize experimental literature in Britain. According to Rayner Heppenstall, the subject of this chapter, “Before the war, it had been possible, though it had not been easy, to be a serious, full-time professional, free-lance writer,” he wrote in in 1963. “The species was now extinct” (*Intellectual Part* 50). Nevertheless, a few British writers continued to write in and expand the modernist form both during and after the war, and they continued in many cases to use middles to deepen, expand, and redirect the epistemological poetics of modernism, and to bind their narrative experiments into complete novelistic narratives.

The final two chapters of this study will concern themselves with post-war experimental British novels, both of which contend with and arguably participate in at least some aspects of postmodern literature. This chapter concerns a novel written and published during the war itself. While *To the Lighthouse* makes World War I and its trauma the middle of its narrative, a separation that binds the novel together, Woolf creates her narrative middle retrospectively, from a position after the war. In that novel, the middle stretches the conventions of both modernist and traditional narrative, but a stable modernist poetics governs both beginning and end. *Between the Acts*, set just before World War Two and written and published during the war, on the other hand, expresses in its end a sharp skepticism about the future of both modernist narrative that seems to point towards postmodernism: Miss La Trobe considers her play a “failure” (209), while Isa ponders changes in the ontology of narrative: “Surely it was time someone invented a new plot, or that the author came out from the bushes . . .” (215). The novel’s final pages are marked by darkness, uncertainty, contradictory thoughts, as the modern setting is transformed into the prehistoric

setting from the beginning of Lucy's book, the *Outline of History*. Here, epistemological uncertainty has become so extreme that it threatens to tip over into ontological uncertainty. Nevertheless, *Between the Acts* maintains a stream-of-consciousness technique throughout. Its middle offers no particular challenge to, disruption of, or modification of that technique.

Rayner Heppenstall's 1943 novel *Saturnine*, by contrast, consists of a linear narrative, presented by a more conventional retrospective first-person narrator with a level of verisimilitude that caused many of its readers to regard it as autobiography, but punctuated by moments of acute epistemological uncertainty. At its middle, there is a moment of crisis, at which epistemological questions nearly tip into ontological questions. However, this middle does not coincide with war. Instead, the beginning of the war coincides with *Saturnine*'s end. With the coming of war, apparently at least, the epistemological uncertainties of modernism also come to an end. The novel's middle, however, takes these epistemological uncertainties to an extreme, where they threaten to tip over into ontological uncertainties, as a result of an extreme crisis. However, where *To the Lighthouse* creates a middle that pushes modernist narrative to new territory through the removal of its focalizers from its setting, and further through the external pressures of war and death, Heppenstall pushes modernist technique near to its breaking point through internal crisis in a focalizer which it never leaves, a crisis which reaches its height in the novel's middle.

At first glance, *Saturnine* does not appear to contain the narrative difficulties or structural complexities typically associated with modernism, or even with some of

the author's other novels. Alick Frobisher, the novel's semiautobiographical<sup>19</sup> first-person retrospective narrator, tells in mostly chronological order the story of an impoverished period of his life, between the death of his uncle-in-law and business partner Sam Thorpe in October of 1938, and his joining the military in June of 1940. Heppenstall's first novel, *The Blaze of Noon* (1939), similarly has a straightforward first-person narration, but the erotic attention to physical detail and intellectual analysis of the sensory impression (“*l’appréhension sensorielle immédiatement intellectualisée par la conscience*”) provided by the blind masseuse who narrates the earlier novel later prompted Hélène Cixous to declare, “*il a inauguré le nouveau roman*” (Cixous). Heppenstall's 1962 novel, *The Connecting Door*, meanwhile, shows the direct influence of the *nouveau roman*, and particularly Robbe-Grillet. In that novel, told in the present tense, the narrator encounters two other characters, Harold and Atha, who turn out to be prior versions of himself—versions whose stories are similarly take place in the present tense. In returning to a town on the Rhine before and after World War II, the narrator encounters his own past, mixing memory with immediate experience and splitting the self in three.

*Saturnine*'s narrator does not provide such an obvious extension to modernist experiments in representing the conscious mind's encounters with the physical world as does the blind narrator of *The Blaze of Noon*. Nor does it have the present-tense immediacy or temporal distortions of *The Connecting Door*. Instead, Frobisher, who

---

19 J.G. Bucknell, author of the only book-length study of Heppenstall, notes that Heppenstall's belief in writing as dramatization is “reflected in *Saturnine*'s construction, in which a ‘realistic’ account of London life (drawn from Heppenstall's own), encompassing bankruptcy, illness, collapsing buildings, literary production, homosexual acquaintances and military service is continually punctuated by fantastical interludes, self-reflection or metafictional ruminations” (Bucknell 40-41).

is undergoing a mental breakdown, relates unreal events, delusions, and visions in the same straightforward manner he uses to relay the more mundane events that dominate the novel. Though these disruptions of the novel's mundane verisimilitude occur only occasionally, they mirror Frobisher's persistent interest in Rudolf Steiner-influenced mysticism (propounded by the nonfictional Steiner's fictional disciples at the Institute of Mystical Science) as well as his interest in astrology, such as the cold promise of death given by the Saturn of the novel's title. *Saturnine*'s modernist experiment, therefore, lies in its representation not of the conscious mind's encounter with real sensory data, but of the mind's encounter with unreal sensory data, whether it be genuine mystical experience or madness. These unreal episodes reach a climax at the beginning of the fourth part of this four-part novel, in which Frobisher declares that he has died and proceeds to narrate an out-of-body experience before returning to his body. This near-death experience, which in many ways mirrors the Medieval journey to the afterlife, serves as a middle of sorts, as Frobisher re-commits himself to life and to his wife and soon-to-be first child before going off to war in the novel's sequel, *The Lesser Infortune*, which chronicles another mental breakdown for Frobisher, this time in military service. It also serves as a coda to *Saturnine*'s long middle, marking the end of Frobisher's delusions and providing a forceful philosophical and mystical resolution to the existential and narrative uncertainties that mark the middle of the novel.

However, *Saturnine* also contains its own short middle, which anticipates *The Connecting Door*'s engagement with the split self. At nearly the novel's exact center, in the seventh of thirteen chapters, Frobisher follows a man who turns out to be

himself. In an episode that resembles in many ways Freud's account of the double in "The Uncanny," Frobisher splits in two, narrating, eventually, his own thoughts in the third person. The result is a doubling of the division of self implied by first-person narration, calling attention to and even pathologizing the novel's conventions. Meanwhile, the differences between mental and physical worlds and between *fabula* and *syuzhet* are confused if not collapsed entirely, as the contents of Frobisher's mind take on physical form and Frobisher-as-character takes over narration and thus control of at least one level of reality. While the later episode of Frobisher's "death" provides what is for Frobisher an intellectually comprehensible split between physical and astral body, the middle of *Saturnine* splits both physical body and consciousness in two, without explanation. It breaks the novel in two just as it breaks the self in two. It represents the crisis of Frobisher's madness, just as it represents a crisis of the novel that attempts to depict, simultaneously, a physical reality and a reality of the consciousness, with all of the unreal implications the latter implies. What's more, its pathological view of the self and uncertainty about the role and nature of narration are never fully overcome. This account of life, narrative, and the self as inevitably, confusingly, pathologically divided is echoed in the continued uncertainty of the Second World War, suggesting that endings and the clarity they bring are at best provisional in the face of the uncertain middle. Whereas *Between the Acts* emphasizes this point most clearly at its ending, *Saturnine* does so at its middle.

*Saturnine*'s episodic structure serves to release the novel from a particular set of conventions that bind the middle tightly to beginning and end, but Heppenstall, unlike J. Hillis Miller, does not see this freeing of the middle as a path to truth. Miller

offers a definition of the middle that emphasizes the digressive nature of the narrative line, particularly in long-form narratives. Much like Aristotle, Miller defines the middle as “all that series in a narrative between beginning and end” (“Narrative Middles” 376). However, for Miller, the novel does not share the traditional unity of plot which is provided in drama by a middle which draws a straight line between beginning and end. Following Friedrich Schlegel, Miller argues that the novel “does not depend on being a continuous, literally represented spectacle” (Miller, “Narrative Middles” 384). That is, the novel has a freedom in regard to duration—Genette’s term for the relative speed of events in the discourse (narrative time) relative to those in the story (story time), which even in scenic narration is conventional in nature (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 87). Miller ascribes this conventionality specifically to the written word. However, Miller’s account of both the narrative line and the split between narrative time and story time presupposes an Aristotelian ideal of drama that has never been true. Aristotle’s account of the unity of action is not descriptive, but prescriptive: “The Unity of a Plot does not consist, as some suppose, in its having one man as its subject. [...] One sees, therefore, the mistake of all the poets who have written a *Hereleid*, a *Theseid*, or similar poems; they suppose that, because Heracles was one man, the story also of Heracles must be one story” (1451a). That is, actions which are not unified are frequent dramatic subjects. And even Aristotle did not prescribe that a dramatic performance must have a duration equal to story time: in fact, Aristotle considered the time of performance to be beyond the scope of the *Poetics*: “As for the limit of its length, so far as that is relative to public performances and spectators, it does not fall within the theory of poetry” (1451a). The search for

unity between time story time and narrative or performance time is therefore a false standard, and it is a problem not unique to the novel, even if the novel by virtue of its length opens up new possibilities.

For Heppenstall, this split is essential to all narrative, and is actually more acute in drama: “Drama stands betwixt and between. It has the particularisation, the locality, of narrative fiction, but its action takes place in an eternal present. The passage of time in a theatre is always brought about by trickery and characteristically by the trick of stopping the play and sending the audience out for a drink. In general, drama is closer to lyric than to narration” (*Double Image* 124-25). That is, the conventions of narrative are more adapted to the necessary split between narrative time and story time. Here, Heppenstall agrees with Miller: written narrative offers possibilities that can make it in some ways a more accurate representation of reality than drama. Moreover, this split is only a sub-set of the greater split between all forms of narrative and reality. Miller argues for digressive narrative, in a sense, on behalf of a sort of realism: a realism that presents life fully, without the over-motivated selection of Aristotelean plotting. For Heppenstall, however, the anti-Aristotelean view is simply another imposing philosophy:

Either man’s life is continuous and coherent, obedient to a single principle throughout, originating in a known cause and proceeding to a known destination. Or it is accidental and chaotic, and any apparent principle is no less so. Those are the two songs that philosophy sings. Theology sings the former, and common sense hesitates between the two. It is the natural tendency of lyrical poetry alone to sing the



fragmentary song. The mind functions in categories and would like to believe them real. The literary forms of biography, drama and fiction implement this natural wish. (*Double Image* 69-70)

As a result, the inherent lie of fiction is inescapable. What's more, in its very fictiveness, narrative is bound up with biography, the attempt to write non-fiction. In giving up the attempt at realism through inclusiveness, Heppenstall makes his allegiance to modernism clear:

The writing and reading of fiction and biography give the mind an agreeable sense of coming to grips with reality and with the supreme reality of individual human life. But nothing could be more remote from the reality of a man's life than any version of it which could be written down. The mere writing gives form to things which had no form and substitutes an intellectual form for a form which once had reality. Every piece of writing is a dramatisation. Even a chemical equation dramatises the complicated mutual impact of substances. The equation is a brief synopsis. Certain common elements are abstracted and given balance and opposition. More is omitted than included. And this is true not only of shabby thought and cheap writing. It is only a little less true of the best of both. Biography is always tendentious and always untrue. Fiction and drama are further refinements of the biographical method. To praise no matter what play or novel for being 'true to life' is to prove oneself a fool. The naturalists, the photographic realists, are the most crafty liars of all. It is only when we

accept the lying perspective as part of our material that we approach reality. Kafka was closer to reality than Zola. But what Kafka wrote was still fiction. (*Double Image* 70)

For Heppenstall, no sort of plotting could help one come closer to reality. Instead, an author with the sense of the inherent unreality of the written word, or any other form of narrative, could employ any literary technique to attempt to approach reality. As a modernist, however, he still considers reality to exist firmly, and the approach to such a reality possible.

However, unlike Miller, Heppenstall does not trust in the power of digression to bring his narrative closer to reality. *Saturnine* is an episodic novel.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, Heppenstall saw *Saturnine* as a picaresque narrative, a form which, according to him has “has no formal plot but that the episodes simply follow each other serially” (Heppenstall, *Intellectual* 46). It is unclear whether the concept of digression has any relevance in such a context. Miller employs the concept of the narrative line metaphorically, but, more literally, the only line in all but a few experimental novels is the line of text on the page. This line proceeds inevitably from beginning to end.<sup>21</sup> That is, without a particular expectation of how the beginning, middle, and end of a story is to be formed, the novelist and reader are free to explore new narrative forms,

---

20 Aristotle writes, “Of simple Plots and actions the episodic are the worst” For Aristotle, an episodic plot is purely sequential, lacking in “probability” or “necessity”: that is, causation (1451b). *Between the Acts*, too, may be considered episodic in nature. Like *Saturnine*, that novel lacks the clearly marked structural middle of *To the Lighthouse*, or even *Mrs. Dalloway* or *Orlando*. It is, however, like *Saturnine*, highly segmented, its stream-of-consciousness narrative divided by the acts of Miss La Trobe’s play.

21 Once again, with a few exceptions, such as the subject of the next chapter, B. S. Johnson’s *The Unfortunates*, as well as hypertext and the Choose Your Own Adventure series of children’s books. Note that the exceptions to the linearity of the novel are, in all cases that I know of, highbrow

without any particular sense of either straightness of line or digression. The serial plot, so disdained by Aristotle, is one well-established method for doing so.

Simply avoiding a formal plot, however, was not for Heppenstall a method that would allow his narrative to approach reality. Instead, Heppenstall employs a particular narrative technique under particular circumstances to effect a particular approach towards reality. Frobisher, in his capacity as narrator, addresses novel's apparently formless middle directly:

It seems as if I were telling four or five stories at once, but that is how it was. I can imagine this story divided up between four or five distinct novels. There would be the novel dealing with a business man who crashed and upon whom a hitherto suppressed romanticism thereafter took its revenge, causing him to suffer delusions and eventually to lose his memory. There would be a novel dealing with the London of before the war and during the Sitzkrieg [sic], its decadent intellectualism, its circles of vice, the disintegration of personality later to be remedied by a national risorgimento. There would be novels of simpler theme, the downfall of an erotophile, the errant husband and wife brought together by the birth of a child. More interesting perhaps than any of these, there would be a highly atmospheric novel dealing with experiences in a half-world of death and rebirth. But in actuality these and other potential themes were inextricable, and I cannot truthfully say what effect attached to what cause or indeed which was

---

experiments, a crossbreed of novels and games, or both. Of course, the reader of any text is free to disrupt its linearity, as any child who has skipped to the end before reading the middle (or not) knows.

cause and which effect. Any attempt at all-embracing consistency would be dishonest (and I believe that it is always so in life and that all novel-writing is dishonest in its degree). I can but play upon the surface and hint at underlying depths wherever I am aware of them.

Nevertheless, I am certain that all things do cohere within a pattern, that anarchy and chaos are conditions not to be found in nature and that, if one were possessed of the necessary technique, the whole of a man and a man's life could be read clearly from a single hair of his head, as some claim to read it in the palm of his hand.

(Heppenstall, *Saturnine* 93)

Frobisher describes the narrative middle as both inherently chaotic and inherently ordered. Rather than a single episodic novel, his story *could* be several, more traditionally formed novels, based around the plot. These multiple novels, bound together, create, in one sense, a relative chaos, because one cannot a single plot line in Frobisher's story. It is the binding together of the novels, in Frobisher's view, that makes his story episodic: these are not merely episodes of a single story, but episodes of multiple novels. However, they are bound together *between* beginning and end—that is, in the middle—and through this binding of multiple narrative lines there is created a complex symbolic structure.

Furthermore, this middle is not simply a middle of the finished narrative product, but a middle of both life (that is, lived narrative) and writing. Frobisher abdicates responsibility for creating narrative coherence both on behalf of himself as narrator and on behalf of Heppenstall as author. Narrative coherence is, instead, a

matter of interpretation, an epistemological rather than ontological matter, and the product of a belief that the threads of narrative must inevitably weave together, even if we can see only their juxtaposition. But Frobisher is also vague as to where narrative coherence might come from, both in this novel and in general. The emphasis on an apparently directionless narrative, however, marks this as a middle-oriented novel, one which is not controlled by a motion from beginning to end, but by a continuous narrative motion subject to the reader's power to create narrative coherence.

Miller offers three specific possibilities for making coherence out of the chaos. The first—similar to Frobisher's view—is the sheer force of the mind's will to construe narrative coherence: "The human need for continuity is so strong that a man will find some principle of order in any random sequence" (Miller, "Narrative Middles" 375). Second, Miller proposes that the unity of the modern novel is not literal, but unspoken and thematic: "Its unity is the unity not of the letter but of the spirit, that is through an association of ideas relating each segment to the others by way of their common relation to a spiritual point which can never be represented as such, but only represented indirectly, in figure or in allegory" ("Narrative Middles" 385). This appears to be at least the partial solution of many modernists, including such figures as Woolf's lighthouse and Conrad's Jim.

*Saturnine*, too, seems to place its narrative faith in a sort of symbolic unity, particularly in relation to death. That is, the concern with death unites many of the plots mentioned by Frobisher and haunts all of them, providing a degree of structural and thematic coherence. The novel begins with Frobisher's declaration, "Sam Thorpe

died on October, 1938” (7). Frobisher soon finds himself feeling a chill in the hospital, waiting for a diagnosis of what seem to be gall stones. Having met a woman whom he refers to as “Thea,” whom he believes he has wronged in a previous life, Frobisher again feels a chill and tells himself, “This is the planet Saturn which has me in its grip” (30). Moreover, immediately preceding the episode in which Frobisher’s self is split in two, Frobisher believes that, in striking his friend and benefactor, Richard St. Hilda, he has caused the man to disintegrate<sup>22</sup>. Frobisher’s near-death vision also includes an explicit discussion of the Freudian death-wish. Indeed, throughout the novel’s long middle, Frobisher views himself as doomed, and his apparent death at the end of this long middle fulfills that sense of fate in the manner predicted: a blow to the head from a loose piece of architecture. All of this personal concern with death takes place under the specter of World War II, a scale of death that seems largely incomprehensible to Frobisher and represents, in addition to the deaths of millions of people, the death of recognizable forms of nationhood.

Despite its distance from battle, *Saturnine* is in many ways a novel of the Second World War. Crucially, the war itself begins midway through the novel,

---

22 As Bucknell notes, St. Hilda also represents for Frobisher a Freudian splitting of the self (Bucknell 42). Early in the novel, as Bucknell quotes, the narrator cites German anti-Semitism as a model for his own relationship to St. Hilda: “it is one of the elementary facts of existence that no man willingly contains a devil. He will try to exteriorize and as it were incarnate it. Thus the German race has tried to incarnate its devil in the Jews. [...] In the same way, I tried to incarnate my devil in Richard St. Hilda” (Heppenstall, *Saturnine* 35). Frobisher further suggests that the Jews will become the German’s devils, destroying the Germans. This disturbing prediction is undermined not only by subsequent realities, but by the failure of St. Hilda to destroy Frobisher—instead, just as the Germans would burn the Jews, Frobisher (at least in his fantasies) disintegrates St. Hilda, yet St. Hilda survives. It is uncertain how much Heppenstall knew of the concentration camps at the time of writing, but it is clear the connection of the struggles of personal identity to not only national identity but the events of WWII is not accidental. Frobisher does his best to ignore the war; Heppenstall does not.

coinciding roughly with the splitting of Alick's self following his conflict with Richard two weeks before the war. The war remains in the background until the end of the novel, when Frobisher reports for duty and receives a medical exam. However, it is easy to read Alick's story as an allegory for the West, and, given Heppenstall's interest in national identity as expressed most acutely in *The Fourfold Tradition*, Britain in particular over the same period of time. During the first half of the book, Frobisher dithers as Neville Chamberlain continues the policy of appeasement through most of 1938 and 1939. There is internal squabbling in the run-up to the war, the declaration of war revealing, as does Frobisher's vision of himself, a crack that had already existed. (Here we might compare Maggie's realization in the middle of *The Golden Bowl*—or the cracking of the bowl itself.) There is, near the beginning of the war, still false hope that things may return to the way they were. But soon it becomes clear that this war is something different—and Frobisher dies. His rebirth is constituted gradually over the final three chapters of the novel, with a rededication on Frobisher's part to family and nation. The final chapter, however, ends on a note which suggests that, in some sense at least, everything will remain the same: the military is a ridiculous bureaucracy, from which Frobisher maintains an ironic distance which is continued in the novel's sequel, *The Lesser Infortune*. This undercutting of Frobisher's transformation is typical of the skepticism of modernism, leaving Frobisher-reborn a similarly ambiguous figure as Mr. Ramsay at the end of *To the Lighthouse*. In both cases, we are left with an individual male survivor as a stand-in for the uncertain transformation of Britain and Europe in the face of unprecedented war. Even these endings leave their characters and societies in the

middle of fundamental change; the uncertainty even in the face of epiphany reflects the devotion of these novels to the narrative of the middle, as well as modernism's role as chronicler of historical middles.

*Saturnine*, however, not only narrates war as middle (both of the novel, and as a narrative middle of history), but was itself written and published in the middle of the war. In some sense, the book does not exist outside of the war: when it was reprinted, it was also rewritten and re-titled, as *The Greater Infortune*. Both *Saturnine* and its sequel were written while Heppenstall was a soldier in the war, and Heppenstall's return to novel-writing was perhaps as much a product of the time on his hands during this period as it was a desire to document and fictionalize the events of his life.

Meanwhile, the book itself bears the visible mark of war: below its publication date of July 1943, the War Economy Standard's logo is imprinted, with the following text: "THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS" (4). The book's obscurity can also be partially attributed to the war. The following page notes a production run of only 1,600 copies, and it is easy to see how, leaving aside these material limitations, *Saturnine* might have seemed neither serious enough nor escapist enough to capture the public's attention in wartime. (It also lacked the scandalous publicity its predecessor, *The Blaze of Noon*, had received for its somewhat erotic depiction of a blind masseuse.) Heppenstall also notes that the episodic form of the picaresque narrative fit nicely with the material difficulties of the book's composition—he could,



with relative ease, send the novel to his publisher one chapter at a time (Heppenstall, *Intellectual* 46).

Because *Saturnine* is, unlike *To the Lighthouse*, a mid-war novel with a more conventional sequel, its ending is not only imbued with the spirit of the middle, but is itself a sort of middle. It takes place during the war, but so does its composition, precluding a conventional ending for perhaps the most archetypal of conventional narrative events. Not only does Heppenstall leave the war—and Frobisher’s relationship to it—unresolved, but they fundamentally cannot be resolved in this novel, due to its parasitical relationship to an unfolding reality and its textual relationship to a novel that had not yet been written. The ending of *Saturnine* corresponds both to the middle of the real war and the middle of a larger fictional(ized) story of which *The Lesser Infortune* would become the second half, a return to mental breakdowns in an uncertain world, though this time without the destabilizing formal effects of Frobisher’s visions and delusions.

We might also read into *Saturnine*’s war-torn production and ending the temporary death of British modernism. It is largely Frobisher’s disintegrating personality that gives *Saturnine* its modernist character. Through Frobisher’s disintegration, the novel foregrounds not only the modernist themes of the disintegrating of the traditional self along with traditional Europe, but also gives us a narrator of almost Beckettian unreliability. Sequences in which a friend of Frobisher’s shrinks, in which Frobisher follows a man who turns out to be himself, and in which Frobisher dies and visits the afterlife are easily read within a modernist-realist framework as the delusions of the narrator.

However, like the stories Macmann and Lemuel in Beckett's *Malone Dies*, these fantasies take on an interest and significance of their own. Like the fantastical elements of the dream-play in the "Circe" chapter of *Ulysses*, Frobisher's delusions and mystical visions operate on a narrative level of their own, working as symbolic narratives within the narrator's mind, even as a more humdrum reality plays out on another narrative level, the "real" world of the narrative. Relying strictly on Frobisher's account—which rarely seeks to explain or fill in the gaps left by these fantasies—the reader is left only the barest sense of what has happened in the real world during these episodes. When Don Quixote returns from the Cave of Montesinos with a tale of a fantastical vision, Cervantes makes it clear that Quixote has simply fallen asleep. Frobisher, though he is, like Quixote, a picaresque hero fleeing an impoverished domesticity while displaying a somewhat ambiguous madness, is also the narrator of his own tale. What's more, the autobiographical nature of the novel lends the character an extra authority. Heppenstall himself continued to believe to some degree in the astrology which guides many of Frobisher's delusions. Perhaps it is unfair, then, to call these episodes delusions. Instead, they occupy an ambiguous space between delusion and vision. This is a novel, like its narrator, uncertain about the relationship between the natural world and the spiritual world. It thus pushes against the edges of a modernist poetics concerned, in Brian McHale's analysis, with epistemological concerns. Like much modernist literature, *Saturnine* asks its readers to puzzle out what is going on in its world—where Frobisher's fantasies begin and end, where to trust his judgments—even as its main character himself tries to puzzle out what is happening in his own life and in a

world seemingly thrown into chaos. Also like much modernist literature, it takes the psyche of its main character as a serious object of novelistic representation. In allowing this representation to completely overtake the physical world in the primary narrative—providing an apparent physical reality of its own—it builds on the technique of “Circe.” But it goes beyond “Circe” in questioning the ontological status of this psychical world. Frobisher’s visions may be merely the delusions of a madman, but in the face of a physical world in the midst of an incomprehensible war, they may also be genuine spiritual visions. Heppenstall was a man of shifting beliefs, both spiritual and political, and *Saturnine* reflects that uncertainty in its ambiguous attention to noncorporeal worlds.

Furthermore, where “Circe” and the Cave of Montesinos are clearly important events with symbolic significance in their respective narratives, they retain a primarily episodic character. Frobisher’s visions, on the other hand, occupy important structural positions in the novel, both marking and effecting dramatic shifts in Frobisher’s spiritual and psychological development. They function, in other words, as middles, providing form, meaning, and narrative direction to an otherwise episodic novel. The most important of these episodes, in which Frobisher is split in two, occurs in the middle of the novel, splitting the novel itself in two. The split is immediately precipitated by the shrinking episode and ultimately healed by Frobisher’s near-death vision. Death and visions thus mark out the middle of the novel—a long middle of picaresque adventures and disintegrating personality as well as a short middle where the physical and psychic/spiritual worlds collide, a climax

which takes *Saturnine* to the edge of postmodernism even as Frobisher seems to fall over the edge of madness.

Like “Time Passes,” *Saturnine*’s middle chapter begins with nightfall. Frobisher has been in a fight with his friend and benefactor, Richard St. Hilda, whom Frobisher describes as first having shrunk before his eyes and then disintegrating under his hands. Frobisher opens the chapter by invoking the night in a way which suggests both his personal crisis and his possible redemption:

To walk by night. I cannot know what reminiscence is provoked in other people by this phrase. To some, I fancy, who have little experience of solitude, it conjures up nothing unless it be that banality the moonlight excursion of lovers. To me and surely to a great many, it implies whatever lies deepest and most jealously guarded in their lives. It means hunger, homelessness and total frustration of the will. It means the piteous trade of a whore. It means restlessness at the full moon, when dogs bay and the lunatic cries aloud from the window of his room.

Above all, it means proximity to the divine. (70)

Like Woolf’s narrator, Frobisher uses the night to probe mankind’s deepest insecurities. Like those in “Time Passes” who venture onto the beach at night, he seeks colloquy with the divine. However, here we see not a vacating of the individual human personality, but a revelation of its depths. And, rather than a distance from nature or divinity, Frobisher finds in the lonely darkness a sort of intimacy. In mentioning the lunatic, moreover, the narrator half-recognizes his own predicament,

and offers proximity to the divine as compensation for, if not the consequence of, his own physical and mental depredations.

Also as in “Time Passes,” this chapter does not lock itself in a literal nighttime, but instead uses the nighttime walk as a theme which suffuses the daytime content of the rest of the chapter. The following morning, Frobisher, who, like Heppenstall, had flirted with Catholicism, enters a church after a three-year absence. He describes his surroundings in precise material detail, but with little recognition of their significance: “A doll in purple sat askew upon a cupboard top, her black hair surmounted by an enormous crown set with pieces of coloured glass. It was three years since I had been in such a place” (70). What was once familiar has become strange—what was once a potential solution to Frobisher’s spiritual problems is now a puzzle, a collection of objects and figures. Frobisher asks for a Father Tavener, but “I did not know Father Tavener, except by name. I had asked for him because his was the first priest’s name that came into my head, and I had known perfectly well that he would not be there” (71). It is unclear, at this point, how in control of his actions Frobisher is. He offers both a conscious and an unconscious motivation for asking Father Tavener—and here we can see one of the splits in his personality. Strangely, however, one of the priests knows Tavener, and, when Father Aspic arrives, “I knew at once that I could tell my story to him” (71). Once again, however, Frobisher is of two minds: when the two men speak, Frobisher tells Aspic that he is a Catholic, then, when Aspic is obviously skeptical, that he is “under instruction” (72). Frobisher says nothing more to his would-be providential confessor. By the end of the scene, Frobisher-as-narrator puts Aspic’s very existence into doubt: “I turned to Father

Aspic, to thank him for his kindness. He was not there. Perhaps he never had been there. Certainly, had I invented him, Father Aspic is a name that I might have given him” (72). Here, the role of madman and writer is conflated, with both having an ambiguous relationship to a divinely ordered world: Father Aspic may be Frobisher’s unwitting creation, or he may be, as the Latin root of “invented” suggests, simply a man he has come upon. Primarily, though, Father Aspic’s appearance marks a continuance of the nighttime walk in the morning light—a delusional, inward looking journey with an ambiguous connection to spirituality.

Though Frobisher’s afternoon wanderings have no such obvious delusions, they continue this theme of uncertain solipsism. After joining a tea party at the Vale of Health, Frobisher notes that “I had begun to enjoy my wanderings for their own sake. I was no longer searching. Or perhaps I was searching, but did not know for what. All I knew was that I must not go back to the flat in St. John’s Wood. Every now and then, I had a moment of panic, as if I had forgotten something of extreme importance” (72-73). This sense of forgetting something of importance suffuses *Saturnine*—its episodic nature, peppered with ellipses, following a character in search of a purpose in life, transfers this sense to the reader; Frobisher’s delusional episodes only serve to heighten this sense. The reader is left to wander like Frobisher, from story to story, perhaps not in search of a central narrative, but with a lingering feeling that there must be a central narrative somewhere in this novel. The supernatural episodes have some importance of their own sake, but they just as likely serve to cover up a material reality while standing in for a psychological one: we do not know quite what has happened at St. John’s Wood, but we are forced to obey Frobisher’s

compulsion to avoid it. Heppenstall therefore blends the psychological, the spiritual, and the narrative in Frobisher's moments of delusion and panic, creating a multi-leveled middle without apparent direction.

Still not in conscious control of his own wanderings, Frobisher arrives at the Institute of Mystical Science, which he has avoided since the early part of the novel. He suggests, in the narration, the possibility of meeting "Thea," but, as with the episode in the church, the Institute is anti-climactic. Instead, a Burmese gem shop attracts Frobisher's attention, and here, noticing a mirror, he splits in two:

I stared into this shop window and felt extraordinarily happy. And then I turned round suddenly. I had felt behind me the presence of somebody in great anguish of spirit. I turned and saw a man with his jacket collar up and drying mud on his shoes. Our eyes met for a second, and then the man turned his heel and walked away, his hands in his trousers pockets. I felt impelled to follow him. (73)

At this point, it is not entirely clear that the man is Frobisher, but the man's distress and unkempt appearance, as well as the mentioning of a mirror, suggest a sort of Doppelgänger. A re-reading (or a careful first reading) reveals that Frobisher has split his personality into a happy self and an anguished self, and the mirror seems to be the catalyst: seeing himself externally, rather than internally, produces happiness.

Furthermore, splitting himself allows Frobisher the focalizer to serve as his own narrator: in the present moment, he sees himself and describes his actions. He has achieved the what Genette calls homodiegetic narration with external focalization—the objective narration of the self (Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* 124).

Whereas Genette's discussion of homodiegetic external narration centers on first-person narrative, which Barthes had argued was absurd or impossible,<sup>23</sup> Frobisher's homodiegetic external narration is in the third person. That is, the possible absurdity of homodiegetic external narration is fully externalized: the self is not simply outside of the self's own thoughts, but outside of its own body. Narrative theory traditionally gives narrators a certain power over the story, but unlike Maggie Verver, who is able to control her own story by narrating it, Frobisher, in narrating his own movements, cedes whatever power over them he might have had left. External narration of the self splits not only mind but body, eliminating any hierarchical connection between the two. Of course, this homodiegetic external third-person narration is itself contained within homodiegetic *internal* first-person narration, creating a multi-leveled polyautonarration. An older Frobisher remains the first-person narrator of the protagonist's story, narrating the actions and thoughts of his younger self without resort to free indirect discourse or interior monologue, mimics his younger self's attempts at objectivity. The diegetic doubling of the self is then, in turn, a further iteration of the split that occurs between diegetic narrator and protagonist. To narrate oneself is to create two selves. To multiply the self is to diffuse control of the self. It

---

<sup>23</sup> Barthes in his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" divides all narration into "personal" and "apersonal." Third-person narratives are either personal or impersonal depending on whether a sentence may be translated into the first person with a simple substitution of pronouns. Barthes argues that the sentence, "the tinkling of the ice against the glass appeared to give Bond a sudden inspiration" cannot be so translated due to the impersonal nature of the verb "appeared" (Barthes 283). The verb "appeared" implies external narration: the narrator does not know whether the glass gave Bond an inspiration, whereas an internal narrator would know (or, rather, narrate) Bond's true internal state, which cannot, from an internal point of view, be a matter of appearance. Of course, this line of argument implies a sort of unity and certainty about the internal self, a perfect knowledge of one's own mental state by virtue of the internal point of view. *The Unfortunates*, as we see here, does not ascribe to this view of the self or the consciousness.



is no wonder that Frobisher as narrator imagines his novel as four or five, with a web of meaning that is beyond his control. In *Saturnine*, narration is not power.

While the doubling of the split between narrator and character certainly complicates matters, as does the ambiguous symbolic function of Frobisher's double, this doubling very closely follows Freud's description of pathological doubling in "The Uncanny":

By slow degrees a special authority takes shape within the ego; this authority, which is able to confront the rest of the ego, performs the function of self-observation and self-criticism, exercises a kind of psychological censorship, and so becomes what we know as the 'conscience'. In the pathological case of delusions of observation it becomes isolated, split off from the ego, and discernible to the clinician. The existence of such an authority, which can treat the rest of the ego as an object – the fact that, in other words, man is capable of self-observation – makes it possible to imbue the old idea of the double with a new content and attribute a number of features to it – above all, those which, in the light of self-criticism, seem to belong to the old, superannuated narcissism of primitive times. (Freud 142-143)

In addition to Frobisher's narcissistic self-narration, we have here the mingling of fantasy and reality, frequent element in Freud's uncanny (Freud 140). On more than one occasion, Frobisher shows an interest in Freudian analysis, including a tentative self-diagnosis of a "castration complex" (Heppenstall, *Saturnine* 11). In one sense, then, we see in this scene not psychoanalysis as a solution to the epistemological

problems of the self, but instead psychoanalysis as a producer (or at least shaping force) of pathologies of the self. Frobisher himself will encounter such pop-psychoanalysis in his near-death vision. Meanwhile, what is perhaps most notable about the Freudian parallels, in addition to the way the novel applies them not only to both *fabula* and *sjužet*, is their inability to provide a useful or even meaningful diagnosis for either Frobisher or the reader. We do not know *why* Frobisher has split in two, and we do not know precisely which part of himself he is attempting to expel; though this double seems to replace Richard St. Hilda as Frobisher's personal devil, Frobisher does not seem particularly hostile or repulsed by his double, but is simply fascinated by him and unable to give up his pursuit.

It is also worth noting that there is nothing particularly uncanny about this scene, either for Frobisher (who seems not the least bit disturbed) or for this reader, who even on first reading was occupied more with epistemological problems (discovering what is happening in physical reality and determining the symbolic meaning of the double) than with atmosphere or emotional identification. Freud notes that the uncanny is largely dependent on uncertainty of belief—if one has not completely discounted belief, for example, in ghosts, then one finds apparent encounter with a ghost uncanny. But if one actively believes in ghosts, or if one's materialist mindset is firm, there is no sense of old, suppressed beliefs returning, and thus no feeling of the uncanny (Freud 154). Not only does Frobisher fail to recognize this moment as a mingling of fantasy and reality—he believes wholly in his delusion—but he expresses for most of the novel an active mystical belief. The reader, meanwhile, is subject to the writer's framing of the story (Freud 158). That is,

for Freud, the uncanny is as much an effect of *syuzhet* as *fabula*. In *Saturnine*, the attention drawn by the text to the *syuzhet* itself, as well as the narrator's matter-of-fact relation of events that undermine our sense that the double might have a real physical existence, push against the effect of the uncanny. Instead, the novel concretizes Freud's notion of the uncanny double and holds it up for the reader's analysis, but, like Frobisher's pursuit of his double, the reader's pursuit of the uncanny here is both inevitable and something of an epistemological dead end.

As Frobisher follows himself through darkness—his increasingly delusive state is reflected in the returning nightfall—he finds his way to an archway and a door with two musicians. Frobisher's Doppelganger tips a musician as he enters. Frobisher observes his other self closely:

The man I was following looked at the musicians, peering into their cynically cheerful, vaguely dirty faces. The one who had stopped playing, the one with the mandolin, coughed and then ignored him, pushed his cap on his head and started strumming again. My man stood close to the two of them for a moment longer, opened his mouth to ask a question, was about to turn and go away and then at last moved up to the door in the archway, pushed it open and went in. I followed. (74)

The material detail here, attending to apparently unimportant actions and physical traits, is in keeping with the style of narration of the entire novel, but at odds with the darkness of the scene. The narration would be much more plausible with the "man" replaced with "I," particularly as it implies that Frobisher knows what his other self

sees in the faces. But here we can see that it is not only Frobisher the focalizer who is lacking in will: his other self is unable to go away and, even more significantly, unable to speak. Frobisher has three roles in this moment: a retrospective narrator, who offers no comment and, apparently, no insight into the situation; a focalizer, who supplies most of the content but can apparently do nothing but follow and observe; and an externalized self, whose actions the focalizer narrates. None of these three versions of Frobisher seems to have control of Frobisher's actions or of the story as a whole. Furthermore, no Frobisher formally recognizes another Frobisher as himself and takes responsibility for his actions. The focalizer, like a standard modernist narrator, has attempted to vacate himself from the story; but in so doing he has only created another self who lacks subjective existence (even if the act of narration creates for him a sort of objective existence). By splitting Frobisher's self, Heppenstall not only questions the idea of the unitary self, but the idea of objective narration which stands at the heart of much modernist storytelling from Flaubert on. Frobisher attempts to narrate objectively, describing only what he sees, but, unwittingly, he describes only himself.

Inside, Frobisher once again encounters a mirror, and he is able to give us this objective description of his own face, not yet recognized as his own, "a face intelligent and mobile but here and there setting in excessively definite lines, the pale, submarine eyes tremulous, hurt and withdrawn, the fair, partly bleaching hair untidy, the outline of cheek and jaw a little rough, shaved perhaps yesterday" (74). The clues to both Frobisher's psychological (hurt, withdrawn) and physical (shaved perhaps yesterday) self are here again. Frobisher, however, does not question his own interest

in this man, and continues to narrate the man's actions without paying attention to his own. Frobisher spends a page describing the man ordering a drink, then follows him back out the door. Once again, Frobisher shows an implausible ability to detect his subject's inner state, replacing the first person with the third person: "He looked worried. Rather hungry, too. In the street was a costermonger's barrow. He seemed to think he would buy some fruit to eat out here and began to feel for a coin in his pocket, but some vague anxiety stopped him" (75-76). On the one hand, the return of the word "vague" serves both to protect the focalizer from charges that he knows too much about his subject's inner state. Heppenstall has created a situation which neatly challenges the narrative conventions of the late James, who also frequently used the word "vague" to describe characters and their states of mind. James's narrators, like the focalizer Frobisher in this scene, narrate the detailed actions and thoughts of various characters while keeping themselves largely objective. James occasionally allows his characters moments of insight into each other's minds. But the complex narrative situation in *Saturnine* points up the unreality of such narrators and insights. Here, the third-person narration is embedded inside a focalized version of a first-person narrator: there is no objective heterodiegetic narrator to ground the description in a sense of reality. Moreover, the situation itself is unreal. Frobisher's insights are not into someone else's mind, but, as the novel will reveal shortly, into his own. But the insights are ultimately superficial—and Frobisher has throughout the novel shown himself with little ability to understand his own thoughts and motivations, let alone those of other people. Whereas James produced insight through objective narration of mental processes, in *Saturnine* the workings of mental processes overwhelm objective

narration. Frobisher has entered a world without objective facts and, therefore, without the possibility of an objective narrator.

Continuing along shop windows, Frobisher and his double reach a newsagent's shop, where again the narrator shows unusual access to the man's mind. After looking at several pre-war posters, the present begins to impinge:

BLACK-OUT FOR ALL LONDON. My man again managed the half of a smile. Another placard apparently startled him for a moment. SOHO MURDER CASE DISCLOSURES. He looked away and looked at it again. It can have told him nothing, but a sweat broke out on his top lip. SOHO KILLING. MAN QUESTIONED. He breathed in quickly and stared across the street, squinting as it were into the huddled shadows of his own mind. But he knew already that this was only a pretence. There was no clue for him in this. (76)

Here, Frobisher not only peeks into the man's mind, but observes his mind observing itself. This is a particularly Jamesian moment, but there are, once again, several important differences. First, narrator, focalizer, and thinker are all one man. Second, while James's focalizers generally cultivate impressions and analysis in search of greater aesthetic, moral, and psychological insight, Frobisher's double seeks only a "clue." The mystery tale that is, in McHale's theory, modernism's double is here revealed as such. We are reminded not only of Frobisher's own entanglement and fugitive status, but of the reader's own unusual predicament of not quite knowing what happened between Frobisher and St. Hilda, despite being witnesses to the former's narration of the scene. This third element—the reader's position of

bafflement toward a scene that has been fully narrated (as opposed to the Jamesian habit of simple omission)—is related to a fourth: a fixed, rather than indeterminate, as is common in James, ambiguity of reference in the final deictic pronoun. “This” may refer to the news placard, which offers no clue to Frobisher’s actions or the public response, or to the man’s own mind. Here again, Heppenstall emphasizes a key apparent break from the Jamesian modernist tradition: the investigation of the mind is not an opportunity for rich discovery and narrative redirection, but is instead an empty cul-de-sac, resulting in an absence of revelation and a narrative stasis.

The man is next confronted with a stereotypical Negro other who initially seems to offer some sense of wholeness to the fractured Frobisher, the Negro soon proves not to conform to stereotype:

Coming towards him now was a tall, thin negro, flat-footed, with hands swinging loose, a big, curly-brimmed hat on the side of his head. The negro, too, was reassuring, being totally alien and remote. My man smiled at the negro and spoke.

He said:

‘Is this Soho?’

‘Yeah, sure.’

The negro said it like any English boy who has been to American films. The voice was not like any of the voices that negroes are supposed to have. That made the man I was following smile all the more. (76-77)

Frobisher is reassured both by the sense of encountering a well-defined cultural other whose very alienness is familiar from racist popular imagery. He is then further reassured when this pattern is reversed: the Negro is undefined in popular culture, but familiar, if not as a Negro, from real life. Furthermore, he is familiar not because his image is replicated by popular culture, but because his voice is itself a replication of popular culture. Perhaps Frobisher smiles because he delights in his expectations being defied, in finding a man more human than expected. I suspect, however, that Frobisher's double's delight is the product of a more complex production of an other, a man different from him in a manner which appeals specifically to his intellectual pretensions: rather than an exotic Negro, the man is a culturally vulgar youth. Furthermore, this man's self, rather than Frobisher's perception of that self, has proven vulnerable to cultural incursions. Frobisher may be split in two at this point, but at least, he can be reassured, the two are both native to himself.

This brief moment of assurance for Frobisher is immediately disrupted by the encounter which at last firmly reveals the identity of the man he has been following. In the following passage, which concludes the chapter, the narrator delves further into the man's mind, using free indirect discourse, narrative description, and, on one occasion, direct discourse, to reveal the man's thoughts. Throughout, Frobisher still fails to recognize himself even as objective events reveal the man's identity:

Then something was happening, and the man with mud-caked shoes and his jacket collar turned up was afraid. Two cars were hesitating round the corner, one grey and one blue. I heard the occupants of the two cars consulting with each other, shouting through the noise of



clutches holding their engines hard.

A woman's voice was calling out to somebody by name:

'Alick. Alick . . .'

The man's first impulse was to run up and see what it was, see if he could help. A lovers' quarrel, a drunken lark involving a girl, possibly a genuine crime. He might be useful. Then fear warned him again to turn away. He turned at once and marched off towards the distant main road, his heart beginning to pump hard.

The thought pulsed in his head:

'I don't want to get mixed up in anything. I must go away. I've got to keep clear of things.'

He strode out as fast as he could. There was no thought in his head, except that he must get away.

But the two cars were following him, were alongside, were pulling up two or three yards in front of him. People were getting out of them and banging the doors, from the grey car a woman and a large young man with a scar over one eye, from the other a police inspector and a constable. The man I was following strode on. He meant to ignore them. They stood in his path.

The woman kept saying:

'Alick, darling. Alick . . .'

It was to him that she was saying it. He must have seen that she was handsome, rather tall, and that she had tears in her eyes, but he

strode on.

He said, with his eyes now looking straight in front of him:

‘I’m sorry. There must be some confusion.’

He tried to get past, but the two policemen barred his way.

The inspector said:

‘Now be reasonable, sir. You’re only . . .’

He did not hear any more. His head went round faster and faster, until his body could do nothing but follow it. His shoulders swung round, and one foot crossed over the other. He toppled heavily in the gutter, knocking off the police-constable’s helmet as he went down. (77-78)

This passage reveals a remarkable degree of both separation and unity of Frobisher-as-narrator and Frobisher-as-character. On the one hand, the narrator retains distance from his subject. The final paragraph in particular mingles narration of physical events with narration of the man’s mental state in the same objective tone. On the other hand, the narrator adheres to a strict focalization, making only observations and judgments available to Frobisher’s mind in the moment, to the point where the chapter ends as he loses consciousness. This combination of unity and split echoes the split within Frobisher both thematically and technically, as, in the moment, Frobisher maintains a belief that he is only observing, rather than living, his life.

The scene reinforces this doubling with apparently objective aspects of the scene. There are two cars, two occupants in each, two policemen. The woman is twice quoted calling Frobisher’s name, repeating “Alick” twice on each occasion. The

impulse of fear comes to Frobisher twice before he begins to run away. Frobisher's thoughts are similarly allusive, even as he seems less aware than ever of his own actions: he refers to the possibility of a lover's quarrel (his own relationship with Richard being left ambiguous), and to the possibility of a crime. Previously, at the newsstand, he seemed at least somewhat aware that he himself was involved in a sort of crime—but here the crime is externalized, even from the "other" Frobisher. Most ironically, Frobisher quotes himself saying, "There must be some confusion." This last piece of dialog not only reflects Frobisher's mental state, but the position the narrator has put the reader in. The man and the woman are not clearly identified as Richard St. Hilda and Frobisher's wife Margaret, even as the narrative of the two Frobishers seems to be resolving itself. Meanwhile, the split between Frobisher-as-narrator, Frobisher-as-character is maintained, even heightened, at the very moment that the two Frobishers in the scene are definitively revealed as the same person. Frobisher's disturbed mental state makes it difficult to grasp exactly what is going on, even if we are able to get the general idea. But the revelation of the identity of the Frobishers heightens the reader's awareness of the narrator's silence on this matter. Rather than state what is plainly true, the narrator maintains his modernist stance of objectively narrating subjective mental states. But there is something impossible about narrating the subjective mental state of a man who is two men, since only one mind can be narrated at once. We are left with a sense of not quite understanding what is going on inside of Frobisher, just as we are not quite sure what is going on in the scene. Frobisher's mind is, at this point, beyond the traditional resources of modernist narration. More traditional narration—with its ability to summarize and

analyze mental states from outside the scene—might provide greater insight. Meanwhile, extreme techniques often associated with postmodernism—such as the parallel columns used by B.S. Johnson in *Christie Malry's Own Double Entry* and in part of Brigid Brophy's *In Transit*—might be able to directly render the split self. Heppenstall's technique, instead, attempts to produce an impression of Frobisher's split minds that is nonetheless continuous. This leaves the reader half in the dark. Happily, this incomplete rendering is perhaps more true to Frobisher's subjective experience than these alternative techniques might have been: by seeing half of Frobisher's mind as he observes himself, Heppenstall is able to replicate some of Frobisher's own confusion about himself. The reader recognizes, as Frobisher does not, that he is a fractured man, that modernist archetype updated to reflect the trauma of World War II as well as the poverty and spiritual and ideological uncertainty of the late thirties. But beyond this, the reader is split, as Frobisher is, from a full understanding of this split self, is cut off from half of Frobisher, and from a comprehension beyond the bare symbol of the Doppelgänger, of what it means for a mind to be split in two.

This central episode of the novel, then, as a seemingly paradoxical mix of split and unification—of the mind, of the body, of the personality, of the narrator. Heppenstall makes us keenly aware that the narrator is both the main character and not the main character, that the main character's thoughts and body are both himself and not himself, that the sort of narrative window into a character's mind that is so central to modernist technique is only one window, with a necessarily incomplete perspective. It is one of Heppenstall's central insights that an incomplete perspective

is not only a necessary aspect of any one view of the world, but that it is a fundamental aspect of the human mind, even, or perhaps especially, when it is turned upon itself. Frobisher is split apart (and, on another level, Heppenstall is split apart from his autobiographical main character), but it is the very split, and the recognition of that split, that makes him whole. That is, at least at moments of crisis—but, more broadly, for all minds that examine themselves—a representation of a mind unsplit is a representation of only part of a mind. By recognizing the split, Heppenstall at least suggests the whole person.

*Saturnine*'s short middle functions in a somewhat parallel manner for the novel as a whole. Like many traditional middles, it ties the novel together with a crisis in the plot—in this case, a low point for the directionless Frobisher. Like many modernist middles, including, for example *Mrs. Dalloway*'s rhetorically satiric encounter between Septimus Smith and Sir William Bradshaw, *Saturnine*'s short middle is also a crisis of narrative technique, in which objective narration of focalized subjective experience is stretched to the breaking point. Like the middle of *Lord Jim*, Frobisher's wanderings after himself attempt to arrest a directionless narrative and main character and to inject that narrative with a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. Before this middle, *Saturnine* lacks an anchor for its themes of madness, spirituality, and their relationship to the material world. This middle locates and instantiates these concerns in the crisis of personality. Moreover, *Saturnine* suggests that the problems of personality are also narrative problems, that the whole of the story is inevitably split between the real and the unreal. In the simplest of narrative metaphors, Frobisher has completed his long road down and is about to begin his long

journey up. But meaning emanates from this narrative bottom, this narrative middle, and it is difficult to shake the notion that this is Heppenstall's true vision of both personality and narrative.

While *Saturnine* eventually gives us a Frobisher apparently healed by a vision of death and a decision to re-commit himself to his family as well as enlist in the army, those later passages suggest a more conventional message that cannot fully overcome the sense of disintegration found in the novel's middle. Indeed, the birth of Frobisher's daughter provides him with another double, described in detached, precise physical detail:

The child was sleeping. I had been led to suppose that new-born children had malformed heads and features for a day or two, especially after a rather difficult birth. This one had a shapely head, and its features were perfectly formed. The head was covered with fine, red-gold hair. The features already suggested a likeness to myself. (142).

This time, instead of fleeing toward his double, Frobisher flees from it: "I looked at the child again. I looked at Margaret. I kissed her. I fled. I did not propose to weep all over the hospital" (142). The narrator does not make clear just what it is about his daughter that has brought Frobisher to tears, but the description certainly suggests that he is disturbed both by coming face to face with himself and by the idea of a human being born into the world without deformation. In the army as well, Frobisher mocks the idea of a perfect physical body: "I was very pleased indeed to be Grade One and made the same joke to everybody I met during the evening—namely, that I was a perfect specimen of British manhood and that they were sending me in for a

beauty competition next week. This is the only kind of joke that is understood in St. John's Wood" (151). Frobisher mocks the idea that he fits an ideal type—his perfection as a physical specimen—but he also deflects his joy at institutional approval with the gender-based humor of homosocial bonding, which, in his role as narrator, he partially disavows as a concession to his intellectually inferior neighbors and fellow enlistees. *Saturnine* begins with one sort of social estrangement—Frobisher's unemployment—and seems to re-tie the social bonds in the end with fatherhood and enlistment. But Frobisher's reactions to these events suggest that outward visions of wholeness, completeness (narrative or otherwise), or perfection are suspect and, at best, contingent.

The suggestion of a female self echoes Frobisher's reaction to his child, when he encounters her again, this time with a name, Judith. No longer referring to her distantly as a gender-neutral "child," Frobisher again remarks that she "bore an astonishing likeness to myself" (145). His thoughts attempt to modify this reaction, to remove some of the sense of Judith as his double while imbuing her with a Romantic wholeness: "Who is she? What is her history? The likeness to myself will pass. A likeness to Margaret will develop and pass. For some time to come, this child will seem to belong to Margaret, to be a part of her. But she is not. She is herself. A child's body may be the creation of her parents, but no child yet ever inherited a soul" (145). Frobisher entertains two ideas of the self here: first, the idea of *Saturnine's* middle, that the self is a discontinuous whole composed of two parts (in this case, a mother and a father); and second, the Romantic idea that the self is continuous, whole, unique, and self-fashioning. This second idea aligns itself well with his near-

death vision, in which life is self-determined. Here, however, he admonishes himself to keep away: “I must bear it in mind if I am one day tempted to assume a right and to make demands upon this Judy Frobisher. It may be that parents have a duty towards their child, but a child has none towards them. A child is born free, and this means free of parenthood” (145). Frobisher suggests that a free, unified soul is possible, but fragile, that external influence quickly destroys this second idea of the self. The self would then, presumably, fracture, defaulting to the first model. Frobisher sees his daughter born whole, but fears damage and fragmentation (he is reluctant to hold her for fear of dropping her). Events and external influence—the stuff of the middles of narratives—threaten the wholeness of beginnings and the possibility of wholeness of endings.

The heightened background of the war nevertheless provides Frobisher something of an anchor. Narrator and character seem both to assent in a judgment when he notes, “On Tuesday, April 9th, the war ascended to new heights of unreality” (135). At this point, the unreality no longer bleeds from Frobisher’s mind into the real world: the real world is itself unreal, allowing Frobisher to offer his own mind as a reassuring contrast. Frobisher joins the military on June 15, 1940, the day after the French government’s flight. Two days later, he remarks,

For me the bottom had dropped out of the war. France was the only country of which I could ever at any time have conceived myself to be a citizen. When France collapsed, the world had ended. The outside world, that is to say. Throughout May, June and July, my inner world



was firm and secure, and its people lived together in a state of natural bliss as though I had already fought and won and lost my war. (147)

Frobisher joins the army not as an act of participation in a broader community or as an attempt to defend a social order he believes in. Instead, his is an act of post-apocalyptic nihilism and a retreat into the self. His reference to the people of his inner world suggests his family, but more literally refers to the multiplicity of the self. He figures the middle of *Saturnine* as a war that has ended with uncertain and even paradoxical results, but has at least resulted in peace. This peace is not the same as unity. In Frobisher's inner life: the self is always divided into separate persons, and they cannot be unified; they can only be made to stop fighting so that life may continue. The suggestion that inner peace can most easily be attained in times of outer war is disturbing, and it leaves *Saturnine* with much of its unsettled quality, suggesting an always-warring inner life when the outer world is at rest, a never-ending middle of either soul or society.

The healing of Frobisher's mind, and thus the end of *Saturnine*'s long middle, is accomplished by his venture entirely into the imaginary world. Whereas in previous fantasy sequences, the real world is blended with Frobisher's imaginings, Frobisher's venture into the afterlife presents a world that is either wholly internal (from a skeptical point of view) or wholly external (from a spiritual point of view). Nevertheless, the depiction of this world, and the transition into it, is accomplished with the same split between Frobisher-as-narrator and Frobisher-as-character that suffuses *Saturnine*: the narrator states with apparent objective certainty, but with no sense of retrospective perspective, the subjective viewpoint of the younger Frobisher.

Thus, after a tile falls from the roof to strike Frobisher in the eye, Chapter Ten concludes, “I died instantly and without pain” (114). What follows is a near-death experience that is both more radical and less radical than Frobisher’s earlier supernatural visions. It is more radical in that the journey into Frobisher’s mind has taken *Saturnine* completely beyond the natural world. Yet, it is, especially after it has been resolved that Frobisher has not died, less radical in that it creates a clear separation between the spiritual or mental realm on the one hand and the physical realm on the other. In taking modernist rendering of the mind of its protagonist out of the real world, *Saturnine* flirts with postmodernism, but it also hearkens back to Medieval near-death visions, while resolving the cognitive instability that plagues much of *Saturnine* for both reader and protagonist.

Frobisher begins by describing the otherworld landscape, and in doing so he offers a rare narratorial intervention. Addressing the reader directly, in the manner of a meditation instructor, the narrator implores, “Imagine if you can a world in which every object is of animal nature. [...] The land itself is animal. No veins of coal or mineral run through it. It is like yeast. [...] Imagine, moreover, that all this is real and yet is not physically discernible to a physical eye” (115). The narrator’s description takes the form of a challenge: can the reader create for himself an improbable imaginary world whose characteristics are described in physical terms, yet cannot be physically seen. It is not enough to imagine something that we cannot see in ordinary life—we must imagine something that, even if it actually exists, cannot be seen in a literal sense: we must imagine a sort of spiritual sight, our imagination’s imagination. Frobisher also insists, however, that this is not an imaginary realm, but a real one.

This is an assertion he could not make of, say, the disintegration of Richard St. Hilda. The fact of Frobisher's apparent death and the story's complete exit from the physical world at last allows the narrator to confidently assert the reality of not just the spiritual realm in general, but the spiritual realm in particular as experienced by Frobisher. In the physical world, Frobisher's point of view can be distorting, as delusions, spiritual possibilities, and physical realities mix. Here there is no mixing, and therefore no distorting, and no other possible point of view. In a sense, then, Frobisher has led us past the boundary of the Jamesian modernist tradition.

Nevertheless, in his devotion to physical description of a landscape that is nevertheless not physical, the narrator poses a hypothetical alternative point of view. The paradox of a physical landscape whose most notable characteristics are not physical leads the narrator to describe it in terms of the impression it makes on the observer: "The effect of a typical landscape in this world is not unlike the effect of certain paintings by the surrealists" (115). But this impression is not Frobisher's; instead it is used to distinguish both Frobisher and his spiritual experience from the imaginative experience of the viewer of a work of art: "To the ordinary human imagination, it must appear that such a landscape was 'horrible' and 'eerie'. I did not find it so, presumably because I was there by right, by necessity and in a state consonant with its nature. In point of fact, I felt extraordinarily happy" (115). Here, the narrator insists that his point of view in this case is not intrinsic to himself, the result of an accumulation of past experiences, current circumstances, and natural temperament; instead, his point of view is extrinsic to himself, something imposed by the laws of the spiritual location. Here, Frobisher turns on its head the modernist

objection to realism: yes, an object may be different according to different points of view, but those points of view are in turn caused by the object itself. That is, the spiritual realm of Luna, identified by Frobisher according to his training at the Institute of Mystical Science, is a comprehensive reality, creating, like the omniscient Realist narrator whom Frobisher briefly imitates, all of the perspective that the observer requires in order to induce the correct effect. That is, it is very much like a fictional text. The narrator's description in physical terms the non-physical impressions of a mystical or imaginary world within a fictional text mirrors the relationship of focalization, a visual metaphor, and all attempts to effect "seeing" through a text, or to describe the representative function of a text in visual terms, is explicitly an impossible task both because there is no real "seeing" to be had, as there is no physical world to be seen, and also because words are not sight.<sup>24</sup> We have in Frobisher's vision, then, the simultaneous collapse of both realist representation and modernist focalization, both the consequence of the removal from the novel of anything that may be mistaken for the real physical world.

Nevertheless, the mystical world maintains some ties to the material world. In perhaps the first clue that Frobisher is not in fact deceased, he chooses to move on from Luna, "not the abiding-place of the recently dead," because "The restless will awakened within me, and as it did so I became aware of the pain in my head" (116). Frobisher seems to attribute this pain to the laws of Luna, but the reader can tie it to the head injury which has apparently killed him. Furthermore, Frobisher finds himself

---

<sup>24</sup> J. Hillis Miller critiques the terms point of view, center of consciousness, and focalization along these lines: they all "evade the fact that novels are made of words" (Miller, "Henry James and 'Focalization'" 124).

next at Middlesex Hospital, which he identifies not as the location of his physical body, but as “evidently my spiritual home” (116). The latter is a direct quotation of Frobisher’s thoughts, while the former is given in free indirect discourse. Connections to the physical world intrude on the narrative at the same time that focalization returns to the narrative.

This mingling of the spiritual and the physical continues in the second of three locations in Frobisher’s spiritual journey: Middlesex Hospital. Here, not only is the physical world blended with the spiritual world of Frobisher’s vision, but past, present, and future are blended, leading Frobisher to view this place as Hell, because “Hell is repetition” (116). As Frobisher notes, this is the hospital where he first received “treatment for a non-existent renal stone” (117) and the place where his wife will give birth to their child. He also identifies it as “my spiritual home” (116), but soon finds that it is also the current home to his physical body. Moreover, he initially cannot see his own body: “It was shut off from my physical vision by a group of doctors” (117). The implication is that he identifies the body through his spiritual vision. The notion is that in this realm, both of these visions meet. When he finally sees his body, as in Luna, he finds that he does not have the reaction he would expect to a normal, physical vision: “For the first time, I observed the expulsion of blood without feeling in the least nauseated or faint” (117). Finally, Frobisher is both present and absent, seemingly noticed by a familiar nurse, who gestures for him to be quiet, but ignored completely when he insists on protesting that “the patient is dead” (117). As the narrator notes of his examination of his own body, “My detachment was extraordinary” (117). The mingling of physical and spiritual realms has once again

resulted in a doubling—or repetition—of Frobisher. This time, however, there is a clear function for each Frobisher: one is his body, the other his spiritual consciousness. In fact, the identification of Hell as repetition at last lends a meaning to the doubling: rather than a narrative wandering, it is something to be escaped, here placed in the middle position in Frobisher’s spiritual journey.<sup>25</sup> It serves both as an indication, to Frobisher and to the reader, that Frobisher has not actually died. The external examination of Frobisher’s own body also serves as a diagnosis of sorts of Frobisher’s mental and spiritual state: the splitting of the self coupled with a directionless relationship to his own personal narrative, marked particularly by an inability to distinguish adequately between past, present, and future.

The final stage of Frobisher’s journey is the longest, and consists largely of a didactic conversation with the Guardian of the Threshold, whom Frobisher compares to St. Peter, but insists guards not heaven itself, but any number of gateways between spiritual realms (118). Initially, however, Frobisher sees figures both lonely and apocalyptic “recede to an infinite distance,” finding himself “at the centre of loneliness” (118). The typical pre-Dante Medieval itinerary for near-death journeys follows the pattern of purgatory, then hell, then a brief glimpse of heaven (Zaleski 33). This is then followed by a series of obstacles and judgments (Zaleski 61-70). The encounter with the Guardian, as we shall see, follows the latter pattern, but the itinerary of purgatory, hell, and heaven is less clear. The first stage of Frobisher’s journey resembles both heaven (due to Frobisher’s joy in the strange landscape) and

---

25 Frobisher’s journey re-orders the typical near-death narrative. As Carol Zaleski notes, in both Medieval and modern narratives, such journeys often begin with the soul hovering over the body (45, 119).

purgatory (like many Medieval visionaries, Frobisher is somewhere he does not belong). The second stage resembles both purgatory, since it seems to be a holding-place for Frobisher before he passes on to the next stage of existence, and, as Frobisher himself identifies, hell—but it most resembles the soul’s initial hovering over the body before initiating the journey through the afterlife (Zaleski 45). The third stage, meanwhile, is both a hellish apocalypse and a purgatorial absence from others. It is also purgatorial in its relative brevity—a paragraph-long interlude before a lengthy encounter with the Guardian. While it is therefore possible to map Frobisher’s vision onto the Medieval vision, and it is possible—as Frobisher himself does—to interpret the vision according to a twentieth-century spiritualist doctrine, the vision itself is ambiguous and possibly scrambled. In fact, the bizarre landscape of Luna could just as easily be a sort of hell or, as Frobisher unwittingly suggests, a surrealist landscape of the post-Freudian psyche. In modernist fashion, then, Heppenstall highlights the epistemological problems related to the interpretation of dreams and visions. Moreover, he highlights the uncertainties and problems related to the construction of narrative: he offers off a landscape that suggests, but does not confirm, a narrative order prescribed by both genre and religious doctrine. Moreover, he scrambles the relationship between this spiritual narrative and the physical world. Finally, in playing with such fundamental narratives of endings, he plays with beginnings, middles, and ends, suggesting that we cannot easily tell them apart and, in a brief vision of loneliness and apocalypse, that even these endings may not be endings, but in fact middles, uncertain crises and transitions that bring us from hazy beginnings to uncertain endings.

The ending Frobisher comes to with the Guardian is, however, anything but uncertain. If, as Miller suggests, modern novels generally attain narrative coherence through symbolic unity, Frobisher imposes narrative coherence on his own life and on the novel through an updated version of the Medieval near-death vision and its philosophical consolation. The force of the encounter is to purge Frobisher of the uncertainty and “anxiety” he cannot escape even in death (119). This anxiety, according to the Guardian, is largely attributable to an unhealthy relationship with time, something we might associate with both a modern mind-set and modernism itself. Frobisher is chastised for his obsession with the past, for his attempts to forget his past, and for his attempts to make contact with “Thea,” whom the Guardian establishes firmly as a woman Frobisher knew in a previous life (121). Furthermore, Frobisher is challenged for his explicitly Freudian diagnosis of his own condition: “I have been allowing the death-wish to predominate” (120). To this, the Guardian replies, “That is a phrase just now current on earth, I believe. It is a misleading phrase. It implies that death is peace, freedom from responsibility” (120). The Guardian’s answer implies not that the Freudian analysis is incorrect, but that, by naming the death-wish, we increase, rather than decrease, the chances that we will fall prey to the death-wish. That is, Frobisher’s encounter with the Guardian is not epistemological in nature, but ontological: it is aimed not at Frobisher understanding the nature of his psyche and its relationship to past, present, and future, but at altering his mode of being. And it is startlingly effective: no sooner has Frobisher been chastised for his attachment to “Thea,” than he is filled with happiness and “beg[ins] to wish that [he] had not died” (121). It is only a small step further for Frobisher to



change his wish into reality. Told by the Guardian that a return to the physical world “does not rest with me,” Frobisher concentrates on a happy moment from his past (an encounter with an old laborer named Sykes) and, as a result, “became aware of the earth and could see it from a great height” (122). Frobisher undergoes a final trial, a largely undescribed encounter with accusers who “waited with infinite patience for me to accuse myself” (123). Thinking again of the Guardian’s words, “Now I understood. He meant that it depended upon myself. With a cry like that of one emerging from an anæsthetic, I lost consciousness and sped towards my body” (123). This final blending of physical and spiritual experience, in which what may be happening in the physical world serves as simile for otherworld events, serves as a final reminder of the epistemological problems created by this encounter. Frobisher willfully interprets what may be authentic spiritual experience—but may be simply a dream or even his final delusion—and, in so doing, makes his will the determinant of his own narrative, and thus of life and death.

Perhaps the most important interpretive question posed by *Saturnine* is the level of authority we should prescribe to the conclusion of Frobisher’s near-death vision. Are the Guardian’s words—and Frobisher’s interpretation of them—the correct way of interpreting the self’s place in the world (at least, the world of this novel)? Are the epistemological uncertainties of the novel’s middle and the Freudian splitting of the self superceded by the ontological certainties of this ending-of-the-middle and the spiritualist rejoining of the soul and the body? I have already suggested that the ending which follows somewhat unsettles the matter, while the relationship of narrator to character points to a continued split of the self. However,

though the novel's return to episodic, rather than ends-driven, storytelling in its final chapters suggests that even powerful spiritual visions cannot bring pure closure to the middle-driven stories of individuals and nations, there can be little doubt that the anxieties and, especially, the mingling of the psychical, physical, and spiritual worlds are almost entirely absent from the novel's ending. If there is not closure to the narrative of Frobisher's life, there is at least some degree of closure to the story of the mental and spiritual crisis that gives the novel its shape—the crisis that comprises the novel's long middle. That long middle, with its modernist epistemological problems both psychoanalytic and narrative, dominates this novel, and its interpretation of the self, narrative, and reality is not wholly undermined by the novel's ending.

Nevertheless, *Saturnine* suggests that, though such middles may shape stories, and every moment—even an ending—is in some ways a middle—the concerns of modernist middles are not always dominant. Sometimes, that is, as Frobisher believes, we are governed by Saturn and sometimes, as Brian McHale writes, novels are governed by epistemological concerns. Authors, however, have other choices available to them and, possibly, a strong assertion of narrative may re-shape and confine the middle, making room for endings both joyful and apocalyptic. These are, according to *Saturnine*, however, narrative choices—even if they cannot be made quite so easily in real life, where the middle and its problems always threaten even the most definitive of endings: death for the individual, war and dissolution for the society. For in *Saturnine*, even these may be part of the middle.

## Chapter 5: A Noun-Like Narrative:

### The Middle as Unfixed Memory in B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*

B. S. (Bryan Stanley) Johnson (1933-1973) was, according to *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, one of “[t]he two most significant English experimental writers” of the 1960s (Lucas 561). This reputation is founded largely on his most famous experiment, *The Unfortunates* (1969). The fourth of seven novels written before Johnson's suicide at the age of 40, *The Unfortunates* is the second novel, after Marc Saporta's *Composition No. 1* in 1962, to be presented to the reader unbound, its sections to be read at random. However, while Saporta's novel is a rigid formalist experiment—each section comprises a single page, and all are to be read at random—Johnson's novel uses its more flexible form to mimic reality (more on the importance of reality to Johnson's writing later). Twenty-seven individually bound sections are contained in a box, ranging in length from a single paragraph to twelve pages. The inside of the box instructs the reader as to how this novel is to be read: “Apart from the first and last sections (which are marked as such) the other twenty-five sections are intended to be read in random order. / If readers prefer not to accept the random order in which they receive the novel, then they may re-arrange the sections into any other random order before reading.” This flexible form is used to contain discrete scenes from the narrator's own memory. *The Unfortunates* therefore has a limited sort of randomness. The novel has a firm beginning and ending; between the beginning and ending, the reader encounters the narrator's memories in a

random order. However, each memory retains its own integrity as a short narrative. Johnson's novel therefore represents memory as a container that may be unlocked by an appropriate beginning and closed by an appropriate ending, but whose contents are unfixed, like a jar of marbles. Yet, no order in which the memories are removed from the jar may alter the shape or color of a single marble, nor significantly alter the pile of marbles one has placed upon the floor. That is, the long middle of *The Unfortunates* contains 25 factorial, or over 15 septillion, possible chronologies for its *syuzhet*, yet only a single *fabula*.

Johnson saw this form of unfixed yet stable narrative segments as the best possible method for representing not simply a generalized truth about memory, but a particular nonfictional truth. Johnson was generally devoted to a very literal sort of truth. He writes in the introduction to a later collection of short stories, "I am not interested in telling lies in my own novels. A useful distinction between literature and other writing for me is that the former teaches one something true about life: and how can you convey truth in a vehicle of fiction? The two terms, *truth* and *fiction*, are opposites, and it must logically be impossible" (*Aren't You* 14). In his final, posthumous novel, *See the Old Lady Decently*, Johnson would follow the historian's path, using research to construct, as best he could, a biography of his mother—though the limits of that research would also become part of the novel's form and narrative. *The Unfortunates*, like the earlier *Trawl*, is instead concerned with conveying the truth not of the physical world, but of Johnson's own memories. *The Unfortunates* itself is almost purely autobiographical, stemming from and recounting the narrator's memories of his friend Tony, who has died of cancer, as he covers a football (soccer)

match in the Midlands town where Tony had lived. The narrator is unnamed outside of the byline of a phony newspaper account of the match on the box's inside cover, and the last name of Johnson's real-life friend, Tony Tillinghast, is not given in the novel—nor is the name of the town, which in real life would have been Nottingham. Furthermore, the teams playing in the match which the narrator covers are given the pseudonyms of United and City, an apparent exception to Johnson's rule that truth is anathema to fiction. Nevertheless, the novel contains Johnson's real-life memories of his friend and of himself.

The form of *The Unfortunates*, according to Johnson, is meant to represent the material in two ways. First, "the novel was to be as nearly as possible a re-created transcript of how my mind worked during eight hours on this particular Saturday" (Johnson, *Aren't You* 25). That is, Johnson is interested not only in writing as accurately as possible his memories of Tony, but his memories of a particular occasion of remembering Tony. Thus, the section labeled "FIRST" contains the narrator's arrival in the unnamed town and his recognition, suppressed until his arrival, that this was Tony's home; while the section labeled "LAST" gives us the narrator's thoughts as his train departs. These sections are fixed not only because they are plausible narrative entries into Johnson's memories; they are fixed because, Johnson believes, they were, in the real world, the entry-points for the memories themselves. An unfixed beginning and ending might alter the *fabula* itself—and, as nonfiction, the *fabula* is for Johnson sacrosanct. However, the middle is unfixed, and it contains not only the narrator's memories of Tony, but various events in the narrator's day—which sometimes, but not always, precipitate memories of Tony. The

middle therefore randomizes the novel's anachronies, Genette's term for "discordance between the two orderings of story [*fabula*] and narrative [*syuzhet*]" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 36). Nevertheless, it is easy to identify the two levels of narrative: the primary narrative, the time frame from which the narrator remembers, and a secondary time frame, which contains the narrator's memories.<sup>26</sup> The reader experiences randomized analepsis when moving from primary to secondary narrative, and prolepsis when moving from secondary to primary narrative, with little difficulty in distinguishing these events' relative order in the *fabula*. However, distinguishing analepsis from prolepsis within a time frame may be more difficult.

In the first motivating factor Johnson gives for the form of the novel, then, Johnson emphasizes, in particular, *how* his mind worked, rather than what *specifically* his mind did. To this, Johnson adds that the randomness of the novel is meant to be "a physical tangible metaphor for randomness and the nature of cancer" (Johnson, *Aren't You* 25). Richardson's interpretation of what he calls the novel's "unfixed *syuzhet*," on the other hand, emphasizes the narrator's grief: "It does not matter where he situates the account of his lunch, or where he places his memory of hitchhiking with his friend. The former event is utterly unimportant, and so is its placement; the latter event can appear anywhere, just as it will appear in a different setting when it is remembered again" (Richardson, "Unnatural Stories and Sequences"). It is not enough, however, to say that the order of events is unimportant to the grieving narrator: following Johnson, I would argue that the inability to recall or even experience events in a fixed order is a crucial part of the narrator's experience.

---

<sup>26</sup> The two time frames of the two narrative levels should not be confused with dual time, which entails "temporal contradictions" (Richardson, "Beyond" 51).

Perhaps the narrator, and not only the novelist, perceives this randomness as reflecting the randomness of his friend's illness and death. Furthermore, the fixed beginning and ending to the *syuzhet* suggest that these events cannot be remembered again in a different setting—at least not in the same way. The randomized form of the middle of the novel is thus a sort of re-created transcript of how Johnson's (that is, both the author and narrator's) mind worked at a particular place and time.

Crucially, the novel is also a *tangible* metaphor. The reader does not experience the randomness of the middle within a text that occupies a familiar object, such as a bound book or (as with many hypertexts) a computer screen. Instead, every encounter with the text is awkward and unfamiliar, calling attention to the act of randomization which the reader must aid, literally picking out sections of the text as the narrator's mind seems to pick individual memories at random and flit through the day itself at random. In this physical-narrative space, events, like the sections of the novel, are distinct enough in themselves, and it takes only a little effort at any moment to distinguish between memory and present events, but both memories and the day's events seem to Johnson's mind to pop up at random. The middle of *The Unfortunates* contains the tension between the unfixeness of representation, whether it be memory, metaphor, or novelization; yet by representing that unfixeness with an unbound physical form, Johnson seeks to bind his novel even more closely to reality by making it represent the narrative not only as a text but as an object. What is represented is, however, not so much a set of "true" events that are narrated—although this sort of reality remains important to Johnson—but the reality of the "state of mind." That is, *The Unfortunates'* randomized *syuzhet* and stable *fabula* are

created by a formal device that represents through a violation of the traditional ontological status of the text a state of epistemological, rather than ontological, uncertainty: a modernist middle through arguably postmodernist means.

This chapter first considers the general theoretical implications of Johnson's randomized middle for traditional narrative theory, grounded in the work of Genette and Todorov. It then enlists more Ronald Langacker's more recent theories in cognitive linguistics to advance a framework for understanding how Johnson's technique reifies the narrative line. Finally, I provide close readings of several sections from the novel. These close readings reveal how Johnson's themes of memory, disease, death, and truthfulness interact with the novel's unusual form. In particular, I will highlight how the beginning and ending of the novel frame its middle. Highlighting the stability of the novel's *fabula* in contrast to its *syuzhet*, I note a particular a section that is marked as different from the rest, and which serves as a short middle of the *fabula* and a sort of anchor for the novel's long middle. Finally, I conclude with a few short speculations on the effects of the novel's form on the relationship between author and reader, particularly in regard to the theme of memory.

The form of *The Unfortunates* proceeds in part from the difficulty of creating a chronologically accurate transcript of this visit and the act of remembering contained within the visit. Johnson knows a beginning and ending for his narrative—they are set by the project he has undertaken, and are the traditional narrative beginning and ending of arrival and departure. However, he cannot remember with certainty the order in which he remembered certain things about his friend Tony, nor



how these remembrances fit in with his journey through the town and time covering the football match. But each memory—of a particular time he visited Tony, of a particular place in town—is in itself discrete, even as the narrator struggles and stumbles in the act of remembering. In this sense, the form of the novel represents a complex theory of memory as well as a devotion to mimeticism as the motivating factor in experimental form. The form, however, is according to Johnson not only mimetic but metaphorical: “the whole novel reflected the randomness of the material: it was itself a physical tangible metaphor for randomness and the nature of cancer” (Johnson, *Aren't You* 25). The form of *The Unfortunates* is not simply about randomness—it is about the fragility of the inside of the book itself, encased in its cardboard body. But the novel, too, is concerned about randomness in life, in death, in disease, as well as the effects of cancer on the body. In this context, the fixity of the “FIRST” and “LAST” sections acquires another meaning: the fixed beginning and ending of any life. In its beginning and ending, then, *The Unfortunates* is utterly conventional, and it sticks to conventional ideas about narrative: stories and lives can be easily given a natural beginning and ending, even if these beginnings and endings are somewhat arbitrary. The challenge to traditional narrative, therefore, is in the middle.

In some sense, that middle is completely Aristotelian: it is simply that which is between the beginning and the end. Allying the novel even more with traditional narrative, the novel's form as whole resembles a simplified Proppian function. In the first section, the narrator's arrival in town and the arousing of memories of his dead friend forming a disruption from a pre-existing equilibrium, and his departure in the

final section resolves the scenario. In the middle, the narrator not only must confront his memories, but he also responds to a specific test, as he must arrive at the match, write a story, and submit it to his editor on time. We can contrast this apparent conventionality to Hillis Miller's reading of Johnson's idol, Lawrence Sterne. Miller argues that digression is the key method by which middles avoid making a straight narrative line from beginning to end (Miller, *Reading Narrative* 68). Unlike *Tristram Shandy*, but like many modernist novels, *The Unfortunates* is relentlessly on task and on subject: tightly restricted to a particular time and place, it exhausts Johnson's memories of Tony as well as his memories of his day in the Midlands town remembering Tony while focusing as well on key themes of randomness, memory, meaninglessness, and death. In one sense, every memory and every bit of wandering about town may be considered a diegetic digression for the narrator, as he diverges from his simple task of covering a football match. However, these digressions, such as they are, constitute the primary subject matter of the novel. That is, it has two clear, parallel tales to tell, and it attempts to exhaust Johnson's memories of both in a way that *Tristram Shandy* can never exhaust the tale of his own life. Both thematically, and at the level of the *fabula*, then, *The Unfortunates* is hardly digressive—and largely matches traditional accounts of narrative structure, even in its middle. Digression, such as it is, is thus tightly contained within a narrative that is structured both by traditional narrative form and modernist thematic structure.

However, at the level of the *syuzhet*, *The Unfortunates* creates an even more radical disruption to the narrative line in its middle than does digression as theorized by Miller. *The Unfortunates*, like Miller's subject, *Tristram Shandy*, moves about

anachronically in its narrator's life. Nevertheless, the book's physical form immediately defeats not only the straight narrative line, where relevant events proceed logically and chronologically from beginning to end, but the narrative line of the text itself. Even most anachronological texts generally have a fixed narrative line in the *syuzhet*. They may wander, as in Sterne, and they may jump, as in Faulkner, but the ordered stream of words exists on the page. Johnson breaks up the narrative line into a set of discrete narrative chunks—themselves subject to the vicissitudes of stream of consciousness narration. Although some of these chunks may be re-ordered in the reader's mind (reconstruction most of what Johnson knows of Tony's life chronologically, as well as the events of Johnson's day apart from his disordered memories of his friend), there is no fully chronologically "correct" order for the sections. However, *The Unfortunates* is not an achronic narrative: the events are not "dateless and ageless" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 84). Instead, they are, following David Herman's distinction, temporally indefinite. Neither is the novel temporally multiple, or "a kind of narration that exploits indefiniteness to pluralize and delinearize itself, to multiply the ways in which the events being recounted can be chained together to produce 'the' narrative itself" (Herman, *Story* 219). More importantly, at the level of narration as well as the level of the physical text, there is no single correct narrative line in the *syuzhet*. Indeed, for the book as an object (rather than a particular reading of the novel), there is no line at all, but a set of discretely bound component objects, arranged provisionally in a series.

The novel's rejection of a fixed arrangement of the middle, even as first and last sections mark clear beginning and ending points for the narrative line, suggest

that each of the novel's sections, however they may be arranged, is a sort of digression. That is, the *syuzhet* actively disrupts the linearity of the *fabula*. However, whereas Miller is able to adapt *Tristram Shandy*'s own image of a curved, snakelike narrative line to represent the digressions (both chronological and thematic) from a straight narrative line, no single line, however curved, can represent the *fabula* of *The Unfortunates*. Instead, such a line would only represent a particular instantiation of the text's multiple *syuzhets*. In one sense, *The Unfortunates* is a novel without a *syuzhet*. In another sense, the novel has two levels of *syuzhet*, in a relation to each other that is parallel to the relationship between *fabula* and *syuzhet*. On one level, there is the *syuzhet* that is created by any particular reading of the text. However, just as a *syuzhet* is theoretically only one possible ordering of the same *fabula*, so each reading of *The Unfortunates* produces a *syuzhet* that is only one possible ordering of the text. This is, of course, true of any particular reading of any particular text: the reader is not forced to read the words of a novel in any particular order, and many readers will do so. However, *The Unfortunates* makes multiple orderings a part of the text itself. The set of all possible orderings, then, is the text's *syuzhet*, and this textual *syuzhet* stands between the reader's *syuzhet* and the *fabula*. While some hypertexts also disrupt the *fabula*,<sup>27</sup> this very disruption maintains the one-to-one relationship between *fabula* and *syuzhet*. By maintaining a consistent *fabula*, *The Unfortunates* creates a single tale without a single line. The text's *syuzhet* creates from the *fabula* not a particular ordering of events, but a fixed set of possible orderings. I would suggest that a narrative line, with more or fewer spatial or temporal digressions, is no

---

27 Richardson gives examples of texts without a fixed order that either do or do not maintain a consistent *fabula*:

longer the correct model for thinking about such a *syuzhet*, even as the novel's beginning, ending, and *fabula* continue to remind us of this or similar models. This narrative line still exists on the level of the *fabula*.

Let us turn, instead, to linguistically-based literary theory, starting specifically with Todorov's theory of narrative episodes. In Todorov's grammar of narrative, "there are two types of episodes [...]: those which describe a state (of equilibrium or of disequilibrium) and those which describe the passage from one state to the other. [...] This definition of the two types of episodes (and hence of propositions designating them) permits us to relate them to two parts of speech, the adjective and the verb" (Todorov 111). Following Todorov, we can view the middle's *syuzhet* as a set of episodes, each occupying an indeterminate location in a confined narrative space, which itself constitutes a larger fixed narrative episode, the novel's middle. In one respect, the middle is adjectival in nature—it describes the narrator's state of mind as he goes about his day and recalls his dead friend. Yet individual episodes may be verbal in nature—Tony grows ill in the narrator's memories, the narrator submits a story to his editor. If the story is the story of Tony, or of a day on the job, the middle as a whole is as verbal as its individual episodes. What's more, it is not entirely clear that the middle as a whole is descriptive of a state of mind, rather than the story of the process by which the narrator remembers and comes to terms with Tony's life and death. Even more, if the reader is to share and engage in the process of remembering, the unfixed order of the *syuzhet* makes it difficult to view this process as singular and linear. The unfixed nature of the *syuzhet* fragments any verb we might find in the middle. Todorov's choice between adjective and verb seems

inadequate to me for such a narrative process, not least because the word “process” already implies motion. Furthermore, it does not account for the importance the novel gives to the book as an object. While Todorov reserves the term “noun” for the agents of his narrative prepositions, I suggest that *The Unfortunates* turns narrative processes themselves into nouns. Let me indulge in a rough analogy to physics: the narrative line, or process, is like a wave of light. However, reading the novel is like measuring the location of a particle of light: the observation fixes its position and even, at this level, seems to change its behavior. When we read the novel, we transform verb into noun.

The form of *The Unfortunates*, and what that form does to what we might think of as the original story of the narrator’s visit to a Midlands town—or, rather, the form that story might take in a traditionally-bound book—is thus analogous to the grammatical process of nominalization. For a more precise understanding of what this process entails, I will turn to the cognitive linguistic work of Ronald W. Langacker. Cognitive linguistics gets its name from one of its basic assumptions: that language is not a separate cognitive ability. Instead, it is a product of more general cognitive abilities, and particularly, language “is basically conceptual structure” (Croft and Cruse 2). Moreover, cognitive linguistics takes the stance that grammatical constructions as well as semantic structures are conceptual—or, as Langacker puts it, “grammar is conceptualization” (qtd. in Croft and Cruse 3). In other words, according to cognitive linguists, language reflects—and is produced by—the way we think. Language is not a machine-like structure, separate from the rest of human thought and experience, but is produced by the way the human mind thinks and interacts with the

world. Grammatical rules, in this version of linguistics, therefore have something akin to meaning—though that meaning is often difficult to put into words. It may be best to think of grammatical differences in words or sentences that refer to the same object or have the same semantic content as being differences not only in how we word something, but in how we think about something—that is, a difference in conceptualization. Specifically, Langacker marks out two components of meaning: content and construal<sup>28</sup> (Langacker 5). Grammar, then, has meaning, but this meaning is primarily in how we construe the semantic content of words—that is, how we think about things. While I am in no position to evaluate the relative merits of the cognitive linguists’ case in the broader debate over the nature of language, their theories are well suited to an attempt to draw analogies between grammatical structures and large-scale literary structures on a conceptual level, simply because cognitive linguistics emphasizes the primacy of conceptualization in grammar. The argument here is that the form of *The Unfortunates* represents a different way of thinking about narrative, and particularly about narrative middles—and that this difference causes its readers to think about, or conceptualize, its story in a fundamentally different way—in turn providing a fundamentally different way of thinking about the world than other

---

28 Langacker further divides construal into five dimensions: specificity, background, perspective, scope, and prominence (Langacker 5). The first “pertains to our capacity for conceiving and portraying an entity at varying levels of precision and detail” (Langacker 5). Background largely concerns the way words and concepts are understood by (implicit) comparison to other words or concepts, which form the background (Langacker 5). Perspective refers to the vantage point from which language is understood, including spatial position as well as notions such as subjectivity and objectivity (Langacker 5-6). Scope is “the array of conceptual content [an expression] evokes” (Langacker 6) Finally, prominence refers to the relative presence or importance a particular thing or concept has in the mind (Langacker 7). Langacker puts these dimensions to very specific uses in his linguistic analyses, but for my purposes I will stick to the basic concept of construal and the different meanings construed by nouns and verbs.

narratives. This fundamental difference is similar to the difference in Langacker's work between a noun and a verb.

For Langacker, the classes of noun and verb each “combine a cognitively salient prototype with a highly abstract schema reflecting a basic cognitive ability” (Langacker 9). Each basic word-class allows us to put a basic cognitive ability into words and in turn allows words to invoke a basic cognitive ability. For nouns, this ability is “conceptual reification, our manifest capacity for grouping a set of entities and manipulating them as a unitary entity for higher-order purposes. [...] At the most schematic level, a noun is thus characterized as an expression that profiles a thing” (Langacker 10). Nouns give thing-ness to our thoughts. Verbs are somewhat more complex, drawing on two basic cognitive abilities: “the ability to establish relationships, and to scan sequentially through a complex structure. It is claimed that every verb profiles a *process*, defined as a relationship that evolves through time and is scanned sequentially along this axis. A process might also be called a *temporal relation*, where ‘temporal’ refers to both its evolution through time and the sequential nature of its scanning” (Langacker 10). The double-temporality in verbs is analogous to the double-temporality of *The Unfortunates*: this novel, like many modernist works, is concerned not only with the temporal relations of the primary narrative (how the narrator related to Tony through time), but with the temporal relations of the focalizer and reader to that primary narrative (how the narrator remembers his relationship with Tony; how the reader learns about the narrator's relationship with Tony as well as his process of remembering). It is not only the case that Tony and the narrator have had a temporal relationship to each other, but that conceptual access to



that temporal relationship is itself a temporal process—the narrator and the reader must mentally (and, in the reader’s case, physically) scan the history of their encounters in order to conceptualize the narrative.

This is, of course, true of all narratives, even if *The Unfortunates* brings a particular complexity to the process. However, *The Unfortunates* (or at least its middle) has a *syuzhet* that lacks a fixed sequence, even if any individual act of reading the novel does. Its narrative middle has been reified or nominalized, a sequence of events and memories of events turned into a thing. This “conceptual reification,” as Langacker calls the nominalization contained in “a nominalized verb like *chirping, consumption, destruction, chanting, or breaking*” (Langacker 86). To say that cancer destroys Tony’s body is to think of the effects of the disease with a temporal profile—to think of them at some relative point of time, through some relative period of time, to think of the temporal relationship between Tony and the cancer. To speak of the destruction of Tony’s body by cancer, however, is to conceptualize that whole relationship—including its temporal profile—as a thing, which can in turn be put into cognitive relationships with other things.

Likewise, *The Unfortunates* itself nominalizes its story—it conceives it not as a temporal relationship, but as a thing, and object that can be mentally manipulated as an atemporal whole. The fact that each section of the novel comprises a more traditional (verbal) narrative emphasizes that the novel is not simply a noun—not simply a collection of words or arbitrarily marked-off sequences of words—that can be manipulated by the reader. Instead, *The Unfortunates* is a narrative whose middle has been reified—Tony’s life, the narrator’s act of remembering that life, has been

turned into a thing. In fact, as Johnson later wrote, the novel was intended to serve as a physical substitute for his own memory: “What matters most to me about *The Unfortunates* is that I have on recall as accurately as possible what happened, that I do not have to carry it around in my mind any more” (Johnson, *Aren't You* 26). Memory, to Johnson, is an object, something that is metaphorically carried in the mind—and *The Unfortunates* is both a representation of the way memory reifies events and a substitute for Johnson’s real-world memory of his friend.

This tension between Johnson’s desire to render both the objective and subjective truth of what happened on both on the day of remembering and in the time and space remembered, also serves link this very same section to another section of present-tense narrative. As Johnson nears the center of the city, he recognizes a domed structure: “the town hall, only they don’t call it the town hall in this city, no, something else, city hall, no, too Americanized, what is it?” (“Cast parapet” 3). The narrator remembers shopping in the area on more than one occasion with Tony and his wife June, but the memory remains general, and the section soon ends with the narrator resolving to walk uphill. Rather than taking the dome as a trigger into a Proustian stream of memories, the narrator resolves to “make my way up there, it’s an object, it’s an objective, it will pass the time” (“Cast parapet” 3). The narrator maintains that the passage of time occurs in the present-day visit to the town, even as the novel’s form disrupts this passage of time—removes it to the reader’s present—by ending the section here. Architecture, moreover, once again serves as a metaphor for reified memory: it is a physical object as well as a physical and mental objective: something to be attained, something to be held. This is as true of the name of the

structure (which is its physical form on the pages of the novel) as it is of the physical structure itself. Furthermore, this attempt to attain the remembered object and the word that allows that object to be correctly written, links the fractured narrative of *The Unfortunates*. Another section begins, “This poky lane by a blackened sandstone church leads, is on my way up to the Council House, now it comes back to me, now I remember, the Council House, the local name for the Town Hall, in this city [...]” (1). Regardless of what order the reader encounters these two sections, when both have been encountered, they form a causal and chronological narrative of goal and attainment. *The Unfortunates* establishes that time does, in fact, pass, even though the passage of time is disrupted at the level of narration. The reader partially reconstructs, retrospectively, a linear *fabula* based on a fragmented object. This is why *The Unfortunates* is not simply a noun-like narrative, but a nominalized-verb-like narrative. The reader can see the temporal profile in the narrative, but does not experience it directly outside of the beginning and the ending. The fragmented, disordered set of single sheets and small, pamphlet-like stapled sections, forces the reader to separate the narrator’s experience of memory and sensation from her own experience of reading that experience of memory and sensation. The reader is forced to regard the passage of time on this single day not as a process, but as an object—even when a chronological reconstruction of that day can be attained.

It may be argued that, on some level, all books reify the narratives they contain, since books are things. In this sense, Johnson’s project in *The Unfortunates* is not much different from Woolf’s in *To the Lighthouse*: both Tony Tillinghast and Woolf’s parents are removed from the memory and placed in the novel in order to

unburden the author's memory. However, *The Unfortunates* goes beyond traditional and even most modernist narratives in making this reified form a present part of the reader's experience. The physical form of *The Unfortunates* is defamiliarizing in a way that calls constant attention to the thing-ness of the book both because the physical form of the book is so unfamiliar and because it requires more (often awkward) physical work and grappling with the physical book in order to read. In this sense, *The Unfortunates* calls attention to the fact that it (and all books) are physical reifications of narrative.

More importantly, however, *The Unfortunates* creates in its form a conceptual as well as physical reification of narrative. In the act of reading virtually any novel, the words as physical object are scanned sequentially through time—that is, the narrative is given a temporal profile, (re-)verbalized. Both the narrative and the act of reading itself acquire a temporal sequence. If a reader is sufficiently familiar with a novel's form, the physically reified narrative (the book) will lose prominence in the mind—the book disappears, and the reader enters the verbal narrative.

Defamiliarization, therefore, plays an important role in disrupting the process by which narrative is conceptualized as a temporal sequence. However, *The Unfortunates* provides a further, conceptual barrier to the conceptual verbalization of its narrative. Embedded in any individual reading of the novel is the knowledge that this act of reading has produced neither a sequence of events that matches the novel's *fabula*, nor even an series of anachronies and achronies that correspond to the novel's *syuzhet*. Instead, the act of reading *The Unfortunates* gives at best one of many possible sequences or forms of the narrative middle.

Johnson's intent, however, is not to produce a writerly novel in the Barthesian sense—a novel that allows the reader to impose upon it different narratives. The “FIRST” and “LAST” sections; the absence of anachrony, emphasized by the relative ease with which many of the events *can* be logically ordered in time; the fact that each section is a non-arbitrary narrative episode; and the verisimilitudinous,<sup>29</sup> concretely specific content of the narrative all suggest that *The Unfortunates* is no more writerly than a typical modernist work. That is, while the novel calls attention to the thing-ness of the book—to its ontological status—the poetics of this device is epistemological rather than ontological. Because the ontological status of the book serves as a metaphor for memory, cancer, and other themes of the novel, it calls attention to the meaning of the events in the novel, rather than disrupting, permeating, or destabilizing the diegetic world, which remains in a highly stable *fabula*. Neither, however, can we easily classify *The Unfortunates* as a readerly novel, since its unconventional form alone makes it particularly difficult to read, and its individual sections do their best to avoid telling conventional stories about Tony's life. Furthermore, changes in the novel's *syuzhet* from reading to reading are not the products of the reader's decisions, imagination, or interpretive framework, but instead by a form that fixes the *syuzhet* according to pre-determined laws, though not into a pre-determined order.

---

29 Prince defines verisimilitude as, “The quality of a text resulting from its degree of conformity to a set of ‘truth’ norms that are external to it” (Prince 103). In Johnson's case, the truth norms are those of rigorous nonfiction—or, rather, of Johnson's very literal interpretation of the word “truth.” We may contrast this to Genette's examination of *vraisemblance* in 18th-century French discourse, where verisimilitude more closely resembles Aristotelian probability. Genette finds the norms of truth in “generic conventions [that] function as a system of natural forces and constraints” (Genette, “*Vraisemblance*” 242). Johnson attempts to locate his truth norms outside the realm of discourse.

Instead, the middle of *The Unfortunates* must be encountered as something that can neither be written nor read. Generally, it cannot be written by the reader because the *fabula* is stable. This stability is important, I believe, to Johnson's personal goals in writing the novel, to and his concept of truth—the memories are Johnson's, not to be tampered with by the reader, and to be re-created as accurately as possible. Generally, the novel also cannot be read, because of the unfixed nature of the *syuzhet* means that no individual act of reading is a reading of the novel self, but instead of the novel in a particular reified state. This, too, is important to Johnson's project of accurately recording his state of mind when remembering Tony. Johnson's memories simply do not take the form of a fixed narrative *syuzhet*. The very temporal nature of a *syuzhet* imposes a temporal structure on Johnson's memory of Tony that, for Johnson, simply does not exist beyond its original containment within a visit to Nottingham and subsequent containment within the book's box. That is, the state of mind did seem sequenced—even anachronically sequenced—and even to the extent that such a sequence existed on a particular real day in the author's life, that sequence is not recoverable. The unfixed *syuzhet* of *The Unfortunates*, as opposed to any of its possible read *syuzhets*, is not enacted by reading the novel. Reading the novel, instead, allows the reader to infer a *syuzhet* that must be conceptualized not in a temporal sequence with any particular order (even if provisional or arbitrary), but as a thing, a reified narrative that contains the possibility of any number of sequences, but does not itself have a sequence. *The Unfortunates* is a narrative whose middle has been turned as nearly as possible into a noun.

However, the nominalized whole produced by the unfixed *syuzhet* is not a single object, but a set of objects. This middle—an ever-present, palpable object in the reader's hand—is composed of as well as bordered by narrative segments that do have a temporal profile and conform to modernist narrative conventions. Part of what makes the middle of *The Unfortunates* different from the middle of nearly every other novel is the way it calls attention to the individuality of these segments, even as it makes each individually largely irrelevant to the progress of the narrative from beginning to end. These narrative segments can be divided into three primary groups. First, many segments contain only narration of Tony and the narrator's past. Because they contain no framing narration, these sections cannot be convincingly placed within the story of the narrator's day in the Midlands, though they sometimes seem to follow directly from each other and can often easily be placed in a chronological ordering of the narrator's and subject's lives. While the entire novel consists of the narrator's interior monologue, there is in some sense a greater purity to the interiority of these segments, since they provide no anchor to the world outside the mind. Furthermore, these segments, taken as a group, give the clearest argument about memory that the novel's narrative form makes: that it comes (and is in turn remembered) disordered, yet in discrete pieces, segments of more or less coherent memory stored in packets in our brains. Though the narrator often agonizes within each of these segments, interrogating his own memories for coherence, honesty, and accuracy, each individual memory provides a fairly conventional, easily comprehensible narrative.





ticket-hall, the long office half-rounded at its ends, that ironic clerestory, brown glazed tiles, green below, the same, the decorative hammerbeams supporting nothing, above, of course! I know this city! How did I not realize when he said, Go and do City this week, that it was this city? Tony” (“FIRST” 1). At this point, a reader who comes to *The Unfortunates* without criticism or paratext will have some difficulty decoding where the narrator is and why he is there. The new edition provides a completed newspaper article on the soccer match which the narrator has arrived to cover on the inside back of the box (as well as a summary of the plot on the outside back of the box), this paratextual element was missing from the first edition. American readers, meanwhile, are likely to have particular difficulty decoding the reference to “City” as an English football club. (Americans may also have more difficulty recognizing the building as a train-station.) The fact that this City does not correspond to any named city (or any particular real club) compounds the difficulty. The narrator recognizes the city, but the reader likely does not. In Johnson’s life, the city was Nottingham (Coe 23). In the bare narrative, however, both city and narrator are anonymous. Moreover, this opening focuses somewhat oddly on the details of architecture rather than the nature or significance of the city. Architecture will remain a major theme in the novel, both in segments that focus on this day in the city and in segments that focus on the past. It is, then, a link between present and past—both because it appears in all three types of narrative segments, and because it remains in the city when Tony himself is gone.

Furthermore, architecture provides a metaphor for the human body. It is subject to detailed physical description, mixes form and function, failing sometimes

at both. This particular failure is given anthropomorphized intent: something about the combination of brown and green, and the functionless supports, is ironic. The narrator is not satisfied with noting a disjunction between form and function. He finds both an explicit and a contrasting, implicit, meaning in the train-station's architecture, though he states neither. The perhaps hopeless search for meaning, which becomes particularly acute as the narrator explores the implications of Tony's life and death, is from the beginning strained by a typically modernist predilection for both obscurity and sophistication. Architecture also provides a contrast with the human body because of its relative, but still incomplete, longevity. Architecture, unlike Tony's body, is still there to be examined, marks this place in a way which Tony himself cannot. It is thus a site for interrogation of both the connections and disjunctions between present and past, not least in its role, here and in other places, as a Proustian trigger for memory.

Johnson's narrative, however, does not flow into the past. The shift from architecture to Tony is not explained, but is presented as an unconventional gap in the page, representing a gap in thought (or perhaps a gap in verbalizable thought). In the segment beginning, "Up there, yes," a similar gap marks the narrator's mind as it skips from recognizing a building he associates with Tony. *The Unfortunates* uses these gaps frequently to represent empty spots in the narrator's stream of consciousness, but also to mark shifts in memory. This is particularly important in sections that mix past and present, like "FIRST" and "Up there, yes." In the latter, each gap brings the narrative more deeply into memory. Walking about town, the narrator recognizes a radar tower, which leads his mind to what Tony had said about

it and then, after a break in the text, into a suppositionally-constructed memory of the time Tony spoke about the tower: “But they were building it at that time, Tony pointed it out to us as a new landmark which would be useful to us in finding our way about the city, only my second visit, and her first, Wendy’s. We must have come up this hill, there, past here, and on, he leading, Tony, we two lovers, like Merlin in the tale, we were besotted, or illfated, at least I was [...]” (“Up there, yes” 1). Architecture leads to voice, which leads to the past, which leads not to illumination of Tony, but a reading of Tony in his importance to the narrator and, particularly, to the most emotionally salient aspect of the narrator’s life—here the failed love affair that was the primary subject of Johnson’s previous novel, *Trawl*. The narrator, however, protests that the opposite is true: “Very much in love with her, yes, Wendy, then. As not now, in this city memories are not now of her so much, but only of her in relation to him. So his death changes the past: yet it should not” (“Up there, yes” 1). Here, “the past” is conflated with the narrator’s memory of the past, and so the unifying force of Tony as subject of both memory and novel inevitably distorts that past, even as it may seem to the reader that it is the solipsism of the narrator’s memory that distorts Tony’s past.

A further gap, then, moves the narrator from a speculative past—what must have been—and ruminations on Wendy and the nature of memory to a purer narrative of his second visit:

He had booked for us at a guesthouse, boarding house, private hotel, I forget which gentility it was known by, at which his parents had once stayed, and which he therefore had some slight cause to recommend,

as knowing it, as he did not know others in the city, which might be full of nits and bedbugs, fleas and vermin: just opposite the tech.

Before leaving London we had in the Strand Woolworths bought a wedding ring [...] (“Up there, yes” 1)

The narrative begins to move chronologically through the visit, but it begins in the pluperfect, marking a shift from the original remembered moment. So do most of the memories in *The Unfortunates* move: as straightforwardly as possible, but including the narrator’s struggles to remember and supply as many relevant details as possible. Once the memory has been triggered, the narrative problem is not how to render the preverbal flow of memory, with the temporal shifts and over-closeness to sensory data commonly associated with modernism. Instead, the problem is how to extract facts from memory. Of the (unspecified) symbolism of a wedding band he and Wendy buy so that they can rent a room together, the narrator wonders, “Or yet again, do I impose this in the knowledge of what happened later? A constant, ha, distorting process, what is true, about that past, about Wendy, about Tony?” (“Up there, yes” 2). The narrator returns to the theme that subsequent memories distort memories of the past—calling the entire project of the novel into question, since Tony’s death may distort the narrator’s memory not only of the city, but of Tony himself.

“Up there, yes” continues to tell the story of this second visit to the Midlands town, sometimes remembering with certainty, sometimes reasoning about what probably or must have happened. It does not, however, return to the frame of the narrator’s walk around town before covering the soccer match. As a rare segment in the middle of *The Unfortunates* that combines both the narrator’s current visit and

memories of prior visits, “Up there, yes” echoes the beginning of “FIRST” in jumping from a piece of architecture to a memory. It also echoes the overall function of “FIRST” in the novel by setting up both the trigger to memory and some of the thematic issues relevant to the memory: in this case, the relationship between the narrator’s memory of Wendy and his memory of Tony, and the way their subsequent respective break-up and death distort that memory. “FIRST,” however, frames the overall set of memories and wanderings that comprise the middle of *The Unfortunates*. For any individual section in the middle, it is the only guaranteed prior knowledge the reader will possess. It is first, and every other section is a possible second. It therefore sets up not only the narrative framework in which the disordered memories will operate, but also serves as a starting place for how both how the novel’s primary subject, Tony, and its unusual form, will be understood. The disordered form of *The Unfortunates* eliminates the middle’s dependence on the beginning for the narrative line, but it increases the dependence of each individual section of the middle on the thematic and epistemological priority of the beginning. That is, because *The Unfortunates* does not move through time from beginning through middle to end, the beginning must hold all of the middle in its frame.

In “FIRST,” another gap follows the one-word sentence “Tony,” isolating the novel’s subject on the page. It is followed by a detailed physical description of Tony’s body:

His cheeks swallowed and collapsed round the insinuated bones, the gums shrivelled, was it, or shrunken, his teeth now standing free of each other in the unnatural half yawn of his mouth, yes, the mouth that

had been so full-fleshed, the whole face, too, now collapsed, derelict, the thick-framed glasses the only constant, the mouth held open as in a controlled scream, but no sound, the head moving only slightly, the white dried and sticky saliva, the last secretions of those harassed glands, cauterized into deficiency, his mouth closing only when he took water from a glass by his bed, that double bed, in his parents' house, bungalow, water or lemon he had to take frequently, because of what the treatment had done to his saliva glands, how it had finished them.           Him ("FIRST" 1)

Our first image of Tony is, in the section labeled "FIRST" is nearer the narrator's last memory of his friend than his first. The effects of chemotherapy on Tony's salivary glands will be encountered again, in the section beginning "At least once he visited us at the Angel, we were married then," but there the narrator remembers a healthier Tony, cancer in remission, visiting a flat the narrator kept during his first few months of marriage (2). In this first description, however, Tony suffers from not only the failure of his salivary glands to function, but a failure, seemingly, of the entire head. The description of Tony's face echoes the architectural description that comes before both in the nonfunctionality of the structure of Tony's face, but in some of the word choices ("now collapsed, derelict") and in the placing of the nonfunctional head of Tony in the larger structure not of his body, but of "his parents' house, bungalow"—signaling Tony's dependence and revising the statement to further diminish the dignity of the structure. Everywhere, Tony is diminished: "Shrivelled," "shrunken," a "half yawn," "harassed glands cauterized into deficiency." Everything is less than it

was and less than it should be. This sense of diminution contrasts with the architecture of the station, which is notable for its sameness, end to end and through time. Nevertheless, the result is similar: as the clerestory beams support nothing, Tony's open mouth emits nothing. While the absence of speech is clearly implied, the description is not of a silenced speaker, but of pre-verbal expression silenced: first "an unnatural half-yawn," then "a controlled scream." The clerestory suggests irony through its lack of function: sophisticated, verbal double-meaning. Tony's mouth suggests unsophisticated double-meaning. But, while the clerestory's meaning remains obscure, Tony's mouth suggests the emotional content of his condition: boredom and terror. These remain significant themes throughout *The Unfortunates*: the terror of death and of meaninglessness, the boredom of day-to-day existence. And they are caused by, as well as read into, Tony's inability to speak in the complicated, rational (unemotional) language of words.

When the narrator first meets Tony, on a trip to a printer as editor of a college literary magazine, he is struck by Tony's intellect, and, particularly, his conversational ability: "He had that sort of mind, Tony, that could marshal an argument methodically, both or all sides, yet leave you quite clear as to which he advocated, supported, and why" ("That was the first time, that must have been the first time, yes" 3). Frequently, the narrator will be unable to remember the specifics of conversations he has had with Tony—unwilling to supply unremembered dialogue and leaving even the subject or occasion of conversation as a matter of speculation. But Tony's way of talking was of such great interest to the young narrator that he and his co-editor "had asked him to be a guest contributor to our magazine, to write as he

had talked, Tony” (“That was the first time, that must have been the first time, yes” 4). *The Unfortunates*, by contrast, is generally unwilling to write as Tony talked: it leaves Tony as we find him in the first paragraph of “FIRST,” unable to speak. The novel begins, then, with an arresting image of Tony’s speechlessness, but Tony’s death, the limits of memory, and the limits of novel-writing itself leave him largely speechless in the novel as a whole. As Philip Tew argues, “Johnson cannot render Tony independently of himself” (*Critical Reading* 42). Tony’s lack of independence in the novel is an extension of his lack of independence in this first image: he is a speechless expression of existential anxiety contained within a structure owned by another.

“FIRST” goes on to set up other major themes and techniques in the novel as well. As the narrator ponders how he will venture out into the city, he states in plain terms the novel’s theory of memory: “The mind circles, at random, does not remember, from one moment to another, other things interpose themselves, the mind’s” (“FIRST” 1). Circling, randomness, and interposition, then, are some of the terms with which we can think of both the stream of consciousness within each section and the overall form of the novel. The novel, and the narrator, circles both Tony and the unnamed Midlands city. The circle has subject matter as its center, but the process of circling has no defined middle: the reader continues around the circle, stopping at one point or another, but unable to tell when the process of circling (or the circle itself) has reached its mid-point. Circling does not lead from beginning to end in an ordered progression, but rather, as a process, has a beginning and an end in time. One does not circle to get somewhere, but when one has arrived at one’s destination,



but is unable to complete the journey—just as the story of Tony’s life, of the narrator’s relationship to Tony, has already reached its end at the beginning of *The Unfortunates*, but memory prevents the story from reaching closure, demands that it continue aimlessly until the narrator’s day in town is through. Additionally, while the narrative of *The Unfortunates* itself has no order and no temporal profile, the act of reading does: the individual reader circles the narrative, even as the narrator’s mind circles Tony.

It is more obvious how *The Unfortunates* instantiates randomness in its form. However, while within each section, the randomness of memory seems motivated, as the narrator’s first memory of Tony is motivated by the station, the reader’s experience of randomness from section to section has no particular motivation. Randomness, then, is not an unproblematic term: there is the seeming randomness of thought, associating sensory stimuli and thoughts to other thoughts; and there is the formalized randomness of the middle of the *Unfortunates*: a set number of parameters left to pure chance. This suggests that, while randomness is ostensibly a characteristic of memory, this is illusory: true randomness is a characteristic not of the memory, but of the universe: of Tony’s fate, not of the narrator’s recollection of that fate. This, then, produces a reverse reading of the disordered middle of *The Unfortunates*: while it may represent the inability of memory to produce an ordered reconstruction of events, it may also represent the arbitrary disruption by random events of the meaning-making, associational “randomness” of memory. There is thus a central irony to the form of *The Unfortunates*: it is both a modernist representation of memory—an experimental formal solution to a problem in realistic mimesis—and a

repudiation of its own central modernist goal of accurately representing the workings of the human mind. As *The Unfortunates* piles meanings on its structure, those meanings clash and destroy each other, and we are left with the possibility that the only meaning of *The Unfortunates*' random ordering of its sections is an absence of meaning.

There are two further characteristics of the mind in this first theorization in "FIRST." Of these, interposition is clearly carried out in the novel's form, sections of memory interposing themselves. The physical fact of separately-bound sections makes this interposition palpable: objects placed between each other, memories and experiences cutting in as stacked objects rather than a story moving through time. Notable, too, however, is the fact that the narrator's mind frequently does not remember. This is a novel as much about absent memories as present memories—as though Proust's Marcel, after the first prodding of tea and cake, were left on the outside of his memories looking in, unable to transport himself back to his youth. *The Unfortunates* contains some rich descriptions (such as further descriptions of architecture and the condition of Tony's body), but it refuses, even in the sections that exist entirely in the past in which Tony lived, to transport the reader fully into memory, leaving each memory an object to be pondered and fact-checked, a recollection rather than a story.

"FIRST," after one such anecdotal recollection of a trip to the Midlands town, concerned more with the narrator's memories of a former girlfriend by the name of Wendy than with Tony, ends by emphasizing the importance of Tony's talk (and the

narrator's problematic relationship to his friend's words) and a question which seems to be answered by the novel's disordered middle:

My visits here were long talks broken only partly by eating, what a generalization, there, more talk on his part than mine, far more, but I learnt, I selected and elected to hear what I needed, what was of most use to me, at that time most use, from his discourse, yes, the word is not too pompous, discourse, a fine mind, a need to communicate embodied in it, too, how can I place his order, his disintegration? ("FIRST" 3-4).

This sentence suggests a prior, self-interested but non-arbitrary selection of available materials: the narrator remembers only what he previously found of use—but that use is not the same as the use of telling Tony's story, or giving an accurate account of Tony's life, even in the restricted sense of its relation to the narrator. These memories then must be placed by the narrator—in a story, in a novel, in a meaningful relationship to his life. In doing so, the narrator is faced with a problem: he admires his friend's discourse, the well-ordered nature of Tony's thoughts and words. But impinging on this is the memory of Tony's disintegration—which seems itself to be the order of Tony's life. We can see the solution to this problem in *The Unfortunates*' box: orderly (by modernist standards) chunks, disintegrated. The reader is placed in the narrator's position by being forced to place this disordered whole in some sort of order—but the only answer for how is "at random." However, just as the narrator's "random" memory is limited by the selections of his former self, so too is the reader limited by the priority of Johnson, both in his role as author and as

narrator/rememberer. Johnson maintains, in “FIRST,” the modernist author’s power to direct meaning, to set the thematic and structural parameters of his novel in the beginning, which functions in this sense much as Edward Said says beginnings do. Furthermore, by setting “FIRST” first, Johnson yokes *The Unfortunates* a modernist tradition (exemplified by Faulkner as well as Proust) that frames the past—and the attempt to discover its meaning—within present memory. If the past, as Faulkner famously says, is not past, it is in *The Unfortunates* a scattered object to be held, mixed up with the present in a random middle, held together only by parameters set up from the first by authority and circumstance. In the noun-like form it takes in *The Unfortunates*’ middle, memory is thus the subject of both phenomenological mimesis and after-the-fact critique.

One section of *The Unfortunates* is devoted to the narrator’s efforts to write and phone in his article on the soccer match as he watches it. This section is the most divorced from memories of Tony, and is thus the purest example of a segment set entirely in the novel’s fictional present. It is also, as Nicolas Tredell observes, a portrait of “not ‘the writer,’ but writing” (36). For Tredell, the narrator of *The Unfortunates* is a cross between a transcription of Johnson’s thoughts on that day, and a retrospective narrator who is writing the text of *The Unfortunates* (36). This is apparent both in the orderly narratives that comprise each segment of the narrator’s memory, and in the narrator’s writerly searching for the correct fact and the correct word. We can see this separation—this criticism of the narrator’s present day thoughts—as he negotiates between his desire to eat and his guilt at being overweight: “[...] I enjoy eating in a strange city, I must eat anyway, I persuade

myself, wrongly, I should think, who knows, but on these jobs I feel so hungry [...]" ("Cast parapet" 1). The novel here attempts to capture a present-tense internal debate, but it does so by creating a narrator who actively narrates—and corrects—his thoughts. "I persuade myself, wrongly," is either a self-narrating thought in a mind at a level of detachment from its own stream-of-consciousness debate, or else the intervention of a narrator in the process of writing the novel who cannot resist critiquing and correcting his thoughts even as he attempts to re-create them in written form. In either case, the stream of consciousness is framed by a writerly critique, retrospective if only by a split second, even though it remains in the present tense.

As the narrator watches the soccer match between City and United, however, negotiations between the present-tense stream of consciousness and the retrospective needs of the writer to get things right and to fit them into a particular form become explicit. From the beginning of the section, the narrator searches for a word that will satisfy both the need for accuracy and the need to provide evocative language (both the mimetic and the expressive): "The pitch worn, the worn patches, like

There might be an image there, I could use an image there, if I can think of one, at this stage of the season, it might too stand for what these two teams are like, are doing.

If I can think of one" ("The pitch worn" 1).

Here, the narrator's stream of consciousness—his immediate thoughts on his environment as he experiences it—are blended completely with his attempts to mold those thoughts into written language that will serve the purposes of a newspaper account of the match. It is impossible for the reader to determine whether "The pitch worn" is the thought in the narrator's mind as he sees the field, or if it is already

retrospective, an attempt to think into writing a phenomenon already witnessed. There is the additional possibility that this is a comment on how writing as both a process and as a profession distorts thought and memory. Indeed, the narrator's professional experience is a barrier to his ability to accurately capture in words the unique event before him: he cannot narrate the soccer match without concerning himself with how it compares to other soccer matches, cannot form the words without concerning himself with how they compare to other words about soccer matches. Having already reported on several matches this season, the narrator finds some difficulty writing about what these teams, this match, are like, particularly as he soon loses interest. The teams aren't playing well, and he cannot drum up even a provisional rooting interest in any team other than his beloved Chelsea. The standard narrative frames, whether those of the fan, or of conventional sportswriting, prove inadequate for this particular match. That is, traditional narrative frameworks prove inadequate to the material provided by this particular match, much as a traditional narrative forms such as biography seemed inadequate to Johnson as a means for representing the randomness of Tony's cancer as well as the experience of remembering him. The narrator, that is, cannot construct a fixed narrative line—even an unusual one—from the individual episodes of the match.

From this first difficulty finding a proper metaphor, the problem here is particularly one of middles. The pitch is a prospective image for something that has no particular shape. The match is of no particular importance, the teams of no particular importance. The moment in the season has no particular importance. The narrator searches for the start to a linear narrative, first in the hope that this will turn

out to be the rare extraordinary match: “The one moment, the one match. A new beginning, is it? But already I suspect the worst of these two sides [...]” (“The pitch worn” 1). Neither the teams nor the time suggest a particular narrative, so the narrator must struggle to find a beginning, middle, and end for his story. The section follows him as he writes provisional sections of the story (given in italics), but the narrative crystallizes only with an ending:

*A fast, violently in-swinging cross from Kelvin was proved too fast and inswung from Williams as the cent Christ! No!*

That’s the story, then, the story, as the subs will think. It doesn’t matter what happens in the last eight minutes, that’s the match, that’s the story.

*It appeared the most innocuous of shots. Gordon, making ground from the position that used to be called right half back, felt that the United defence had fallen back sufficiently for him to try a long shot, but mishit it with that anti-climactic inefficiency which had characterized the whole match and, as Edson advanced and*

*stooped academically correctly to gather the ground shot with his body behind it, some demon chance gremlin trog thought took over in Mull’s mind that he could stop it himself and accordingly stuck out a boot. To the chagrin of the rest of the United players however and the unholy delight of the City supporters (who must be used to and thrive on this kind of farce, be fed weaned on*

*it, welcome it) the ball spun lazily slowly inevitably off his boot in a lazy parabola as some would say looping up and clear of the still stooping Edson's now upreaching arms to bounce once before crossing the line into the back of the United net. That leaves the goalie in a very strange position, posture. ("The pitch worn" 8-9).*

The farcical goal here is subordinated to the narrator's consciousness, but specifically to his consciousness as a writer. The choice of the narrative to follow the writer's consciousness results, in turn, in a split between the apprehensions of the narrator and the apprehensions of the reader: the reporter knows what has happened from the exclamation "Christ! No!" but the reader must wait for the italicized words to be written in the notebook. Knowledge of impressions is here explicitly dependent on the writer's ability to formulate expressions.

Furthermore, the expressions are dependent on the writer's ability both to find, in the moment of writing, the right word, but also on the writer's ability to determine the story. The narrator's hesitations (represented by white space in the text) and revisions ("*demon chance gremlin trog*") bring together in-the-moment consciousness with writerly retrospection: once again, Johnson calls attention to the difficulty of capturing, of reifying, the flow of time when every point of view inevitably imposes its own temporal flow. The narrator's mind reaches for language of a religious nature for even this anti-climax ("*demon,*" "*unholy*"), an attempt to dramatize the absence of drama and tie the ephemeral to the eternal. The most crucial narrative choice made by the narrator, however, is not linguistic or metaphorical. Rather, it is the authoritative decision he makes to determine that this moment is the



end of the story, though he is reluctant to imbue this authority entirely in himself (“as the subs will think”). The moment that ends the story is near the end of the match, but is not itself the end of the match. Even in systems such as sporting events that have rules to determine their beginnings and ends, narrative, whether determined collectively (by the conventions of sportswriting, by common assumptions about the probabilities of various outcomes) or individually (by a particular writer, by the coach who removes his star players from the game) remains an irregular arbiter of beginning, middle, and end. The middle of the game is such that any moment, given the proper match between story and event, may become critical, may become the end. In the act of writing, middle is not defined by a predetermined beginning and end; instead, beginning and end are plucked out of an indeterminate middle. That indeterminate middle that is being molded into a story here (as in *The Unfortunates*) is ever-receding memory, which writing and consciousness attempt to bar off within a beginning and ending.

Ultimately, however, the narrator chooses to write a story that frames a narrative not of the match itself, but of an experience of the match, much as *The Unfortunates* itself is a novel about the experience of remembering a dead friend, rather than about the friend himself (or even the memories themselves). In the case of the match, this approach allows the ending of the narrator’s story to extend beyond the end, for narrative purposes, of the match itself. The section ends with the narrator calling in his story, and we hear the image’s final place in the story’s first sentence: “Skill was as uncommon as grass on the bare pitch on which City beat United one nil [...]” (“The pitch

worn” 9-10). The image finds the object for which it is a metaphor in the sheer ineptitude of the play. This story of ineptitude, and the way the metaphor which begins the phoned-in story reflects the narrator’s own first experience of the match, is like many modernist stories: it is not a story of exceptional importance or of exceptional people, but instead of an arbitrary time period in a place to which the narrator is arbitrarily assigned. Furthermore, despite hewing fairly closely to the conventions of sports journalism, the account the narrator phones in roughly follows his own experience of the match. The story begins, as the section of *The Unfortunates* does, with the image of the torn-up field. It ends with little attention to the on-field play after the lone goal is scored: “The remaining eight minutes were played out to the continuing sound of the City supporters’s apostrophe delight at the goal comma [...] For they are that kind of crowd comma and this was indeed their kind of match full point. That’s the lot, that’s the end” (“The pitch worn” 12). The narrator’s story thus ends not with a logical consequence of actions on the field, and not even with the chronological ending to events on the field. Instead, it ends with a characterization of the crowd to match the characterization of the players with which the report begins. The narrator gives his story a unity of tone rather than a causal narrative. And that tone is a very modernist sense of alienation—from the match, from the city, from the people around the narrator, from the act of storytelling. Between a beginning and ending that frame this sense of alienation, there is a seemingly random event that gives the match a result, if not a meaning. Like Tony’s death, the goal at the soccer match is both shocking and deadening, an event in the middle which startles, but ultimately only confirms the meaninglessness of the

whole. Even this attempt to find meaning in meaninglessness, however, is ultimately stifled. On the inside of the box, the final version of the story is printed. In this version of the story, both the opening metaphor of the pitch and the final description of the crowd have been cut. Here, the story ends, “And then farce. Gordon hit a fierce shot, the ball struck Mull’s outstretched foot and went over Edson into the goal.” Space limitations—and the conventions of journalism—limit the scope of the story. From the perspective of the narrator’s version of the story, this final version is all middle, both spatially and temporally: it contains its narrative to the field and to the long middle of the match (the first event narrated comes “Within the first ten minutes,” while the last comes with eight minutes to spare). Ironically, this version of the story was not printed in the first edition of the novel, which was more purely a book in (that is, in the middle of, not printed on) a box.

The two sections from the middle of *The Unfortunates* that I have discussed at length (“Up there, yes,” “The pitch worn”) are the longest in the novel. The second-shortest describes Tony’s funeral. In the shortest of all, the narrator learns of Tony’s death:

June rang on the Saturday, was it, or the Thursday before, no, quite late, we had already arranged to go, though what arrangements could we have needed to make, saying there was no need for us to come down now, on Sunday, for he had died that evening, had not recovered consciousness that morning from his sleep, but previously there had been the opposite of a relapse, three days when his mind had been virtually normal, for which she had been grateful, June, it had seemed

like a miracle, though he still could not move, his mind had come back and they had talked very seriously about everything, for the first time had talked about death.

This is the complete text of the section. It is, as Tredell notes, a remarkably second-hand moment (Tredell 39). Partly, this is a recognition of the narrator's own distance from his subject: he is not important enough in Tony's life to have a final, intimate conversation. (His own conversations with Tony are generally either light or intellectual.) However, the narrator not only makes no attempt to re-create Tony and June's final conversation with any specificity, despite his perhaps-ironic assertion elsewhere that, "generalizations are useless" ("Time" 3). The narrator does not here express any specific frustrations at this fact, but his own reluctance to conjure factually dubious specifics robs this conversation (and many other moments in the novel) of the realistic specificity that might give them uniqueness. Johnson is devoted to avoiding generalization because, "In general, generalization is to lie, to tell lies" ("LAST" 6), but that same determination to avoid telling lies often commits his narrative to, if not quite generalization, a limitation to only general facts, from which the reader may make generalizations. Tony and June's talk about death becomes not a specific talk about death, but is reduced to the words which denote it: "a talk about death." The deathbed conversation is thus fully nominalized: it is contained wholly in a noun-phrase, rather than a story with a temporal profile.

Even the narrator's conversation with June, however, receives strangely attenuated description. This event would seem to form a possible short middle for the narrative of *The Unfortunates*: the death of Tony the central event from which

extends, in the one direction, Tony's life and, in the other direction, the narrator's remembering of that life. In a chronological ordering of the novel that places memories of Tony before the account of the narrator's day, this section would in fact come fairly near the middle—the sixteenth or seventeenth out of twenty-seven sections. Nevertheless, and despite the narrator's self-acknowledged "solipsism" ("LAST" 6), the narrator does not delve deeply into his own consciousness in the moment of the phone call. In the novel's final sentence, the narrator does attempt to analyze the importance of Tony's death: "Not how he died, not what he died of, even less why he died, are of concern, to me, only the fact that he did die, he is dead, is important: the loss to me, to us" ("LAST" 6). When the novel narrates the moment at which the narrator learns of this loss, provides no such retrospective assessment. But it also does not provide the a stream-of-consciousness rendering of the importance. We may surmise that the narrator's mind was largely blank at that moment (though he might have said so). We might surmise that his memory of that moment is likewise blank. But what seems more likely is that this final assessment—that only the fact of Tony's death is important—has overruled Johnson's intent to render his memories (and the consciousness of memory) as fully as possible, as stated in *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*. Instead, what might have been the novel's emotional core is concerned primarily with getting the day correct. This is typical of the method of *The Unfortunates*: more often than not, the novel represents the mind as it attempts to peg down memories. This technique is at its starkest in the starkest moment of the novel.

By contrast, when the narrator first hears that Tony has cancer, the narrator does give his reactions: “[...] he wrote to say he was in hospital for the removal of a tumour in the neck, on the neck, and would not therefore be at home when I came: but I could see him in hospital, if I cared to, and I did, it worried me, shocked me, thinking the obvious, yes, I cared to very much, when I heard” (“Just as it seemed” 5). More details of the cancer (June tells the narrator it is in Tony’s collarbone) follow. The narrator is equally forthcoming with his less sympathetic reactions: “No, he couldn’t read, in the circumstances, and I could never understand why, all through his illness, that it deprived him of his ability to read [...]” (“Just as it seemed” 7). In general, Johnson does not spare himself, shows himself to be, though a devoted friend, self-interested in his dealings with Tony, impatient when Tony is no longer able to edit his novels. All these emotions are rendered retrospectively—they are facts to be remembered, just as the letter from Tony and the day of the phone call from June are facts to be remembered. But, in the moment of death (or, rather, the delayed moment of the notification of death, when death is apprehended), emotional facts are entirely absent. It is impossible to tell whether it is the narrator, remembering that phone call at some indeterminate time during a day in his dead friend’s hometown, who declines to examine his own reactions at that crucial moment, or whether it is the writer, transforming a day of remembering into a novelistic expression, who chooses to elide the emotional content of this memory. Ultimately, though, the effect is one a narrated mind that obsessively attempts to fix the inconsequential (the day of the week) in order to avoid looking too deeply at the consequences of death.

This undernarrated phone call may be the second section in the novel for the reader, and it may be the twenty-sixth. The presence of the “FIRST” section, however, guarantees that it will not be the first time the reader learns of Tony’s death; conversely, the “LAST” section guarantees that Tony’s death cannot be the last event of the novel. By containing Tony’s death somewhere in the middle of the novel, Johnson guarantees that the reader’s knowledge of Tony’s death will not coincide with the moment the past-tense version of the narrator learns of his death. The reader is thus separated from the narrator’s experience of Tony’s death on a broader narrative level. Furthermore, that death is not allowed the priority of beginning or ending. This priority is reserved for the narrator as he gets off a train and as a train pulls away from town, respectively.

The journey to and from memory is thus prioritized—and the middle of *The Unfortunates* serves as a formal expression of that memory. *The Unfortunates*, and by extension its theory of memory, is not like traditional narrative, with a fixed *syuzhet*, however anachronous, corresponding to a fixed *fabula*. Nor is it like many modernist narratives, where a fixed *fabula* is implied, but may be difficult or impossible to construct with certainty from the *syuzhet*, which may contain both anachronies and achronies, as well as other narrative devices that produce epistemological difficulties. Nor, like much postmodernist literature, does *The Unfortunates* go further and create a *fabula* that is itself unfixed or unstable, creating ontological difficulties. Instead, It is an odd combination of fixed *fabula* and radically unfixed *syuzhet* that nevertheless poses relatively few difficulties in reconstructing the *fabula*, but instead foregrounds epistemological problems related to the *meaning* of events and their relationship to

memory: a mixture of the ordered and the disordered, of the stream of consciousness and the judgment of the writer. In so doing, *The Unfortunates* attempts to examine the epistemological problems of memory and narrative as a thing, rather than as a process—a probing of the epistemological problems related to turning events (particularly, for Johnson, true events) into memories and memories into novels.

This middle layers memory upon memory, as it remembers a day of remembering. It questions the accuracy of memory even as it attempts to preserve memory as a fact in itself. It suggests that the apprehension of narratives, of stories—of beginnings and endings—threatens to distort prior memories, yet it operates within its own fixed beginning and ending. By giving the reader a choice in the ordering the text, it suggests the possibility of a writerly text—a text whose form and meaning are subject to the whims and interpretations of the reader. But the same randomness which suggests this possibility also destroys it: the reader has no real choice, beyond whether and how many times to shuffle the pages. *The Unfortunates* suggests that, while memory is unlikely to re-create the exact chronological order of events, or even the order of previous acts of remembering, it does preserve some of time's original chronological ordering. What's more, it maintains a certain confidence that events do happen in a particular chronological order, and that that chronological order can be mostly (if not completely) recovered. But it is recovered as an object, not as an experience. This is what it means for memory to be nominalized: we can gather up what we know of our past, of our memories, we can evaluate their veracity, and we can put them in a box—but we cannot re-create the experience of them. We know the past, and the memories which contain it, happens in time—but we know it only in our



own time. Rather than push his readers into an experience of their own unique time, *The Unfortunates* and its randomized middle seeks only to alienate its readers from the temporal profile of Johnson's past, and of his memories, which have become only loose objects in a box.

## Chapter 6: Indivisible Form, Divided:

### The Middle as Leap from Modernism to Postmodernism in

#### Brigid Brophy's *In Transit*

The Anglo-Irish novelist Brigid Brophy's 1969 *In Transit: An Heroi-Cyclic Novel* begins where *The Waste-Land* ends: with the cross-cultural, multi-linguistic disintegration of language. It ends, in postmodernist fashion, with an explicit nod to the Baroque, with an address to the reader that puts into question the relationship between narrator and reader, fiction and reality. The novel's middle both dramatizes the transition from the end of high modernism, with its linguistic dance between order and chaos, to the simultaneously iconoclastic and traditionalist meta-storytelling of postmodernism, while also serving as the glue that binds these two narrative modes into a single novel. Brophy's novel, written in the age of counterculture and nascent postmodernism, dramatizes this transition through its themes of gender and genre as well as language, linking a late modernist beginning to a postmodernist end with a leap across ontological boundaries. By shifting from modernism and postmodernism through an actual textual middle, Brophy takes her readers with her across the chasm between modernist and postmodernist approaches. This shift goes beyond a change in narrative direction or a change in formal approach to the narrative (though it is both of those): it is an upending of the very ontological status of the story being narrated and the world in which it takes place. In making this profound shift, Brophy builds on the structurally-important middles of modernist novels, showing both the limitations

of the modernist approach and the potential uses of the middle in a pluralistic and postmodernist future.

Brian McHale's theories of modernist and postmodernist fiction have formed the basis for the definition of modernism used in this study. Modernism and postmodernism are distinguished in his work not by historical periodization, by their relationship to the concept of the modern, or to a list of typical traits or techniques (though McHale does often supply the latter). Instead, they are distinguished by the concept of the dominant, which McHale credits to Jurij Tynjanov via Roman Jakobson. For McHale's (and our) purposes, the dominant is the primary focus of the work, conceived by McHale in this case as a philosophical category around which a work structures its thematics. For modernism, the dominant is the epistemological, while for postmodernism, the dominant is the ontological. That is, modernism is concerned with questions about the nature of knowledge, while postmodernism is concerned with questions about the nature of the world. However, a thematic epistemological or ontological dominant is not enough to make a work modernist or postmodernist. McHale connects each philosophical category with a type of genre fiction: the epistemological with detective fiction; the ontological with science fiction. These genres explore their dominants thematically, as well as through plot mechanics. However, they differ from modernism and postmodernism in that the -isms incorporate the dominant in their poetics as well as their thematics.

The line between postmodernism and world-building genre fiction such as science fiction or fantasy is a good deal thinner than the difference between modernism and detective fiction or other mystery-driven forms of realism. This is

because postmodernism concerns the nature of the world itself—which can be destabilized not only by literary technique, as such, but by the choice of a high-concept world. That is, the poetics of postmodernism cannot easily be confined to a separate category of “literary technique” as can the poetics of modernism. This perhaps at least partly explains why postmodernism is often identified with a self-aware return to traditional genre writing as it is with “difficult” writing by authors such as Thomas Pynchon.<sup>30</sup> This also may explain how easily many popular art forms incorporate or anticipate postmodernist techniques (particularly to humorous effect), from the flexible physics and repeated breaking of the fourth wall found in Looney Tunes to the literary mash-ups and hopping between books found in, for example, the stories of Woody Allen and the novels of Jasper Fforde.<sup>31</sup> That is, the breaking of ontological boundaries is a well-founded popular form of storytelling and joke-telling, based, at least in part, on the delight involved in both disturbing and confirming our expectations of genre and world stability. So, when examining the presence of both modernism and postmodernism in *In Transit*, I will argue that the novel’s postmodernism is both an extension of modernism and its techniques into the realm of the ontological, and a return to the traditional realms of genre writing and popular joke-telling.

---

30 See, for example, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, which includes “period pastiche” such as A. S. Byatt’s *Possession: A Romance* to be a key strain “of Postmodern British fiction, which by reanimating styles from the literary tradition, explores the relation of that tradition to the fate of language and literary culture in the contemporary era” (Murphet 722).

31 Allen’s “The Kugelmass Episode” tells the story of a bored professor who enters the text of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* in order to engage in an affair with its protagonist, who eventually finds her way into the real world; in Fforde’s *The Eyre Affair*, the protagonist must prevent a villain from erasing Jane Eyre from all copies of the novel by entering the book itself. The novel and its sequels contain many similar crossings between “real” and “fictional” worlds.

McHale's lists of the questions posed by modernism and postmodernism are especially useful for illuminating the difference between *In Transit*'s two halves. Mchale begins with the Cognitive and Postcognitive Questions, proposed by Dick Higgins in *A Dialectic of Centuries* (1978) as the fundamental questions posed by 20th-century artists before and after approximately 1958. The Cognitive Questions become Mchale's epistemological questions of modernism: "How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" (qtd. in Mchale 9). To these, Mchale adds, "What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable?" (Mchale 9). These epistemological questions are specified in *In Transit* as questions about the main character's gender and questions about language as a medium of knowledge and transmission of knowledge, in addition to questions for the reader of how to translate the modernist narrative's account of a character's perceptions into knowledge about the story and its world. The Postcognitive Questions become Mchale's ontological questions of postmodernism: "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" (qtd. in Mchale 10). *In Transit* poses in its second half questions of radical action in a constantly shifting reality, where the main character is split into multiple selves. We have encountered multiple selves already in Heppenstall's *Saturnine*, but whereas that earlier novel grounded the splitting of the self in the internal psychology of its narrator, Frobisher, in *In Transit* the split is presented externally, to the point where this split seems to effect changes

in the diegetic reality of the novel. McHale's additional questions address the dominance of genre play and overt shifting literary forms in the novel's second half: "What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured?" (McHale 10). Throughout *In Transit*, most of the epistemological and ontological questions are raised to one degree or another.

Contrary to previous critics who read *In Transit* primarily as a unitary (if progressive) exploration of language, gender, and literary technique, I argue that the dominant concerns as well as poetics of *In Transit* undergo a major shift in the middle of the novel. Hopkins, for example, argues that the novel is postmodernist from the start:

The self-consciousness within the narrating voice of the problems of stream of consciousness narration is striking and an index of the novel's obsession with narration and language. Indeed, this metafictional quality (an awareness of fiction as an issue to be explicitly emphasized with the fiction itself) and the simultaneous self-awareness and fragmentation of the narrator over numerous different kinds of discourse take this novel towards postmodernism in a more obvious sense than that suggested earlier as applicable to Brophy. (Hopkins 17)

Obsession with narration and language, however, is a quality common to modernist narrative texts, notably those of Conrad, Joyce, and Faulkner. The fragmentation of the narrator of *In Transit* is, on the other hand, a second-half occurrence.

Fragmentation, too, is a common modernist trope. It is the realization of these modernist concerns in the novel's second half as transformations in the story world and the rules that govern its functioning as well as its narration that marks the transition between epistemological and ontological. This shift is worthy of investigation in its own right, as a technical device and a structural feature of Brophy's novel. It is also worthy of investigation as it relates to how we read the novel's themes of gender and language: for it posits a fundamental disjunction between the language of the self and its construction of gender, and the languages of the world and their very different constructions of gender. While *In Transit* suggests that the lines between the ontological and epistemological are porous, it also establishes that they exist. In *In Transit*, there is both an essential self with a coherent identity and limited knowledge, and multiple social selves—and it is the anxiety of transmission between the two, particularly in regards to gender, which fuels the novel.

*In Transit* uses music as inspiration to mark itself as a complete work of art formed of disparate parts. *In Transit* is divided into four sections, plus a brief CODETTA. All five have a primary title and a subtitle; the former is thematic, while the latter always a typical title of a movement of a classical symphony or sonata. The four main sections also have a supertitle, indicating (often playfully) the section number. The five titles, with typographical elements roughly transcribed, are:

section one

LINGUISTIC LEPROSY  
Allegro non troppo

sexshuntwo

THE CASE OF THE  
MISSING (RE)MEMBER  
Andante

section three

DE REBUS  
Scherzo and Fugue

section four

LET IT ALL COME BREAKDOWN  
Allegro Energico e Passionato

CODETTA  
Più allegro

While each section of *In Transit* has, to a certain extent, its own themes and its own poetics, the middle which takes us from Section 2 to Section 3 represents a fundamental shift in the novel's dominant. We can see this reflected in the section titles themselves. LINGUISTIC LEPROSY foregrounds both language and disintegration, both prototypical modernist concerns. The chapter itself follows the narrator's decision to remain in the international transit lounge of an airport, memories of childhood trauma and transplantation from Ireland to England, as well as the difficulties of knowing the world through language, especially given the internationalization of language(s). THE CASE OF THE MISSING (RE)MEMBER, as a title, echoes detective fiction, McHale's genre-fiction twin of modernism. It concerns the narrator's struggle to determine his or her gender. Both of these sections take place in a stable, realistic world—the difficulty for both narrator and reader is in



determining facts about that world and the plot through the narrator's limited and perhaps distorted perceptions. DE REBUS, on the other hand immediately moves us from knowledge and perception to things themselves. The main character (no longer narrator) alternates and later splits him/herself between the genders, encountering often impossible characters and situations that both demonstrate and place the main character in various well-defined gender roles, often drawn from literary genres. LET IT ALL COME BREAKDOWN once again refers to things, rather than perceptions, with unconventional (broken?) grammar—but the concern is not simply “things,” but the world itself. Appropriately, it is not just the adventures of a single main character that undergo postmodernist destabilization. The narrative now follows multiple characters, some or none of whom may be offshoots of the main character, in alternating narrative tones and genres, as the airport is taken over by revolutionaries. At this stage, for the first time, therefore, there is something resembling a traditional plot for a popular narrative: there are large-scale events, and they come to a climax when a man who has usurped the control tower from the revolutionaries deliberately causes two planes to crash into each other. The CODETTA continues the postmodernist trend while grounding itself in a partial technical return to the first two sections: the main character returns as narrator and offers three endings, including a gesture to the reader. All of these are typical postmodernist techniques, calling attention to the ambiguous relationship between the world of the novel and the real world, as well as the relationship which has been central to *In Transit* as a whole: the relationship between writer, narrator, and reader.

*In Transit*'s musical subtitles also emphasize the novel's overall structure as a juxtaposing of disparate parts. Like the "titles" of movements of actual classical works, the novel's subtitles are descriptions of form and style, often literally simply an instruction to the player(s) regarding the speed at which the movement is to be played.<sup>32</sup> "Allegro non troppo," for example, literally means "not too fast," but, combined with the knowledge that this is a first movement, indicates the sonata allegro form, which prescribes a particular pattern for the development of thematic material and also connotes a certain amount of musical seriousness or "weightiness." "Scherzo and Fugue," on the other hand, is literally a joke and a flight. In music, a scherzo is a movement of lighter character, generally associated with Classical and Romantic-era music of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The fugue is a musical form most strongly associated with Bach and the Baroque era, where multiple musical lines or voices "chase after" each other; the form was also often improvised, though it is often considered weightier than a scherzo, especially when employed in a

---

32 Annegret Maack argues that these subtitles are taken from Brahms' Fourth Symphony, "conceived as a renunciation of the classical three-movement symphony" (44). This is problematic on both counts. Only the first and fourth movements match Brahms exactly. Furthermore, the four-movement symphony was long-established by the time Brahms wrote his symphonies. Haydn, for example, wrote his later symphonies in four movements. It is also worth noting that, even in his own lifetime, Brahms, despite a number of musical innovations, was set up as the avatar of the conservative camp, opposed to Wagner's attempts to inaugurate a new approach to music. Thus, while a four- or five-movement work may signal an association with Romanticism and its stretching of Classical (and Baroque) forms, this is in the manner of an extension, rather than a renunciation. If Brophy allies herself with Romanticism, it is with the Classical branch of Romanticism. In the 1965 essay "A Literary Person's Guide to the Opera," Brophy wrote, "my own deepest conviction is that form is one and indivisible, and constant for all the arts. (The most copybook example I know of 'sonata form' is Andrew Marvell's poem 'To His Coy Mistress'.)" (*Don't Never Forget* 109). Brophy's musical subtitles are part of a formalist, not an anti-formalist, project, a connection with rather than a breaking-off from both the forms of the past and the forms of other genres. Brophy, in fact, suggests that any experimentalism in *In Transit* is, from a formal perspective, superficial.

more classical context, as by Beethoven. Single movements that include both scherzo and fugue are most common in the latter half of the twentieth century, coinciding with a postmodern move to revisit traditional musical forms. “Scherzo and Fugue” in particular thus speaks directly to a postmodernist impulse to re-purpose, hybridize, and juxtapose traditional forms.

In general, the section sub-titles are, metaphorically, statements about each section’s genre. Collectively, they indicate not only a parallel musical form, but specifically the form of a concert-piece that collects into a single work multiple sections with independent styles and themes. Traditionally, these movements would be connected by a key, a tonal center which grounds the movements and describes their relationship to each other. The further we get from late eighteenth-century classicism, however, the more the movement’s fixed relationship to a key is broken; simultaneously, later works are more likely to connect the movements thematically. The musical form implies a connection between the novel’s unstable form and the unstable forms of classical music, both of which seek to bind together a large amount of often disparate material into a unitary whole. In any such work, the question of the middle is essential: beginnings and endings can supply thematic material, and they can supply direction (from the former or towards the later) in which the thematic material is developed, but as single points, they cannot hold a long work together. Middles define the relationship between beginning and end—they define how the disparate materials of a novel are bound together, for they are themselves the binding. The modernist middles I have been exploring bind explicitly disparate materials—

they are perched between or represent themselves differing genres, points of view, times, settings, and literary techniques.

Like *The Golden Bowl*, *In Transit* has a middle which crucially shifts the novel's point of view around clear textual markings. In both cases, the shift is effected by an event in the narrated world. Unlike *The Golden Bowl*, however, *In Transit* narrates the event directly, without any prolepsis or analepsis to separate *fabula* from *syuzhet*, and the shift in point of view does not line up neatly with the marked sections of the novel. *In Transit*'s shift from modernism to postmodernism occurs both thematically and, most important for the present study, in narrative technique. It is represented in the world of the story by the protagonist's passing through a doorway and out of the Aristotelian unity of place provided by the Transit Lounge. In the narrative discourse, this shift is represented by a switch from first-person to third-person narration. Both these shifts are metaphors for an exit from the interior world of modernism, the world of a mind's attempt to know a fixed world, to the exterior world of postmodernism, where the self can be known only through the social, physical, and discursive environment, but where that environment is itself as unstable as modernist perception.

Both of these transitions are strongly connected to the protagonist's search for a stable gender identity. The first-person narrator disappears, with a suicide note, one chapter after acquiring a male gender identity, "hurling myself from top to bottom" (114). That is, the end of the first-person narrator is figured as a suicide, precipitated by the determination of gender. The narrator's flight down the stairs, from the transit lounge proper to the lavatory, becomes a leap into death. At this point, the first-

person narrator transforms into the third-person O’Rooley. Confidently entering the men’s lavatory, O’Rooley takes advantage of the privacy and searches for physical proof of gender, but finds that “Something – flesh briefly veiled by underclothes – was there, but not in the expected form” (117). To this point, the narrator has attempted to resolve gender confusion based on the performance of gender roles in public: how the narrator is dressed, how others react to the narrator, the narrator’s memories of behavior and encounters with others in the past. The narrator has assumed a fundamental coherence between gender and sex; when one has been determined, the other will be as well. The narrator is therefore left with an epistemological problem, attempting to gather knowledge of gender from the comically unavailable or ambiguous evidence. Sexshuntoo has been the Tale of the Missing Remember: a modernist mystery concerning the difficulty of determining reality using the unreliable medium of subjective memory. Once the narrator is able to confront the body in private, however, the chapter is transformed into the Tale of the Missing Member. Rather than using gender performance to epistemologically determine sex, the novel from this point uses sex to ontologically determine gender. The disappearance of the first-person narrator at this point abets this shift: gender is now something that is determined extradiegetically, a fact of the story-narrated from outside, rather than a diegetic hypothesis.

At the end of Sexshuntwo, the now-female protagonist Patricia “crept through the gap and stood upright,” exiting not only the transit lounge, but the building itself (124). The language suggests both birth and development. That is, Patricia is born or grows into the novel’s second half, which will be dominated by gender roles that are

performative in a Butlerian sense, but a sense that is particularized to narrative. Butler clarifies her definition of gender performativity in order to repudiate what she sees as a misunderstanding of her use of the term:

The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today. (Butler 21)

Instead, Butler argues, "Gender is performative insofar as it is the *effect* of a regulator regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized *under constraint*. Social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetition of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization" (Butler 21). *In Transit's* narrator/protagonist(s) is not capable of deciding his or her gender—instead, gender is something that must be epistemologically determined, according to a given set of criteria. In the novel's second half, this protagonist will undergo multiple instances of gender construction and destabilization, according to outside constraints. These constraints, however, are not purely social.<sup>33</sup> Instead, the constraints are particularly genre constraints, as Brophy investigates the ways particular gender roles are embedded in—and perhaps created by—particular literary (and other artistic) conventions. That is, in the postmodernist second half of Brophy's novel, literary

---

<sup>33</sup> Although it is particularly notable that social constraints prevent the narrator from determining his or her gender in the novel's first half: Pat is constrained from taking off his or her clothes in public.

performance (on the part of an author or narrator) is like both analogous to and deeply bound up with Butlerian gender performance. However, the novel's modernist first half does, contra Butler, suggest a self that exists prior to gender—suggested metaphorically as a self in the womb or in childhood. And *In Transit* goes even further: this pre-gendered self is more of a self than a gendered self could possibly be: only this pre-gendered self is a subject, rather than an object, narrator rather than narrated. Nevertheless, Butler's rule still applies: the first-person narrator cannot simply choose a gender at will; and, indeed, even the ungendered nature of the narrator is presented not as a choice, but as an absence against which the narrator struggles: an absence of normal memory and normal evidence, and then an absence of normal genitalia (here invoking Freud, but possibly suggesting the presence of some sort of transgendered genitalia). There is either the pre-gendered subject or the object of constantly shifting genre-related gender constraints. But the subject is not the pre-modernist stable subject: it is an unstable modernist subject, grasping for determinable gender.

*In Transit* tackles these issues of gender throughout, but particularly in its two middle sections. However, the modernist approach that dominates the first half of the novel represents a fundamentally different approach to gender than that offered in the novel's latter half. This difference—and the novel's very leap into a postmodernist approach, is driven by Brophy's views on the relationship between gender, identity, consciousness, and art. Section One ends with the narrator's musing on the meaning of the story of Orestes, as told in the gender-bending (and mythology-mixing) Italian opera *Alitalia*, which is being piped over the public-address system. Pat ponders "why

the chorus describe themselves as all akin to Orestes” (58). Pat concludes that this is “a metaphor of the social nature of the act of art,” “a metaphor of the social nature of an operatic performance and the hybrid structure of opera as an artistic form (opera=coopera),” and “an epidomized though no doubt [...] unconscious account of the socio-texture of Italian life” (58). This interpretation is followed by the chorus listing various ties of kinship (59). The move to the social realm here is in stark contrast to the novel’s opening sentence, “Ce qui m’étonnait qui’it was my French that disintegrated first” (11). This opening sentence announces the novel’s interest in multi-linguistic puns, language, and the classic modernist trope of disintegration. The sentences that follow further clarify that this first section of the novel will be concerned with the narrative “I,” and the complex relationship it creates between narrator (with some powers of retrospectivity that allow the French, in some sense, to be retained) and the “I” that exists within the world of the narrative:

Thus I expounded my affliction, an instant after I noticed its onset. My words went, of course, unvoiced. A comic-strippist would balloon them under the heading THINKS – a pretty convention, but a convention just the same. For instance, is the ‘THINKS’ part of the thought, implying the thinker is aware of thinking?

Moreover, and this is a much more important omission – comic strips don’t shew whom the thoughts are thought *to*. (11)

The as-yet-unnamed Pat is here revealed to be a complex construction, without French and yet with French, speaking and yet not speaking. Language, the narrator seems to indicate, is inherently social, yet the conventions of narrative prose as well



as the conventions of thought itself allow for or even demand a sort of internal narrative, a social transaction with, seemingly, a single party. The language used by the passage itself emphasizes the drive to internal language: the French that is lost is “my” French (or not lost—the meaning of “disintegration” is never quite clear in *In Transit*, and this, too, may be taken as a critique of modernist anxiety, where change and commingling and epistemological difficulties are sometimes made synonymous with loss). The words and affliction, too, are “my,” and two “I”s at the top of the novel’s second paragraph announce the section’s solipsism.

So, by the end of Section One, we are moving toward a view of the self and its language as socially constructed—or, rather, moving toward an exploration of the social aspects of the construction of the self. The “I,” however, remains, and is able to consider the social as something essential but in some crucial way separate.

Sexshuntwo begins, “I was a fine one to have declared myself out of sympathy with lost identities. Before a cock or a contralto could reasonably have crowed thrice, and while my system still pulsed to the informally fugal effect of that splendid closing chorus from *Alitalia*” (63). Identity—defined by *Alitalia* and Pat’s reading of the opera as social in nature—has become the crucial question of the novel. However, the meaning of the word itself—much like the meaning of “disintegration” or “I,” is definitively ambiguous. While Sexshuntwo will for the first time make gender issues a primary theme of the novel, in the beginning of Sexshuntwo gender and identity are two separate issues entirely:

there went missing in my own mind not, indeed, my sense of my  
identity (on which I retained a clear, firm clasp throughout the

lamentable incident which I am now going, in a manner as straightforward and circumstantial as I can muster, to narrate) but a piece of information which, though less individual to me than my identity, was in certain immediate respects even more vital. (*In Transit* 63)

The even more vital piece of information referred to by the narrator is the knowledge of the narrator's own anatomical sex and gender.

The narrator seems to reject the view of identity as a pure social construct, the view associated with the more extreme interpretations of Butler's performativity that Butler eventually rejected. Nevertheless, identity is first invoked in the social realm—a loss of identity being somehow a loss of a sense of kinship with others. Identity here is not the same thing as consciousness, and particularly not the linguistic aspect of consciousness that is reproducible through language. Modernist stream-of-consciousness narrative gives us partial access to consciousness, but this consciousness is itself already a social mediation of identity itself. Consciousness may be socially permeable, even partly readable, but identity is not. Sheryl Stevenson argues that *In Transit* throughout (but especially following Pat's gender confusion) is an extension of the Bakhtinian mix of discourses into a world of unstable language and gender norms:

A hodgepodge of voices, the first-person narrative conveys a psyche so permeated by social discourses that it seems, as Bakhtin says, a 'borderline' phenomenon, merging self and society and so having 'extraterritorial status.' In both Bakhtin and Brophy this metaphor of

extraterritoriality (of being in transit, between states) reflects a notion of language as the constituting element of a radically social psyche.

(183)

This psyche is not what the novel defines as identity, but the stream of consciousness, which is not any more radically social in *In Transit* than it is in any other situation: for this is not identity, but thought that is at stake. Moreover, rendering only the stream of consciousness limits the narrative's ability to represent the social context in which the mind operates. As Alan Palmer argues, stream of consciousness—particularly stream of consciousness conceived of as direct and indirect representation of specifically verbal conscious thought (direct and free indirect thought)—represents only some of a character's mental processes. In particular, Palmer notes, “Analyses of particular passages of free indirect thought or direct thought will necessarily reveal the social context of the thought under discussion” (Palmer 33). By extension, representations of consciousness that rely primarily on direct and free indirect thought do not give a reader a full account of the social context of the thought. That is, stream of consciousness narrative, rather than being the most full and accurate representation of a character's mental processes, instead provides a contextually limited representation of those processes—and often limits the processes represented to verbal processes specifically. However, *In Transit* goes beyond this problem, because Pat seems to be suffering from the same limited access to Pat's mind that the reader does. The basic social context of gender—as well as others, such as a shared understanding of what language is being spoken—is missing. By operating primarily through a modernist stream-of-consciousness discourse, the narrator represents the



The narrator here has access to many discourses and mixes them freely. The narrator's consciousness is indeed multi-linguistic and multi-discursive and constantly influenced by Pat's surroundings. But self and society are not merged. The narrator plays, actively, with the international space of the lounge and delights in the disintegration of language as a coherent, stable source of meaning. But the narrator's identity and consciousness are not threatened by this linguistic and gender play.

Identity, then, seems to be intimately bound up with the social realm, as our sense of ourselves as separate persons depends on our sense of other persons. Identity, as a sense of oneself as a coherent being, then, is in some sense constructed out of a social sense, a sense of kinship—these are other selves, I have such-and-such a relationship to these selves. But *Sexshuntwo* leaves identity in this realm—in transit between a sort of pure consciousness and a socially constructed role that reifies the consciousness. Identity exists both completely apart from and intimately bound with the social role. Pat's identity depends on her social sense, but it is not determined *by* the roles assigned by the social realm. Instead, in this "Case," the social realm is a source of information, a source of "facts" that the narrator (and the narrator's narrated self) can use to learn more about the stable "I" of identity.

The social status of gender and the physical status of sex are questions which the narrator's agile, socially un-anchored consciousness can explore fluidly, safe in the certainty of the narrating "I" and its active stream of consciousness. As Karen Lawrence argues, the ungendered first-person pronoun enables a sort of gender agnosticism for both narrator and reader (Lawrence 40). The stream of consciousness that pours out from the narrator allows both narrator and reader to infer a unified

identity, which remains unitary and unthreatened throughout. The linguistic form implies that gender is something extraneous to consciousness—something that must be sensed *by* the narrating consciousness rather than being an innate aspect of that consciousness. The wholeness of identity is, with the possible exception of some cases of schizophrenia, unassailable from within the realm of consciousness which the first-person narrative explores. Gender identity is almost, if not absolutely, an oxymoron, because gender roles (as explored in the latter half of the novel) are social constructs, while identity is fundamentally private and exists outside of labels—outside, even, of language. By defining gender as extrinsic to identity, Brophy reveals a fissure in the techniques of modernism. The narrator’s gender is fundamentally an epistemological question. However, as announced by title of *Sexshuntwo*, “The Case of the Missing (Re)member,” it is an epistemological question that can be addressed comfortably within the popular form of detective fiction. And, indeed, *Sexshuntwo* finds Pat repeatedly attempting to gather clues about his or her gender: from memories, from physical observation, and from social observation.

It is the social realm which proves (temporarily) decisive for Pat’s gender, and also proves the undoing of the first-person narrator. Pat encounters a man, an airedale by the name of Donaghue, who announces himself as the husband of an old friend of Pat’s by the name of Betty. Pat, who neither remembers him nor is able to hear him clearly, supplies the old friend with the full maiden name of Betty Bouncer. As Pat fakes her way through the conversation, she attempts to learn the nature of her own relationship with Betty, in an attempt to discern her gender. Donaghue departs with the declaration that Betty spoke of Pat as either her “first date” or her “first mate” –

once again, the slipperiness of the spoken word combines with Pat's comically limited ability to make observations about the outside world to thwart epistemological resolution. Pat, however, seems determined to come to a conclusion on the gender question. Betty, since married, is in Pat's mind likely heterosexual, making a "first date" or a "first mate" (sexual meaning) male—with the "punning on some nautical pastime or get-up" also implying a male "bo's'n's mate" (114). Objectively, the evidence is not particularly decisive, but just as Pat "will convince myself memory now brings you back in festoons of blonde hair jauntily but insecurely tucked up under a yachting cap, while you play cap'n or bo's'n or any other apostrophe'd rôle you please," Pat makes the decision to make of the evidence not a fact of identity, but a gender role: "whichever world your husband said, beloved Betty Bouncer, and whichever way you care to read the evidence, I quite clearly am, must be and can only be A MAN" (114).

Pat's assertion that this conclusion is epistemologically based is fundamentally weak. The decision is framed within the realm not of evidence and logic, but in the realm of social convention (by which Pat reads Donaghue's indeterminate words) and imagination (by which Pat creates both Betty Bouncer and a roleplaying past for herself). The epistemological basis of gender is, in short, a lie we tell ourselves. The relevant facts of sexuality, comically unavailable to Pat, are obvious in the real world: they are not epistemological problems. Identity, as rendered by the stream of consciousness, is also fundamentally unchanged by questions of gender. Gender is important, Pat asserts instead, in the ontological realm. Gender is a story and a social transaction, an act of imagination. Pat's desire to assign a gender is

not an effort to give the narrator an identity—it is a desire to make Pat not the narrating consciousness, but a narrated character, someone about whom stories can be told. Pat’s declaration of manhood is followed by decisive action: “I walked not towards the exit-strait, though it was now empty, but, firmly and quickly, to the stairs” (114). This is followed by the novel’s last piece of first-person narration until the CODETTA: an “INTERLOO” equating this decisive action (and decisive gendering) as the narrator’s suicide:

And in hurling myself from top to bottom of them I shall be destroyed.  
For, triumph, triumph! I have attained (or had handed to me on a  
chatter-platter) my suicide; and this, which I, being at the time in my  
bright mind, address to my Reader-coroner, is my suicide note.

Yours In Quest,

P. (Sir)(Knight Errant) (114-115)

This INTERLOO, like many of the novel’s interludes, seems to come from a different narrative perspective than the primary narration. That is, the narrator speaks directly to the reader as reader, clarifying the difference, even in first-person narration, between Pat-the-narrator and Pat-the-character. Tense, however, confuses what would seem to be a strong retrospective voice, for the narrator “shall be destroyed” by an action taken, seemingly, in the past. How can a character, retrospectively narrated, be the engine of suicide for a future narrating-self? Any pretense of a logical relationship between character and narrator is essentially broken. Instead, narrator fluidly takes on the gender of the character, and anticipates the genre role-playing which will dominate the next section of the novel. But by thus becoming a character, by



becoming definable, the first-person narrator is destroyed. Whether the third-person narrator who follows is, in some sense, the same narrator is uncertain.

Brophy's non-fictional writings give us some insight into the relationship between consciousness, fiction, and the shift both to a third-person narrator and to postmodern techniques. In a 1963 essay, "The Novel as a Takeover Bid," Brophy argues that the novel goes beyond a mixing of discourses in the consciousness, beyond the epistemological problems tackled by modernism and detective fiction. The novel, with its demand that we submit, for hours and days at a time, to a world and point of view not our own, is a temporary threat to identity itself: "The novel doesn't stop short at taking you out of yourself: it puts the author in your place. It forces you to *become* the author" (*Don't Never Forget* 99). True immersive storytelling, which Brophy values immensely, does not simply upset the consciousness epistemologically with questions of what is happening in the story, what is the solution to the mystery, what is the point of view of this or that character or narrator: it removes and replaces the very identity that would ask these questions. Novel-reading is for Brophy an ontologically-transformative experience. It doesn't just change how we exist in the world: it removes both ourselves and the world and replaces them with the author.

This author, as Brophy argues elsewhere, is "in position not of Ego, but of God" (*Prancing Novelist* 56). This marks a fundamental distinction between character and narrator which much stream-of-consciousness and autobiographical modernism may seem to elide. People, however, would often prefer to be replaced by a character than by a god: "People are not 'characters'. They may pretend to be, perhaps in the hope of becoming as popular as the characters in Victorian fiction" (*Prancing*

*Novelist* 33). That is, Pat-the-narrator *cannot* ever be equivalent to a conscious mind: Pat's identity has always been an illusion, one propped up, rather than inhibited, by uncertainty about gender. Once Pat acquires gender, Pat is able to emerge from the story-minimal world of modernism, from the world of the representation of thought. Pat reveals himself as a character, and the illusion of identity disappears, to be replaced by a series of roles, characters, and stories. Pat has never been the God who mimics, absorbs, sometimes masters and sometimes drowns in multiple discourses, because Pat is not the author. From this point, Brophy cuts the reader's relationship to a consistent character, to the illusory consciousness, to deal more directly with the ontological, rather than epistemological, threat and pleasure of stories.

“The Case of the Missing (Re)Member” itself, however, lingers on for five subsections, including the INTERLOO, following Pat's gender-confident walk down the stairs in sub-section 5. That is, while the first-person Pat dominates Sexshuntwo in terms of words and number of pages, the last of this modernist first-person narrative takes place in the precise middle in terms of sub-sections. The final four sub-sections represent the male O'Rooley (most of 6), then the female Patricia (end of 6-10) in the gendered space of the men's restroom. Confident in his gender, Patrick O'Rooley

approached the lavatory, unzipped his trousers and reached his hand inside.

There was nothing there.

That is inexact. Something – flesh briefly veiled by underclothes – was there, but not in the expected form.

Half-fainting, Patricia staggered against the wall and dully heard that she had knocked her briefcase thumping to the floor. (117).

This moment represents not only a shift in the protagonist's gender (and, with the third person in place, perhaps a shift in the protagonist), but another shift from the epistemological to the ontological. Up until this point, *Sexshuntwo* has been primarily concerned with Pat's mental processes—memory, observation, and deduction—as they relate to determining the character's gender. The strangeness of the novel in this section has not been related to external realities, but to Pat's comical inability to determine a seemingly basic fact, with the failing of memory being perhaps the strangest and most obvious circumstance, as highlighted by Pat's reactions to the “evidence” of Betty Bouncer. It has been, up until this point, *The Case of the Missing Remember*—a detective story about an epistemological problem. In this moment, however, the section becomes *The Case of the Missing Member*, as Pat's problem transitions from an epistemological one to an ontological one. That is, Pat has been attempting to determine his or her physical sexual characteristics based on a variety of evidence, and has found the evidence inconclusive. Pat's assumption has been that sex and gender are equivalent, and that binary categorization is possible—that is, that gender is a stable reality, a fact about the world, with two simple possibilities for classification. However, what Pat finds is something that is incompatible with pre-existing categories—so much so that the narrator has no word with which to name it directly. This is the tipping point between epistemology and ontology—it is not simply that the sex is unknown, but that, as far as existing categories go, it does not exist. One could imagine an epistemologically-dominant text that is concerned

primarily with classifying Pat's transgendered genitalia. However, Pat adopts a Freudian model, where sex is defined as the presence or absence of male genitalia. The problem is no longer absence of knowledge about Pat's sexual characteristics, but the absence of the characteristics themselves. The world itself has violated Pat's epistemological models, and Pat locates the problem in the world rather than in those models.

As Patricia escapes first the lavatory and then the Transit Lounge itself—outside onto a ledge in the “wide, deep, cold space” (124), she finds herself in Section Three no longer in the naturalistic world occupied by most modernism. With the beginning of Section Three, Patricia instead finds herself in “the lesbian underworld,” where “all the porters were women” (130). At first, this world appears to still be that of a realistic airport: subsection 1 takes place in the familiarly mechanical world of luggage conveyance. However, once Patricia has identified this (physically naturalistic) space as the (socially fantastical) lesbian underworld, we can see that the genres and language play which in the first half of the novel dominated Pat's mind now begin to meld into the world itself. Making her way back up to the airport via the conveyor belt, Patricia sees

two inscriptions, one on each side of the flap she was headed for.

The left flank read

WOMEN OF THE WORLD UNITE.

YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE

BUT YOUR LABOUR PAINS.

The right complemented the doctrine with

WOMEN OF THE WORLD UNITE.

YOU HAVE EVERYTHING TO

GAIN – IN PARTICULAR,

YOUR DAISY CHAINS. (132)

Politics—and in particular the politics of socialism—is here invoked, gendered, sexualized, and punned out of self-seriousness into a playful celebration of sexual play and linguistic pleasure. The parody, delight in language, and themes have been characteristic not only of Brophy, but of Pat’s mind, whether narrated in first or third person. Here, seeing an inscribed mirror of her own thought process, bumps her head on it, as Pat’s addled mind is further externalized.

The bumped head on a gateway is yet another indication that we are entering a new realm, another ratchet away from realistic modernism to fantastical postmodernism, to a realm where mind and world collide. At the end of this first subsection, Sexshuntwo’s title is definitively transformed yet again, as the sexual becomes not only physical, but social and political: “just in time! The missing member!” cries an unknown man. But this does not turn out to be a political membership, as the novel quickly abandons the lesbian underworld for an even more inexplicable world: a game show appearing seemingly out of nowhere. Playing the game WHAT’S MY KINK, Patricia is addressed as a man and, as a result, gradually becomes Patrick again. The physical member, so crucial at the end of Sexshuntwo, is

now irrelevant, replaced by the purely social membership in a particular gender and, increasingly, in a very particular gender role. Later, two Irishwomen seem to refer to Pat as “one of us,” putting Pat’s gender once again in doubt—and making a muddle of gender and national identities.

As Section Three continues, Pat takes on a number of more specific, highly gendered identities. These include “the high proud lesbian-queen” resisting the advances of a Don Juan figure (149); a slave boy headed to market, a highly sexualized identity precipitated by the same Don Juan figure referring to Pat as a boy (151); Slim O’Rooley, a detective investigating the theft (not loss) of the missing member (154); Sir Patrice, “the best knight in the world” (160); Burleigh O’Rooley, a lawyer whose name is a pun on Raymond Burr, the gay actor who played Perry Mason (161); Patricia “Bunny” (last name not given, Burleigh’s secretary; Oruleus/Ulrix/Unruly, a fantasy hero who sets off into “the dread realm of the Great Camp King” (177); and possibly Oc herself, the heroine of the pornographic novel Pat has been reading. Gender roles become increasingly indistinguishable from genre roles. Gender is treated, then, as postmodernist fiction. With the force of a controlling narrative voice ceded to a disembodied narrator, Pat’s identity, too, is ceded to fiction. This echoes Brophy’s description of the reader’s submission to the author, the total immersion, in “The Novel as a Takeover Bid” (1963): “The novel doesn’t stop short at taking you out of yourself: it puts the author in your place. It forces you to *become* the author” (*Don’t Never Forget* 99). While Brophy celebrates the giving up of oneself to the author as one of the supreme joys of fiction, and as a perceived threat

by various conservative cultural forces, in *In Transit* Brophy reverses the terms. It is not the reader, but the character, who disappears into a series of literary roles.

This is clearly postmodern territory. McHale argues that the overt destruction or creation of a character is highly disruptive to a narrative's ontology in two ways: "on the one hand, the ontological instability and tentativeness of the fictional world is demonstrated; on the other hand, the ontological superiority of the author is dramatized" (211). Pat is not quite destroyed in Section Three, but the ontological problem here is arguably even more severe. Rather than giving the reader a clean break from the character, Brophy takes the character apart, replacing Pat with stock fictions who, even more puzzlingly, seem to have been created at least partly from Pat's mind. That is, the author-character drama is played out *within* the character of Pat, who does not demonstrate her superiority to her fictions, but instead is replaced by them. What's more, the stock nature of these fictions reveals Pat's mind—so much the subject of the first two sections of the novel—as itself a product of pre-existing fictions. Brophy is therefore able to simultaneously dramatize the superiority of the author while also demonstrating the ultimate inferiority of the author to the fictions of mass culture. This wrinkle in the character-author ontological relationship is further emphasized by the fact that Pat was the narrator in the first two sections of the novel, and in particular a narrator with strong autobiographical elements. As a semi-authorial narrator, often expounding views on subjects such as fiction and opera similar to Brophy's own, Pat plays a large part in creating the implied author of the novel. That is, Pat-as-narrator serves as not only the Ishmael-like connective tissue of the novel, or guide and digressive commentator, but also as something of a conduit

between reader and author. When Pat is shattered, so too is that conduit. We sense the author's complete ability to control the narrative—to destroy what once seemed a stable part of this world—even as our sense of that author herself is shattered and the ability of any author to control her own narrative—even of herself—is brought into question. This is even more disturbing when we consider Brophy's view of the reader's relationship to the author of a work of fiction: "The novel doesn't stop short at taking you out of yourself: it puts the author in your place. It forces you to *become* the author" (*Don't* 19). As Pat splits, disintegrates, or is taken over by these various roles, so too does the reader's Brophy, and, by extension, the reader.

This is why it is so crucially important that the transformation of *In Transit* from modernist to postmodernist text take place in the middle of the novel. If *In Transit* had begun as a postmodernist novel—that is, as a novel in which the main character shifts between identities and the narrative between genres from page to page—it would be unable to establish the bond between character, narrator, author, and reader. That is to say, by establishing itself as a postmodernist novel from the beginning, *In Transit* would create a set of rules or expectations—even if those rules are simply, "the rules may be broken at any time." By establishing a modernist narrative structure, with its adherence to the conventional ontological stability of character and world, Brophy is able to immerse the reader in that world, to put the reader in the place of the author of the world. Then, in the middle of the novel, Brophy announces that this world and its rules are gone and that the author whom the reader had inhabited does not exist. It is an invasion of the fictional world in some ways more ontologically disruptive than novels that adhere to similar postmodernist



conventions from the beginning. Similarly, it is more ontologically disruptive than postmodernist endings, such as B.S. Johnson's announcement in the final paragraphs of *House Mother Normal* that the novel has been a fiction of his creation, or even Brophy's (or some Brophy-like narrator's) somewhat similar address to the reader at the end of *In Transit* itself, which I will discuss in more detail later. By transitioning not simply between genres, as Conrad does with the middle of *Lord Jim*, and as postmodernist fictions may do at any moment, but between the epistemological and ontological dominant—long enough for both dominants to establish themselves firmly—Brophy is able to highlight the ontological conventions of modernism and nascent postmodernism alike. This is not simply a switch of narrative modes, but a switch in the definition of narrative itself, and its attendant relationships between author, reader, and fictional world. By creating this middle space between modernism and postmodernism, Brophy is able to examine with even greater force some key ontological themes of postmodernism, including the nature of fiction and the line between the individual mind and the social world. It is crucial, then, that Brophy explores this by splitting a single character into many, a character who is at the same time both author and reader.

So while Pat in Section Three is in transit between existing and not existing as a character, *In Transit* itself as an ontological construct, a stable fiction with a stable author, is also in transit. The destruction of Pat as coherent character living in a coherent, realistic world with a stable relationship with the reader is made even more obvious when Pat is split into Burleigh and Bunny. This, too, emphasizes that shattering a character has consequences not only for that character: it has disruptive

consequences for the entire world of the transit lounge's ontology, which first came under attack (more on this theme in Section Four) from the lesbian underworld just outside. Initially, these two characters appear in the same scene, with Burleigh the lawyer touting his Holmesian devotion to Logic while discussing the case with his secretary Bunny. Their initial dialogue may be read as an externalization of two aspects of an internal character—that is, spoken words from two different characters standing in for thoughts from two parts of a single character's personality. Even here, however, we are reminded that this is no transparent dramatization of Pat's "true" complex personality and thoughts. Instead, we have comically hackneyed dialogue, with the woman in a clearly subservient position. Despite this doubling of character, Bunny seems to be there only to encourage Burleigh; her contribution to the dialogue is perhaps even less than the contributions of Socrates' disciples (detective fiction is not the only genre invoked here), with affirmations ("I'll do that, chief") and expressions of concern ("You *will* be careful, chief?") (164). Soon, however, Burleigh and Bunny split up, with an agreement to meet again in the bar. When Bunny fails to arrive, the narrative itself splits in into two columns. Whereas, in *Sexshuntwo*, these columns represent the parallel thoughts of a single consciousness, here they represent the separate thoughts and actions (still in third person) of two separate characters. Burleigh and Bunny's attempts to meet as they investigate the "mystery" have a Superman/Clark Kent quality, but the novel undermines the idea that they are, in fact, one person. Burleigh and Bunny not only exist as external personas, but also display an independent consciousness and awareness of each other. They also engage in parallel actions in the same investigation, so that the reader is

held in suspense about when they will be reunited. The two columns, with Burleigh (increasingly referred to as O’Rooley or Patrick) on the left and Bunny (increasingly referred to as Patricia or simply “the heroine”) on the right) alternate in Section Three—once again preserving at least the idea that these two characters cannot be in the same place (here, the same place on the page) at once. Split from each other, Burleigh and Bunny fall into other genres, roles, and personalities. Opera once again seems to dominate, with the stagecraft keeping the two characters apart marked by diagrams. The various roles Pat takes on in Section Three are therefore portrayed both as manifestations of one character and as irreconcilable both to each other and to a stable reality. These roles are explicitly the roles of fiction, with the characters’ very actions dictated by the needs of fiction. This includes the very suspense created by the metafictional idea that these two characters are in fact the single character we have known through the novel’s first half. We might, therefore, look for a unifying consciousness not in roles or characters within the drama, but in the genre itself. That is, if Pat can still be said to exist in this novel, the character is increasingly present only as an author—but, specifically, an author whose material is an explicit patchwork of existing genres and tropes. By late in Section Three, therefore, not only has Brophy eliminated the single fictional character as the storehouse for a single fictional consciousness, but has crushed the very connection between character and consciousness.

By removing us from not only a realistic, logically coherent world, but also from a world in which character and consciousness are bound together, Brophy has made her most decisive move into postmodernism. It is not simply the case that the

world presented to the reader in Section Three is ontologically unstable, but that the philosophy of character and consciousness implied by the narrative makes the sort of questions about consciousness and point of view typically posed by modernism impossible to even consider. Section Three includes various characters in various roles, but because they do not embody individual consciousnesses, they do not have individual points of view. Even the Pat of Section One is now suspect—are her thoughts in fact thoughts, or is this simply the way verbally-adept modernist psychodrama plays out?

The novel's first half includes its own clues as to why, at the middle of this novel, modernism fails in its attempt to render Pat as a single consciousness facing (and posing) primarily epistemological problems. Pat's increasing disappearance into a series of stock roles and genres (even if they always maintain a hint of playfulness, as Brophy highlights the patriarchal as well as the subversive implications of various genres and gender tropes) can be read as a direct result of the failure of the modernist stream-of-consciousness anti-narrative to solve the problems of the middle. Early in the novel, Pat poses the Transit Lounge itself as a sort of challenge—to inhabit the present as a narrative tense ungoverned by beginnings and endings:

Relaxed but not to the extent of sleep or anaesthesia, whetted enough to enjoy but not cut yourself on your own ambition or anxiety, not so intent on the future as to be tensed-up, you could inhabit *this* tense. Your fingers could sink into the very nap and texture of *now*.

It was obvious to me that it was myself whom I had, in my euphoric, light-and-airy boldness, already cast in the rôle of this

pioneer who should for ever (or at least for some hours) remain in the Transit Lounge and thus perpetually or for a simulacrum of perpetuity remain in the present moment, in at least *semi*-sempiternal transit between departure from the past and arrival at the future.

Yet even as I hectored the public-address system to that effect, the corner of my eye, from its perch on my floor-adhesive stalk before the bar, was casting up the amenities within stroll and including among them the bookstall whence cometh my anaesthesia, in the form of those vertical take-off flights directly out of the present into the never-never tense: fictions. (24)

By staying in the Transit Lounge, Pat is attempting to manipulate reality, to create an eternal present where origin (beginning) and destination (ending) are not only unknown, but actively disavowed. From this early point, however, Pat seems to identify this very narrative austerity with a vulnerability to fiction. In the Transit Lounge, this means the rather limited fictions available from an airport bookshop, magazine rack, and public-address system. That is, the attempt to construct a pure middle, which is also, for the novel, an attempt to construct a somehow pure, ungendered narrative consciousness, is far from an effective bulwark against the threats of Aristotelian narrative, calcified gender roles, and hackneyed fictions. Quite the opposite: without a well-defined traditional narrative (that is, a movement from beginning to ending) of Pat's own life, the character is left to inhabit pre-defined roles. The longer Pat remains in the transit lounge, the more these roles take over, until they snuff out Pat's own identity entirely. Pat, by taking a pause in the narrative

of Pat's own life, and by forgetting crucial pieces of that life, increasingly is replaced by those anaesthetic books. Once again, we see that Pat is in the role of the reader of Brophy's immersive novel, who gives herself up to the mind of the author. Only in Pat's case, there seems to be no singular author within the fictional world. (There is inevitably an author in the sense that Pat, as a character in a novel, is from the beginning controlled fully by the author.) The difference here, the difference of being in transit, is the difference of giving oneself, one's consciousness and one's narrative, up to not a single coherent narrative, a single world, but to the whole world of fiction—at least as it is available in an airport bookshop.

Transit-lounge-as-middle is an escape from reality and its temporal, if not narrative, motion, into the world of overdetermined narrative discourse and its recursive relationships between author, reader, and character. Pat's attempt to live in the transit lounge may be read as an attempt to live "in the midst," Kermode's term for the "irreducibly intermediary preoccupations" of human life (Kermode 7). That is, both Pat and Kermode seem to regard the middle, divorced from beginning and ending, as more authentically expressing human existence than a life lived with narrative reference to beginning or ending. For Kermode, fiction is founded on a "concordance of beginning, middle, and end" (Kermode 35). Breaking the concordance, Pat seeks to live—at least for awhile—a non-fictional life. Yet the result, at the beginning of the novel, is an even more fictional life. Instead of a narrator comprehending life through a fiction, Pat becomes in the middle of the novel a collection of fictions. Instead of replacing fiction, Pat is replaced by fictions—not simply fictional characters, but the fictions themselves. In a sense, this is inevitable,

because Pat attempts to deny the basic human need for fictional concordances: “Men, like poets, rush ‘into the midst,’ *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems” (Kermode 7). To live only in the middle would be, for Pat, to live without meaning—perhaps, as Kermode argues, a psychological impossibility for a human being. Brophy seems to agree, and to further suggest that this is a narrative impossibility for a character. During *In Transit*’s first half, where psychological concerns (here a subset of epistemological concerns) trump metafictional concerns (here a subset of ontological concerns), we witness a mental breakdown. During *In Transit*’s second half, the metafictional concerns predominate, and we witness a breakdown of character and narrative. In both halves of the novel, these concerns serve as metaphors for each other, even as the distinctions between narrative and mind, character and reader, reader and author, collapse.

Section Four takes this collapse even further, as the Patrick and Patricia characters disappear almost entirely. At the end of Section Three, Bunny is kidnapped by lesbian revolutionaries. She takes on the pseudonym of BARBARA, but immediately upon doing so, she is revealed to be a man. Thus, the shifting-gender equilibrium of the middle of the novel is temporarily restored, but this time both genders are subsumed by a pseudonym. With that pseudonym comes a role in both a group of people (the revolutionaries) and a genre (Barbara is the leader of the revolutionary group in a high-stakes action-suspense tale). However, before the group makes it to the control tower, Barbara abdicates her role as leader. Soon after, the

revolutionaries find that another group of revolutionaries has already seized the control tower. By abdicating a leadership role in the drama, Pat abdicates a central place in the narrative.

Nevertheless, the narrative, increasingly driven by action-oriented genre conventions, with the stakes externalized to the fate of an entire airport at least, continues. Pat initially seems to have been wiped entirely from the narrative. No longer can we see Burleigh and Bunny playing out the operas and detective fictions running through Pat's head, pursuing her concerns about the "missing member" in an otherwise apparently uneventful Transit Lounge. At the beginning of Section Four, and periodically throughout, a detached third-person voice, no longer connected to any consciousness, gives a pseudo-scholarly account of the Revolution of Perpetual War. Other lines of narrative include parodic accounts of God Almighty, the "mannerist angel" (and the attempts of Baroco, a black member of the lesbian revolutionaries, to set off an explosion).

Eventually, however, Pat begins to re-emerge as something other than the abdicated author of the proceedings. Pat appears somewhat obliquely in two pairs of dialogues: Och, the protagonist in the pornographic novel Pat had been reading, discusses language and philosophy with a professor emeritus; they are later joined by O'Rooley, pondering language by the bookstand. Meanwhile, a Father Itis discusses Ireland and religion with a "son" who turns out to be named Pat. What may remain of Pat's consciousness has been spread thin, as possible versions of the novel's main character discuss the interests of the Pat of Section One with authority figures. Meanwhile, the fate of the revolution, often punningly and cryptically communicated



not through the intimate voice of the public-address system, but instead through captions on a monitor, takes center stage. The revolutionaries increasingly bicker, and the Transit Lounge descends into chaos.

The novel has taken on the clear narrative of a disaster film, lending a certain level of stability to the proceedings. On the one hand, this seems to mark a move away from postmodernism since, despite the high level of absurdity, the reader can now follow a fairly conventional narrative. Within this narrative, there are clearly defined stakes. With Och and the professor killed off, O’Rooley eventually emerges as the protagonist of a disaster story, making it up to the control tower amidst increasing chaos in time to witness a terrible plane crash, as a mad “commietsar” in the control tower arranges for two planes to crash into each other. Once again, genre conventions are re-affirmed: in the wake of the crash, “The official demolition squads and refrigeration units screamed off first, wailing into the drizzle and swerving down the storm-greased track as in a B-feature movie” (230). However, the very invocation of the B-feature movie indicates that Section Four has taken the postmodernist ontological experiment to its logical conclusion. With constantly shifting genres and characters, an authorial consciousness is still visible. But with the dominance of a single genre, the ontological transformation is complete: the modernist novel has not simply been undermined and destabilized by ontological concerns: it, like its characters, has been overwritten by a conventional genre. And within the now more stable, and hence more immersive, narrative world of the story, we see that reality itself has become like a generic tale.

However, Brophy is not entirely done with modernism. Midway through Section Four, there is a suggestion that the seemingly radical ontological changes in the airport are in fact radical epistemological changes. As Baroco becomes a “self-destructive artist” by decapitating himself on a propeller blade, “Indoors, the Transit Lounge, without any physical change being wrought, suddenly sprang into a new, temporary existence as an art gallery, like a pattern leaping into 3-D when viewed from a new standpoint” (211). Here, Brophy’s narrator asserts something of a middle ground, the moment where modernism is transformed into postmodernism. The Transit Lounge does not simply appear to become an art gallery from a certain point of view: it becomes an art gallery. This non-physical transformation is compared to the effects of point of view on certain objects, but the narrator does not explicitly state that this transformation is the result in a change of point of view. Such a shift in point of view would have to be a collective shift, since the art gallery is not simply there from the point of view of certain characters. This reinforces the novel’s general shift away from the individual consciousness to the collective. So we have a transformation that is non-physical, similar to a transformation in an individual’s point of view, but that does not seem to be merely a change in perception, but a change in reality. What actually effects the transformation is the narrator’s statement that such a transformation has taken place. This is, therefore, as close as we might come to a purely narrative transformation in reality. This narrative transformation straddles the line between ontological (highlights the narrative universe and its questionable ontological status) and epistemological (highlights the ability of interpretation, rather than concrete physical changes, to alter reality). This

transformation, then, occupies the moment immediately after modernism, just as it is transforming into postmodernism.

The final sub-sections of Section Four are similarly suggestive that this middle space is the key to the novel's inquiries about the nature of identity, consciousness, language, and reality. Airedale Donaghue, Betty's husband, is the lone survivor of the climactic plane crash. Don Donovan (perhaps the Irish footballer, perhaps an echo of Pat's earlier statement that Donaghue looked like a Don), searching the wreckage, discovers the missing member, at last referred to explicitly as a penis. Don calls out "Quis," and

The response was half-hearted and came slow and spasmodic from here and there round the sparse circle of bidders at auction, responding as they were at half-vocal-power and that only because there really was nothing else left:

'Eg – o'

'Eg – o'

'Eg . . . ' (232-33)

The novel has returned to Sexshuntwo's central Freudian mystery plot. While we have not returned to a mostly-ordinary transit lounge, we have returned to material and a narrative mode that echoes the novel's middle—where an individual protagonist's mental crisis begins to manifest itself in the novel's narrated world. Pat has returned, if not as narrator or character, at least as a memory that haunts the novel. The individual consciousness (and its problems of gender identity) exists here, explicitly, as an echo in anonymous mouths and as the dismembered symbol of

masculinity. Its manifestations are physical and social, but the novel suggests that modernism's individual consciousness, fraught with epistemological difficulties, is the source of the postmodernist chaos. This allows for two possible interpretations.<sup>34</sup> First, the modernist interpretation in which the latter half of *In Transit*, like the Nighttown episode of *Ulysses*, takes place in the ordinary world as distorted through a character's mind as well as an author's conceit. In this interpretation, none of the events we read about are real, but are instead only metaphors for Pat's psychic journey, or perhaps are literal manifestations of Pat's dreams or hallucinations. Second, the postmodernist interpretation follows the line that begins with Borges's "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." Whereas in that story, the collective belief in a fantasy world eventually creates a new reality, here Pat's individual stream of consciousness creates an ever-shifting reality, perhaps gaining its power from its grounding in collective myths and common narrative forms. In either case, however, the individual consciousness has returned to some importance, returning the reader to the middle place between modernism and postmodernism, where epistemological and ontological problems bleed into each other and the stability of the laws of a narrative world is itself an open question.

In some ways, this middle place between modernism and postmodernism is more postmodernist than the postmodernism proper that dominates Sections Three and Four. In Section Three, the instability of the narrative world and its characters is itself a sort of stability. That is, once we accept that Pat is no longer simply Pat, once

---

34 McHale describes fiction that "looked at one way [...] seems to be focused on epistemological issues, while looked at another way it seems to be focused on ontological issues" as "limit-modernism" (13).

we accept that a genre and a role can take over at any moment, this very instability becomes a recognizable narrative form with its own rules. Section Four, meanwhile, is even more consistent in its genre parody. It takes place in a fantastic world where constantly shifting revolutions can take over an airport and books laden with metaphor and pun become deadly threats, but this is, in its own way, a stable universe. And it is instability within the narrative world as well as between the narrative world and the real world that creates the most radical ontological poetics. To the extent that these Sections are highly unstable, this instability comes largely from the reader's memory of the novel's modernist first half. When Pat is seemingly erased from the novel, this is a major ontological problem because Pat has been established as more than a wholly artificial character Pat has not been introduced to the reader as a "character" created by an author, as in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Instead, Pat has been introduced as an authorial narrator with a complex personality whose consciousness has been the main field of narrative and thematic interest.

Postmodernism, as we find it in the second half of *In Transit*, is most ontologically disruptive when it is disrupting a particular narrative ontology. As the stable story-world of modernism increasingly slips away, each successive transformation is less disruptive. Genre pastiche, characters that appear and disappear, instantaneous transformation of discourse into reality—these become collectively a stable set of rules by which the story-world itself can operate. That is, ontological problems simply become a different ontology. In order to clearly distinguish itself from science fiction or other genres of speculative fiction, postmodernism requires an ontological reference point outside itself, a stable reality

to violate. *In Transit*'s postmodernism is then, in part, a product of its modernism. In this sense, *In Transit* enacts McHale's theory of how postmodernism emerges from modernism. McHale argues that postmodernism should be thought of, both logically and historically, as "POSTmodernISM," or "after the *modernist movement*" (5). The key logical mechanism for this theory is the idea that

Intricable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability: push epistemological questions far enough and they 'tip over' into ontological questions. By the same token, push ontological questions far enough and they tip over into epistemological questions – the sequence is not linear and unidirectional, but bidirectional and reversible. (11)

I would argue that this bidirectionality is essential to the vitality of postmodernism, at least as we see it in *In Transit*. By highlighting the fact that, for example, that a physical transformation of the transit lounge into a library would be a violation of a "normal" stable reality, *In Transit* simultaneously moves away from the ontological dominant in the latter part of Section Four, while reinforcing the ontological problems posed by the text as a whole.

*In Transit*'s CODETTA further mixes epistemological and ontological problems, as well as beginnings and endings, and linear and cyclical narratives. The CODETTA's rapid-fire approach serves as a reminder of the various narrative methods of the novel as a whole, while ultimately emphasizing the novel's status as a piece of narrative discourse: that is, a social exchange between narrator and hearer in which the narrator's relationship to the story and its characters—even an apparently

diegetic narrator—is ultimately arbitrary. This postmodernist effect—an exploration of the ontological status of the story as a product of the narrative discourse—is nevertheless accomplished by reminding us of the novel’s passage from epistemological to ontological dominant that largely dismisses some of the novel’s major epistemological and ontological concerns. In the CODETTA’s first line, the first-person narrator of the modernist first half returns with an invocation of beginnings. Simultaneously, however, it declares the epistemological problems posed by the first-person pronoun irrelevant: “And out of that egg, ego too am re-hatched. [/] It no longer matters a damn of course whether ‘I’ is masc. Or fem/ or whether ‘you’ is sing. Or plur.” (234). This is an ending of the first half’s epistemological crisis without solving the epistemological riddles that evoked the crisis. Similarly, the heightened drama of the novel’s second half seems to be resolved on the level of plot, rather than erased from existence: “the revolution has achieved resolution by coming to full revolution” (234). What’s more, the narrator continues to enact the heightened drama of that characterizes much of the novel’s second half, climbing out onto a ledge and contemplating suicide. The narrator is re-born, seemingly, to mirror this full revolution, reaching the point where beginnings are also endings. The narrator, moreover, vacillates between considering the suicide as related to an epistemological problem—the narrator’s place in the world—and being a pure ontological fact. In the first place, the narrator looks at the crowd below and “I recognize them as, indeed, my very close kin. I think that is why I want to suicide” (235). However, with allusions to the *Aeneid* and *De rerum natura*—that is, a work of nationalist myth-making and a work of naturalist philosophy fundamentally concerned with matters

ontological—shifts to consider depression as a fact that explains itself, or, rather, is explained by the physical signs of its existence: “I would suicide purely by reason of lacrimae rerum. My posthumous autobiography: *De Rerum Tristitia* (by Partitia)” (235). Much as genitalia fully explain gender in the novel’s second half, here tears fully explain suicide. In an ending that is also a beginning, epistemological and ontological problems are rapidly juxtaposed in a way that seems largely to sublimate both to a more traditional plot resolution: the narrator’s impending suicide.

However, before the suicide is completed, the narrator once again reminds the reader of the difference between story and discourse, emphasizing the narrative transaction, rather than the narrator’s role as a character in the story. However, where, in the middle of the novel, diegetic narrator was seemingly replaced by an extra-diegetic narrator and a variety of characters, here, in the middle of the CODETTA, the narrator takes responsibility for the alteration in narrative discourse, and makes it explicitly part of a social transaction: “I warned you I wouldn’t play god, disliking as I rigorously do that old fraud’s authoritarian temperament. [/] So You’ll have to make the choice” (235). The choice the narrator offers is between third-person narratives of Patrick or Patricia, side by side again, but there is little real choice: the reader inevitably reads both, and both involve the protagonist falling to his or her death.<sup>35</sup>

---

35 McHale writes that “the multiplication of endings” of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, “occurs not in the ‘real’ world of this novel, but in the subjective subworld or domain of the character-narrator” (109). Explicitly fictionalized, the multiple endings of *In Transit* are also subjective—but they are presented as subjective in the domain of the reader. McHale contrasts these subjective multiple endings with the true multiple endings found in B.S. Johnson’s story, “Broad Thoughts from a Home,” offered, as in *In Transit*, as a choice for the reader (McHale 110). The subjective element in Brophy’s novel suggests a more modernist project, but the focus on the reader suggests something more postmodernist, reaching across the realm of fiction even as it marks the fiction as fiction.



The narrator identifies this as “Explicit fiction,” then concludes with a declaration of love to the reader, suggesting that the lines between reader and writer, like those between modernism and postmodernism, are permeable: “Love of You has, I mean to say, decided me to live. I conceive I can read as well as be read like a book. I desire You to locute me. [...] both of You” (236). The emphasis here on the implied reader—important in the first section of the novel—gains new meaning after the pluralization of protagonists in the novel’s second half. If, as Brophy has argued, readers of novels allow themselves to be taken over by authors, *In Transit* suggests that the narrator of a novel is equally a reader. If, in the middle of the novel, the narrator seemed to become alternately (or simultaneously) Patrick and Patricia, the CODETTA suggests that it is as much the reader who is transformed into multiple personae as the narrator. The text is celebrated as a space where identity is permeable, and ambiguity of meaning is a source of joy rather than anxiety. In a sense, this is a postmodernist celebration of modernism, epistemological problems of the text re-cast as ontological solutions to the problem of isolated identity in a polyglot world. The postmodernist turn on verbal ambiguity is extended on the novel’s final page, which consists of the word “FIN” placed in a drawing of a fish (237). The visual and verbal pun further emphasizes the text as discursive transaction. The word “FIN” is both a speech act that ends both story and discourse and a sign that labels the fish’s fin. Furthermore, the “fin” it refers to is both the fin in the drawing on the page and the fin of the imagined fish to which the drawing refers. Simultaneously, the fin in the drawing refers back to the end of the novel. That is, story and discourse is multi-layered here, as signs refer to further signs, and discourse itself becomes the story.

However, I would argue that we read this collapse of story into discourse *as* a violation of ontological boundaries specifically because of the prior assumption that those boundaries exist. Similarly, *In Transit* shows how postmodernist narrative grows out of the grounds of modernist narrative. Ontological plurality and instability not only may follow from epistemological uncertainty; they also depend on prior epistemological uncertainty in order to retain their own instability. If we were to begin *In Transit* in the middle—with its shifting multiple genres, stock characters, and shifting realities—we could read the narrative as simply occurring in a fantastical world. Alternately, we might read it not as a narrative at all, but purely as a discursive transaction. In both cases, there is relatively little destabilization of our sense of reality. However, because these changes in the story world first gain expression primarily as epistemological problems—because we first assume that there is a stable world about which we have incomplete knowledge or differing points of view—*In Transit* creates in its middle a deeply ontologically disruptive narrative poetics. Modernism emphasizes the separation between story and discourse, between the world and the consciousness. It is by disrupting this relationship—by implying a stable story-world and then yanking it out from under us—that *In Transit* achieves its greatest ontological disruption. The possibility that a dream may be reality, or that reality may be a dream, is what gives both dream and reality the sense of plurality and instability. Once we know we are in a dream, the dream's own logic and rules can become their own sort of comfort, a stable realm of escape. *In Transit's* narrative middle is thus simultaneously the space between modernism and postmodernism—

the space between the Transit Lounge and lesbian underground, the space between beginning and ending—and the novel's most authentically postmodernist space.

## Conclusion

Modernism and narrative middles are mutually illuminating subjects.

Modernist texts frequently employ extreme, experimental, or variable narrative techniques. When they employ or alter these techniques in the middle of a text, they help the audience to identify a distinct narrative middle: a central section of the text or division in the text that is a key structuring element of the text as a whole.

Narrative middles may be used to reshape genre the direction of the narrative, as they are in *Lord Jim*. They may reconfigure point of view, as does the middle of *The Golden Bowl*. They may depart radically from the narrative technique of the rest of a novel, creating their own space for exploration of narrative tense, mood, and voice, as we have seen in *To the Lighthouse*. Narrative middles may also delve deeper into the consciousness, upsetting some of the assumptions of traditional narrative and unified character, as we have seen in *Saturnine*. Narrative middles may also be the site of a disruption in the one-to-one relationship between *fabula* and *syuzhet*, as in *The Unfortunates*. Finally, narrative middles may reshape a novel's poetics entirely, as when *In Transit* shifts from modernist beginning to postmodernist ending. In all of these cases, the middle is characterized by differences in the narrative discourse.

While these differences may cause us to view a text as fragmented—or may even tempt us to read a single novel as two or three separate narratives—this difference also binds disparate pieces of modernist novels into a whole. That is, modernist narrative middles, because they are enclosed in a single text (and, generally, a single physical object), create new narrative structures, often out of disparate parts. By

structuring novels around the middle, modernist novelists are able to circumvent old narrative structures and create new ones, opening up a space for new points of view and new epistemological complexities.

This dissertation has focused on a selection of British modernist novels. However, even within modernist narrative fiction, there are a wide variety of texts that that could be explored. Of the six texts I have read here, only *The Golden Bowl* was originally published in more than one volume, and reprintings are generally bound in a single volume. Multi-volume novels and series of novels would likely expand the scope of possible middles, perhaps enabling further connections between modernist middles and middles of the nineteenth-century literature explored in *Narrative Middles*. Expanding the study of modernist middles to additional texts and different types of texts might yield new questions and new answers. We might, for example, look for structural turning points in multi-volume novels by authors such as Dorothy Richardson, Marcel Proust, and Anthony Powell. We might consider how *Malone Dies* functions as a transition in narrative technique between *Molloy* and *The Unnameable*. Moving from the large-scale to the small-scale, we might examine the middles of modernist short stories, and the different narrative middles that are created by story collections such as Hemingway's *The Nick Adams Stories*.

Postcolonial literature is also potentially fertile ground for the study of narrative middles, modernist or otherwise. For example, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* arguably represents a shift in the point of view of its protagonist and focalizer, Okonkwo, through a change in how narrative time is typically represented. The novel is divided typographically into three parts, but Part One takes up

approximately half of the narrative. As Wole Ogundele argues, Part One is characterized by repeated rituals, analepsis, and vague temporal markers, while Parts Two and Three feature clearer temporal markers and frequent and often large ellipses; this shift in the approach to narrative tense marks a shift in the perception of time from cyclical to linear and from a mythic to a historical imagination (Ogundele 135). That is, the narrative discourse reflects a shift in epistemology that occurs due to the disruption of traditional communities by the appearance of Western colonizers. I have made only the slightest sketch of a reading of one of the most influential postcolonial novels in the English language, with the intention of suggesting the territory for further study. Particularly in light of recent efforts to expand the reach of modernist studies to include many postcolonial texts, there is room for the study of not only the narrative middles of postcolonial texts, but of the specifically modernist narrative middles to be found in some postcolonial texts.

Graphic novels, as well, contain narrative middles, with some radical approaches that may help us to understand how middles may shape our understanding of narrative. The American Chris Ware's 2012 graphic novel *Building Stories* is a successor to *The Unfortunates* in its use of a "book-in-a-box" format that allows readers to choose a different *syuzhet* without affecting the *fabula*. It goes further than *The Unfortunates*, however, in that its 14 separate sections do not include a beginning and ending and, even more radically, do not share a common format. Instead, the box contains a variety of physical formats, from small pamphlets to hard-bound volumes to posters to a piece of cardboard that can be unfolded like the playing surface of a board game. Consisting largely or previously published material, *Building Stories*

suggests on the back of the box that serves as its cover “appropriate places to set down, forget or completely lose any number of its contents within the walls of an average well-appointed home” (Ware). Thus, *Building Stories* suggests both how containing the fragments of a middle within even an unconventional physical structure creates a coherent narrative, even as parts of that middle may be easily jettisoned or lost. By suggesting that its component parts are as much objects in the reader’s home as they are pieces of a single narrative, *Building Stories* takes a further step in the direction of postmodernism.

Films may also employ modernist narrative middles. One particular recent film contains a modernist narrative middle that shine some light on the connections between modernist and postmodernist narrative. Rian Johnson’s time-travel drama *Looper* (2012) shifts its tense, mood, genre, and visual style quite dramatically in its middle. From a fast-moving urban crime drama, shown through its young male protagonist’s eyes, it shifts to a slow moving rural fantasy/horror drama seen initially through the eyes of a young woman. The shift in point of view is eventually reflected in the young man’s actions, as he begins to see the needs and desires of others. His actions, culminating in his suicide, eventually affect the world ontologically, wiping out most of the events of the film. That is, an epistemological shift at the film’s middle effects an ontological shift at the film’s end. This shift begins with a change in how the audience perceives the narrative.

As some of the possibilities I have outlined above suggest, the study of narrative middles is in its infancy, and its scope should extend well beyond modernism. While it is certainly not the case that the middles of texts have been paid

little attention in the past, little of that attention has focused on the middle *as* a middle. As I hope this study has shown, there is much to be gained by thinking explicitly of narrative middles. Attention to narrative middles can help illuminate narrative structures, highlight new texts or new passages, and, perhaps most importantly, can help us re-think what makes a text a single narrative. If we are to think of texts primarily through their beginnings and endings, the middle very easily may become a muddle. To escape an Aristotelian model of narrative means, in part, to think of the middle as something distinct, a text in itself, a space that creates, rather than is simply created by, narrative structure.



## Works Cited

- Abbott, H. Porter. "What Do We Mean When We Say 'Narrative Literature?': Looking for Answers Across Disciplinary Border." *Style* 34.2 (Summer 2000): 260-273.
- Abel, Elizabeth. *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. Ingram Bywater. *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*. New York: Modern Library, 1984. 219-66.
- Attridge, John. "'The Yellow-Dog Thing': Joseph Conrad, Verisimilitude, and Professionalism." *ELH* 77.2 (Summer 2010): 267-296.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaïlovich. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
- Banfield, Ann. "Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time." *Poetics Today* 24.3 (Fall 2003): 471-516.
- Baxter, Katherine Isobel. "Lord Jim: A Character in Search of a Plot." *Critical Survey* 21.1 (2009): 103-117.
- Barthes, Roland. *A Barthes Reader*. Ed. Susan Sontag. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Collected Fictions*. Trans. Andrew Hurley. London: Penguin, 1998.
- Bremond, Claude. "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities." Trans. Elaine D. Cancalon. *New Literary History* 11.3 (Spring 1980): 387-411.
- Briggs, Julia. *Reading Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

- Brophy, Brigid. *Don't Never Forget: Collected views and reviews*. New York, Chicago, and San Francisco: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1966.
- . *In Transit: An Heroi-Cyclic Novel*. Chicago: Dalkey Archive, 2002.
- . *Prancing Novelist: A Defence of Fiction in the Form of a Critical Biography in Praise of Ronald Firbank*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1973.
- Bruss, Paul S. "Marlow's Interview with Stein: The Implications of the Metaphor." *Studies in the Novel* 5.4 (Winter 1973): 491-503
- Bucknell, J. G. *Rayner Heppenstall: A Critical Study*. Champaign and London: Dalkey Archive, 2007.
- Butler, Judith. "Critically Queer." *GLQ* 1.1 (1993): 17-32.
- Calinescu, Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.
- Campbell, Sarah. "Saying 'Nothing' and Meaning 'Everything' in *The Golden Bowl*." *Arizona Quarterly* 67.2 (Summer 2011): 101-125.
- Caughie, Pamela L. *Virginia Woolf & Postmodernism: Literature in Quest & Question of Itself*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- . "Wo(o)lfish Academics." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 37.2 (Spring 2004): 69-80.
- Cixous, Hélène. "Grande-Bretagne: Langage et regard dans le roman experimental." *Le Monde* 18 May 1967, literature supplement: 7.
- Coe, Jonathan. *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B. S. Johnson*. New York: Continuum, 2005.
- Chu, Patricia E. *Race, Nationalism and the State in British and American Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

- Croft, William and D. Alan Cruse. *Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Cohen, Scott A. “ ‘Get Out!’: Empire Migration and Human Traffic in *Lord Jim*.” *Novel: A Forum in Fiction* 37 (Summer 2003): 374-97.
- Cohn, Dorrit. “ ‘First Shock of Complete Perception’: The Opening Episode of *The Golden Bowl*, Volume 2.” *Henry James Review* 22 (2001): 1-9.
- . *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Lord Jim*. Ed. Thomas C. Moser. New York and London: Norton, 1996.
- Cuddon, J. A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Fourth Ed. Rev. C. E. Preston. London: Penguin, 1999.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Freedman, Jonathan. “What Maggie Knew: Game Theory, The Golden Bowl, and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Knowledge.” *The Cambridge Quarterly* 37.1 (2008): 98-113.
- Freedman, Ralph. *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Hermann Hesse, André Gide, and Virginia Woolf*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. “Lyric Subversion of Narrative in Women’s Writing: Virginia Woolf and the Tyranny of the Plot.” *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology*. Ed. James Phelan. Columbus: Ohio State University Press,

1989. 162-185.
- . "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies." *Modernism/modernity* 13.3 (2006): 425-443.
- . "Planetary: Musing Modernist Studies." *Modernism/modernity* 17.3 (Sept. 2010): 471-499.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McLintock. New York: Penguin, 2003.
- Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1977].
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980.
- . *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- . "Vraisemblance and Motivation." Trans. David Gorman. *Narrative* 9.3 (Oct. 2001): 239-258.
- Green, Jeremy. "Rayner Heppenstall and the Politics of Cultural Memory." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 5.2: 95-108.
- Guerard, Albert J. *Conrad the Novelist*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958.
- Hampson, Robert. *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000.
- Heppenstall, Rayner. *The Intellectual Part*. London: Barrie & Rockliffe, 1963.
- . *The Lesser Infortune*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1953.
- . *Saturnine*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1943.

- Herman, David. *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002.
- . *Universal Grammar and Narrative Form*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Hopkins, Chris. "The Neglect of Brigid Brophy." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15.3 (Fall 1995): 12-17.
- Humphrey, Robert. *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1972 [1954].
- James, Henry. *The Ambassadors*. Ed. Christopher Butler. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- . *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*. Ed. Roger Gard. London: Penguin, 1987.
- . *The Golden Bowl*. Ed. Virginia Llewellyn Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Jameson, Frederic. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981.
- . *A Singular Modernity*. London and New York: Verso, 2012 [2002].
- Jamil, S. Salina. *Jamesian Centgers of Consciousness as Readers and Tellers of Stories*. Lanham, New York, and Oxford: U P of America, 2001.
- Jensen, Meg. "Tradition and revelation: moments of being in Virginia Woolf's major novels." *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*. Ed. Morag Shiach. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 112-25.

- Johnson, B. S. *The Unfortunates*. Ed. Jonathan Coe. New York: New Directions, 2007.
- . *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* London: Hutchinson, 1973.
- Kafalenos, Emma. "Lingering along the Narrative Path: Extended Functions in Kafka and Henry James." *Narrative* 3.2 (May 1995): 117-138.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Langacker, Ronald W. *Grammar and Conceptualization*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000.
- Lawrence, Karen. "In Transit: from James Joyce to Brigid Brophy." *Transcultural Joyce*. Ed. Karen R. Lawrence. Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 37-45.
- Leavis, F. R. *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1948.
- Lee, Hermione. *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977.
- Leaska, Mitchell A. *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: From Beginning to End*. New York: John Jay Press, 1977.
- . *Virginia Woolf's Lighthouse: A Study in Critical Method*. New York: Columbia U P, 1970.
- London, Bette. *The Appropriated Voice: Narrative Authority in Conrad, Forster, and Woolf*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990.
- Levine, Caroline. *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press,

2003.

Levine, Caroline and Mario Ortiz-Robles, ed. *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011.

Lewis, Pericles. *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Lothe, Jakob. *Conrad's Narrative Method*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Lucas, John. "The sixties: realism and experiment." *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*. Ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 545-61.

Maack, Annegret. "Condordia Discors: Brigid Brophy's *In Transit*." Trans. J. Swann. *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15.3 (Fall 1995): 40-45.

Majumdar, Robin and Allen McLaurin, ed. *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.

Mao, Douglas and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. "The New Modernist Studies." *PMLA* 123.3 (May 2008): 737-748.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York and London: Methuen, 1987.

Miller, J. Hillis. "Henry James and 'Focalization,' or Why James Loves Gyp." A *Companion to Narrative Theory*. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, ed. Malden, Oxford, and Carlton: Blackwell, 2005. 124-135.

---. "Lord Jim: Repetition as Subversion of Organic Form." Conrad 439-454.

---. "Narrative Middles: A Preliminary Outline." *Genre* 11 (Fall 1978): 375-387.

Moore, Madeline. *The Short Season Between Two Silences: The Mystical and the*

- Political in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*. Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984.
- Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987.
- Murphet, Julian. "Fiction and postmodernity." *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 716-735.
- Naremore, James. *The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973.
- Nicholls, Peter. *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995.
- Nishihara, Laverne. " 'The Fetters of That Strange Freedom': Boundary as Regulating Technique in *Lord Jim*." *Conradiana* 28.1 (1996): 54-65.
- Norrman, Ralph. *Wholeness Restored: Love of Symmetry as a Shaping Force in the Writings of Henry James, Kurt Vonnegut, Samuel Butler and Raymond Chandler*. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris, and Wien: Peter Lang, 1998.
- Ogundele, Wole. "Devices of Evasion: The Mythic versus the Historical Imagination in the Postcolonial African Novel." *Research in African Literatures* 33.3 (Fall 2002): 125-39
- Palmer, Alan. "The Construction of Fictional Minds." *Narrative* 10.1 (Jan. 2002): 28-46.
- Perkins, Wendy B. "The Politics of Form: Narrative Segmentation in Conrad,



- Lawrence, Woolf, and Hemingway.” Diss. U of Delaware, Spring 1996. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1996.
- Peters, John G. “Stein’s Collections: Order and Chaos in *Lord Jim*. *Conradiana* 28.1 (1996): 48-53.
- “The Phantasmagoria of the East.” *Joseph Conrad: Critical Assessments*. Ed. Keith Carabine. Vol. 1. Mountfield: Helm Information, 1992. 280-81.
- Pick, Anat. “Miracles of Arrangement: Structures of Multiplicity and the Birth of Justice in Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl*. *Henry James Review* 21.2 (Spring 2000): 115-132.
- Prince, Gerald. *A Dictionary of Narratology*. Revised ed. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.
- Puckett, Kent. “Before and Afterwardness in Henry James.” *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Ed. Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011. 75-106.
- Richardson, Brian. “Beyond Story and Discourse: Narrative Time in Postmodern and Nonmimetic Fiction.” *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*. Ed. Brian Richardson. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002. 47-63.
- . “Unnatural Stories and Plots.” Forthcoming.
- . *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006.
- Ruotolo, Lucio P. *The Interrupted Moment: A View of Virginia Woolf’s Novels*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986.

- Said, Edward. *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. New York: Basic Books, 1975.
- Schneider, Lissa. *Conrad's Narratives of Difference: Not Exactly Tales for Boys*.  
New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Schor, Hilary Margo. "Reading Knowledge: Curiosity in *The Golden Bowl*." *Henry James Review* 26.3 (Fall 2005): 237-245.
- Sherman, David. "A Plot Unraveling into Ethics: Woolf, Levinas, and 'Time Passes.'" *Woolf Studies Annual* 13 (2007): 159-79.
- Snaith, Anna. *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000.
- Stevenson, Sheryl. "Language and Gender In Transit: Feminist Extensions of Bakhtin." *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*. Ed. Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. 181-198.
- Tew, Philip. *B. S. Johnson: A Critical Reading*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1977.
- Tredell, Nicolas. "Telling Life, Telling Death: *The Unfortunates*." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 5.2 (1984): 34-42.
- Thomas, William B. "The Author's Voice in *The Ambassadors*." *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 1.2 (May 1971): 108-121.
- Tratner, Michael. *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin.

- London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.
- Ware, Chris. *Building Stories*. New York and Toronto: Pantheon Books, 2012.
- Warhol, Robyn R. "Narrative Refusals and Generic Transformation in Austen and James: What Doesn't Happen in *Northanger Abbey* and *The Spoils of Poynton*." *Henry James Review* 28.3 (Fall 2007): 259-268.
- Watt, Ian. *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979.
- Wells, H. G. *The Time Machine: An Invention*. London: Heinemann, 1895. Online edition. *Nineteenth Century Fiction*. Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 2000.
- Woolf, Virginia. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell. Vol. 3: 1925-1930. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.
- . *Orlando: A Biography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975.
- . *To the Lighthouse*. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt, 1981.
- . *To the Lighthouse: The original holograph draft*. Ed. Susan Dick. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1982.