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Ambivalent Intimacies:

Literary character and the ethics of authorial authority in the post-

war British novel

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Declaration

I, Jessica Hannah, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information

has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis considers the work of five novelists in post-war Britain: Iris Murdoch, Brophy, Muriel Spark, Sam Selvon, and Doris Lessing. These writers understood the strength of a novel's authorial position to be an ethical problem, insofar as it might involve the subordination of multiple voices and perspectives in the interests of one powerful, singular, dominant voice. Each was preoccupied with the dangers of voices too authoritative, and the questionable power of omniscient narration really to be omniscient. These writers used self-conscious, anxious, even megalomaniacal narrators to draw attention to the problem of the authoritative authorial position by parodic means, and sought to give other apparently fragmentary, obscure or minor voices ontological weight.

It was this moment in literary history that saw a commitment to double-voicedness become the foremost ethical concern of the novelist. Living and writing in Britain in the 1960s, these writers concurrently developed—with no formal or organised coordination with one another—a set of literary strategies designed to promote alterity and the multiplicity of voices and perspectives in their novels in a manoeuvre that involved the relinquishment of the firm and singular authorial position that they had come to associate with literary modernism. The 1960s ought to be understood as a critically acute moment for innovation in the British novel; one that marks the birth of an insistence on the ethics of eschewing the monolithic and embracing the heterogenous with corresponding literary strategies that insist, correspondingly, on dialogism above monologism.

Impact Statement

This thesis makes a claim for the significance of literary strategies developed in British novels of the 1960s and aims to articulate their aesthetic, political, and ethical effects. It engages with academic work on the late-modernist British novel as well as the work of narrative theorists writing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and contributes to a historical understanding of a moment in literary history that has only recently begun to receive due critical attention. By devoting chapters to writers such as Brigid Brophy alongside more well-known counterparts, the thesis seeks to make a claim for the historical significance of certain novelists of the period whose work has received little mainstream recognition. In its rather usual cross-section of the literary-historical moment—with chapters devoted to Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch, Sam Selvon and Doris Lessing, as well as Brophy—it offers new ways of understanding significant literary developments of the 1960s. The specific literary-historical focus of the thesis means it is unlikely to make a direct impact in certain areas of public life outside academia. Since it takes as its subject novelists preoccupied with questions of literary and political authority and with dislocation, displacement, and migrancy, however, it can serve to elaborate the relationship of the post-war British novel to wider cultural and postcolonial contexts.

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Preface
Ambivalent Intimacies:
Literary Character and the Ethics of Authorial Authority in the Post-war British Novel

This is the text we are creating it verbally we are the text we do not exist either we are a pack of lies dreamt up by the unreliable narrator in love with the zeroist author in love with himself but absent in the nature of things, an etherised unauthorised other.

Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru*[1]

In January of 1966, Iris Murdoch wrote, in a letter to Brigid Brophy: 'No, I've never worried about realism (i.e. I've assumed I knew the truth of that matter).'[2] Murdoch asked, 'Do you mean realism or 'naturalism' sometimes so-called? Who is a typical "realist" {so called} Zola? Tolstoy?'[3] Murdoch's questions are indicative of an ambivalence towards 'realism'—and a sense of hesitancy about the term's usefulness and its meaning—shared by five novelists working in post-war Britain: Murdoch, Brophy, Muriel Spark, Sam Selvon, and Doris Lessing. These writers shared a sense of ambivalence towards literary realism and its association with a powerful authorial position, and an attendant sense of discomfort about their own authority as authors of literary works. In admitting her own 'difficulty' with realism, for instance, Muriel Spark articulated a more widely held view, suggesting that 'realistic novels are more committed to dogmatic and absolute truth than most other varieties of fiction.'[4]

Murdoch, Brophy, Spark, Selvon, and Lessing were alike in that each produced their first novels in Britain in the 1950s, but they formed no deliberate group or alliance, and no one of them had met or corresponded with all the others. Nonetheless, a consideration of their literary works, correspondences and non-fiction writings reveals a hitherto unexamined set of biographical, aesthetic, and ethical commonalities between them. Sam Selvon, for instance, was born in Trinidad in 1923 and worked, during the war, a wireless operator with the local branch of

the Royal Naval Reserve. After several years as a journalist in Trinidad, Selvon moved to Britain two years after the 1948 British Nationality Act had granted British citizenship to colonial subjects after the war. Doris Lessing was born in Iran some four years earlier than Selvon, and moved to what was then known as Rhodesia with her parents in 1925. She immigrated to Britain in 1949, a year earlier than Selvon, and both writers published their first novels within two years of arrival. As Louise Yelin has argued astutely, Lessing's 'English identity' was guaranteed by the same 1948 Act that granted Selvon rights of citizenship, and her 'self-fashioning as an English writer—her textual performance of her own English identity—is complicated both by her colonial beginnings and by fault lines running through definitions of Englishness itself.'[5]

In *In Pursuit of the English* (1960)*, Lessing describes the challenges of migration to the colonial centre from its dominions: 'My head was, as usual in those early days in London, in a maze […] It seemed to me impossible that the people walking past the decent little shops that were so alike, and the cold stone slabs decorated with pale gleaming fishes and vivid parsley, like giant plates of salad thrust forward into the street, could ever know one part of London from another.'[6] Lessing's account resonates with Selvon's description of the overwhelming and vertiginous experience of being a migrant in post-war London in *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), in which Selvon's protagonist, Moses, senses 'a great aimlessness, a great restlessness […] the black faces bobbing up and down in the millions of white, strained faces, everybody hustling along the Strand, the spades jostling in the crowd, bewildered, hopeless.'[7]

Like Lessing, Muriel Spark spent many years of her youth in Rhodesia. Having moved there after her marriage in 1937, she found herself trapped for much of the war before returning to Britain in 1944. Spark and Lessing did not meet until the 1950s, but when they did, they became friends; Spark recalled that during her time in Africa, she 'would have loved to have

someone like Doris to talk to.'[8] On the subject of Spark's time in Rhodesia, Lessing wrote that she had 'been brought up with all that, I knew how to dissemble, and the cost if you didn't. I used to feel pity for the poor girls from Home, and even now I feel a kind of retrospective protectiveness for Muriel Spark, who couldn't have had any idea of what she was getting herself into.'[9] During her youth, Lessing was a committed Marxist, but as she grew older, she became increasingly interested in Sufism, a form of Islamic mysticism. Spark's life, too, was marked by religious and ideological changes; she was of Jewish ancestry, and converted to Roman Catholicism in the 1950s. Like Selvon and Lessing, Spark's cultural, national and religious affinities are not easily summarised; Bryan Cheyette describes her as an 'essentially diasporic writer with a double vision,' and suggests that the 'reason that she is equally well known as a Scottish-Jewish writer, Catholic convert, and poetic modernist is that she has managed to defy all of these categories.'[10]

Iris Murdoch, who was born in Dublin in 1919 but grew up in England, was a friend of both Spark and Lessing. While Spark produced 'black propaganda' for the Political Warfare Executive,[11] Murdoch worked for the Treasury and then for the UNRRA during the war. Afterwards, she taught at Oxford for fifteen years, and wrote a number of eminent philosophical works—including the first in English on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre in 1953—before turning to writing novels with 1954's *Under the Net*. Amongst those who criticised Murdoch for a certain out-of-touchness in her observation of contemporary life was Muriel Spark, who once complained that Murdoch 'doesn't look.'[12] 'In her novels,' Spark claimed, 'she'll have a secretary or a typist putting on her hat and gloves. People haven't been wearing hats and gloves for a long, long time. She hasn't looked at modern life much. She's there in Oxford.'[13] Despite this deficiency, Spark insisted, 'It won't matter. In 50 years' time, they'll look back on her as if

she were George Eliot—who also didn't look much. Jane Austen looked. The Brontës looked. They knew what people wore.'[14] At the same time, Spark was, like Lessing, a friend of Murdoch's, and protective of her; Robert E. Hosmer has described how Spark and Lessing were 'so upset' by the publication by Murdoch's husband, John Bayley, of an intimate account of Murdoch's decline into Alzheimer's shortly before her death that they 'drafted a letter to the *Times*, but thought the better of it and never sent it.'[15]

Murdoch shared, with the other four writers, a preoccupation with migrancy, displacement, and metropolitanism that was both political in outlook and deeply personal. On the subject of her own family history, Murdoch remarked, 'I feel as I grow older that we were wanderers, and I've only recently realized that I'm a kind of exile, a displaced person. I identify with exiles.'[16] When, in the bar of a train in 1981, Murdoch was greeted by a fellow traveller as the novelist Margaret Drabble, she responded by asking how she could tell 'that I'm not Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, or Muriel Spark?'[17]

Brigid Brophy, the youngest novelist of the five, is the least well-known of them all. While Lessing, Murdoch, and Spark have, between them, between the recipients of a several James Tait Black Memorial Prizes, Booker Prizes, Golden PEN Awards, and a Nobel Prize, recognition of Selvon's importance in histories of post-war British literature has been more muted, though his *The Lonely Londoners* is rightly beginning to see increased critical and public recognition in the twenty-first century. Brophy, on the other hand, remains largely obscure, although recent critical appraisals of her work such as *Brigid Brophy: Avant-Garde Writer, Critic, Activist* (2020) have gone some way towards addressing the dearth of attention to her work.[18] Brophy was a close friend and lover of Murdoch; the two exchanged hundreds of letters throughout their lives, and Brophy dedicated her novel *Flesh* to Murdoch in 1962. Like

Murdoch, Brophy was Anglo-Irish—she described herself, rather ambivalently, as 'quasi-Irish'[19]—and spent the majority of her life in London. She was a journalist as well as a novelist, an outspoken activist and advocate for animal welfare, public lending rights, and social reform, and an often merciless reviewer of critical and literary works. In a typically acerbic review of Spark's novel *The Girls of Slender Means* in the *London Magazine* in 1963, Brophy missed the wit of Spark's novel, and instead focuses on its apparent deficiencies, repetitiveness, and 'verbal maladroitness,' and claimed that the novel 'catches the spirit of the ages and then weakly lets it go.'[20] Elsewhere, Brophy demonstrated her explicit literary debt to Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* in her 1963 novel *The Finishing Touch,* set in a girls' finishing school in the South of France.[21] Carole Sweeney has argued that Brophy's work is 'not easily accommodated in a literary historical continuum that posits orderly breaks between realism/modernism/postmodernism,'[22] and this description might extended to Spark, Murdoch, Selvon and Lessing just as well. Jonathan Gibbs describes Brophy as 'as involved in her characters as Murdoch, but able to dismiss them with a Sparkish turn of the wrist when need be.'[23] All three, he insists, 'put serious characters at the heart of a comedy.'[24] Like Selvon, Spark, Lessing, and Murdoch, Brophy was preoccupied with anxieties pertaining to identity and transitivity after the war. Uprooted from Ireland, lost in an unnamed European airport and afflicted with amnesia, the narrator of her 1969 novel *In Transit* slides between languages demarcated by an equivocal slash: 'You could look out on la piste/die Startbahne/the apron, whereon it was forbidden to smoke/rauchen/fumer.'[25]

Sam Selvon's dislocation from the women writers whose work forms the focus of the other four chapters is as significant as the commonalities observed above. While Selvon was a frequent correspondent and interlocutor of Caribbean writers in Britain such as Andrew Salkey

and George Lamming, there is no evidence that Selvon interacted with contemporaries such as

Spark, Murdoch, Brophy or Lessing.[26] Such differences on the level of milieu point to the stark

ways in which literary circles were gendered and racialised in Britain in the 1960s; what such

differences should not obscure, however, is the striking correspondences between all five writers

in terms of literary strategy and ethical conception of the novel and its work. Selvon's apparent

dissonance in relation to the other novelists, indeed, allows another perspective on the zeitgeist;

one that is differently situated, and moreover one germane to my exploration of the dispersal of

singular authority and the multiplication of authoritative perspectives.

The voices of the novel and the ethical problem

 For Spark, Murdoch, Brophy, Selvon, and Lessing, the strength of the position of a novel's

author—and, by association, its narrator—was an ethical problem, because it involved the

subordination of multiple voices and perspectives in the interests of one powerful, singular,

dominant voice.[27] Each novelist was preoccupied with the dangers of voices too authoritative,

and the questionable power of omniscient narration really to be omniscient. All five were vividly

aware, of course, in the immediate aftermath of the war, of the stark threats posed by

authoritarianism. This awareness inflected their anxieties about the authority of authorship. As I

delineate in the forthcoming chapters, many of them used political metaphors—references, for

instance, to tyranny, dogma, totalitarianism, and state surveillance—to articulate their concerns

about the ethics of literary production. Undoubtedly their particular preoccupation with such

problems was shaped by global political and cultural contexts after the war. Patricia Waugh

includes Murdoch and Spark in what she calls a 'first generation of experimental writers who

reached maturity in the sixties and early seventies' for whom, 'after Nazism, it seemed evident […] that the projection of Promethean desire beyond the controlled realm of art had, as often as not, realized a hell of violence rather than an aestheticized utopia. In a desacrilized society, aesthetic vision may seem liberating but in fact may represent a potentially and powerfully destructive force.'[28]

All five writers responded to this salient ethical problem with crucially similar literary strategies. First, each used self-conscious, anxious, and even megalomaniacal narrators to draw attention to the problem of the authoritative authorial position by parodic means. Further, they developed innovative narrational strategies in order to produce what they understood to be an ethical alternative to such singular authority. In introducing double-voicedness into their novels in place of the singular, monolithic, authoritative authorial voice, they sought to give these other apparently fragmentary, obscure or minor voices ontological weight.[29] As I delineate below, the novelists' precise strategies differ; Brophy, for instance, is invested in the protagonist whose narrative position—whether the object or subject of discourse—shifts and changes, and whose physical body materially shifts and changes, too. Selvon, on the other hand, makes his focus the ethical problem of what it might mean to speak on behalf of someone else by way of a narrator-protagonist anxiously preoccupied with his own relation to categories such as 'Black,' 'English,' or the 'English literary canon' by way of an eccentric memoirist-narrator. Though the specific narrational techniques these writers developed differed, they held in common a shared motivation to counter the authorial position's singular authority with an array of narrative voices invested with ontological heft.

The implications for the novel more widely are several. It was this moment in literary history that saw, in an oblique way, a commitment to double-voicedness as the foremost ethical

concern of the novelist. Living and writing within broadly the same political and geographical context, these writers concurrently developed—with no formal or organised coordination with one another—a set of literary strategies designed to promote alterity and the multiplicity of voices and perspectives in their literary works in a manoeuvre that at the same time meant the relinquishment of the firm and singular authorial position that they had come to associate with literary modernism. This period, spanning from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, ought to be understood as a critically acute moment for innovation in the British novel; one that marks the birth of an insistence on the ethics of eschewing the monolithic and embracing the heterogenous with literary strategies that insist, correspondingly, on dialogism above monologism.

There is insufficient space in this thesis to trace the legacies of this literary-historical moment and its innovations in the literatures and politics of the fifty or sixty years between it and the present. I turn briefly to two twentieth-century writers in particular—Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Rancière—because of the profound way in which they animate this discussion of literary history. It is important to emphasise that the implications for the novel of the moment in literary history on which I focus are significant; novels of the last half-century that engage seriously with the possibility of autonomous characters, or those that make their focus the ethical problems of a singular narrational perspective, owe much to these earlier writers.

The concerns of the five authors considered in this thesis resonate with the philosophical perspective on character autonomy that Bakhtin famously articulates in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963). Dostoevsky's 'major heroes,' Bakhtin writes, 'are, by the very nature of his creative design, *not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse.*'[30] The effect is a 'polyphonic novel' in which the voice of the character is given equal weight to that of the author.[31] Instead of the singularity of monologism,

there is a radical polyphony, and the many voices of the novel take on the ontological stature of the voice of the novelist. 'A character's word about himself and his world,' Bakhtin writes, 'is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is':

> it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters.[32]

The effect is not the author's total relinquishment—the novelist 'is not required to renounce himself or his own consciousness'—but rather that the author's own consciousness is 'broaden[ed], deepen[ed] and rearrange[d] […] in order to accommodate the autonomous consciousnesses of others.'[33] The effect is that it is 'as if the character were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual world,'[34] and the characters are as if 'free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even rebelling against him.'[35] In other words, the alternative to the reified and inanimate characters of monologic discourse is the creation of another subject-position.

Polyphony in Bakhtin's terms is not only multiplicity of voice, but also of perspective; 'utterly incompatible elements […] are distributed among several worlds and several autonomous consciousnesses; they are presented not within a single field of vision but within several fields of vision, each full and of equal worth.'[36] Bakhtin aligns the novel's representation of lived reality with contingency; it is the novel's capacity for expressing uncertainty that fosters the sense of a plausibly autonomous fictional world.[37]

Bakhtin's words in the 1960s can be felt again in Jacques Rancière's work at the turn of the century. In *The Flesh of Words* (1998), Rancière describes a connection 'between the power

of the writer and the character who is his hostage' from which 'we have seen two traditions

emerge that define two ideas of literature.'[38] In the first, which he names 'the virtuoso tradition,'

the author 'makes fun of his story and his characters, creates them and leaves them along the

way, sends them on adventures or encloses them in a secret or enigmatic structure all the better

hidden from the reader's shrewdness since it is actually only the secret of the nonexistence of the

secret.'[39] His second approach to the novel, however, is aligned with Bakhtin's definition of the

polyphonic novel. Rancière describes those writers who recognise a fundamental 'tension,' in

their own work, 'of literary mastery with its necessary and impossible condition, democratic

literality.' Bakhtin's 'polyphony' and what Rancière's 'democratic literality' might name the

most significant qualities of the novel towards which the five authors with which this thesis is

concerned aspired, populated by characters that are the 'autonomous consciousnesses' Bakhtin

describes.

   'To confront this solidarity between literary power and the banality or democratic

wandering [*errance*] of the letter,' writes Rancière, 'is to bring the writer's mastery to the point

of rupture.'[40] This 'rupture,' indeed, is the creative effect of the suffusion of these novels with a

radical alterity, with the proliferation of autonomous voices and perspectives that necessarily

amounts to a relinquishment—sometimes with the explosive force of rupture—of authorial

control. Rancière understands the effects of the 'rupture' of writerly 'mastery' to instantiate what

at first seems to be a shocking kind of reversal of hierarchy: 'Then it is the hostage who takes the

master hostage, who draws him in and encloses him in the island of the book to the detriment of

his own book,' he writes.[41] This sentence, however, is not yet finished, and instead posits an

alternative in the form of an outward gesture that makes a promise for the ethical potential of the

rupture of writerly mastery in both literature and politics. It might be that the hostage 'takes the

master hostage, […] draws him in and encloses him,' *or,* Rancière writes, 'who forces him to place his cause in the hands of those who care for the ills of writing and democracy: those engineers of souls who identify the network of material channels of communication and connecting with the new community, with the living book of the living law, the law of love.'[42] It is this alternative possibility with which the novels considered in the following chapters are concerned, the possibility that the rupturing of authorial authority might not simply instantiate a newly entrenched form of singular authority but rather might permit other modes of speaking and of being, whose commitment to multiplicity—of voice, of perspective, of power—is the foundation of its ethics.

Ambivalent intimacies

The first chapter, 'Obtrusive Intimacies: Muriel Spark's Tyrannical Narration and the Strategic Opacity of Character,' tracks the ways in which Spark's novels are preoccupied with the ethical problems posed by omniscient narration. Caroline Rose, the protagonist of Muriel Spark's first novel, *The Comforters* (1957), is at work on a literary-critical book entitled *Form in the Modern Novel*, and admits early on to 'having difficulty with the chapter on realism.'[43] A short time later, she begins to hear a ghostly authorial presence typing out her thoughts on a typewriter as she has them. In her novels, Spark returned continually to the aesthetic and ethical stakes of making minds legible via intrusive narrative techniques such as omniscient narration and free indirect discourse. By the time she wrote *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* in 1961, she had developed a literary strategy that I call 'tyrannical narration,' a mode in which a single character's politics and tone of voice come to dominate the voice of the novel. Understanding the preservation of the

privacy of the mind to be an ethical imperative, I argue that Spark developed a second narrative

strategy—one I term 'strategic opacity'—that occludes characters' interiorities from narrators'

gazes. In doing so, I offer a counterargument to those who have understood Spark as detached,

aloof, and cruel,[44] and highlight instead her commitment to an ethical precept, insofar as

diminishing her own authorial and narratorial powers, she invests her characters with privacy and

autonomy.

The second chapter, '"[F]ull of blankness and jumble": Iris Murdoch's Minor

Characters,' considers the ways in which minor characters in Murdoch's novels of the early

1970s exist on these texts' social and discursive edges. Such characters tend to enter the novels'

plots when they are cleaning protagonists' homes or preparing their meals, or else when they are

brought together by chance, often with violent consequences. The third-person narrator of *An

Accidental Man* (1971) affords barely any textual space to working-class characters, while the

first-person narrator of *The Black Prince* (1973) renders all those around him minor characters in

the manner of his own life, and the effect in both cases is a kind of squashing of characters under

the immense weight of a singular perspective. While Murdoch has been interpreted by many as

exerting strict authorial control over her plots and characters, I argue instead that her

commitment to contingency as an ethical virtue led her to practice, in her narration, the kind of

authorial negation that she named, in the works of Homer and Shakespeare, an ethic of 'merciful

objectivity.'[45] In her novels, Murdoch resists this kind of monologism in both novels by offering

a kind of promise for the minor character capable of evading the coercive control of their

narrators. Certain minor characters simply will not be dispatched in the way that the narratives

seem to expect of them, and for this they seem to possess a particular kind of resonance and

ontological heft. They achieve a degree of autonomy—that which Murdoch would call

'opacity'—beyond that of the novels' hapless and repellent protagonists.

Chapter Three, 'Metonymy *In Transit:* Brigid Brophy's Ontological Anxieties,' considers the most explicitly experimental writer of the five. In 1969's *In Transit,* the dizzying, metonymic leaps of Brophy's puns and wordplay at the level of narration propel the events at the level of plot. The narration of *In Transit* is characterised by indeterminacy, and illustrates what the author names as a disintegration of 'Aristotelean logic' such that a thing might be 'both X and not-X.'[46] Throughout the novel, Brophy refuses anything like a stable set of relations between discursive positions, as the narration swings between first- and third-person. When the narrator, Pat, is hailed as a man or woman by other characters, moreover, this use of language proves also to precipitate a material change in Pat's body. This narrator-character is both object and subject of discourse, oscillating between these roles as each alternative becomes grammatically and bodily uninhabitable. Pat's sex-gender indeterminacy and the ontic specificity of their damaged passport point to the strange textual convergence of the legibility of a title, name or pronoun and the perceived authenticity of a subject, especially within the highly regulated space of the airport setting of this novel self-conscious about its own artifice. Ultimately, Brophy's privileging of indeterminacy and contradiction produces a radically dialogic novel that refuses the authorial voice a position of ontological superiority or any narrative category a position of stability.

The fourth chapter, '"I will knock them in the Old Kent Road with my language alone": Representation and Misrecognition in Sam Selvon,' focuses in particular on Selvon's 1975 novel *Moses Ascending*. The novel's eponymous protagonist proves to be a frustrating narrator to both the novel's other characters, who malign his selfishness and failure to back any political cause, and also to the novel's readers, since his eccentric and often contradictory behaviours have him resist any reading that would understand him as a representation with allegorical or stereotypical

significance. Rather than struggle to read Moses as typical*,* and thereby submit to the reductiveness of what Fredric Jameson has called 'collective abstractions,' I instead focus on the ways that Moses's manifestations of individualism—his eccentricities, insecurities, and ostensible apathy towards political activism—produce the unexpected effect of an authentic and autonomous character. In the parodic form of Moses's memoir, Selvon advances a politics of non-representation by resisting the impulse to flatten collectivities into monolithic, homogenous, or abstract groups, or to create a work that would make plain the ontologies of categories such as 'migrant,' 'British,' or 'Caribbean' in a mimetic way. Instead, the novel's mode of narration accommodates multiple conflicting voices and perspectives through parody, irony, and counter-canonical satire, and in doing so refuses the pressure to speak on behalf of or 'represent' others in a homogenous way in favour of offering multi-voiced, overlapping, and irreconcilable perspectives.

The final chapter, '"There's nothing new under the sun": Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and Parodic Realism,' argues that Lessing's celebrated novel of 1962 constitutes an effort to reject singular, ostensibly authoritative accounts of global history, events, and individual identities, and instead to recognise these accounts as partisan, incomplete, and necessarily subjective. The narrational strategies of *The Golden Notebook* oscillate and change across the novel's fragmented form, from the omniscient mode of a nineteenth-centuryesque realist novel to the detailed descriptions of first-person recollection, from cut-and-paste pastiches to the sprawling textual representation of psychological breakdown. In developing a mode of narration that I name 'parodic realism,' Lessing produces, in her novel, a multi-voiced quality. Drawing on Bakhtin's argument that parody undermines the pretensions of authoritative discourse and limits an author's capacity to enter into the novel as a guiding authoritative voice, this chapter argues

that *The Golden Notebook*'s narration enables a rejection of monological authority and instead makes a claim for the contingency of events and identities, and for the labile, split, contradictory nature of selfhood.

While their precise focuses differ, Spark, Murdoch, Brophy, Selvon, and Lessing were driven by the same strong ethical and aesthetic motivations.[47] Each was committed to what George Levine names 'the ultimate realist impulse'—that is, 'the capacity to register […] the reality of the unknowable other and to continue to care'—while at the same time they shared a profound sense of ambivalence towards the strength of the authorial position that they saw as inherent to the realist genre.[48] For each of these post-war novelists, then, an ethical imperative emerges within the novel such that an authoritarian authorial position is not ethically viable. For Spark, it is the fundamental privacy of the mind; for Murdoch, contingency and what she called the 'opacity of persons'; for Brophy, the ultimate multiplicity and contradictoriness of the human subject; for Selvon, the irreducibility of the individual as a metonym for or homogenous part of the collective; and for Lessing, the impossibility of the objectivity of the writer and the subjectivity of any account of history.

It was to these ethical demands that these novelists responded with innovative techniques of narration to produce novels characterised by parody, multiplicity, and the dispersal of voice. As Timothy Bewes has argued; 'in the twentieth century, the ethical appears as a permanent *rendering inadequate* of form.'[49] For this reason, none of the five fits comfortably on either side of divisions between 'experimental' or 'realist' post-war literary fiction that have been used by scholars to understand both the aesthetic distinctions between texts and how post-war writers understood themselves. These writers' aesthetic practices, as well as the ethics that motivated them, are themselves characterised by ambivalence, both in the psychoanalytic sense of the

simultaneous existence of contradictory feelings towards a single object,[50] and in terms of the capaciousness that 'both/and' affords beyond 'either/or.'[51] In a coda, I gesture to the legacy of the common project of these five post-war writers in a later novel—1991's *Textermination*—by one of their contemporaries, Christine Brooke-Rose. Brooke-Rose was deeply invested in the connection between narration and ethics, and more specifically the opportunities for producing literary works that reject the authoritative position of the authorial voice in favour of producing and giving ontological weight to multiple textual voices afforded by innovative modes of narration.

This thesis builds on work produced in the last two decades by scholars who have pursued epistemological and ontological questions pertaining to literary character. In *The Economy of Character* (1998), Deidre Shauna Lynch drew attention to the social construction and historicity of subjectivity, and mapped literary character's 'changing conditions of legibility.'[52] Since Lynch, the field of literary character has witnessed a significant revival, and the emphasis on textuality that was central to the poststructuralist critique of character has been replaced by attentiveness to characters' historicity and ontologies.[53] Many of these monographs have focused on British nineteenth-century realist novels by Austen, Dickens, Eliot and others, not least because the complex plots of such novels tend to be packed with a multitude of characters drawn in intimate detail. Literary realism, moreover, might be understood, in George Levine's words, as a kind of 'strenuous art,' one that is self-consciously aware of the effort required to reconstruct the social world it strives to imitate, which necessarily involves an effort to produce the illusion of character autonomy.[54] Focusing on British novels of the post-war period, my thesis takes a different direction. I theorise that novelists at this moment felt an ambivalent sense of both debt to and suspicion of realist literary strategies, and that for them the

creation of the illusion of autonomous characters was one means of producing novels that resisted a singular, tyrannical authorial position in favour of the multiplication of narrative positions invested with epistemological and ontological stature to match the authorial voice's own.

A number of recent scholars have theorised the ways in which the peculiar illusion of autonomous characters is necessarily bound up in the question of authorial control.[55] Maria Su Wang, for instance, has explored what she names the 'operative paradox of realist fictionality, where the novelist seeks to create the illusion that everything happens as a result of the autonomous actions of the characters rather than at the behest of her novelistic design.'[56] Wang proposes that realist fiction tends to handle this paradox through the use of 'uncertainty and ambiguity in the presentation of decisive actions by characters,' which heightens the illusion of autonomy because the difficulty of determining motive serves to 'hint […] at the impression of a more complex reality.'[57] Julia Jordan, moreover, has observed what she terms 'modernism's authorial retreat' wherein many modernist authors 'introduce a degree of opacity' to the characters they create.[58] The effect is the illusion of an autonomous character, since to 'gesture towards a character's privacy, their occlusions, their furtiveness, their fugitive tendencies, is to acknowledge that *sua sponte* is identical with incomprehensibility.'[59] Limited and incomplete representations of individuals has the potential to produce the illusion of an autonomous character insofar as such representations seem to index something inaccessible, and Jordan names the effect 'gestural autonomy'; that is, 'an indicated, but never seen in its entirety, behind-the-text capaciousness and wealth of personhood that promotes an otherness of character.'[60]

Focusing on novelists writing later than those considered by Wang and Jordan,[61] I explore the ramifications of these writers' shared suspicion of the apparent objectivity,

transparency, and confidence of the realist or high-modernist narrator. Flaubert's well-known

formulation of the creed of artistic impersonality was that the 'artist in his work must be like God

in creation, invisible and all-powerful; you can sense him everywhere, but you cannot see him.'[62]

Joyce's version of Flaubert's analogy, which took impersonality still further, suggests that this

dynamic persisted in the novels of literary modernism: 'The artist, like the God of creation,

remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence,

indifferent, paring his fingernails.'[63] Richard Walsh suggests that the 'consummately impersonal

artist,' because '[a]bstracted from the work's representational world as the God of creation,'

seems able to grant the narrative 'a similar internal autonomy to that conceded by the hapless

novelist whose characters simply take over; but here the dispensation is made without admitting

any loss of personal artistic credit—rather the reverse.'[64]

My five exemplary authors understand their relationship to their novels and the characters

within them in starkly different terms. Their authorial control, or lack of it, is neither godlike nor

'hapless,' neither tyrannical nor utterly relinquished. While scholars such as Elaine Scarry have

emphasised the generative potential of authorial control,[65] each of the five writers considered in

this thesis was committed to a strategy of what Julia Jordan has named 'epistemological

humility,'[66] and were also, perennially anxious about the 'tyrannical, if unintended,

ventriloquism of a character's voice by a novelist.'[67]

Such humility is legible in frequent pronouncements on the subject of writing novels by

each of the writers in question. One striking example is Sam Selvon's insistence, in 1991, that in

the 'process of creativity, unknowingness is the quintessence that propels me—I want to know as

much as the reader what happens next, or what shit [his protagonist] 'Moses' is going to come up

with, and when I emerge, your guess is as good as mine as to who is the culprit.'[68] Like Selvon,

the American postmodernist Donald Barthelme described 'not-knowing' as essential to creativity: 'Without the scanning process engendered by not-knowing,' he claimed, 'without the possibility of having the mind move in unanticipated directions, there would be no invention.'[69] Bartheleme was aware, too, of the necessary difficulties of such an undertaking: 'The not-knowing is not simple, because it's hedged about with prohibitions, roads that may not be taken. The more serious the artist, the more problems he takes into account and the more considerations limit his possible initiatives.'[70] When it comes to the creation of literary character, as Jordan argues, it is '*knowing* one's character that is deadening, because such knowledge refutes the very privacy that makes a character inaccessible enough to assume independent existence.'[71] For Spark, Murdoch, Brophy, Selvon, and Lessing, the creation of the illusion of autonomous characters was a crucial strategy in accomplishing what they understood to be an ethical imperative; that is, in suffusing the novel with radical alterity, and allowing these multiple new positions to stand on their own, independent of a controlling authorial influence.[72]

In what follows, then, I focus on a moment in literary history in which the question of character autonomy has, until now, attracted little critical attention. It was in the British novel of the 1960s that the investment of manifold perspectives with ontological and epistemological weight became its writers' central ethical preoccupation, and moreover their foremost strategy for the dispersal of singular authorial authority. The trajectory of the subsequent five chapters might be understood as quasi-temporal, insofar as they are ordered according to an approximate chronological scope. More significantly, though, they chart a movement from a privileging of formal techniques for the replacement of singular authorial authority with multiple, ambivalent, textual voices to the more explicitly political affordances of such strategies, in an effort to stress the conjunction of concerns both aesthetic and ethical in the British novel of the 1960s.

Notes

[1] Christine Brooke-Rose, *The Christine Brooke-Rose Omnibus: Four Novels* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006), 733.

[2] Correspondence from Iris Murdoch to Brigid Brophy, 3 January 1966, from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives, KUAS142/6/112.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Muriel Spark and Robert Hosmer, 'An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark', *Salmagundi*, no. 146/147 (2005): 147.

[5] Louise Yelin, *From the Margins of Empire: Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 57, https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501711435.

[6] Doris Lessing, *In Pursuit of the English* (London: Flamingo, 1993), 41.

[7] Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin, 2006), 139.

[8] Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae: A Volume of Autobiography* (New York: New Directions, 2011), 120.

[9] Doris Lessing, *Time Bites: Views and Reviews* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 115.

[10] Bryan Cheyette, 'Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*', in *A Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945-2000*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 368.

[11] Spark recalls that she 'played a very small part, but as a fly on the wall I took in a whole world of method and intrigue in the dark field of Black Propaganda or Psychological Warfare, and the successful and purposeful deceit of the enemy.' Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 142.

[12] Muriel Spark quoted in David Streitfeld, 'Fired Up', *Washington Post*, 12 August 1993.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] 'Muriel Spark: A Glance through An Open Door' by Robert E. Hosmer, *Scottish Review of Books,* October 3, 2013.

[16] Iris Murdoch, 'John Haffenden Talks to Iris Murdoch (1983)', interview by John Haffenden, in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, ed. Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 130.

[17] Peter J. Conradi, 'Iris Murdoch Obituary', *The Guardian*, 9 February 1999, https://www.theguardian.com/news/1999/feb/09/guardianobituaries-peterconradi.

[18] See Richard Canning and Gerri Kimber, eds., *Brigid Brophy: Avant-Garde Writer, Critic, Activist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

[19] Leslie Dock and Brigid Brophy, 'An Interview with Brigid Brophy', *Contemporary Literature* 17, no. 2 (1976): 161, https://doi.org/10.2307/1207662.

[20] Brigid Brophy, 'Selected Books', *London Magazine* 3, no. 9 (December 1963): 79, 78. Brophy writes, 'Mrs. Spark is probably the best low-brow novelist to appear since Margery Sharp,' and insists that she is not, 'as she has been called in *The Observer,* "one of those rare artists whose work never needs pruning." Neither is she (still *The Observer*) "an assured technician," with (*Sunday Times*) "absolute authority over her material." Still less is she a "pure-languaged writer" (*New Statesman*). Least of all is she (*New Statesman* again) "a poet-novelist of formidable power." I agree with *The Observer*'s critic that "her touch is light but her themes are big": I would add, however, that she treats her big themes pretentiously.' Brophy, 76–77.

[21] See Brigid Brophy, *The Finishing Touch*, 2013.

[22] Carole Sweeney, '"Why This Rather Than That?": The Delightful Perversity of Brigid Brophy', *Contemporary Women's Writing* 12, no. 2 (15 September 2018): 236, https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpy019.

[23] Jonathan Gibbs, '"The Large Door": Where Do You Get Your Ideas?', *Tiny Camels* (blog), 21 January 2019, https://tinycamels.wordpress.com/2019/01/21/the-large-door-where-do-you-get-your-ideas/.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Brigid Brophy, *In Transit: An Heroi-Cyclic Novel* (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2002), 13.

[26] In an analysis of the work of Christine Brooke-Rose, Julia Jordan remarks that it is 'certainly true that there is an iteration or the British group of experimentalist writers that is noticeably female, with [Ann] Quin, Brooke-Rose, [Eva] Figes, Maggie Ross, Anna Kavan, and then the more ambiguous figures of Doris Lessing, Muriel Spark, Angela Carter, and Iris Murdoch coming and going.' *Late Modernism and the Avant-Garde British Novel: Oblique Strategies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 187.

[27] The work of these five writers exemplifies a more widespread post-war literary phenomenon. In his introduction to the French edition of his novel *Crash* (1973), for instance, J.G. Ballard famously suggested that the 'techniques of perspectives of the traditional 19th century novel' were no longer adequate for the contemporary author. Ballard expressed his doubt that the novelist in the second half of the twentieth century still possessed 'the moral authority to invent a self-sufficient and self-enclosed world, to preside over his characters like an examiner, knowing all the questions in advance.' '"Over Our Lives Preside the Great Twin Leitmotifs of the 20th Century—Sex and Paranoia": J.G. Ballard: Introduction to *Crash* (1974)', in *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice*, ed. Martin Travers (London: Continuum, 2006), 311.

[28] Patricia Waugh, 'Postmodern Fiction and the Rise of Critical Theory', in *A Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945 - 2000*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer, 2008, 73–74, https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:101:1-201410101540.

[29] Throughout this thesis, I employ the terms 'authorial voice' and 'authorial position' in an effort to distinguish the fictionality of the constructed authorial presence in the text from the flesh-and-blood biographical author.

[30] M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 6–7.

[31] Bakhtin, 5–46.

[32] Bakhtin, 7.

[33] Bakhtin, 68.

[34] Bakhtin, 5.

[35] Bakhtin, 6.

[36] Bakhtin, 16.

[37] The novel, he writes in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 'inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present).' *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 7.

[38] Jacques Rancière, *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*, Atopia (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 109.

[39] Rancière, 109.

[40] Rancière, 109.

[41] Rancière, 109.

[42] Rancière, *The Flesh of Words*, 109–10.

[43] Muriel Spark, *The Comforters* (New York: New Directions, 2014), 57.

[44] Such a view is famously articulated in Malcolm Bradbury, 'Muriel Spark's Fingernails', *Critical Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (September 1972): 241–50, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8705.1972.tb02059.x.

[45] Iris Murdoch, 'Philosophy and Literature: A Dialogue with Iris Murdoch', interview by Bryan Magee, in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter J. Conradi (New York: Penguin, 1999), 30.

[46] Dock and Brophy, 'An Interview with Brigid Brophy', 166.

[47] In her book on the literature of the post-war period in Britain, *Late Modernism and the Avant-Garde British Novel: Oblique Strategies* (2020), Julia Jordan argues that Lessing, Brophy, Murdoch and Spark—alongside other novelists of the era such as B.S. Johnson, Alexander Trocchi, Zulfikar Ghose and Ann Quin—share 'the urge to renovation, and the sense that formal experimentation matters,' that 'such experimentation has a capacity for speaking to the culture rather than comprising a bulwark against it' and that 'opacity and indeterminacy are, if not virtuous in and of themselves, necessary correctives to the type of narrative that they defined themselves against.' Jordan, 31–32.

[48] George Levine, *Realism, Ethics and Secularism: Essays on Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 272.

[49] Timothy Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 19.

[50] For Freud, the term in its most general sense designated the presence in a subject of a pair of opposed impulses of the same intensity.

[51] Sonya Andermahr's suggestion that Brophy's work involves a kind of 'both/and aesthetics' is illuminating here. See Sonya Andermahr, 'Both/And Aesthetics: Gender, Art, and Language in Brigid Brophy's *In Transit* and Ali Smith's *How to Be Both*', *Contemporary Women's Writing* 12, no. 2 (15 September 2018): 248–63, https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpy001.

[52] Lynch asked, '[w]ho counts as a character, and under what conditions and in which spaces is a character legible?' *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1.

[53] See, for example: Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*, Theory and Interpretation of Narrative (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006); Alan Palmer, *Social Minds in the Novel*, Theory and Interpretation of Narrative (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010); Blakey Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); John Frow, *Character and Person*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Jeremy Rosen, *Minor Characters Have Their Day: Genre and the Contemporary Literary Marketplace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); James Phelan, *Somebody Telling Somebody Else: A Rhetorical Poetics of Narrative*, Theory and Interpretation of Narrative (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017); Elaine Auyoung, *When Fiction Feels Real: Representation and the Reading Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Emily Steinlight, *Populating the Novel: Literary Form and the Politics of Surplus Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Amanda Anderson, Toril Moi, and Rita Felski, eds., *Character: Three*

Inquiries in Literary Studies, Trios (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019); Joanna Klara Teske and Arkadiusz Gut, 'The Reader's Mindreading of Realist, Modernist, and Postmodern Fiction: A Comparative Study', *Narrative* 29, no. 1 (2021): 47–70, https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2021.0002. A number of recent scholars, further, have focused on those literary characters who do not act. See, for instance, Timothy Bewes, who has recently theorized the 'anagonist,' a character who 'would not only not act, but would not feel, not think, not search, would not even hesitate.' 'The Novel Problematic', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 44, no. 1 (2011): 307. In a similar vein, see also Maria Christou, 'Kazuo Ishiguro's Nonactors', *Novel* 53, no. 3 (1 November 2020): 360–82, https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-8624552.

[54] Catherine Gallagher has argued that many readers 'hold that fictional characters appeal to readers on the basis of their distinctive ontological lack'; that is, that we enjoy characters' very finitude partly because that epistemological limit makes us, by contrast, seem less bounded. 'What Would Napoleon Do? Historical, Fictional, and Counterfactual Characters', *New Literary History* 42, no. 2 (2011): 317. Alicia Christoff has complicated Gallagher's theory in a recent reading of Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* in which she identifies a 'condition where readers cannot quite distinguish themselves from literary characters,' and asks, 'To the people around us, isn't our interiority as fictional as a literary character's? And aren't we just as prone to thinking of our life stories in terms of narrative convention?' 'Alone with Tess', *NOVEL A Forum on Fiction* 48, no. 1 (1 January 2015): 28, https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-2860309.

[55] Henriette Heidbrink has argued that *all* characters are 'easily unhinged from their medial context and therefore seem to possess a certain autonomy,' and she therefore calls characters 'quasi-autonomous phenomena.' 'Fictional Characters in Literary and Media Studies', in *Characters in Fictional Worlds*, ed. Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 67, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110232424.2.67.

[56] Maria Su Wang, 'Realism's Operative Paradox: Character Autonomy vs. Authorial Construction in Middlemarch', *Narrative* 23, no. 3 (2015): 295, https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2015.0018. Wang asks, 'how does a novelist such as George Eliot make us momentarily forget that her characters' apparently lifelike agency is directly a result of her authorial construction?' Wang, 291.

[57] Wang, 'Realism's Operative Paradox', 292–93. Maria Su Wang describes the illusion of character autonomy as produced by specifically narrational means; 'If the authorial audience cannot definitively know whose viewpoint is represented, even within a single sentence,' she writes, 'then her/his uncertainty perpetuates the illusion of autonomy by suggesting that the characters exceed what exists on the page.' Wang, 298. Wang's work is aligned with that of Erica Haugtvedt, who emphasises the ways in which 'characters can persist even when their behavior is not being narrated.' 'The Victorian Serial Novel and Transfictional Character', *Victorian Studies* 59, no. 3 (2017): 410, https://doi.org/10.2979/victorianstudies.59.3.04.

[58] Julia Jordan, 'Autonomous Automata: Opacity and the Fugitive Character in the Modernist Novel and After', in *The Legacies of Modernism*, ed. David James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 101, 97, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511998317.008.

[59] Jordan, 97. Jordan suggests that such techniques in the works of novelists such as Woolf, Ford, and Beckett are 'indicative of an authorial desire to represent faithfully the epistemological gulf between people, and therefore to gift characters with a mimetic version of freedom and autonomy which is 'inscribed *gesturally* in the text.' Jordan, 97. The result is something like a surfeit of ontological presence; the narratives do not *contain* character, but rather involve 'authentic beings that would represent an excess of being to the text.' Jordan, 110.

[60] Jordan, 'Autonomous Automata', 99.

[61] Wang focuses on George Eliot's work, and Jordan on modernist British and Irish novels.

[62] See Gustave Flaubert to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie, 18 March 1857, in Gustave Flaubert, *Selected Letters*, trans. Geoffrey Wall, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 1997), 247–48.

[63] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Collector's Library, 2005), 249.

[64] Richard Walsh, 'The Novelist as Medium', *Neophilologus* 84, no. 3 (2000): 339, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1004732328260.

[65] Elaine Scarry's focus is on the ways in which 'authorial instruction' can mean that 'perceptual mimesis, which when undertaken on one's own is ordinarily feeble and impoverished,' can, for the readers of novels, 'sometimes closely approximate… actual perception?' *Dreaming by the Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999), 6.

[66] Jordan, 'Autonomous Automata', 102.

[67] Jordan contrasts this kind of character autonomy with the sort generated in more explicitly and self-consciously metafictional works. Because the latter sort, who 'obtrude on the reader in their aggressive fictionality,' (as exemplified in the work of Flann O'Brien) have no privacy, they become 'anti-characters,' and the effect is 'an authorial effacement of a sort, but also a paradoxical authorial tyranny.' Jordan, 106–7.

[68] Samuel Selvon, 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.', *Kunapipi* 17, no. 1 (1995): 126. Muriel Spark understood the artist to be a 'minor public servant'; 'If he starts thinking of himself as a public master,' she said, 'he's in trouble.' Spark quoted in Ruth Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 133. Iris Murdoch, further, wrote that a 'great novelist is essentially tolerant, that is, displays a real apprehension of persons other than the author as having a right to exist and to have a separate mode of being which is important and interesting to themselves.' 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter J. Conradi (New York: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), 271.

[69] Donald Barthelme, 'Not-Knowing', in *Not-Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme*, ed. Kim Herzinger (New York: Vintage, 1999), 12.

[70] Barthelme, 12. With regard to the question of character autonomy, for instance, partial knowledge of a character might strengthen a reader's impression that that character is independent of a controlling omniscience, or, alternatively, it might weaken it, if the novel gives the impression that this controlling omniscience possesses knowledge of the character that is not imparted to us.

[71] Jordan, 'Autonomous Automata', 102.

[72] While Marina MacKay has suggested that it 'would be a mistake to treat the [post-war] experimental novel as a wholly 'writerly' project when, so much for the erosion of authorial power and the attendant empowering of the reader, many of the most radical postwar experiments leave you little to do except marvel at the novelist's virtuoso achievement,' and cites the famous constraints of authors such as Georges Perec and Walter Abish, it is crucial to observe that Spark, Murdoch, Brophy, Selvon, and Lessing did not write the kinds of novels that Mackay describes. 'Novel and Anti-Novel', in *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 154, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511781544.

<center>**Obtrusive Intimacies:**</center>

<center>**Muriel Spark's Tyrannical Narration and the Strategic Opacity of Character**</center>

> So very much elsewhere in the establishment do the walls have ears that neither Mildred nor Walburga is now conscious of them as they were when the mechanisms were first installed. It is like being told, and all the time knowing, that the Eyes of God are upon us; it means everything and therefore nothing. The two nuns speak as freely as the Jesuits who suspect no eavesdropping device more innocuous than God to be making a chronicle of their present privacy.

<div align="right">Muriel Spark, The Abbess of Crewe[1]</div>

Dorrit Cohn argues in her seminal book on narrative poetics, *Transparent Minds* (1978), that the history of the novel has accustomed its readers to 'unreal transparencies.'[2] Realism, Cohn suggests, is never mimetic but consists of naturalising an otherwise never-experienced access to the 'transparent' subjectivity of other people's minds. As Andrew H. Miller puts it in *The Burdens of Perfection* (2011): 'why should the novel grant us as its most outrageous gift the illusion of unprecedented access to the consciousness of others, a gift nowhere more distinctively wrapped than when in free indirect discourse, if not in response to the sceptical anxiety that such access is, in our non-reading existence, nowhere available?'[3] Narrative modes associated with the development of the novel form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of which free indirect discourse is the quintessential example, permit access to the very private recesses that we might have thought to be the most sacrosanct and unassailable; the interiority of the mind. As Blakey Vermeule puts it: 'Writers use it to slice the heads off their characters.'[4]

This chapter reads the novels published by the Scottish novelist Muriel Spark between 1957 and 1970 as constituting an ongoing exploration of the problem of representing the privacy of the mind. These novels return continually to the aesthetic and ethical stakes of making minds legible via narrative techniques such as free indirect discourse, and to the problem of how such a technique, an 'illusion' of access to something 'nowhere available' outside the novel, might have

any claim to representing the real.[5] This is a vexed question in the study of literary ontology more widely; Catherine Gallagher has argued that characters are not 'preexisting creature[s] with multiple levels of existence, a surface and recesses, an exterior and an interior,' and readers' abilities to see inside these characters' minds is as a result the source of their affective appeal.[6] The resultant paradox is that 'the 'seemingly intimate revelations of the character's depths,' Gallagher writes, 'are also revelations of its textual nature.'[7] Timothy Bewes, further, suggests that it has become clear that the 'access the novel gives to an individual's dreams, self-communings, and movements is a sign of the form's limitations, not its "affordances"; for the novel's understanding extends only to that which meets the criterion of [what Jacques Rancière has called] "a specific mode of causality."'[8] Bewes cites E.M. Forster, who observed that while 'in daily life we never understand each other […] people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader. […] Their inner as well as their outer life can be exposed.'[9]

Spark's novels foreground the ways in which techniques associated with realist modes come to represent an invasion of privacy—and, indeed, become increasingly legible as what Bewes describes as signs of the 'limitations' of the novel form—in the post-war period, an era characterised by the rise of mass surveillance and the threat of tyranny on an atomic scale.[10] The overtly metaleptic elements of Spark's first novel, *The Comforters,* constitute an early exploration of the ethical ramifications of intrusive narrative strategies that violate the sanctity of characters' minds. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, published five years later, Spark continued to probe the ethical and ontological stakes of intrusion into minds with a literary strategy that I name 'tyrannical narration,' a mode in which the title character's politics and tone of voice come to dominate the novel's narration. Throughout the 1960s, Spark's commitment to the ethical and personal stakes of her adopted religion, Catholicism, prompted her repeated return, in her novels,

to the distinction between omniscience and omnipotence at the level of authorship, narration, and character. At the same time, she became increasingly preoccupied with the works of the French *nouveaux romanciers*, whose novels and theoretical texts were concerned with a similar set of problems regarding the limits of representation, the impossibility of objectivity, and the privacy of the mind.[11]

Throughout the period, Spark's growing interest in both Catholicism and the theories of the *nouveaux romanciers* impelled her development of narrative techniques commensurate to the experience of other minds, one ultimately characterised by not-knowing. My argument seeks to issue a corrective to the perception of Spark evinced by critics such as Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge, who have understood the combination of her apparent commitment to firm, God-given truth and her often arch, indifferent narrators to be evidence of her security—even, her dogmatism—as a Catholic writer. As well as tyrannical narration, I identify a second narrative strategy—one I term 'strategic opacity'—in which unobtrusive narration is a defining formal and theoretical feature of the novels in question. While the 'extraordinary capacity of the novel,' as James Wood has it, is that it 'can tell us what a character is thinking,' what proves to be even more extraordinary in Spark's work is the resistance to exercising that capacity.[12] Spark's uses of tyrannical narration and strategic opacity ultimately have ethical import, insofar as these twin strategies demonstrate, respectively, the violence of authoritarianism and an alternative means by which to treat other people.

Intrusion and metalepsis in *The Comforters*

From the ring of smugglers in *The Comforters* (1957) to the assumed identities and fraudulent practices in *Aiding and Abetting* (2000), the plots of the twenty-two novels Spark produced in

her lifetime are replete with spies, surveillance, and blackmail. Spark's satire of the Watergate scandal, *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974)*,* is overtly focused on the surveillance culture of its time; as Sheryl Stevenson writes, the book foregrounds historically specific discourses, and 'even individual words — "bungle," "bugged," "leaked"—are rank with Watergate associations.'[13]

In his influential 1988 study *The Novel and the Police,* D.A. Miller draws an analogy between Foucauldian surveillance and the novel form, positing that the omniscient narration of realist nineteenth-century authors such as Balzac 'assumes a fully panoptic view of the world it places under surveillance.'[14] Thus the panoptic, monologic narrative voice of traditional realist fiction as Miller identifies it is part of the novel's policing power. Writing in the *New York Review of Books* some twenty years earlier in 1968, Christopher Ricks insists upon a version of precisely these narrative strategies in Muriel Spark's novels, which he describes as 'extreme instances of novels in which the novelist is a private detective spying on his own characters.'[15] In this article Ricks argues that Spark's first novel, *The Comforters,* 'manifest[s] a genuine uneasiness about Mrs. Spark's own practice.'[16] 'She must be aware,' he writes, 'of how closely her artistic proceeding resembles the snooping, prying, spying, blackmailing, and informing which bubble throughout her plots.'[17] In distinction to Ricks, I identify the strategies in Spark's novels as a radical departure from those that Miller identifies in nineteenth-century realist fiction,[18] and insist rather on a fundamental distinction between what Ricks calls 'her artistic proceeding' and what happens 'throughout her plots.'

The knot in Ricks' reading is that his claim relies very much on examples from Spark's very first novel, *The Comforters,* while failing to take into account the significance of this novel's central narrative technique of radical metalepsis. Published in 1957, *The Comforters* ironises the intrusiveness of narratorial stance by exaggerating it; the novel's narrator is so

thoroughly intrusive that its presence in the form of a disembodied voice 'like one person speaking in several tones at once' becomes disturbingly conspicuous to its protagonist, the novelist Caroline Rose.[19] Metalepsis is a narrative technique concerned with the invasion of elements from one ontological level into another. In his *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method,* Gérard Genette defines metalepsis as 'any *intrusion* by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by the diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.) or the inverse.'[20] The radical metaleptic techniques *The Comforters* tests the very limits of the intrusive narrator and the apparently transparent legibility of characters' minds.[21] When Caroline, alone in her flat, hears the sounds of a typewriter and a voice, she agonises over whether the sounds are, in Genette's narratological terms, extradiegetic or intradiegetic; in other words, she wonders whether the voice originates from some supernatural order or author, or is a hallucination emanating from her own addled mind.[22]

Because Caroline hears the voice narrate her actions moments after she has performed them, Spark's reader encounters various passages in the novel twice; first as extradiegetic narration, and then, in italics, as the words Caroline hears. The voice, which Caroline becomes increasingly convinced is that of a 'writer on another plane of existence,' proves itself capable of 'remarking her own thoughts' as well as her actions.[23] Caroline searches the building to try to find the voice's provenance, but discovers nothing. At this moment, the narration shifts into free indirect discourse:

> A typewriter and a chorus of voices: What on earth are they up to at this time of night? Caroline wondered. But what worried her were the words they had used, coinciding so exactly with her own thoughts.
> Then it began again. Tap-tappity-tap; the typewriter. And again, the voices: Caroline ran out on to the landing, for it seemed quite certain the sound came from that direction. No one was there. The chanting reached her as she returned to her room, with these words exactly:
> *What on earth are they up to at this time of night? Caroline wondered. But what worried*

her were the words they had used, coinciding so exactly with her own thoughts.[24]

Before the voices appeared in the novel, the narrator often articulated Caroline's thoughts, whether in the form of direct thought quotation or free indirect discourse.[25] Patricia Waugh sees the 'peculiar oneness and plurality of the free indirect voice in fiction in its capacity to entangle narrators and characters normally positioned at different diegetic and therefore reality-effect levels' as being 'metafictionally flaunted to open up ontological possibility' in *The Comforters*.[26] Waugh's comments suggest that free indirect discourse is *always* metaleptic; that it intrinsically has us question the distinctness of so-called ontological or diegetic levels. D.A. Miller describes free indirect discourse as an 'epistemological advantage over character'; being a character in Austen's fiction, writes Miller, means 'to be slapped silly by a narration whose constant battering, however satisfying—or terrifying—to readers, its recipient is kept from ever noticing. After all, how would even the cleverest character divine that he or she is being narrated?'[27] In Spark, the ontological boundary is ruptured, and Caroline divines precisely that. Spark's metaleptic technique produces an intrusion into the character's mind distinct from all previous narratorial intrusions precisely because the character herself is vividly and miserably aware of it all, rather than oblivious.

Caroline has been read by a number of critics as *The Comforters*' Spark-surrogate; both are recent Catholic converts of Jewish heritage, and Spark, like Caroline, suffered from vivid hallucinations in the mid-1950s, shortly before *The Comforters* was published. David Lodge suggests that the 'objections to orthodox Christian belief and to authorial omniscience in fiction are […] essentially the same,' namely that both 'involve a denial of human autonomy, of human freedom.'[28] Spark's work, however, insists on a crucial distinction between the benevolent Christian God and the omniscient narrator, as well as the tyrannical author whose existence such

a narrator implies. In *The Comforters,* Caroline objects to mind-reading and mind-control precisely on the grounds of its distinction from the principles of her faith. She declares, 'I refuse to have my thoughts and actions controlled by some unknown, possibly sinister being. I intend to subject him to reason. I happen to be a Christian.'[29] What this utterance emphasises is the clear distinction, to Caroline's mind, between the 'unknown, possibly sinister being' and the Christian God, and this correlates with Spark's remarks on the subject throughout her life. 'Freedom,' Spark insisted at the Edinburgh book festival in 2004, 'is what I experience in the Catholic faith.'[30]

The narrative experiments legible in *The Comforters* explore the privacy of the mind as a prerequisite for any kind of selfhood. Another of the novel's characters, Georgina Hogg, is an eavesdropper and extortioner for whom intrusion into other people's private lives, it becomes apparent, serves as some kind of compensation for her own lack of personhood. Helena, tellingly, says of her: 'I am beginning to think that Georgina is not all there.'[31] Allan Hepburn underscores the similarity between Hogg and an omniscient narrator whereby both violate privacies in a relentlessly unidirectional way: 'Like Hogg, omniscient narrators intrude on characters without permitting intrusion in return.'[32] The crucial distinction between them, however, is that narrators can intrude into minds; spaces which Hogg, who is limited to reading people's private letters and eavesdropping on their conversations, cannot access, try as she might.

When not explicitly featuring in the plot, Hogg becomes not so much inscrutable as non-existent, and the distinction between the two turns out to be ontological.[33] Towards the end of the novel, the narrator states, for instance, that 'as soon as Mrs Hogg stepped into her room she

simply disappeared. She had no private life whatsoever.'[34] Several pages later, Caroline repeats precisely these words:

> "Maybe she has no private life whatsoever," Caroline said, and she giggled to take the grim edge off her words.
> "Oh, she has no private life, poor soul," Helena agreed, meaning the woman had no friends.[35]

This repetition here of 'no private life' bears an uncanny similarity to the passage I quoted earlier, in which extradiegetic narration reappeared in the novel as italicised intradiegetic sounds audible to Caroline. While *then,* Caroline was distressed to hear her life narrated, however, she seems entirely oblivious now to the fact that the phrase 'she has no private life whatsoever' is a quotation, a repetition of words that have appeared before. These words, moreover, intrude not just into her house, but into her *mind* by some unknown process: Hepburn describes her as 'picking up this sentence from the narrator as if by telepathy or by radio transmission.'[36] Spark's narrator provides the reason for Caroline's 'giggle,' and the 'meaning' of Helena's words, and there is a sharp irony to the discrepancy between the narrator's gloss—'meaning the woman had no friends,' which asserts that Helena's words are intended figuratively—and the character's actual utterance—'she has no private life, poor soul,' in which Helena seems to have hit the nail on the head quite by accident.

Spark's narrative strategy in *The Comforters* is innovative only because it defamiliarises otherwise naturalised narrative modes. The particular mode to which her attention returns most repeatedly in her exploration of the ethics of representing minds is free indirect discourse, in which, Gérard Genette has written famously, the 'two voices' of narrator and character 'can blend and merge.'[37] Anne-Lise François describes free indirect discourse as an 'unobtrusively intimate narrative mode' which, she says, 'holds a key to what "we moderns" might consider the Holy Word's secular equivalent—the inner lives of "other people."'[38] What Spark's early novels

demonstrate, however, is how in fact obtrusively intimate such a mode is, the ways in which it constitutes an invasion of privacy. The 'freedom' Spark insists she finds in the Catholic faith is nowhere to be found in a mode that exposes 'the inner lives of "other people."'

Spark continued to interrogate the ethics of rendering characters' minds as pure text, dispensing with the overt metalepsis that characterised *The Comforters* in favour of a kind of narratorial disengagement, the establishment of ironic distance between narrator and character, in order to emphasise the ontological and epistemological distance between a narrator's conceptions of characters' minds and characters' conceptions of each other's. 'After initially descending into the murky world of private emotions and unconverted history in her first two novels,' Bryan Cheyette argues, Spark 'eventually found refuge behind an impersonal and godlike narrator in her neoclassical third novel, *Memento Mori*.'[39] Cheyette's description of the narrator of 1959's *Memento Mori* as 'godlike' is germane to my interest in the ontological distinction between narrators and characters in Spark's fiction, though I would suggest that this narrator is not so much characterised by 'impersonal[ity]' as by an excess of personality.

In *Memento Mori,* Spark is interested in the kind of cruelty such a free indirect mode might permit, the tyrannical control it allows narrators to exert over characters. *Memento Mori* focuses on a group of elderly characters who receive threatening anonymous phone calls, among whom are Godfrey and Charmian Colston, for whom Mabel Pettigrew and Mrs Anthony work as domestic staff. Several passages in *Memento Mori* underscore that radical difference between the powers of perception of the novel's characters and its narrator; we learn, for instance, that 'Mrs Anthony knew instinctively that Mrs Pettigrew was a kindly woman. Her instinct was wrong.'[40] Spark's narration emphasises the disparity between the different degrees of knowledge at different diegetic levels, flaunting instances of bad mind-reading in order to emphasise the

superiority of that narrator's own mind-reading capabilities. The narrator, unlike Mrs Anthony, need not rely on fallible 'instinct,' and thus neither need the reader. The implication is that one either is a 'kindly woman' or one isn't; the question is not so much a matter of opinion as objective fact, assuming that such a thing might be measured or quantified. What is privileged here, to the exclusion of all else, is the primacy of the narrator's judgement, and its accuracy in judging characters' judgements, so as to create the impression that it is not a judgement at all, but rather an objective fact. Sentences like this one betray a kind of interpretive authoritarianism: a narrative mode that contains and controls its readers' understandings of the character of its characters is what kills character, severing their link to the real. A mind that is entirely legible, and that has no privacy, autonomy, or interiority, is not a mind at all.

Tyrannical narration in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Spark's narrative experiments of the late 1950s led her to the recognition that representative modes which surveil characters, control them, know them, and insist on the transparent legibility of their minds cannot belong to any ethically responsible representative practice. At the beginning of the 1960s, Spark's work began to dwell yet more explicitly on the problem of tyranny, of the exertion of cruel, illegitimate, or absolutist control over others, and to gesture to the need for alternatives to literary techniques of invasion and domination in an era of burgeoning mass surveillance schemes and Cold War tensions.[41]

Spark's most famous novel foregrounds the destructive sorts of tyranny that might be propagated by particular narrative modalities inherited from realism. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* was first published in a single edition of the *New Yorker* in 1961 and issued as a novel by

Macmillan in the UK the same year. The novel is set mostly in 1930s Edinburgh, where a group of schoolgirls are identified by their teacher, Miss Brodie, as her 'set.'[42] The girls' education is shaped according to Brodie's unorthodox teaching methods involving stories of her own romantic life in place of history classes as well as lessons on the *fascisti* of her hero, Benito Mussolini. Brodie's famous 'prime' begins in 1930 and closes in 1939, running parallel to the rise of fascisms in Europe.

The novel's plot sees Brodie cement her own ideology through indoctrination in the guise of education. When, for instance, she asks her pupils for the name of 'the greatest Italian painter' and one responds 'Leonardo Da Vinci, Miss Brodie,' she insists that 'That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite.'[43] While the novel is narrated in the third person, Brodie's perspective soon comes to eclipse all others. In the pictures she brings back from a trip to Italy to show her pupils, Mussolini 'stood on a platform like a gym teacher or a Guides mistress and watched them.'[44] Mussolini, then, resembles children's female figures of authority, while their foremost female figure of authority, Miss Brodie, resembles Mussolini. The girls themselves identify with Mussolini's *fascisti,* 'marching along, all knit together for her need.'[45] Spark's similes produce a dizzying kind of narrative *mise en abyme* wherein every perspective in the text ultimately returns to Brodie, the novel's central entity and the girls' ultimate point of reference that comes to eclipse all else. Even every portrait that the school's art master paints of each of the girls ends up being a version of Brodie herself. No matter his subject nor how he rearranges his paintings such that they 'stood in a different light,' they nevertheless 'still looked like Miss Brodie.'[46]

In her 2011 book *Women Modernists and Fascism,* Annalisa Zox-Weaver identifies a 'modernist fascination with the dictator,' and argues that 'the shadow of the dictator looms large

over modernism.'[47] In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,* two narratological issues are crucially linked to the novel's thematic considerations of fascism: the violability of the psychological interiorities of her characters, and the question of whether the novel can be said to have a singular 'voice.' Spark foregrounds the connection between the tools of fascism—of which the intolerance of singularity and interiority had proved, during the war, to be a fundamental symptom—and the narratological concept that Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* names 'monologism.'[48] Monologue, Bakhtin writes, 'denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights […] *another person* remains wholly and merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness.'[49] As D.A. Miller has it,

> the master-voice of monologism never simply soliloquises. It continually needs to confirm its authority by qualifying, cancelling, endorsing, subsuming all the other voices it lets speak. No doubt the need stands behind the great prominence the nineteenth-century novel gives to *style indirect libre*, in which, respeaking a character's thoughts or speeches, the narration simultaneously subverts their authority and secures its own.[50]

The solipsistic and objectifying character of Bakhtinian monologue sounds rather like Miss Brodie's pedagogy. What is remarkable in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is how Spark effects a kind of inversion of the principle Miller describes in the nineteenth-century novel, in which 'narration' subverts the authority of 'character' to secure its own. 'Omniscient narrations,' writes George Levine in *Realism, Ethics and Secularism* (2008), 'can be described as monologic as opposed to dialogic, constrained by a single consciousness rather than revelatory of the free play of alternative voices.'[51] Free indirect discourse, Levine argues, is a dialogic narrative mode.[52] Spark's narrative mode *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* involves a striking departure from this usual model. In this novel, it is free indirect discourse that comes to be associated with the singularity and rigidity—the authoritarianism, even—of monologism. Marked by a shift into

tyrannical narration, in this novel it is a dominant *character* who subverts the authority of the narrator, securing her own, such that Brodie's master-voice comes to eclipse everything else in the novel, including the voice of the novel itself.[53] This reversal constitutes an effort on Spark's part to take seriously the problem of narratorial epistemic and diegetic superiority by having a character, ostensibly positioned on an 'inferior' diegetic level, subsume the voice of the narrator. From this tyrannical position as both character and assumed narrator of the text, other characters' minds become, to Brodie, both legible and inscribable.

Brodie shores up her girls' inescapable identification as her 'set' by maligning alternative forms of community. Brodie never tires of drumming her message into her girls:

> Phrases like "team spirit" are always employed to cut across individualism, love and personal loyalties. Ideas like "team spirit" ought not to be enjoined on the female sex, especially if they are of that dedicated nature whose virtues from time immemorial have been utterly opposed to the concept.[54]

The phrase 'team spirit' belongs to the pedagogical institution embodied by the school's headteacher, Miss Mackay, who strongly disapproves of Brodie's teaching methods and spends much of the novel seeking evidence to justify her dismissal. 'Team spirit' is the name for an ideology that becomes, in Brodie's mouth, a slur, maligned as antithetical to her own ideological investments, which she glosses as 'individualism, love, and personal loyalties,' though this seems to pertain specifically and exclusively to *her* as an individual: we learn that by 'the age of twelve,' the Brodie set were 'immediately recognisable as Miss Brodie's pupils,' and 'by the time they were sixteen […] they remained unmistakably Brodie.'[55] While Brodie is a Junior school teacher, many of the novel's events occur while the girls are members of the Senior school. Despite her separation from her students, Brodie is able to assert a remote influence upon them perhaps all the stronger for its remoteness. By the time the girls are members of the Senior School, her presence and policing power is felt viscerally despite her corporeal absence:

Miss Brodie as the leader of the set, Miss Brodie as a Roman matron, Miss Brodie as an educational reformer were still prominent. It was not always comfortable, from the school's point of view, to be associated with her […] It was impossible for them to escape from the Brodie set because they were the Brodie set in the eyes of the school. Nominally, they were members of Holyrood, Melrose, Argyll and Biggar, but it had been well known that the Brodie set had no team spirit and did not care which house won the shield. They were not allowed to care. Their disregard had now become an institution, to be respected like the house system itself.[56]

The phrase 'team spirit' in the passage above might be understood as an ambiguous moment of free indirect discourse. First seen in Miss Brodie's direct speech, here the expression becomes part of the narrator's vocabulary, inflected by both Miss Brodie's and Miss Mackay's usages and, moreover, by the usage of the school's pupils, both in and outside the Brodie set, who are aware of the tendentiousness of the term while its exact designation remains, to them, uncertain. The ambiguity of the provenance of the statement that 'it had been well known that the Brodie set had no team spirit' is precisely the source of its power.[57] As Anne-Lise François has it, free indirect discourse, is a 'strangely agentless mode of report' that consists of a grammatical indeterminacy of assignable 'voice' and creates 'the impression of a floating, groundless, unaccountable presence.'[58] Dorrit Cohn, similarly, suggests in *Transparent Minds* that the effect of the synthesis of mimesis and diegesis found in narrated monologue is an increasing awareness of ambiguity for the reader.[59] The obscurity that results from the mode's disorienting effects instils it with a kind of power; what appears to be perspectival diversity is monologism, the implied univocal position associated with authorial control. '[T]eam spirit' becomes not the opposite of Brodie's 'individualism, love, and personal loyalties,' but another name for it. All competing ideologies—the school's 'team spirit,' the Brownies and the Girl Guides, all of which Brodie derides, Brodie's own ideology and Mussolini's *fascisti,* whom she adores—all converge to amount to the same thing. The seeming plurality of voices that free indirect discourse produces ultimately confirms Brodie's singular, monological authority.[60]

Following Genette, James Wood articulates free indirect discourse as a kind of merging of narrator and character. 'As soon as someone tells a story about a character,' Wood writes, 'narrative seems to want to bend itself around that character, wants to merge with that character, to take on his or her way of thinking and speaking. A novelist's omniscience soon enough becomes a kind of secret sharing; this is called "free indirect style."'[61] In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, on the other hand, free indirect discourse performs a very different function. What the narrative 'wants' in this text is irrelevant; it is a result of Brodie's agency that the narrative takes on 'her way of thinking and speaking.' As Spark herself said in an interview with Robert Hosmer: 'the thing about Miss Brodie is that she has no restraining influence whatsoever.'[62] Brodie's famous maxim— 'give me a girl at an impressionable age and she is mine for life'— intimates just the beginnings of her influence.[63]

On 'one of the last autumn days when the leaves were falling in little gusts,' Miss Brodie leads her class outside for a lesson underneath the elm tree.[64] The subject of the lesson in Brodie's own 'felled fiancé,' Hugh Carruthers, who died 'the week before the Armistice.'[65] In Brodie's sentimental account, Carruthers 'fell like an autumn leaf, although he was only twenty-two years of age,'[66] and her story is well on its way when the headmistress, Miss Mackay, 'was seen to approach across the lawn.'[67] When Miss Mackay arrives and enquires why the girls are crying, Brodie's response is immediate: '"They are moved by a story I have been telling them. We are having a history lesson," said Miss Brodie, catching a falling leaf neatly in her hand as she spoke.'[68] Given the description of Carruthers dying 'like an autumn leaf,' Brodie's deft catch here as she successfully fools Miss Mackay seems rather too perfect. Miss Brodie's idiom is legible in passages that are ostensibly purely descriptive of events within the diegesis so as to produce the uncanny impression that Miss Brodie's eccentric romanticism might actually shape

the course of events; the motif of leaves seems to suggest that Brodie's idiom carries

metaleptically into not just the description of plot but the constitution of it.

While the neat catch of the leaf, however, might suggest here Brodie's effortless control

over the situation, it appears again before the episode is over. 'Speech is silver but silence is

golden,' Miss Brodie declares, and then turns on Mary McGregor:

> "Mary, are you listening? What was I saying?"
> Mary McGregor, lumpy, with merely two eyes, a nose and a mouth like a snowman, who
> was later famous for being stupid and always to blame and who, at the age of twenty-
> three, lost her life in a hotel fire, ventured, "Golden."
> "What did I say was golden?"
> Mary cast her eyes around her and up above. Sandy whispered, "The falling leaves."
> "The falling leaves," said Mary.
> "Plainly," said Miss Brodie, "you were not listening to me. If only you small girls would
> listen to me I would make of you the crème de la crème."[69]

At the moment Brodie had seemed to be most in control—she captivates her audience, deceives

Miss Mackay, and captures the leaf—Spark's narration seems to swoop in and assert its own

authority in a striking moment of prolepsis. Control of the motif of leaves slips from Brodie's

grasp as Sandy, with deliberate malice, supplies the wrong answer to Mary. The moment serves

to illustrate that Brodie's control over the narrative and the narration is always precarious. It is

ultimately Sandy who ends the episode having achieved what she wanted, and Spark's narration

that demonstrates ultimate control over the events of the future; Brodie's hypothetical 'I *would*

make of you the crème de la crème' is no match for the grammar of the narration, from whose

godlike perspective Mary's life is already 'lost.'

The only problems: Omniscience and omnipotence in *Not to Disturb*

In an essay on 'surveillance, omniscience, and narrative power' in Spark's work, Lewis

MacLeod divides her novels' 'efforts at omniscient understanding' into two starkly opposed

groups: while 'some efforts at omniscient understanding are "at God's side,"' he writes, 'others

do the work of evil.'[70] MacLeod thus distinguishes divine omniscience from the unethical,

earthly imitation of it by those characters who pry, overreach, and violate each other's privacy.

Missing from MacLeod's taxonomy of godly omniscience and earthly spying is the question of

narration; his argument is limited to characters who aspire to omniscience, and he does not

devote attention to Spark's narrators. While a few of Spark's novels offer a fairly straightforward

condemnation of the blackmailers and spies represented within them as characters,[71] the

authorial stance on the ethical problem of intrusive narration is rather more complicated;

extradiegetic third-person narrators in general cannot easily be characterised as divine or earthy.

They might, insofar as they are distinct from the represented world, positioned on some other

plane, and involved in the shaping of the narrative, be understood as godlike. On the other hand,

they might resemble more closely those early imitations who 'do the work of evil'; it is not

always apparent whether narrators are to be understood as creators of narratives or simply tellers

of them.

In *Not to Disturb* (1970)*,* the domestic staff at a stately residence in Geneva are able to

predict and exploit for financial gain the demise of their employers as a direct result of their

years of meticulous surveillance. Such scrupulous attentiveness to their employers' affairs has,

by some critics, been wrongly identified as murder;[72] rather, as James Bailey suggests, it is the

head butler's 'intimate knowledge of the private lives of his masters [that] leads him to predict

correctly that none of the trio will remain alive by dawn,' and his project is thus to 'devise ways

of capitalizing upon the aftermath of the night's events.'[73] Indeed, as Willy Maley comments, the

servants are 'non-participant observers' who 'only stand and wait: having worked out the ending before the event, these avant-garde servants have a fiction to preserve.'[74] When the police finally appear at the novel's end, Spark explicitly foregrounds the discrepancy between their unconscious obliviousness and the sustained discipline and surveillance of the servants: 'The plain-clothes man in the hall is dozing on a chair, waiting for the relief man to come, as is also the plain-clothes man on the upstairs landing,' while the domestic staff have 'kept faithful vigil all night.'[75]

In this novel, the domestic staff employed by the Baron and Baroness Klopstock, led by the head butler, Lister, see the future as written and unalterable. Lister controls the narration of night's events, and his speaking about the house as a crime scene constitutes it as a crime scene before any crimes are committed. Lister urges his colleagues to neither 'strain […] after vulgar chronology' nor 'split hairs […] between the past, present and future tenses,' because, modelling himself as an omniscience narrator, sequential time ceases to pertain.[76] As Bryan Cheyette has written, an aspect of Miss Brodie culminates in Spark's later 'false novelist[s],' and 'dangerously attractive mythomaniacs' such as Lister, who 'mistakenly think that their myth-fictions can determine reality.'[77]

While Cheyette usefully describes such characters 'inhuman writers manqués,' I would alter his formulation in order to focus instead on Lister as a *narrator* manqué in *Not to Disturb*.[78] Lister resembles the realist narrators of George Eliot's novels, who report, as D.A. Miller identifies, the facts of the characters' lives while expressing impotence when it comes to intervening and helping them when in trouble. 'Omniscient narration may typically know all,' Miller writes, 'but it can hardly *do* all,' and thus Eliot's narrative mode insists on the absolute separation of 'the function of narration' and 'the causalities operating in the narrative.'[79] While

Lister is markedly less empathetic than the narrator of *Middlemarch*, who exclaims 'poor Dorothea,' 'poor Lydgate,' 'poor Rosamond,' he too disowns power at the same time that he shores it up: as Miller has it, '[i]mpotent to intervene in the 'facts,' the narration nevertheless controls the discursive framework in which they are perceived as such.'[80] In *Not to Disturb,* the discursive framework is under Lister's control.

While in *The Comforters* Spark parodied the realist narrator by literalising the 'intrusive' behaviour of such narration by having it traverse ontological boundaries and appear as audible sounds within the story-world, in *Not To Disturb*, Spark has a character assume the role of the realist narrator in order to defamiliarise the convention whereby such narrators are understood to be omniscient but not omnipotent. Lister demonstrates his control of the novel's events and his knowledge of the future at the same time that he insists that he is powerless to unwrite it, while the distance he attempts to establish between himself and the unfolding events is repeatedly and ironically undercut by reminders from other characters that they exist on the same ontological level; when Lister states that 'the Baron is no more,' for instance, the Reverend is confused, insisting, 'I can hear his voice. What d'you mean?'[81] Lister speaks in declaratives in the simple future tense— 'The whole of Geneva will get a great surprise'—but also professes to be unable to prevent the deaths of the Klopstocks because their deaths have already been described and documented: 'My memoirs up to the funeral are as a matter of fact more or less complete. At all events, it's out of our hands.'[82] His scrupulous accumulation of written, visual and sonic documentation of what has yet to come reverses the retroactivity of memoir, insofar as he cements, in a professedly inviolable narrative form, not memory but anticipation.

Ultimately, Lister's insistence that 'To all intents and purposes, they're already dead, although as a matter of banal fact, the night's business has still to accomplish itself' might as

well be an ironic commentary on how narrative works; it is already written, and now it just has to be read.[83] As Mark Currie puts it in *About Time* (2006), whereas 'the existence of the future is controversial in extra-fictional human time, it is much less controversial to claim that the fictional future already exists. […] The privilege of the present is undermined by writing, and so too is the asymmetry between the past and future, since the future is no more open, no more affected by decision and choice than is the past.'[84] In Lister's flattened chronology, the Klopstocks are always already dead, because they're dead by the end of the book: 'They haunt the house,' says Lister, 'like insubstantial bodies, while still alive. I think we have a long wait in front of us.'[85] Gabriel Josipovici writes that Spark's use of prolepsis in *Not to Disturb* 'is the sign of a vision which extends beyond the perspective of individual, mortal men, which has tended to be the vision of the novel.'[86] If Josipovici means, by 'the novel,' the novel *in general,* the stakes of Spark's ironic use of prolepsis in this novel are ontological; Lister is less 'mortal m[a]n' than the embodiment of 'the vision of the novel.'

Spark's 'strategic opacity': The 1960s and the *nouveau roman*

A number of novels written by Spark in the first fifteen years of her career, then—*The Comforters, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,* and *Not to Disturb*, amongst others—demonstrate the destructive potential of both tyrannical narration by enacting or representing it. Another group of Spark's novels, however, explore the same questions via a very different narrative method. In an interview with Martin McQuillan, Spark described the experiences that particularly motivated her to explore this alternative narrative route. For Spark, the event that vividly brought together the moral horrors of the war and the ways in which language might be

manipulated for good or evil purposes was the experience of being a journalist at the trial in

Jerusalem of the Nazi Adolf Eichmann in 1961. 'I went to the Eichmann trial for the *Observer*,'

Spark told McQuillan; 'I objectified everything much more after that. I didn't write "the English

novel" so much […] [I] was very much more influenced by the French writers of the *nouveau*

roman.'[87] As this comment suggests, while techniques inherited from authors in the realist

tradition seemed increasingly distant from the reality of the unprecedented challenges of her

particular historical moment, reading 'the French writers of the *nouveau roman*,' and in

particular, the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet, one of the foremost figures of the movement,

provided her with a set of formal and methodological tools that influenced her narrative

innovations profoundly.

In his essay 'A Future for the Novel' (1956) Robbe-Grillet describes the mid-twentieth

century as an era that saw what he called 'the destitution of the old myths of "depth."'[88] He

argued that given the inscrutability of both the world and the human mind, no novelist could

presume to understand the psychology of characters, and the pure externality with which one is

left ought to be what the novel seeks to represent. '[T]he visual or descriptive adjective,' he

writes, 'the word that contents itself with measuring, locating, limiting, defining, indicates a

difficult but most likely direction for a new art of the novel.'[89] In an interview for the *Paris*

Review in 1986, Robbe-Grillet described the true goal of fiction as 'not a question of evoking but

of piercing the world.'[90] The world ought to be understood not, he said, as 'a sensible continuity

that can be comprehensively explained but a perpetual aspiration to sense, perpetually

disappointed.'[91] What Robbe-Grillet's writings suggest is that given the unknowable and

unexplainable nature of minds, fidelity in representation is derived from resistance to the

explanatory impulse, and that any representation that knows itself as destined for failure might be a truer representation for it.

Spark herself described Robbe-Grillet as having 'got away from the novel of descriptions of people's feelings. Spark said that while '"He said" is a fact, actually an outward fact […] "he felt" and "he thought" are interpolations by the author.'[92] As early as 1960, she described her own technique as being inspired by the *nouveaux romanciers*, stating:

> you leave out "he felt" […] —no thoughts or feelings. You're just observing, that's all. A sighter. You're only seeing what people do. You read between the lines what they think […] We've got no right whatsoever to say […] what they're thinking, feeling, because you don't know. […] It really gives you another dimension, because people fill it in.[93]

The agency Spark attributes to her characters in these comments, as well as the relative modesty of her characterisation of the authorial position, is striking. Spark raises the issue of *rights*, and imagines her characters as 'thinking' and 'feeling,' or being in possession of something their author might not 'know,' distinct from 'outward fact.'[94] As Adam Guy writes, Spark's engagement with the *nouveau roman* in the 1960s involved 'portraying it as offering a uniquely contemporary form of realism.'[95] For Spark, ultimately, the *nouveau roman* 'embodies a realism with a particular kind of moral force.'[96]

Early in *The Public Image* (1968), the narrator describes Annabel, a film actress living in Italy, as being 'as unaware of her husband's secret life as she was of her own, for hers was not articulate. She probably never formed a sentence in her mind that she would hesitate to reveal in the open air.'[97] The consciousness of a character with no interiority to be accessed— one for whom there is no such thing as an unexpressed or inexpressible thought—could never be articulated in what the linguist Ann Banfield has famously called the 'unspeakable sentences' of free indirect discourse.[98] And yet in *The Public Image,* the narrator's equivocation—signalled by the word 'probably'—is an ironic suggestion of the limits of that narrator's knowledge even in

its very claim that there's nothing else to know. It constitutes an admission that there might be things in her mind that stay there, and are never spoken or even speakable. Annabel's 'secret life,' after all, is not non-existent, but rather 'not articulate'—it has the inchoate quality of thought rather than the concrete verbalisation of speech. As its title intimates, *The Public Image* is a novel preoccupied with scandal and the exposure of private and personal details in a public arena. And yet the novel's narration resists the lure to subject to scrutiny and to public consumption those thoughts and feelings that might never be articulated or articulatable in speech, or even consciously articulated to oneself even in the ostensible privacy of one's own mind. These are the sorts of experiences that Anne-Lise François felicitously calls 'uncounted,' a word that, in her words, 'refers less to an absence of narration or failure to acknowledge than to an action of "uncounting" (even "dis-counting"—making light of, depositing to leave unclaimed—if this could be taken non-pejoratively).'[99]

In an analysis of Hamlet's madness in his book *Will in the World* (2016)*,* Stephen Greenblatt argues that the 'crucial breakthrough' in Shakespeare's play involved 'an intense representation of inwardness called forth by a new technique of radical excision.'[100] Shakespeare's strategy involves the excision of a 'key explanatory element' in order to 'occlud[e] the rationale, motivation, or ethical principle that accounted for the action that was to unfold' that Greenblatt calls 'strategic opacity.'[101] As in Shakespeare's plays, in Spark's novels, it is precisely the strategy of 'opacity' that brings about an 'an intense representation of inwardness.' The character comes alive in the explanatory gap. Unlike Shakespeare, what Spark found it necessary to 'occlud[e]' was the obtrusion of her narration into the intimate, private space Greenblatt calls 'inwardness.' Borrowing from Greenblatt, I suggest that Spark's alternative approach to narration might be named 'strategic opacity,' since there can be no

definitive political name to serve as a counterpoint to 'tyrannical narration' given that the politics of that form are, by definition, contradictory, inconsistent, and paradoxical. While tyranny is monolithic and connected to a coherent politics, opacity is a multifaceted strategy. In Spark's work, the two narrative approaches inform each other; that is, passages of tyrannical narration demonstrate its cruelties and the need for an alternative approach, whereas passages of strategic opacity illustrate this alternative and eschew tyrannical narration in favour of a *nouveau romanesque* characterological imperviousness.

Sometimes these two very different narrative methods are present within a single novel. While in *Memento Mori,* as we have seen, Spark's narrator is capable of the brutal transcription of a character's thoughts, elsewhere the author's narratological approach is very different. A conversation, for example, takes place between two elderly characters; Charmian, a successful novelist, and her former lover, the arthritic poet Guy Leet:

> "And yet," said Charmian, smiling up at the sky through the window, "when I was halfway through writing a novel I always got into a muddle and didn't know where it was leading me." Guy thought: She is going to say—dear Charmian—she is going to say, "The characters seemed to take on a life of their own."
> "The characters," said Charmian, "seemed to take control of my pen after a while. But at first I always got into a tangle. I used to say to myself:
>> Oh what a tangled web we weave,
>> When first we practice to deceive!
> "Because," she said, "the art of fiction is very like the practise of deception."
> "And in life," he said, "is the practise of deception in life an art too?"
> "In life," she said, "everything is different. Everything is in the Providence of God. When I think of my own life…Godfrey…"
> Guy wished he had not introduced the question of life, but had continued discussing her novels.[102]

This passage from one of Spark's earliest novels anticipates many of her subsequent preoccupations with the question of narration and the representation of minds. While Guy might appear to have the powers of telepathy—he can predict what Charmian 'is going to say'—his apparent mind-reading powers are eclipsed by those of the narrator who, it appears, can reach

into *his* mind and report, verbatim, what he is thinking.[103] The reader is only able to know that Guy can predict with reasonable accuracy which hackneyed expression Charmian will come up with because her narrator can relate, very precisely, what 'Guy thought' and 'Guy wished.' Spark's narrator foregrounds the inferiority of the telepathic abilities of Guy, a character, relative to the narrator's own. Guy's abilities are limited to those with which we are familiar 'in life'; one might be able to guess, from context, what somebody else is thinking, but a mind is never legible as pure text in the way it is when a narrator—effortlessly, it seems—relates to us a character's thoughts. Charmian makes a claim for the stark ontological distinctness of 'life' and 'fiction'— whereas the former involves 'Providence,' the latter is like 'deception'—but her slippage between the 'Providence of God' and 'Godfrey,' the name of her condescending husband, signifies, ironically, the ambiguity of the relationship between the two. The passage aligns the novel's reader with Guy—both are interpreters working with incomplete information—in order to emphasise both the unique powers and the significant limitations of the narrator. Because the narrator relates Guy's thoughts and feelings but not Charmian's, her interiority remains as inviolable to the reader as it is to Guy. Spark's use of ellipses within Charmian's direct speech— 'When I think of my own life…Godfrey…'—gestures to something ineffable that cannot be contained in language. The significance of that pause, rendered as an ellipsis, is inaccessible to a narrator or to anyone in or outside of the diegesis. It is precisely this kind of aporia that becomes central to Spark's novels, which constantly return to the problem of representing details that cannot be disclosed or known to anybody because they are unknowable. This passage from *Memento Mori* intimates that literary characters 'take on a life of their own' precisely when they are inscrutable to their narrators, when their minds and motives are opaque. Such 'lives' are ontologically different from the lives that characters lead as individuals in novels' plots; I do not

use the term to refer to characters' social lives, or material opportunities, or even their vital status. Indeed, a character's 'life' in the sense I use the term is not necessarily inhibited by the fact of a character's death. Instead, the condition under which characters have 'a life of their own' in the sense that I use it (as does Charmian herself); that they are drawn as capable of possessing private and inscrutable minds that are opaque to surveillance.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,* even—by some accounts Spark's most tyrannical novel—while free indirect discourse is at times a strategy for invasion and dominance, at others it might also render visible, in the right textual situation, forms of resistance. While Brodie's idiom comes to dominate the whole novel, she is never focalised in the sentences of free indirect discourse. As James Wood writes: 'In the course of the novel we never leave the school to go home with Miss Brodie. We never see her in private, off-stage. Always, she is the performing teacher, keeping a public face. We surmise that there is something unfulfilled and even desperate about her, but the novelist refuses us access to her interior.'[104] The resolute opacity of Brodie's interiority that Wood points to is perhaps the origin of her power, and, moreover, the *product* of the comparative scrutability of her students' minds. The narrator observes, for instance, that 'there was nothing outwardly odd about Miss Brodie. Inwardly was a different matter, and it remained to be seen, towards what extremities her nature worked her.'[105] Such observations obscure Miss Brodie's interiority in precisely the move that reveals that of her student, Sandy. As Genette has it, 'focalization is 'essentially […] a *restriction*,' and indeed in making Sandy more scrutable—insofar as we learn that Brodie is obscure *according to Sandy's assessment*— Brodie becomes opaque.[106] What Spark makes plain again is that there is real power to be had from having an inviolable psychological interiority; that is, of having the kind of privacy that cannot be invaded.

At certain moments in this novel, one can glimpse Spark replicating an intrusive technique not in order to expose that which is private, but to reveal the non-exposure of these experiences to everyone in the diegesis, including Brodie herself. It is in these moments that Spark insists on the total ontological separation of the world of the text and the world of the reader; the reader becomes not a spy but a witness to precisely that which can't be witnessed, the non-expression and non-revelation of personal experience. In her classroom, Brodie tells her students:

> "I have no doubt Miss Mackay wishes to question my methods of instruction. […] To me education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil's soul. To Miss Mackay it is a putting in of something that is not there, and that is not what I call education, I call it intrusion. Now, Miss Mackay has accused me of putting ideas into my girls' heads, but in fact that is her practice and mine is quite the opposite. Never let it be said that I put ideas into your heads. What is the meaning of education, Sandy?"
> "To lead out," said Sandy, who was composing a formal invitation to Alan Breck, a year and a day after their breath-taking flight through the heather.[107]

Brodie's diatribe against Miss Mackay's methods here of course reveals their similarity to her own; 'intrusion' is precisely the name for Brodie's authoritarian pedagogy. Despite this, Sandy is able to resist Brodie's influence because of the narratives that transpire within her own mind. Spark's narration shifts deftly from the reality of the classroom – '"To lead out," said Sandy'—to the interiority of Sandy's fantasy starring Alan Breck, a character from Robert Louis Stephenson's 1886 adventure novel *Kidnapped,* into which Miss Brodie is incapable of intruding. Sandy is able to pay half-attention and exist simultaneously in her fantasy world, and free indirect discourse turns out to be the very narrative mode with which Spark shows the privacy of the mind to be representable in the novel form.

'Drastic reductions': *The Driver's Seat* and the privacy of the mind

Certain elements of the plot of Spark's tenth novel, *The Driver's Seat* (1970)*,* are reasonably clear: Lise, the protagonist, embarks on a journey from a northern city to a southern one with a firm purpose which appears initially to be the pursuit of a romantic or sexual experience. At the beginning of the third chapter, the reader learns that Lise 'will be found tomorrow morning dead from multiple stab wounds.'[108] It becomes apparent that this murder, which is ultimately realised in the novel's final pages, is what she was seeking. As Patricia Waugh usefully suggests, this is a novel whose 'deep poetic structure' is made up of 'a rhythm of *containment* – plots, interiors, bodies, clothing and uniforms, veils' and '*expulsion* – shouts, tears […] screams, riots, stampedes, orgasms, violence, murder.'[109] The novel begins with Lise's rejection, in a shop, of a dress on the grounds that it is impenetrable, that 'the material doesn't stain,' and ends with her being raped and then murdered with a knife— 'he plunges into her, with the knife held high,' and then 'stabs wherever he likes.'[110] The plot's disturbing instances of intrusion, penetration and resistance return the reader to Spark's central narratological preoccupation: the violability or sanctity of the mind. At the novel's beginning, identical dresses 'hang in the back storeroom awaiting the drastic reductions of next week's sale.'[111] As the plot unfolds, this sentence comes to describe the structure and tone of the novel. Spark's proleptic technique renders the dresses, like Lise, uncannily 'awaiting' what will befall them, and in this novel, Spark's rendering of character is characterised by 'drastic reductions'; her literary technique, like that of *nouveaux romanciers* by whom she was strongly influenced*,* foregrounds visible and tangible externalities, and resists intruding upon the privacy of the mind.

In an early review of the novel in *The New Republic* in October of 1970*,* Peter Wolfe described Spark as a 'surface novelist,' complaining that she never takes the reader into Lise's mind.[112] While the description resonates as a pejorative label, the polysemy of the word 'surface'

means that it signifies ambiguously; it might imply that Spark is superficial, or that her books are, or that her characters have no discernible interiorities. Wolfe's comment is indicative of a frustration with the text's surfaces evinced by many of its subsequent critics, of its many descriptions of objects, clothing and faces combined with its resilient refusal to dwell on anything 'beneath' these surfaces in the realm of psychological 'depth,' motivation, or thought. The human surface in *The Driver's Seat,* Lise's body, is frustrating because it cannot be breached by free indirect discourse, and denies its reader access to interiority.[113] Martin Stannard's reading of the novel evinces a frustration that its narration knows but declines to tell what Lise is thinking or feeling, as if it denies us something which it is capable of disclosing; as he puts it, '[e]verything happens before our eyes as it does to Lise, and the narrator *refuses* to interpret.'[114]

The narrator of *The Driver's Seat* emphasises a lack of insight into Lise's mind with several rhetorical questions. Lise is described as 'lifting the corners of her carefully packed things, if in absent-minded accompaniment to some thought, who knows what?'[115] A page later, the narrator remarks, yet more explicitly, 'Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell?'[116] Stannard would no doubt see such questions as both goading and ironic, as teasing the reader with the suggestion that of course *Spark* knows, and can tell. Such a reading, however, would necessarily require the conflation of the author and the narrator, while Spark insists on their separation. These deceptively straightforward questions are productively ambiguous; the pronoun 'who' suggests that the knowledge of authors *or* narrators might face certain limits; the verb 'can' might signal either capability or a more ethical question about *rights*; and 'tell' might mean either 'identify' or 'narrate.'

Jonathan Kemp, while recognising that the narrator is not positioned omnisciently on the

diegetic level of a god or an author, makes a different error in assuming that the narrator ought,

then, to be understood as human or humanlike. '[C]ertainly no psychological explanations' of

Lise's actions, Kemp writes,

> are offered in any straightforward manner. Everything is described externally, as if it
> were being viewed through a camera lens. […] the narration is almost cinematic in its
> attention to surface detail and action. The narrator/witness is no wiser as to why Lise does
> what she does than is the reader. […] No attempt is made […] to explain the purpose of
> the events reported or to speculate on their causes.[117]

Kemp's reference to a 'camera lens' gestures towards a sense of the narrator as mechanical or

impersonal, a reading apparently motivated by an understanding of the camera as an object that

records, often intimately or intrusively, but which is insentient. I am inclined to agree with David

Lodge, who has remarked, in a different context, that while film is often 'made to stand for a

highly mimetic art' he is 'not convinced […] that the camera is, in human hands, any more

neutral than language, or that it renders literary realism redundant.'[118] Kemp's use of the term

'narrator/witness' exposes the anthropomorphism upon which his characterisation of *The*

Driver's Seat's narration depends. It is because Kemp understands the narrator as an observer, a

'witness,' that he foregrounds the lack of any 'attempt' to 'explain' or 'speculate.' Any normal

person who was a 'witness' to the book's events, we might assume, would search, horrified, for

motives; any witness who did not behave this way, we might imagine, would be just as

pathological as Lise.

Less hesitant than Kemp, with his rather equivocal 'narrator/witness' appellation, are

critics who refer to the narrator as a specific character or character-type. In doing so, these

commentators read the novel's flatness of tone not as neutrality or a lack of tone, but as a distinct

tone in itself, one that is clinical and precise. Bran Nicol, for instance, sees the novel's narrator

as a more malevolent version of Kemp's 'witness,' insisting that Spark's apparently 'omniscient'
narrator is 'far from God-like […] What we have instead is a deposed, humanized figure rather
than a transcendent one; a small-scale, prurient, menacing entity, more like a stalker than a
deity.'[119] Judith Roof, on the other hand, identifies the narrator as 'the deliberately bland but
expert voice of Lise's documentarist,' and sees the novel as an 'aestheticized case stud[y].'[120]
Roof's reading exploits the ambiguity of the word 'voice,' insofar as the term allows her to be
non-committal about whether she understands the novel's narration as vocal—her reference to
the documentarist's 'voice' seems to jar with the later reference to a 'case stud[y]'—or whether
she uses 'voice' as a particular narratological term. The novel's narration ultimately is neither
'bland' nor 'expert,' insofar as it offers vivid descriptions of objects and events but offers no
commentary on them in the form of interpretation or analysis. Still other critics, such as Martin
McQuillan, see the novel as specifically textual rather than vocal, but wrongly assume that the
novel is the account of a non-participating, unseen character: 'The whole of the novel,'
McQuillan writes, 'with its cool as marble depthlessness and its refusal to engage with the
emotions or motivations of its characters, can be reread as an unnerving police report.'[121]

> *The Driver's Seat* concludes with an image of the police:
>
> He runs to the car, taking his chance and knowing that he will at last be taken, and seeing
> already as he drives away from the Pavilion and away, the sad little office where the
> police clank in and out and the type–writer ticks out his unnerving statement: "She told
> me to kill her and I killed her. She spoke in many languages but she was telling me to kill
> her all the time. She told me precisely what to do. I was hoping to start a new life." He
> sees already the gleaming buttons of the policemen's uniforms, hears the cold and the
> confiding, the hot and the barking voices, sees already the holsters and the epaulets and
> all those trappings devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity,
> pity and fear.[122]

While McQuillan's claim is evidently motivated by this final paragraph, the novel's conclusion
locates its reader not in the police office, but in the mind of the killer. As he drives away, he

'see[s] already' the futility of this escape attempt, and the repercussions that await him. Thus the image of the police with which the novel ends is hardly evidence that the narrative emanates from them; the 'trappings' and 'voices' of the police are figments of the killer's imagination, his anticipation of the repercussions that await him. Spark grants her reader access, finally, to the mind of the killer in a way she never grants access to Lise's.

By the novel's conclusion, its present-tense narration and lack of internal focalisation combined with occasional proleptic movements in the future anterior confound any effort to categorise the narrator of *The Driver's Seat* as either omniscient or human. Instead, the narrator resembles those that Mark Currie describes as standing 'at the shoulder of a character, knowing nothing in retrospect, foreseeing nothing,' and who thus restore 'contingency and the possibility of possibility.'[123] The novel's narrative perspective cannot be attributed to an all-knowing godlike figure, or to any character in the diegesis, or to one implied within it, such as a police officer or analyst. As Jonathan Culler has suggested, in the absence of a focalising narrator, 'we invent a person to be the source of textual details, but since this knowledge is not that which an ordinary person could have, we must imagine this invented person to be godlike, omniscient.'[124]

After checking in at the airport before her flight, Lise 'grabs the papers and moves away as if only thinking about the next formality of travel.'[125] Spark's narrator reports that it is 'almost as if, satisfied that she has successfully registered the fact of her presence at the airport among the July thousands there, she has fulfilled a small item of a greater purpose.[126] The words 'as if,' which appear twice in a few lines, render the narrator's knowledge of Lise's mind ambiguous. The first sentence suggests both that the narrator doesn't know what Lise is 'thinking about,' since a comparative conjunction cast in a hypothetical mode, 'as if,' is required, and at the same time suggests that the narrator is aware that this isn't what she's thinking at all; it is 'as if,' and

only as if, she's merely 'thinking of the next formality of travel.' The following sentence, with its teasing 'almost,' betrays an awareness of the grim motivations behind Lise's seemingly innocuous behaviour: it does seem, in retrospect, that 'register[ing] the fact of her presence' is precisely a 'small item of greater purpose' in her overall plan to construct a conspicuous route through her last day alive for the police to retrace sometime hence. Later, having arrived 'here in the South,' Lise stands out in her ostentatiously garish outfit, looking 'curiously of the street-prostitute class' in her 'knee-covering clothes.'[127] The narrative then makes a proleptic shift: 'So she lays the trail, presently to be followed by Interpol and elaborated upon with due art by the journalists of Europe for the few days it takes for her identity to be established.'[128] This sentence serves to unravel the narrative conceit established earlier, when the narrator equivocated about the contents of Lise's mind, professing not to know whether she was thinking about 'the next formality of travel' or something more sinister and less banal. The deliberate, declarative nature of the claim that '[s]o she lays the trail' at a narrative level reflects a deliberateness at the level of plot; the premeditation and intentionality implied in the notion of 'lay[ing] the trail' is far removed from the slipperiness of 'as if.'

Frank Kermode recognises the novel's formal and thematic concerns as being in line with the *nouveaux romanciers*, and identifies the problem of its narrator not as one of omniscience and reticence, but rather as one of limited perspective. 'As she proceeds on her peculiar pilgrimage,' Kermode writes of Lise, 'we are allowed to observe her closely, but have no other privilege, so that we don't know why she is so upset, what […] she thinks she's doing. […] In short, there is a strong flavour of *nouveau roman*.'[129] What Kermode describes here accords with the term 'external focalisation' introduced by Gérard Genette in his *Narrative Discourse* to designate the mode in which narration focuses on the external aspects of events and

characters,[130] relating only physically ascertainable facts—we learn that Lise's 'hair is pale brown'—but imparts neither information about characters' thoughts and feelings nor interpretation—her hair is only 'probably tinted.'[131] While Genette links the mode with mystery and crime narratives,[132] these genres tend to promise a revelation at the end in the form of closure and justice served. *The Driver's Seat* offers its reader nothing in the way of 'unambiguous disclosures and soothing restorations,' as Caroline Levine has it.[133] The novel's narration might thus be understood as constituting not a refusal to describe psychological interiority, but incapacity; as Judith Roof puts it, because 'narrating does not align the story with any definite understanding,' it 'exposes narrative's *failure* of insight.'[134]

When Lise finally finds her murderer in the hotel lobby and begins to escort him out, she calls back to the porter: 'You can keep his luggage. You can have the book as well; it's a whydunnit in q-sharp major.'[135] A number of critics have read the book that Lise purchases in the airport, carries around with her all day and finally abandons at the hotel to be more than a device for drawing attention to herself, like her garish clothes or eccentric behaviour, but rather as a kind of *mise en abyme* of *The Driver's Seat* itself: Vassiliki Koloctroni describes this as a 'self-referential moment, or a metafictional move,' proposing that 'as a 'whydunnit' rather than a 'whodunnit', the book is concerned with the motives for the crime rather than the crime itself.'[136] The 'book' that Koloctroni references here, I think, is not Lise's book but *The Driver's Seat,* and yet this claim from the mouth of one of Spark's most deceptive characters should not be approached without scepticism. The 'whydunnit in q-sharp major' is something of a red herring; while the end of the traditional promises to disclose *who* committed the crime, the end of *The Driver's Seat* offers its reader not *why,* but *how*. Narration, in this way, becomes legible as the novel's theme, as the mystery it delineates and ultimately solves; how the representation of the

text's events happen, how we get from the dress shop to the police station, is the novel's focus, not the who or why of the crime.[137]

While Lise's nose is described as 'short and wider than it will look in the likeness constructed partly by the method of identikit, partly by photography, soon to be published in the newspapers of four languages,' Spark gives her reader no details about Lise's face or the size and width of her nose except in relation to the identikit, to which we don't have access, either.[138] Identification, the novel suggests, is relative, and *The Driver's Seat* gives its reader very little to measure anything else against. This non-description of Lise's face, described in relation to the non-description of the identikit, foregrounds the insufficiency of narration, the way in which any perspective on a set of represented events must always be limited and incomplete. While Lise is not a missing person—her body is in the police's custody—an identikit is put together not to find *her*, as it would with a missing person or a fugitive suspect, but rather her identity.[139] When Lise, in a taxi, stuffs her passport 'down the back of the seat till it is out of sight' and deliberately leaves it there, she effectively forfeits her identity in the act but in doing so gains a kind of control.[140] Lise positions herself as the only character with comprehensive knowledge about her motives, her movements, and her identity, and this knowledge dies with her. Lise's knowledge, moreover, is superior to that of both narrator and reader; her death, realised at the end of the novel but referred to explicitly from its beginning, produces an epistemological aporia. The knowledge that is lost cannot be recuperated by anyone within or external to the diegesis. The reader's perspective bears affinities to that of minor characters (we watch Lise pass through public spaces), of the investigating police (we look, in vain, for motives) and of Lise herself (we know the actions and events of the last days of her life in more detail than any police officer or observer ever could). The search for an all-encompassing perspective is a futile task.

Of course, *The Driver's Seat* does not conclude happily for Lise. Her subjection to a brutal attack and murder makes it impossible to describe her as 'free' or 'alive.' Like Miss Brodie, who also ends up dead by the end of her book, Lise might be understood to be punished by Spark for her zealous mythomania, and her conviction that she can control the narrative of her own life. Also like Brodie, however, Lise is not narratologically dead—that is, perfectly scrutable—while she is alive. For Lise, like Brodie, Charmian Colston, and a number of Spark's other characters, the author's strategic opacity gives her life.

As Julia Jordan argues, '[o]ne of the characteristic shifts that late modernism traces is towards unknowingness, which might be a move from realism to something more unsettling, less compensatory,' and in Spark's work the 'giving up of control […] might be read as grace.'[141] Jordan writes, Spark 'certainly [did] not think that knowing things, or thinking about how to know them, is an automatically good thing, and in fact quite the opposite.'[142] Rather, she 'was concerned with not- knowing, and specifically in a compositional sense.'[143] When asked in an interview why the narrator *The Driver's Seat* seems to have no idea what Lise is thinking, Spark responded: 'God knows. In that book it wasn't for the author to say.'[144] This claim that 'God knows' is a wry kind of joke; while Spark's God is omniscient, the author's control over her creation is radically limited. In 1962, moreover, Spark advocated privileging a version of not knowing over mastery of character as the only ethical route for the representation of consciousness:

> I must tell you that I know nothing whatsoever about the novel, because I write them and also I don't want to know. The more I know, the less I feel like writing any other novel at all. I feel like the centipede who has discovered he has a hundred legs. He was paralysed—he couldn't walk and this is my position. I couldn't write a novel if I knew really anything very much about it. […] I think that for a novelist to try and change anybody, for anyone to try and change anybody is horrible. I think it is tyranny and very wrong […]. It's only because I feel I might give pleasure and serve the reader by releasing anxiety. I think if people changed it would be very bad. We would become like

the people we are writing about. People who want to be the boss, and change everybody. I think that […] the novelist should never forget the dignity of his calling and remember that he is a servant.[145]

Spark's awareness of all the representative strategies at her disposal—the alarming surplus of number of moving parts she realises she has at her command—results in paralysis. This paralysis is a redemptive effect of shock, a kind of short circuiting that frees reader, author and character from a tyrannical triple-bind: the reader experiences not tyrannical 'control' but rather the release of anxiety; the author is free to know 'nothing whatsoever'; the character retains an interiority that does not offer itself up as legible or knowable, and in this way comes to life.

Notes

[1] Muriel Spark, *The Abbess of Crewe* (New York: Viking, 1974), 58.

[2] Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 3.

[3] Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 90.

[4] Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?*, 72.

[5] Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 90.

[6] Catherine Gallagher, 'The Rise of Fictionality', in *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 356–57.

[7] Gallagher, 356. Gallagher proposes that the appeal of literary characters to readers in general is not the illusion of reality, but precisely their fictionality; we are drawn to literary characters in general because they are not people.

[8] Timothy Bewes, 'Introduction: The Anagonist', *Novel* 53, no. 3 (1 November 2020): 308, https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-8624498.

[9] Bewes, 308.

[10] Andrew Hammond has argued that in British mid-century literature, espionage motifs 'infiltrated genres other than the spy narrative,' and that the extent of their use suggests 'some national pathology finding expression in the period's fiction.' *British Fiction and the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 88. Building on Hammond's work, James Smith has argued convincingly that 'first-hand exposure to the propaganda and deception operations of the Second World War left its legacy in key post-war works,' and cites Spark's *Memento Mori* (1959) by way of example as well as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* (1958). 'Covert Legacies in Postwar British Fiction', in *British Literature in Transition, 1940-1960: Postwar*, ed. Gill Plain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 337.

[11] As Len Gutkin writes, Spark's novels are 'singularly preoccupied with those problems of literary ontology critics have long associated with the postmodern novel at its most formally experimental.' Len Gutkin, 'Muriel Spark's Camp Metafiction', *Contemporary Literature* 58, no. 1 (2017): 54–55.

[12] James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage, 2009), 99.

[13] Sheryl Stevenson, "Poetry Deleted," Parody Added: Watergate, Spark's Style, and Bakhtin's Stylistics', *ARIEL* 24, no. 4 (1993): 74.

[14] D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 23.

[15] Christopher Ricks, 'Extreme Instances', *New York Review of Books* 11, no. 2 (19 December 1968): 32.

[16] Ricks, 32.

[17] Ricks, 32.

[18] It is central to Miller's point, indeed, that in the novels of the nineteenth century, middle-class communities become defined by the *absence* of the police, a process wherein 'the world of delinquency is actively occulted: made cryptic by virtue of its cryptic isolation.' *The Novel and the Police*, 6. When the police vanish from novels, policing power migrates to the level of

narration: 'Whenever the novel censures policing power, it has already reinvented it, in the very practice of novelistic representation.' Miller, 20.

[19] Spark, *The Comforters*, 54.

[20] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 234–35 (my emphasis.)

[21] Dorrit Cohn defines psychonarration as the 'narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness.' *Transparent Minds*, 14. Joanna Klara Teske and Arkadiusz Gut observe that in certain postmodern fictions, psychonarration's 'usual effect—authoritativeness—is subverted by the use of metafiction, irony, parody of diverse literary styles, and the playful use of extremely sophisticated language.' Teske and Gut, 'The Reader's Mindreading of Realist, Modernist, and Postmodern Fiction', 62.

[22] Julia Jordan describes Spark as a novelist who seems 'in possession of realism's structural consolations and formal scaffolding,' and yet who evinces 'a scapticism about some of the ontological and epistemological correlates that underpin the possibility of that realism.' Jordan, *Oblique Strategies,* 53.

[23] Spark, *The Comforters*, 54.

[24] Spark, 44.

[25] An example of direct thought quotation in the novel appears early on in the novel: 'She told herself "I'm good at packing a suitcase," forming these words in her mind to keep other words, other thoughts, from crowding in.' Spark, 35. An instance of free indirect discourse appears a few pages later: 'She had stopped eating, was conscious of two things, a splitting headache and Mrs Hogg. These bemused patterers on the theme of love, had they faced Mrs Hogg in person? Returning to her carriage Caroline passed a married couple who had been staying at St Philumena's, on their way to the dining-car. They had been among the fireside company. She remembered that they were to have left today.' Spark, 39.

[26] Patricia Waugh, 'Muriel Spark's "Informed Air": The Auditory Imagination and the Voices of Fiction', *Textual Practice* 32, no. 9 (21 October 2018): 1644, https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2018.1533171.

[27] D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or, the Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 71.

[28] David Lodge, 'The Uses and Abuses of Omniscience', *Critical Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (September 1970): 237, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8705.1970.tb02335.x.

[29] Spark, *The Comforters*, 93.

[30] Charlotte Higgins, 'We Can Always Touch the Hem of the Great One's Skirt Later', *The Guardian*, 23 August 2004, www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/aug/23/books.edinburgh04.

[31] Spark, *The Comforters*, 162.

[32] Allan Hepburn, *A Grain of Faith: Religion in Mid-Century British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 142.

[33] Wendy Veronica Xin has recently theorised the 'plotter,' that literary character who schemes 'for upward mobility, social status, or financial security' and whose 'active plotting,' crucially, 'drives the novel's own discursive formation.' 'The Importance of Being Frank', *Novel* 52, no. 1 (1 May 2019): 24, https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-7330074. Understood in Xin's terms, Georgina Hogg's obsessive plotting might also be the source of her distinct lack of ontological stature within the narrative; for Xin, the plotter is necessarily '[t]oo minor a character to elicit sympathetic or affective identification.' Xin, 23.

[34] Spark, *The Comforters*, 142.

[35] Spark, 196.

[36] Hepburn, *A Grain of Faith*, 141.

[37] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 253. Elsewhere in *Narrative Discourse,* Genette writes: 'in free indirect speech, the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the instances are then *merged*' Genette, 174. Before Genette, Roy Pascal argued that 'we hear in 'style indirect libre' a dual voice, which, through vocabulary, sentence structure, and intonation subtly fuses the two voices of the character and the narrator.' *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and Its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 26.

[38] Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 12.

[39] Cheyette, 'Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*', 368.

[40] Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 53.

[41] In her autobiography *Curriculum Vitae* (1992), Spark describes her experiences working for the Foreign Office during the Second World War; 'as a fly on the wall,' she writes, 'I took in a whole world of method and intrigue in the dark field of Black Propaganda or Psychological Warfare, and the successful and purposeful deceit of the enemy.' *Curriculum Vitae*, 142. Marina MacKay links Spark's wartime eliciting information for Political Warfare Executive from German prisoners with what she sees as 'central obsession of Spark's early work,' the 'illicit acquisition and deployment of information.' 'Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason', *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 3 (2008): 507.

[42] Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (London: Penguin, 2000), 5.

[43] Spark, 11.

[44] Spark, 31.

[45] Spark, 31.

[46] Spark, 99.

[47] Annalisa Zox-Weaver, *Women Modernists and Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6–7.

[48] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 292.

[49] Bakhtin, 292–93.

[50] Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, 25.

[51] Levine, *Realism, Ethics and Secularism*, 193.

[52] Levine writes: 'Free indirect discourse is an ingenious compromise between first person narration, whose limits and unreliability have been part of novelists' problems since *Pamela*, and full omniscience. And free indirect discourse has turned out to be the best mode by which an author can, as it were, disappear, and give the impression that what unfolds on the page simply happens without his (or her) intervention or help. On the other hand, it allows interiority without subjecting the reader to the full bias of the characters' desires and prejudices and without the falsity of representation of thought that comes registered inside quotation marks, as though the mind works precisely in the rhetorically imposing way that stage representation requires.' Levine, 192.

[53] Free indirect might be understood to operate insidiously because it allows authors to evade responsibility for their utterances; as Casey Finch and Peter Bowen have suggested, 'almost total authority—a near epistemological hegemony—is staged and enacted because its agency is either elided altogether or spread so thinly that it cannot ever be named as such.' '"The Tittle-Tattle of

Highbury": Gossip and the Free Indirect Style in *Emma'*, *Representations*, no. 31 (July 1990): 15, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928397.

[54] Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, 78.

[55] Spark, 5–6.

[56] Spark, 111–12.

[57] That is, the term could be read as originating from different characters with significant tonal differences. The statement 'but it had been well known that the Brodie set had no team spirit and did not care which house won the shield' could originate from Miss Brodie, Miss Mackay, the other schoolgirls or the Brodie set themselves with varying degrees of pride, scorn, distrust and confusion.

[58] François, *Open Secrets*, 13.

[59] Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 495.

[60] Linking to the description of the school in this passage directly to European fascisms, Judy Suh writes: 'The narrator enables us to shift the view […] from their own individual motives to the surrounding conditions that compel them to stay together as a set, i.e. the "normal" conditions that enable fascism to flourish. When their original reputation as renegades has become a recognizable institution within the Marcia Blaine school as a "system," the Brodie girls become an indispensable part of the organization overall.' 'The Familiar Attractions of Fascism in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*', *Journal of Modern Literature* 30, no. 2 (April 2007): 93, https://doi.org/10.2979/JML.2007.30.2.86.

[61] Wood, *How Fiction Works*, 8.

[62] Spark and Hosmer, 'An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark', 151.

[63] Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, 9. Casey Finch and Peter Bowen argue that 'free indirect style functions specifically to disguise the ideological imperatives of the novel as the autonomous ideation of one of its characters.' They suggest that 'almost total authority—a near epistemological hegemony—is staged and enacted because its agency is either elided altogether or spread so thinly that it cannot ever be named as such.' 'The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury', 14–15. This impression as represents an ideological illusion, symptomatic of the obfuscation and erasure of particular perspectives effected by hegemonic discourse. In the case of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, however, the situation seems to be the reverse; the character's ideological imperatives pretend to be—and thereby become—the novel's.

[64] Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, 12.

[65] Spark, 12.

[66] Spark, 12.

[67] Spark, 13.

[68] Spark, 13.

[69] Spark, 13–14.

[70] Lewis MacLeod, 'Matters of Care and Control: Surveillance, Omniscience, and Narrative Power in *The Abbess of Crewe* and *Loitering with Intent*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 575.

[71] *The Comforters'* Georgina Hogg or *Memento Mori*'s Mabel Pettigrew, for example.

[72] Len Gutkin, for instance, writes that '[i]n this novel, a group of servants led by Lister, the butler, murder their wealthy employers and scheme their way into inheriting fortune and property' (Gutkin, 'Muriel Spark's Camp Metafiction', 53.).

[73] James Bailey, 'Salutary Scars: The "Disorienting" Fictions of Muriel Spark, *Contemporary Women's Writing* 9, no. 1 (1 March 2015): 47, https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpu032.

[74] Willy Maley, 'Not to Deconstruct? Righting and Deference in *Not to Disturb*', in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 175.

[75] Muriel Spark, *Not to Disturb* (London: Macmillan, 1971), 159.

[76] Spark, 66, 6–7.

[77] Cheyette, 'Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*', 372.

[78] Cheyette, 372.

[79] Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, 24–25.

[80] Miller, 25.

[81] Spark, *Not to Disturb*, 66.

[82] Spark, 12.

[83] Spark, 17.

[84] Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 143. Currie makes further observations on this subject elsewhere in *About Time:* 'For a written narrative,' he writes, 'the existence of the future is material, in the form of graphic signs or pages ahead, and it is referential.' Currie, 147. Later, he asks, 'why should we take retronarrative to connote certainty or concurrent and prospective narration to have any kind of claim on the authentic representation of temporal becoming when both unfold in the temporality of textual processing, and both are complete in advance?' Currie, 171.

[85] Spark, *Not to Disturb*, 37.

[86] Gabriel Josipovici, 'Muriel Spark and the Practice of Deception', in *The Teller & the Tale: Essays on Literature & Culture, 1990-2015* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2016), 230.

[87] Martin McQuillan, 'Introduction: "I Don't Know Anything about Freud": Muriel Spark Meets Contemporary Criticism', in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 215.

[88] Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'A Future for the Novel', in *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 23.

[89] Robbe-Grillet, 24.

[90] Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'Alain Robbe-Grillet, The Art of Fiction No. 91', interview by Shusha Guppy, *Paris Review* 99 (Spring 1986), https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2819/the-art-of-fiction-no-91-alain-robbe-grillet.

[91] Robbe-Grillet.

[92] Spark and Hosmer, 'An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark', 147.

[93] Quoted in Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), xviii. Square brackets in Stannard's original.

[94] Ten years earlier in 1950, the novelist Henry Green criticised the writer who 'speaks directly to his reader' such that the 'kind of action which dialogue is, is held up while the writer, who has no business with the story he is writing, but intrudes like a Greek chorus to underline his meaning.' Green stated: 'It is as if husband and wife were alone in the living room, and a voice came out of a corner of the ceiling to tell them what both were like, or what the other felt. And do we know, in life, what other people are really like? I very much doubt it. We certainly do not know what other people are thinking and feeling. How then can the novelist be so sure?' *Surviving: The Uncollected Writings of Henry Green*, ed. Matthew Yorke (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), 139.

[95] Adam Guy, *The Nouveau Roman and Writing in Britain after Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 139.

[96] Guy, 142.

[97] Muriel Spark, *The Public Image* (New York: New Directions, 1993), 18.

[98] Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction*, Routledge Revivals (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

[99] François, *Open Secrets*, 13.

[100] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 323.

[101] Greenblatt, 323–24.

[102] Spark, *Memento Mori*, 187–88.

[103] Dorrit Cohn refers to this technique as 'direct thought-quotation.' (Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 98.)

[104] Wood, *How Fiction Works*, 88.

[105] Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, 43.

[106] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 192.

[107] Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, 36–37.

[108] Muriel Spark, *The Driver's Seat* (London: Penguin, 2006), 25.

[109] Patricia Waugh, 'Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity: Art, Secularization, and Psychosis', in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 68.

[110] Spark, *The Driver's Seat*, 107.

[111] Spark, 7.

[112] Peter Wolfe, 'Choosing the Death', *The New Republic*, 3 October 1970, 27.

[113] The critical reception of *The Driver's Seat* in the 1970s and onwards might be located within a wider discourse Susan Stewart describes as 'the feminine as surface.' *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 168. Women's bodies in Spark's novels of the early 1970s do not give up their secrets readily: 1971's *Not to Disturb,* for instance, offers its reader no free indirect discourse, but rather a parody of it. The stomach of the pregnant Heloise becomes an object of scrutiny, and the characters stare at it 'as if to discern by a kind of X-ray eye who the father truly might be.' Spark, *Not to Disturb*, 10. In *Not to Disturb,* Spark ironises the urge to look through the transparent body into its legible, narratable contents. Since the baby might be the heir to the Klopstock dynasty, the servants arrange a hasty wedding between Heloise and the mad Klopstock brother in the attic, and it is thus this lineage that motivates both the servants' and the novel's the plot.

[114] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 366–67 (my emphasis).

[115] Spark, *The Driver's Seat*, 49.

[116] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 50.

[117] Jonathan Kemp, '"Her Lips Are Slightly Parted": The Ineffability of Erotic Sociality in Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 3 (2008): 545.

[118] David Lodge, 'The Novelist at the Crossroads', in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 99.

[119] Bran Nichol, 'Reading Spark in the Age of Suspicion', in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman, A Modern Fiction Studies Book (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 112–13. Elsewhere, Nichol writes of the 'distinctive effect of reading Robbe-Grillet's novels, where his detached, camera-like perspective inevitably becomes rationalized by the reader as the product of a particular, usually obsessive or pathological, kind

of psyche.' 'Murdoch's Mannered Realism: Metafiction, Morality and the Post-War Novel', in *Iris Murdoch and Morality*, ed. Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 28.

[120] Judith Roof, 'The Future Perfect's Perfect Future: Spark's and Duras's Narrative Drive', in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 52.

[121] McQuillan, 'Introduction', 3.

[122] Spark, *The Driver's Seat*, 107.

[123] Mark Currie, *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 170.

[124] Jonathan Culler, 'Omniscience', *Narrative* 12, no. 1 (2004): 28.

[125] Spark, *The Driver's Seat*, 20.

[126] Spark, 20.

[127] Spark, 50.

[128] Spark, 50.

[129] Frank Kermode, 'Sheerer Spark', *The Listener* 84 (24 September 1970): 425.

[130] See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 192–94. Genette refers to 'the narrator's marked ignorance with respect to the hero's real thoughts.' Genette, 194.

[131] Spark, *The Driver's Seat*, 18. The uncertainty suggested by the word 'probably' is crucial, and is reminiscent of Henry Green's distinction between phrases such as 'He seemed to hesitate' and 'He hesitated': 'If you have "he hesitated," this seems like a stage direction, and is too direct a communication from the author. Where then have we got? I have tried to show that the purpose of the novelist is to create, in the mind of the reader, life which is *not,* and which is non-representational.' Green, *Surviving*, 142.

[132] Genette offers, by way of examples, 'Dashiell Hammett's novels,' the openings of adventure stories, and 'certain short stories by Hemingway.' *Narrative Discourse*, 190.

[133] Caroline Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt*, Victorian Literature and Culture Series (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 2.

[134] Roof, 'The Future Perfect's Perfect Future: Spark's and Duras's Narrative Drive', 52 (my emphasis).

[135] Spark, *The Driver's Seat*, 101.

[136] Vassiliki Kolocotroni, '*The Driver's Seat* : Undoing Character, Becoming Legend', *Textual Practice* 32, no. 9 (21 October 2018): 1546, https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2018.1533180.

[137] Marilyn Reizbaum usefully describes Spark's writing as 'a form of theory.' 'Waiting for Godot at *The Mandelbaum Gate*', *Textual Practice* 32, no. 9 (21 October 2018): 1606, https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2018.1533183.

[138] Spark, *The Driver's Seat*, 18.

[139] In *Not to Disturb,* the filmmaker Mr Samuel makes various recommendations for the recording of interviews with the Klopstocks' domestic staff, suggesting that a 'good idea to open with' would be to 'build up the Baroness like an identikit, when the police are looking for the motive and they put an eye here and a nose there. Very visual.' Spark, *Not to Disturb*, 96. The detective's task in the case of both Lise's and Baroness Klopstock's murders does not involve identifying the victim or the culprit, but rather the motive. And yet in Samuel's vision for his film, just as with the dissemination of images of Lise in the wake of her death, it is as though the composition of the Baroness's face provides a clue to or indexes the motives and causes behind her death. *Identikit* was the name of the film made of *The Driver's Seat* in 1974, as well

as the title of the Italian translation of the book. According to Martin Stannard, Spark 'liked it.'
Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 363.

[140] Spark, *The Driver's Seat*, 52.

[141] Jordan, *Oblique Strategies*, 62-63.

[142] Jordan, 63.

[143] Jordan, 60.

[144] Muriel Spark, 'An Interview with Muriel Spark', interview by Sarah Frankel, *Partisan Review* 54, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 454.

[145] *International Writer's Conference (A Transcript of the Proceedings)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962), 23.

'[F]ull of blankness and jumble':

Iris Murdoch's Minor Characters

> How selective guilt is, thought Bruno. It is the sins that link significantly with our life which we remember and regret. People whom we just knocked down in passing are soon lost to memory. Yet their wounds may be as great. We regret only the frailty which the form of our life has made us own to.
>
> Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream*[1]

'[I]f you get hold of a good character,' Iris Murdoch claimed, 'he will invent himself.'[2] Such a character, she argued,

> will invent his mode of speech and his past, make his jokes, and so on. The thing is to get the fundamental patterns right, the basic idea of what it's all about and who the people are. It begins for me with a very small, but one hopes very powerful, nucleus of two or three people in a situation. This might be anything, but I want these people to be very real to me so that I can see them and think them and understand them for two or three years. Gradually, then, I develop the situation.[3]

Murdoch did not here indicate whether the word 'good' ought to be understood in an ethical, aesthetic, or philosophical sense. What it might mean to 'get hold of' a character is similarly obscure. Murdoch's language implies, somewhat paradoxically, that a kind of pinning-down is required in order for a character to escape from the author's grasp and to 'invent himself.' The tussle between coercion and its relinquishment, between a character's self-generation ('he will invent himself') and firm authorial control ('I develop the situation') are suggestive of a peculiar theorisation of literary ontology germane to Muriel Spark's work in the previous chapter. The present chapter pursues these questions further, and asks in particular if Murdoch's literary process begins with a 'small' but 'powerful' group of 'two or three,' what happens to this representational dynamic when she 'develop[s] the situation'—that is, she moves beyond this 'nucleus' to represent a plurality of characters? Are minor characters 'good' characters, can they

invent themselves, or do turn out to be less 'real to [her]' such that she cannot 'see them and think them and understand them'?

Characterhood, Marie-Laure Ryan argues, 'is a scalar concept, ranging from possible persons to referents of proper names who lack individuating and mental human substance.'[4] Ryan's comment implies an ontological difference between certain types of character that might vary by degree. Alex Woloch, too, argues in his famous study of literary character *The One vs. the Many* (2003) that certain minor characters, 'simply through their subordinated multiplicity, hover vulnerably on the borderline between name and number.'[5] The 'borderline' that Woloch describes seems to be an ontological boundary that divides types of characters.[6] If Murdoch's minor characters are ontologically different from her protagonists, it is important to determine the criteria for this ontological distinction which also permits us to re-evaluate the wider, vexed question of literary ontology in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s.

Murdoch described her 1971 novel *An Accidental Man* as a 'deliberate attempt to exclude the central nucleus and have a lot of different attachments pulling the plot and the interest away into further corners.'[7] The characters of this novel, she claimed, 'have lives of their own,' and 'are pursuing dramas of their own which are quite alien to the central story.'[8] In *An Accidental Man*, Murdoch weaves together a number of interconnected subplots pertaining to the activities of various characters linked by families and friendships—and yet its number of protagonists is not especially unusual for a novel by Murdoch (or indeed among other post-war British writers). The novel does not so much relinquish its 'central nucleus' model as expand it from 'two or three' to seven or eight primary characters insofar as they occupy a similar place in the novel's plot as the characters in her earlier books; there are simply more of them. My interest lies in those characters who strike me as very different from the others—the minor characters who seem

to exist on the novel's social and discursive edges. These characters tend to enter the novel's plot when they are cleaning the protagonists' homes or preparing their meals, or else when they are brought together by chance, often with violent consequences.

Murdoch's first book, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1952), was the first book to be published in English on Jean-Paul Sartre's work. While as a philosopher, Murdoch should not be understood to subscribe to Sartre's philosophical arguments in any uniform or unequivocal way, Sartre's notion of real, limited, and subjective freedom as a condition of human existence, wherein individuals are radically free and at the same time bound by circumstance, was fundamental to her philosophy.[9] According to this argument, the individual is, crucially, free only within given situations.[10] This avowed belief in the moral value of freedom and contingency—and the insistence that freedom is always limited by circumstance—illuminates the relationship between Murdoch's conception of the ontology of her literary characters. Murdoch saw freedom as an incontrovertible moral good, but at the same time recognised the ethical imperative to see the other 'as she really is.'[11] Her biographer Peter Conradi saw that she desired to 'set her characters "free"' and at the same time realised that 'human beings are profoundly unfree.'[12]

Murdoch's representations of certain minor characters exemplify this tension insofar as they illustrate quite how limited, in practice, an individual's freedoms might be, or how bound by circumstance they are, even while they exist in a radically contingent world. Several of Murdoch's minor characters are so 'profoundly unfree' by dint of their material circumstances that there is no place for them amongst a novel's characters or within its discursive regime. Such characters suffer from a supreme lack of agency on two diegetic levels, insofar as both other characters *and* the novel's narration denies them anything like the 'attention' that Murdoch

recognises to be a moral good.[13] Bradley Pearson, the narrator of Murdoch's 1973 novel *The Black Prince,* makes a claim for 'one of the many respects in which life is unlike art'; namely, that 'characters in art can have unassailable dignity, whereas characters in life have none.'[14] As Bradley suggests, literary characters *can* have dignity; but what is more significant is that some do not. I am interested in what happens when the dignity of 'characters in art' is assailed or denied, and to whom this happens.

In *The One vs. the Many,* Alex Woloch reads literary form as an index of historical inequality, and describes minor characters as 'the proletariat of the novel.'[15] For Woloch, the representation of minor characters in realist novels can never be extricated from issues of class; these characters are often subordinated to, and in the service of, its protagonists. The 'distributional matrix' he describes requires minor characters as part of its structure, in the service of telling a tale 'about' others.[16] In *An Accidental Man*, minor characters tend to be the 'proletariat,' both within the plot, in a socioeconomic sense—these characters exist in a servile relationship to some of the novel's primary characters, or else are their children—and in Woloch's narratological sense, too, insofar as they exist in order to tell us something about the main characters, or function as obstacles in their way. Diversity of character type, after all, is crucial to the effectiveness of realist literary plots; this is the lesson of the realist novel. As Woloch has it, is that individual development is achievable only at the necessary cost of the subordination of the many.[17]

The working-class minor characters that Murdoch introduces in *An Accidental Man* are in every case subordinated to the needs of their wealthier counterparts, and subordinated not only in terms of the requirements of plot, but also in terms of the narrative attention given to them. The suffering and indeed the deaths of many of these working-class characters is rarely depicted in a

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manner that marks these events—and, by association, these people—as significant.[18] Murdoch's depiction of minor characters in *An Accidental Man* does not indicate a particular interest in representing a more diverse social world than those of her previous thirteen novels. In fact, the novel's depiction of minor characters works to demonstrate quite how inegalitarian the represented world is; this inequality, or social stratification, is rendered visible not simply within the events of the plot, but also in the novel's narration. A turn to the book's minor characters, external to the middle-class inner ring of families, illuminates her conception of the ontology of literary character and its significance for the ethical treatment of others in the world.

In 1973, two years after *An Accidental Man,* Murdoch published *The Black Prince.* The latter novel is narrated in the first person by Bradley Pearson, a rather unsuccessful author, and constitutes his account of the days leading up to his arrest for the murder of his friend, Arnold Baffin. During this time, Bradley falls in love with and briefly absconds with Baffin's teenaged daughter. The characters Bradley depicts in his manuscript are all individuals in his own life— his family, friends, and colleagues—but in the narrative he crafts, all are turned into minor characters, subordinated to his own narrative interests. In Bradley's solipsistic account, only he is authentic, complex, and real; everyone else around him is significant only in relation to him, is constituted by his narrative decisions, and has no existence apart from him.

On the subject of what he calls the 'democratic impulse' that Erich Auerbach 'detects as fundamental to the development of realism,' George Levine argues that for a novelist to follow this impulse 'would be to move to a narrative in which there are no focal figures but every figure would gather the fullest sympathetic and imaginative attention.'[19] Levine concludes that there 'is, then, a moral implication to these kinds of exclusions.'[20] The moral implications of such exclusions might be understood to be the focus of Murdoch's literary undertakings in *An*

Accidental Man and *The Black Prince.* An attentiveness to minor characters reveals a striking

divergence in the narrative forms of these two novels. Instead of Murdoch's own famous theory

of dichotomous novelistic forms—the 'journalistic' and the 'crystalline'—I turn to Bakhtin's

theorisation of monologic and dialogic language to posit that *An Accidental Man* might be

understood as centrifugal in form, and *The Black Prince* as centripetal. Considered in terms of

minor characters, *An Accidental Man,* narrated in the third person, seems to sprawl outwards, and

seems to have insufficient space to accommodate all its characters. As a result, many get short

shrift; its characters seem underserved by its sprawling, chaotic plot. In *The Black Prince,* on the

other hand, everything collapses into the centre, into the single, monologic voice and perspective

of its narcissistic first-person narrator and protagonist, Bradley Pearson. Though the novels were

published just two years apart, a focus on the representation of minor characters reveals two

radically different approaches to the question of literary ontology.[21]

     This might at first seem to be a rather pessimistic, even bleak, account of Murdoch's

work, insofar as neither form can accommodate minor characters in an ethically responsible way;

these characters are either flung out to the edges or crushed under the weight of one enormous

personality. Both novels, however, offer a kind of promise for the minor character capable of

evading the coercive control of their narrators. Certain minor characters are capable of achieving

a degree of autonomy and what Murdoch would call 'opacity' beyond that of the novels' hapless

and repellent protagonists.[22] These characters simply will not be dispatched in the way that the

narrative seems to expect of them, and for this they seem to possess a particular kind of

resonance and ontological heft. They achieve this, moreover, precisely by dint of their

minorness; no protagonist or central character would be capable of such opacity. As Alex

Woloch has delineated, the representation of all literary characters involves a 'tension between

structure and reference' which is 'generative of, and integral to, narrative signification.'[23] From a structuralist perspective, characters are understood purely as discursive constructs or textual functions,[24] whereas to have a referential conception of character is to understand them as real, authentic, autonomous entities that exceed the bounds of the text. In Murdoch's novels, minor characters' recalcitrance is an index of their referential power, which illuminates the paradoxes of her philosophy of 'attention,' since it becomes apparent that this behaviour that Murdoch believed to be a moral good meant being attentive to the fact that there are aspects of other people to which one *cannot* attend. Respect for the reality of others and a refusal of the impulse to control was for Murdoch—like her contemporary, Muriel Spark—an incontrovertible element of the ethical representation of other people.

The occlusion of working-class characters in *An Accidental Man*

While the chaotic plot of *An Accidental Man* is driven by the actions of the accidental man of the novel's title, the hapless Austin Gibson Grey, it is by no means limited to them; indeed, Austin's behaviour sends the narrative spinning out in multiple directions, chasing the many contingencies and often grim consequences of his actions. Also involved in the novel's central affairs are many members of Austin's family and other acquaintances, among whom are his brother, Matthew, his wife, Dorina, and Dorina's sister, Mavis, who is also Matthew's lover. Somewhere on the periphery of this tangled knot of individuals is Mrs Carberry, the charwoman at Valmorana, the house Mavis inherited from her mother. In her first appearance in the novel, this minor character is represented from Mavis's perspective, in sentences of free indirect discourse:

> "I haven't an idea what to do, it's worrying me out of my mind," said Mrs Carberry to Mavis Argyll. Mrs Carberry was talking about her retarded son, Ronald. Ronald was ten. Mrs Carberry had four other children. Mr Carberry drank.[25]

In this passage, Murdoch's narrator employs a strange kind of free indirect style, insofar as these short declarative sentences at first seem to be strictly factual and unaffected by any character's orienting consciousness; it is as though this sparse list of facts is the sum total of her existence. This compassionless presentation of the apparently miserable facts of Mrs Carberry's life, however, emphasises the discrepancy between the personal details she has shared with Mavis and the palpable apathy that Mavis feels towards them. Indeed, it seems as though this information is only shared at all because the novel's narrator is motivated to narrate, to provide exposition, and to characterise its characters, and when that narrative voice 'merges' with Mavis's, this characterisation's affect is bored and flat. For Mavis, Mrs Carberry is not someone about whom it is remotely interesting to gossip; Mavis would not divulge information about her to any other character within the narrative. While Mrs Carberry enters the novel as pure exteriority, as an assemblage of biographical facts and a fragment of direct speech, the novel's narration privileges the already privileged Mavis, and Mavis's interiority is both revealed and constituted by the sentences of free indirect style that indicate her disposition and her politics. Mrs Carberry's concerns for her disabled child are reduced to the banality of cliché—she is worried 'out of [her] mind'—while Mavis fails to recognise her being in possession a mind to be worried out of.

The rather euphemistic language used by the narrator to describe Mrs Carberry as being someone 'who helped out' signals that Mavis is again being focalised via the sentences of free indirect style:

> Mrs Carberry, who helped out, was loading the washing-up machine. Her eldest son was in trouble with the police. Her husband was a tyrannical brute. Mavis thought, this

woman has real troubles, not like my nervous evanescent woes. Yet Mavis's woes were real to Mavis and though she was sorry for Mrs Carberry she could not quite conceive as three-dimensional that awful world where children whined and a man shouted.[26]

Mavis's failure at empathy is again represented via a narrative device that privileges her interiority over Mrs Carberry's. What is ultimately revealed here is not Mrs Carberry's lack of three-dimensionality, but Mavis's failure to recognise it; Mavis's solipsistic perspective overwhelms the narrative perspective and blocks out Mrs Carberry's home and her mind, here merged together as 'that awful world,' entirely. Mavis is in possession of the orienting perspective because this is the way the world she lives in works. After this passage, the narrator moves on to a detailed description of Mavis's inheritance of the house, and turns away from Mrs Carberry. The charwoman comes to her employer's house, not the other way around, and this dynamic is reproduced in the text's narrative perspective. Mavis cannot visualise Mrs Carberry's home, and indeed this is a place indeed that Murdoch's narrator never takes her reader. Even Mrs Carberry's name is an instance of free indirect style; while other characters, once introduced, are referred to by their first names, Mrs Carberry is resolutely shackled to her title, and given no first name at all anywhere in the book. This is because the other characters have no interest in learning her first name, and think about her—inasmuch as they ever do—in a purely servile capacity.

Elsewhere in the novel, the narration again signals its own shift to focalise Mavis in the palpable condescension of its declarative statement of what it was that Mrs Carberry 'believed':

Mrs Carberry believed in God and Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in much the same way that she believed in Walter and Ronald and Mavis. The sun was shining, making a flowering cherry tree at the corner into a winged gallery of rosy light. The petals were falling slowly to the pavement through the still air like autumn leaves. Mrs Carberry walked into the slow rain of petals with her head down, hump-backed with anxiety. Mavis felt relief when she turned the corner. She moved to the side window which looked down on the garden and watched Dorina who was standing barefoot in the middle of the

lawn.[27]

The word 'anxiety' offers a tiny glimpse of Mrs Carberry's interiority, but one that is legible only via the externality of her 'hump-backed' stature, perceived by Mavis. Framed in the 'winged gallery of rosy light,' she contrasts with the beauty of her surroundings, foreshortened and 'hump-backed' among petals which fall like 'rain' and 'autumn leaves.' Mrs Carberry herself gets no lyricism or figurative language.

Mrs Carberry's ten-year-old son, Ronald, is disabled; Mavis thinks of him as 'retarded.' Despite his mother's pleas, Mavis repeatedly refuses to let Ronald live at Valmorana:

> Mavis was now thinking, no, I will not give way about Ronald Carberry. The little boy had a touching face. But he was unmanageable, unworkable, would never be fully a human being. Mavis knew that if she was not careful she would have Ronald Carberry forever. She did not want that sort of responsibility, she did not want to re-enter the hot muddled personal unhappiness of the ordinary human lot. That at least her imitation dedicated life had enabled her to shun.[28]

The direct thought quotation that gives way to free indirect style in this passage reveals that while Mavis might concede, sentimentally, that Ronald has a 'touching face,' she cannot get past this exteriority; indeed, she conceives him as someone without interiority. The shocking cruelty of her assessment that the disabled child 'would never be fully a human being' is a particularly extreme iteration of her failure to recognise the independent existence and interiority of the working-class people around her, the 'ordinary human lot' of ordinary people like the Carberry family. One of the cruellest ironies in a novel replete with them is the fact that Ronald becomes increasingly psychologically impenetrable as a result of being treated like he has no psychological interiority. As the novel progresses, Ronald's condition seems to worsen as he is neglected by everyone but his mother. At Mavis's behest, Ronald is institutionalised; Mrs Carberry reports back to Mavis about her visit to him in hospital, and his mind is figured as a prison:

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"He never even talks now, poor mite […] When I came to see him he just turned away his head. Who knows what goes on in his mind, what he suffers and thinks there, poor little boy, all shut up inside himself."

"I'm sure he doesn't suffer," said Mavis. But she wasn't sure.[29]

Murdoch's reader is permitted insight into Mavis's mind, and given not only what she said, but also what she thought and felt; she 'wasn't sure.' Ronald, on the other hand, is entirely occluded, spatially and psychologically. Never having had any agency to begin with, he is whisked away from the plot.

Ronald is not the only working-class child in *An Accidental Man* who is a victim of both adult characters' actions and of narrative inattention. Six-year-old Rosalind Monkley appears in the novel only as a momentary 'vision of a little girl of about six in a pink dress' before she becomes a heap in the road, a 'bare arm' and 'trickle of blood,' struck down and killed by Austin Gibson Grey, drunk behind the wheel of his brother Matthew's car.[30] The child's death forces Austin and his passengers, Matthew and Garth, to stop the car in a part of London that they would usually only ever pass through en route between more salubrious neighbourhoods. In the moments following the collision, the scene is described from the restricted visual and verbal perspectives of the car's occupants, wherein the narrator adopts a very limited set of adjectives that fixate on class; the collision takes place in a 'poorish street,' and the girl is only the 'poor remains in the road.'[31] In both social and narrative terms, Rosalind, like Ronald, is more plot device than person; each exists in the text only in relation to its main characters. These children—the novel's minor minor characters—are granted no agency within its plot, and the neglect to which they are subjected by the novel's protagonists seems to be replicated on a second diegetic level, within the novel's narration. While the self-indulgent woes of an adult protagonist such as Austin, for instance, are traced attentively throughout the novel, the sufferings of the novel's child characters are afforded only the merest narrative attention.

After Rosalind's death, Murdoch's narration continues to present minor character working-class interiorities—that is, domestic spaces, bodies, minds—as that which either is, or really ought to be, occluded for the sake of propriety and the comfort of its protagonists. After the child's funeral, Austin, accompanied by Matthew and Mavis, visits her parents' home. The encounter is described from Mavis's perspective; the Monkleys live in a caravan parked on a 'waste land' covered with 'thin grasses' whose 'blanched dryness expressed desolation to Mavis as she sat on one of the divans and looked out of the window.'[32] The narration continues to focalise Mavis in its description of the interior of the Monkleys' home; the caravan is 'tidy and depressingly neat,' and 'Mr and Mrs Monkley seemed small too, as if they had been made with the fittings.'[33] While Matthew converses with the Monkleys, Mavis's gaze wanders back outside, to the 'blanched grass.' Mavis 'knew,' at this moment, 'that she was soon going to start to cry and would not be able to stop. She would cry for herself and her wasted life, and for all desolate and wasted lives. The child's death in itself seemed to have little meaning.'[34] Even when various features of the text might have seemed to mark Rosalind as the focus of attention—Mavis's location in the home of Rosalind's grieving parents, the invocation of a 'wasted life,' and the reappearance of the word 'desolate,' for instance—for Mavis, Rosalind remains entirely insignificant. Even in Mavis's dream the previous night 'about a child being run over,' the dream's protagonist is not Rosalind; instead, the 'child in her dream had been [Mavis's sister] Dorina.'[35] Mavis's first and only real interaction with Rosalind's mother comes in response to Mary Monkley's description of herself as 'not a mother any more,' since her only child is dead. The only interiority of working-class minor characters that is glimpsed is decidedly visceral rather than psychological, and Mavis is quick to occlude all of it as swiftly as possible:

"You may have another child," said Mavis.
"I've had my womb removed," said Mrs Monkley, "it got diseased, you see."

"We must go," said Mavis.[36]

A short time later, Norman Monkley, the girl's stepfather, discovers that Austin was drunk at the time of the collision and begins to extort him. After an argument, Austin hits the man over the head with a box file, piercing his skull with a 'violent crack' and leaving him unconscious.[37] Austin's understanding of Norman is rather like Mavis's of Mrs Carberry, insofar as Murdoch's free indirect style reveals him to imagine that if only Norman were out of sight, he simply would not exist:

> How could he hide what had happened, tidy Norman away and make this awful thing not to be? He had an absurd impulse to thrust Norman in under the bed. Put Norman in a cupboard. It had already begun to seem like the name of a thing.[38]

While Norman survives, the injury leaves him severely brain-damaged, and entirely obliterates his short-term memory, which happily solves Austin's problem: 'The hospital staff now thought that Norman would never fully recover. So that was all very satisfactory.'[39] Austin, who has treated the Monkleys as if they had no psychological interiority in the first place, robs Norman of his permanently, and Norman vanishes from the plot in all but name; in the novel's final scene, it is revealed that Austin's nephew Garth intends to exploit the family still further by writing 'best-sellers under the name of Norman Monkley.'[40]

What Murdoch's narration in these episodes intimates is that when, in *An Accidental Man,* minor characters are hidden from view—when the middle-class characters cease to be reminded of the awkward presence of such people in their proximity—they do not exist. The effect of the occlusion of working-class minor characters like Mrs Carberry and others is an overwhelming 'relief' for its middle-class protagonists such as Mavis. Mavis understands Mrs Carberry to be a minor character in her own life in purely structural terms, and cannot conceive of her life going on elsewhere. Writing of Murdoch's portrayal of Mrs Carberry specifically,

Rosalind Miles suggests that it is 'hard to feel anything but embarrassed' when reading *An Accidental Man.*[41] While Miles attributes the problem to a 'failure of tone or technique rather than in any way as a conscious belittlement or deliberate expression of elitist values,' I want to suggest that the difference between 'tone' and 'technique' here is critical. Murdoch's narrative technique is deliberately limited, such that Mrs Carberry is never focalised as Mavis or Austin is, but the tone does not endorse the blinkered, self-involved perspectives of the middle-class characters. By mimicking in her narration the perspective of her main characters, Murdoch crafts a novel that stands as a testament against the behaviours antithetical to her ethics of attention.

The depiction of minor characters as ontologically different from protagonists illustrates the profound material effects that can be wrought by a given representation. Third-person narration is, in these examples, always oriented and influenced by the perceptions of its characters. In its representation of minor characters, *An Accidental Man* relentlessly focalises its protagonists, and thus Mavis's and Austin's ideations and ideological imperatives come to appear to be the novel's own. If the perspectives of Mavis and Austin shape the narrative, they also shape character; in the world of the novel, these perceptions have material effects.

Making minor characters in *The Black Prince*

In an essay entitled 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited,' Murdoch criticised novels such as Camus's *The Stranger* (1942) and Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) for what she saw as an all-too common feature of contemporary novels; that 'a single person has swallowed up the entire book.'[42] Murdoch understood the twentieth-century novel to lack that quintessential characteristic of its nineteenth-century precursor, namely a view of society and of the individuals

in it as an organic and indivisible whole. In nineteenth-century literature, she proposed, the opposition between form and the contingency of life was contained in characters' multiplicity, which is regarded as an aspect of their inalienable uniqueness and value. Such characters are, in Murdoch's view, real and live individuals; that is to say, they possess an authenticity which extends beyond the confines of the form within the bounds of which they were conceived. Murdoch recognised the loneliness of the individual in the twentieth-century novel to be, as György Lukács put it in *The Theory of the Novel* (1916), 'neither accidental nor the fault of the individual, but signifies that the desire for the essence always leads out of the world of social structures and communities and that a community is possible only at the surface of life and can only be based on compromise.'[43]

In her own work, Murdoch saw the importance of distinguishing a 'recognisable style' from a 'personal presence.'[44] A 'literary presence' that is 'too bossy,' she claimed,

> may be damaging; when for instance one favoured character may be the author's spokesman. Bad writing is almost always full of the fumes of personality […]. I do not mind owning a personal style, but I do not want to be obviously present in my work.[45]

Despite her professed aversion to their influence, several critics have found these 'fumes of personality' in Murdoch's novels, and perhaps in 1973's *The Black Prince* most of all, which might be understood to be precisely the kind of novel that the author deplored, in which 'a single person has swallowed up the entire book.'[46] Some have described the resemblance between Murdoch's own philosophical beliefs and those articulated by Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince* as a case of what Murdoch would call 'presence' than 'style'; Peter Lamarque, for instance, describes himself as 'not yet confident that I have always isolated the voice of Iris Murdoch from that of Bradley Pearson.'[47] Bran Nicol, further, remarks on how far *The Black Prince* is from Murdoch's own 'ethics of impersonality.'[48] For Nicol, Murdoch's

unprecedented act of literary exhibitionism in this novel contravenes most of the injunctions of her literary superego: it is exquisitely patterned; the hero is manifested as a—heavily disguised—version of herself who regards all other characters in terms of how they relate to himself rather than as separate individuals. […] *The Black Prince* contradict[s] Murdoch's ethics of literary production by *unmasking her as the supremely transcendent author, organizing tyrannically all the points of view in the text, rather than letting the characters exist freely as separate beings.* The radical implication is that if this applies to *The Black Prince,* the same can be said of her other novels, even the less experimental ones where she assumes a position of "impersonality" with regard to her fictional world and its inhabitants.[49]

Nichol here seems to mistake the fictional text Murdoch represents—Bradley's manuscript, entitled *The Black Prince: A Celebration of Love*— for the novel within which she represents it, *The Black Prince.* It is only with this distinction that one can distinguish between the 'supremely transcendent' and 'tyrannical' author of the first from the 'position of "impersonality"' that characterises the second. It is Bradley, not Murdoch, who is 'the supremely transcendent author' who does not let his characters 'exist freely as separate beings.' Understanding Bradley as a 'version of [the author] herself,' Nicol does not distinguish between the author who creates the fictional world and the author that she represents within it. Murdoch's 'ethics of literary production' ought to be judged according to the novel she produces, rather than the one she depicts; we should not, at this juncture, confuse Murdoch with the fictional author she creates.

Bradley 'regards all other characters in terms of how they relate to himself' because he is both author and narrator of a narrative that he understands to be fundamentally *about* himself; his obsession with providing an account of himself sacrifices the freedom of those around him to exist 'as separate beings,' and it is Bradley who 'organiz[es] tyrannically all the points of view in the text,' and represents other people only insofar as they serve the interests of his narrative. Murdoch should not so readily be held responsible for the moral failures of the character she depicts critically. Lorna Sage has remarked that the novel 'could have been told in the omniscient third person,' and argues that 'there would have been much lost in the way of local

effect, but nothing of consequence in 'placing' the story as a whole.'[50] Sage's claim is striking

not least because it seems to me that the story's 'placing' depends entirely on its narrative

perspective; Bradley is a paranoid reader with a vested interest in retrospectively finding

meaning in meaninglessness. As Murdoch herself put it, rather understatedly, in 1988: 'It would

be an entirely different kind of novel if one divided the space up equally between the different

versions.'[51] Bradley is Murdoch's exemplary illustration of the egoist incapable of producing

ethical work; as first-person narrator, he objectifies all those involved in his plot, denying them

the freedom to 'exist freely.' An understanding of *The Black Prince* in these terms goes some

way towards resolving what Julia Jordan has named the 'paradox of Murdoch's belief in

contingency as a literary good and her supreme, almost dictatorial authorial control' in the

novel.[52] That is, the novel might be understood in terms of what Christine Brooke-Rose has

called 'one of the ways some authors, from Laurence Sterne on, have always dealt with the

problem of the author's authority'; namely, 'by exaggerating it.'[53]

As an actor within the plot, Bradley's efforts to control those around him are markedly

ineffectual. He fails to keep his ex-wife Christian's brother, Francis Marloe, out of his house, for

instance, or to prevent a friendship between his friend Arnold Baffin and Christian, or even to

retrieve his sister's possessions from her husband's house. As a narrator, on the other hand, he is

capable of exerting a control over them that he never had while they were transpiring, as though

he had knowledge of events and actions in advance. Bradley, then, is a first-person narrator

masquerading as an omniscient one; what looks like foreknowledge is actually retrospective, the

memory of personal experience. He states in his Postscript, for instance:

> I felt that every single thing that was happening to me was not just predestined but
> somehow actively at the moment of its occurrence *thought* by a divine power which held
> me in its talons. I […] knew that I could not now, by the most frenzied struggling, ever

escape my fate.[54]

Bradley typically misidentifies the reason why chains of events are inexorable; he thinks it is because they are predestined, whereas the significantly more mundane reality is that it is because they have already happened.

As narrator, Bradley turns all others into minor characters entirely subservient to his own narrative interests. He pictures his teenage lover Julian, for instance, not as a 'shadowy mass of contradictions like [his] own, but a casket containing entities which are clear-cut and definite but hidden.'[55] The occlusion of Julian's mind to Bradley—its hiddenness—seems, to him, to be evidence of the 'definite' nature of whatever is in it. Unable to picture that which is hidden, Bradley fails to conceive of what other minds are like; imagining that others do not possess minds like his own, he appears to understand other people as ontologically identical to those characters who are—to use E.M. Forster's famous vocabulary for literary characters—'flat.'[56] In Bradley's view, his detailed depiction of his own interiority and the stunted depictions of other people are mirrors of reality. He draws flat characters because he understands other people to be, intrinsically, flat. If there is any question of insufficiency or infidelity, it should be understood as a problem pertaining to the people rather than to the representation of them, and thus should be no grounds for doubt of his prowess as an author; as far as he is concerned, there really are people like this in the world who are flat and two-dimensional. In this sense, Bradley resembles Jake Donaghue, the narrator-protagonist of Murdoch's first novel, *Under the Net* (1953). At the very beginning of the book, Jake introduces his companion, Finn, in the following terms:

> I sometimes feel that Finn has very little inner life. I mean no disrespect to him in saying this; some have and some haven't. I connect this too with his truthfulness. Subtle people, like myself, can see too much ever to give a straight answer. […] It may be, though, that Finn misses his inner life, and that that is why he follows me about, as I have a complex one and highly differentiated. Anyhow, I count Finn as an inhabitant of my universe, and cannot conceive that he has one containing me; and this arrangement seems restful for

both of us.[57]

Finn's unannounced departure at the end of the novel forces Jake to realise that he has 'conceived things as I pleased and not as they were.'[58]

In *Aspects of the Novel,* E.M. Forster described Lady Bertram's dog in Austen's *Mansfield Park* as 'flat, like most animals in fiction.'[59] The reason fictional animals are usually flat is perhaps because people tend to understand real animals as in possession of less complex consciousnesses than humans, and lacking in the kind of privacy that might be gestured to by so-called 'roundness.' In *The Black Prince,* Bradley repeatedly describes his minor characters as dog-like in what seems to constitute an attempt to justify his treatment of them as if they really *were* animals; Bradley claims to have been unperturbed, for instance, when his tryst with Rachel is interrupted by Francis. 'Francis Marloe came into the room, said, 'Oh, sorry,' and went out again,' Bradley recounts: 'I minded him no more than if he had been a dog.'[60] He is of course displeased when others treat him in much the same way. In response to Francis's reductive pseudo-psychoanalytic analysis of him, he complains:

> Francis wanted to "explain" me. […] But any human person is infinitely more complex than this type of explanation. By "infinitely" (or should I say "almost infinitely"? Alas I am no philosopher) I mean that there are not only more details, but more kinds of details with more kinds of relations than these diminishers can dream of.[61]

While Bradley is, here, uncharacteristically astute, he is at the same time characteristically blind to the irony of the parallels between his own reductive characterisations and assessments of those around him and Francis' assessment of himself.

As the author of *The Black Prince—A Celebration of Love,* Bradley attends to the things and the people that are retrospectively significant to what he sees as the drama of his life. At the novel's beginning, for instance, he takes his reader on a tour of his house, and mentions, in his living room, 'small oriental bronzes, modest stuff, some of which I may describe later since two

at least of these objects play a role in the story.'[62] He takes a similar approach to the description of people; also early in the novel, he announces that '[s]ince Rachel Baffin is one of the main actors, in a crucial sense perhaps the main actor, in my drama I should now like to pause briefly to describe her.'[63] In Bradley's manuscript, that is, narrative attention to Rachel is directly proportional to her relevance to his plot, and outside of it she may as well not exist. The language of a 'main actor' is telling; crucially, Rachel is not an 'actor' in the sense that she has any agency, but rather in the sense that she takes place in a 'drama' written, directed and starring Bradley himself.

The Black Prince's most minor character of all, Septimus Leech, has the kind of silly name deplored by a critic like James Wood, who criticises postmodern writers such as Thomas Pynchon for the 'habit of making his flat characters dance for a moment on stage and then whisking them away, his vaudevillian fondness for silly names, japes, mishaps, disguises, silly errors, and so on.'[64] Bradley describes Leech as the 'new boy-friend' who bought Julian tickets to *Rosenkavalier*, the opera that she attends with Bradley immediately before he confesses his love to her.[65] Leech's Dickensian name and the rather easy allegorical reading suggested by his clingy behaviour make him seem almost ostentatiously flimsy—a flimsiness which, perhaps, has the effect of making Bradley seem more vivid, more ontologically convincing, by way of contrast.[66] The year after *The Black* Prince's publication, Leech was retroactively rendered even more ontologically unstable via a metaleptic cameo in a list of Blaise Gavender's 'wonderfully various' psychoanalysis patients in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974):

> Stanley Tumbelholme had an obsessional fear of his sister. Angelica Mendelssohn suffered paralysing jealously through being in love with members of the Royal Family. Maurice Guimarron thought he had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. Septimus Leech was a blocked writer. Penelope Biggers was insomniac because she feared to "die" in her sleep and be buried alive.[67]

In *The Black Prince,* after Bradley confesses his feelings to Julian, she denies any relationship with Leech. Julian insists that she 'just said that. I think I may even have said it out of some sort of instinct to tease you.'[68] Leech is a fabrication, but whether Julian's fabrication or Bradley's is undisclosed. The reason for the inconsistency of this account remains unconfirmed, whether it was a strategy of Julian's to try to make Bradley jealous, or a strategy of Bradley's to organise his book's plot, insofar as Leech is cast as a rival, only to be swiftly dispatched when this dynamic is no longer necessary. Bradley's typically unreliable narration rather destabilises Julian's ontology, insofar as it remains ambiguous whether she ought to be understood as real and Leech as her invention, or whether Bradley's entire representation is unreliable, that perhaps these conversations never took place at all.

Bradley's orientation to other people might be compared productively with the description of an interpersonal dynamic that Murdoch illustrates in her philosophical essay 'The Idea of Perfection' (1970). By way of an example, Murdoch describes a mother, M, who 'feels hostility to her daughter-in-law,' D, whom M finds to be 'pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile.'[69] Murdoch writes:

> Time passes, and it could be that M settles down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D, imprisoned (if I may use a question begging word) by the cliché: my poor son has married a silly vulgar girl.
> However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just attention to an object which confronts her.[70]

'M' looks again, and 'observes D until gradually her vision of D alters…D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on.'[71] Attention, for Murdoch, 'is the effort to counteract such states of illusion' as 'convincingly coherent but false pictures of the world.'[72]

In the example Murdoch provides in 'The Idea of Perfection,' this is all very well; after

reconsideration and then attention, M is able to direct a 'just and loving gaze' towards D, and see

her 'as she really is.'[73] When it comes to literary characters, however, the stakes are rather

different. A narrator's inattention to a literary character has a material effect upon that

character's constitution. Or, put differently; narrative perception constitutes a character

ontologically. In *The Black Prince,* once, in a brief moment of self-awareness, Bradley declares:

> How prejudiced is this picture of Arnold, how superficial this picture of Priscilla!
> Emotions cloud the view, and so far from isolating the particular, draw generality and
> even theory in their train. When I write of Arnold my pen shakes with resentment, love,
> remorse, and fear. It is as if I were building a barrier against him composed of words,
> hiding myself behind a mound of words. We defend ourselves by descriptions and tame
> words by generalizing. […] When I think of my sister I feel pity, annoyance, guilt,
> disgust *and it is in the "light" of these that I present her, crippled and diminished by my
> perception itself.*[74]

Bradley recognises that his subjective and indeed biased narration produces 'prejudiced' and

'superficial' representations; that is to say, his use of language has material effects. His

'perception' of Priscilla actively 'cripple[s]' and 'diminishe[s]' her. As narrator, Bradley has the

power to summon characters into being or expunge them from his narrative as he sees fit, but

such characters might bear no relation to the humans beings of whom they were supposed to be

representations. In fact, the character, a representation of Priscilla, is shaped not by reference to a

person in the world, but by the negative affect—'pity, annoyance, guilt, disgust'—of the author

who represents her. The ultimate effect is Bradley's own diminishment; his extreme solipsism

renders him strangely flat. The peculiar corollary, perhaps, is that the novel cannot help but

gesture outwards, here, to those other characters and worlds that Bradley is so determined to

eclipse.[75]

The minor character identified as 'P. Loxias' is perhaps *The Black Prince*'s most obscure

character of all. In his foreword to the text, Bradley dedicates the book explicitly to Loxias,

whom he addresses as 'my dearest friend, my comrade and my teacher.'[76] Rachel Baffin, in her

postscript, describes Loxias as 'a nom de guerre of a fellow-prisoner upon whom the unfortunate

BP seems to have become distressingly fixated. The name conceals the identity of a notorious

rapist and murderer, a well-known musical virtuoso.'[77] In his postscript, on the other hand,

Francis proposes that 'the alleged Mr Loxias' is 'our friend in a thin disguise,' and notes 'even a

marked similarity in literary style':

> The narcissism of the deviant eats up all other characters and will tolerate only one:
> himself. Bradley invents Mr Loxias so as to present *himself* to the world with a flourish
> of alleged objectivity. He says of P. Loxias "I could have invented him." In fact he did!'[78]

Perhaps Francis proves his own ontological solidity with his rather convincing interrogation of

Loxias's.[79] His point seems astute: Bradley 'eats up all other characters' and ultimately makes

himself the *only* character. Addressing Loxias, Bradley describes 'the whole of what I write here,

and perhaps somehow unconsciously my whole *oeuvre*' as a 'communication addressed to you.'

What he calls 'this direct speaking' he claims, brings him 'relief,' and what is implied is that the

address is really a conceit; this apparent apostrophe has no addressee, and is purely a means of

self-articulation.[80] Loxias indeed describes himself as Bradley's 'alter ego' and says that Bradley

'added a dimension to my being'; Bradley reveals himself to be his own narratee or imagined

reader.[81] Loxias seems to be just another of the characters in his narrative.[82]

In his 'Editor's Postscript,' Loxias offers a riposte: 'As for my own identity: I can

scarcely, "Dr" Marloe, be an invention of Bradley's, since I have survived him. Falstaff, it is

true, survived Shakespeare, but did not edit his plays.'[83] The effect of his insistence on his own

veracity here, however, might be simply that the reader is reminded that Murdoch is the chief

architect of the overall narrative. While Loxias casts aspersions on Francis's qualifications with

the sneering quotation marks around the word 'Dr,' then, this credential quibble is entirely

overshadowed by a much bigger, ontological one; Loxias is, indeed, no 'invention of Bradley's,' but this is because they are both inventions of Murdoch's. Loxias, we are reminded, did not edit the document in front of us, and the gap between the represented text, *The Black Prince—A Celebration of Love,* and the novel, *The Black Prince,* seems to gape more widely here. In this perhaps rather self-deprecating moment—Murdoch, after all, did believe that literary characters survive their creators, but as Loxias points out, not quite as literally as that—the author at the same time shores up her authority as creator.[84]

Murdochian parody: the contemporary novel and its problems

In 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel' (1958), Raymond Williams describes a vein of the realistic novel that he terms 'personal' as opposed to 'social.'[85] In 'many personal novels,' Williams writes,

> the general way of life [appears] as a simple backcloth, of shopping and the outbreak of war and buses and odd minor characters from another social class. Society is outside the people, though at times, even violently, it breaks in on them. […] it seems to me that for every case of conscious selection (as in Proust, say, where the concentration is entirely justified and yet produces, obliquely, a master-portrait of a general way of life) there are perhaps a hundred cases where the restriction is simply a failure of consciousness, a failure to realize the extent to which the substance of a general way of life actively affects the closest personal experience.[86]

Williams's description of such novels sounds remarkably like a description of *An Accidental Man,* in which 'odd minor characters from another social class' form the 'back-cloth' of the novel, insofar as these individuals are not made the subject of anything like the attention Murdoch understands to be a moral good. Williams might have been writing specifically about *An Accidental Man* when he writes that '[w]hat is missed' in such novels is 'the element of common substance':

and this is often amusingly revealed in the sudden drop in sensibility when someone with a different social life-style—a charwoman, say, as they put it, reverting now suddenly to the social novel's categories—is as a person, but they will not have her as a person, encountered. We are people, you sometimes hear between the lines, to *us* these things are important. And this is not so much social snobbery, though it can be diagnosed as that, as the failure to realize the nature of the general social element in *their own* lives. We are people, just like that; the rest is the world or society or politics or something, dull things that are written about in the newspapers. But the fact is that we are people and people within a society: that whole view was at the centre of the realistic novel.[87]

Later in the same essay, Williams describes another 'personal kind' of novel; 'the novel of the "personal formula,"' in which 'a particular pattern is abstracted from the sum of experience, and persons are created from that.'[88] Such novels, Williams writes, 'tak[e] one person's feelings and needs as absolute,' and so 'create other persons in these sole terms,' and thus 'can be summed up by saying that it only takes one person seriously, though then often very seriously indeed.'[89] In this case, Williams seems to describe *The Black Prince*: while the 'broad intention of realism is obvious,' he writes, 'finally only one character is fully and consistently observed, while the others fall away into graded levels of caricature, according to their distance from him.'[90] Williams calls for a revival of the 'realistic novel' because of his belief that it needs 'a genuine community: a community of persons linked not merely by one kind of relationship—work, friendship, family—but by many, interlocking kinds.'[91] He argues, ultimately, that the

> necessary adjustment is so great that it involves the most difficult kind of integration: the recovery, in fact, of that kind of feeling about persons and a whole way of life which I described as marking the realistic novel. [...] We need this recovery of wholeness, for the most ordinary business of living, yet the necessary learning and adjustment in experience can only take place in ways which the realistic novel alone can record.[92]

Williams, then, provides a taxonomy of two kinds of contemporary novels, of which *An Accidental Man* and *The Black Prince* are exemplary. These two very different novels, published within two years of each other in the early 1970s, served as Murdoch's illustration of two crucial ways in which individuals might fail in the ethical representation and perception of other people.

In these novels, Murdoch's parodic take on what she understood to be the limitations of nineteenth-century lyrical realist and twentieth-century modernist literary modes necessarily involves the undermining and reappropriation of these modes principally via experimental narrational techniques. As radically double-voiced works, though, *An Accidental Man* and *The Black Prince* are not only illustrative of ethical failings. At the same time, rather, they are capable of indicating an alternative route, an ethical means of treating other people endorsed by the author.

Murdoch's undispatchable minor characters

In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster privileged what he called 'round characters' because novelists can use them to reveal the 'secret life, which each of us lives privately' whereas 'flat characters' have no secrets in themselves but create a kind of 'atmosphere' with their predictable patterns of speech and behaviour.[93] In a departure from Forster's theory, a number of recent scholars have interrogated the peculiar illusion of autonomy that so-called minor or flat characters are capable of producing. Elaine Auyoung, for instance, has recently argued that protagonists, despite being generally thought to possess greater solidity and depth than their satellites, are actually more evanescent than minor or stock characters, who— precisely because their behaviour is anticipable—are endowed with proleptic potential.[94] Grace Pregent, moreover, argues that because '[l]ess is known about minor characters than about major characters, […] these very gaps arguably serve to fuel readerly interest and foster the sensation of lingering curiosity generated by some minor characters.'[95] In Alex Woloch's view—famously articulated in *The One vs. the Many* —characters struggle for what he calls the novel's 'distributed attention' from

other characters, the novelist, and the reader. Woloch's examples emphasise competition: the battle of the *Iliad*, or the courtships at the heart of *Pride and Prejudice*. Kristen H. Starkowski suggests, contra Woloch, that these losers in the competition for narrative attention become winners insofar as these 'ambassadors of elsewhere' are 'never fully out of sight or mind,' and can often be found 'participat[ing] in a different social activity in an adjacent story world.'[96] Starkowski argues that this 'social distance, captured in passing by a gaze that has no interest in registering these elsewheres in any level of depth and that often strives to reduce them to functions, has the effect of making Dickens's minor characters appear strangely memorable from the vantage point of those through whom we meet them.'[97]

While Woloch argues that the 'strange significance of minor characters resides largely in the way that the character disappears […] for *every* minor character does—by strict definition— disappear,' he does not give much room to those characters that the novel *cannot* dispatch.[98] While in Murdoch's novels certain characters are resoundingly effaced, others seem to linger, and the narration tends to return to them despite concerted efforts to get them out of sight. Such characters' obscurity thus renders them strangely prominent. The advantage of narrative occlusion turns out to be that under the right circumstances, it might permit a desirable—even empowering—form of privacy.[99] In certain episodes in both *An Accidental Man* and *The Black Prince,* Murdoch relinquishes authorial control in a move that hat does not compromise the dedicated attention that she believed to be critical to an ethical conception of literary character. In these episodes, characters' occlusion seems closer to escape than neglect.

Before considering these undispatchable minor characters that manage to maintain, in their occlusion, a form of privacy, it is important to consider a minor character of Murdoch's who has perhaps the least privacy of all. *An Accidental Man* features a minor character named

Henrietta Sayce who is never represented directly in the text, and appears only when she is referred to by others in the novel's epistolary passages or its party scenes, which are represented almost exclusively in dialogue. Henrietta, who is ten, is reported to have 'gassed Mollie Arbuthnot's cat,'[100] and 'been blackmailing her brother for years,'[101] and to be 'a DEVIL,'[102] 'on LSD,'[103] and 'engaged to Patrick Tisbourne.'[104] At the end of the novel, Patrick's mother Clara is informed on the telephone that Henrietta has died in a freak accident; having been 'climbing on some scaffolding, she 'fell off and broke her skull.'[105] Henrietta is represented only by way of other characters' gossip, in those sections of the novel from which narration is entirely absent, and as such her characterisation is strictly limited to the written and spoken judgements of those other characters.[106] No narrative voice is present to interpret or verify these claims, to provide contextualising information, or indeed to illuminate the motivations of these gossiping characters. In the party scenes, the uncertain imbrication of voices means it is difficult to tell who is speaking, and from where. While the letters, at least, are addressed and signed, in the party scenes, responsibility for utterances is dispersed. The narrator's palpable absence from such passages permits a kind of equivocation whereby these utterances are neither endorsed nor disavowed. These stichomythic passages have the quality of 'sourceless, autonomous speech' that Casey Finch and Peter Bowen attribute to gossip; they seem to possess an 'authority that is everywhere apparent but whose source is nowhere to be found.'[107]

Blakey Vermeule has argued that gossip 'flows into a text the moment a writer chooses frame tales or letters as her narrative vehicle,' and 'automatically distances the reader from actions that may be too painful to contemplate.'[108] 'If a writer can complete an action through gossip,' Vermeule argues, that writer 'pushes the action deeper into the background.'[109] The process Vermeule describes is precisely what happens to Henrietta. Dialogue vivifies characters,

but Henrietta never gets to participate in it—she is only ever its victim, or object, and is then swiftly dispatched from the narrative in a move that renders her life cartoonish, a warped cautionary tale of an exaggeratedly wicked child who meets a grisly end. She has a life neither outside the plot nor inside it.[110] Henrietta has no ontological weight to her, constructed as she is from the salacious back-and-forth of local gossip. She is a narrative chimera, insofar as her occlusion seems only to exist to hide the fact that what is being hidden is precisely nothing; that there isn't anyone there at all.

'Serious gossip,' for Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'takes place in private, at leisure, in the context of trust, usually among no more than two or three people.'[111] Such gossip, Spacks writes, 'provides a resource for the subordinated, and is a 'crucial means of self-expression, a crucial form of solidarity.[112] Gossip might shore up the individual relationships of 'solidarity' between the wealthier characters—but surely everyone knows that they are the subject of gossip every time their backs are turned. In *An Accidental Man*, those socially 'subordinated' do not get to gossip—but nor are they its object. As Vermeule puts it: 'People gossip up; Samuel Johnson observed that only the poor have privacy.'[113] When the circle of characters expands beyond what both Murdoch and Spacks would call 'two or three people,'[114] working-class characters are occluded from gossip's remit. The party scenes are spaces in which untagged dialogue exposes the secrets of others, but it does not expose those characters who are seen as having nothing worth exposing. While Henrietta—the daughter of a wealthy member of the inner social circle—is relentlessly gossiped about and exposed, Murdoch's working-class characters vitally retain privacy. The occlusion of these characters' lives turns out to be to their advantage.

The concept of privacy is, as Rachel Wiseman has argued, key to Murdoch's understanding of what it means to be human:

Murdoch argues that moral philosophy must be able speak in terms of good and evil, piety and salvation, humility and love—concepts that are connected to perfection, not mediocracy—and she thinks that these concepts get application only against a background picture of humans as substantive individuals or selves, each with a personal history, and a rich, unique, and ultimately private, inner life.[115]

A minor character might be more powerful for eluding the imperative to be self-expressive or to speak according to the narrative's demands, to possess an undisclosed mind. Such a character's life might be understood as gestured to but not grasped by the narrative. Murdoch recognised the information we have about characters and real people alike to be necessarily always limited. In an essay titled 'Vision and Choice in Morality' (1956), she argued:

> We *imagine* fictitious characters as concrete individuals and although it is true that the information we have about them is limited, this may be so also in the case of real people, and anyway the information is endlessly open to reinterpretation. In fact, we may, in the course of time, alter our assessment of a fictitious character […] Why existentialists like writing novels is plain. A novelist can readily represent a situation in which the agent is immersed, which he only partly understands, and whose solution may involve a clash of irreconcilable moral viewpoints. Whether and in what circumstances such a "representation" constitutes an "explanation" is, of course, another question.[116]

In the spareness of their characterisation, Murdoch's minor characters might be understood to be somehow freed from the mimetic problem wherein any representation of a human being is inevitably incomplete, since language can never adequately depict that person in their entirety. In her representations of minor characters, Murdoch takes this inevitable incompleteness and turns it to her advantage; the representation of the minor character does not strive towards completeness and then fail, but rather recognises that completeness to be fantastical. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch insisted that 'only in our own illusioning fantasy are we complete,'[117] and the representation of a minor character comes closer, in its necessary limitedness, to the truth of incompleteness by way of gesture than to a false sense of completeness by way of direct representation.

We might return to *An Accidental Man*'s Mrs Carberry here by way of example. In one episode, Austin breaks into Valmorana in an effort to find his wife Dorina, and then runs into Mrs Carberry and Ronald in the street outside shortly afterwards. The narrator reports:

> What did Mrs Carberry think about him, he suddenly wondered. Had she seen him climbing over the wall? But then it did not really matter to him or to anybody else what Mrs Carberry thought. If God existed he would be indifferent to the thoughts of Mrs Carberry.[118]

If the creator of the narrative universe and all the beings in it is understood as God, then the God who is 'indifferent to the thoughts of Mrs Carberry' is, rather damningly, Murdoch herself. The narrative focus in this episode, however, rather undoes the possibility of any such indifference. While Mrs Carberry's mind is occluded, Austin's is harshly exposed, and the result is ugly; Murdoch shifts her narrative into free indirect discourse at this moment to signal that this assumption about God's indifference is Austin's judgement, and not the novel's. In fact, free indirect style exposes his callousness. For Mavis, Mrs Carberry was never worth gossiping about, as if her privacy isn't worth having, because no one cares about it—and yet she has it all the same. The same cannot be said for Mavis herself or for Austin, the workings of whose minds are made horribly visible.

Elsewhere, we learn that Mrs Carberry 'looked tired, vague, old, older than Mavis though she was probably fifteen years younger.' [119] Murdoch's use of the verb 'looked' rather than 'was' is illustrative of the constraint of her narration, which refuses to offer up anything definitive about Mrs Carberry's physical or affective states, and is limited exclusively to appearance, while the word 'probably'—'she was probably fifteen years younger than Mavis'—seems to show no concern for the details of her biography. What it perhaps suggests, however, is that Mrs Carberry somehow eludes description; she cannot be fully known by those other characters who condescend to her but also fail to grasp her, and it is this failure to take hold that the narration

imitates, and to which it is thereby limited. The description Mrs Carberry's 'vague' appearance might be understood as a derogatory description of an old woman's face or as a sign of fundamental disinterest in her, but more powerfully than this it suggests that there is something to Mrs Carberry that cannot be known or articulated. Rachel Malik has argued that for certain minor characters, the 'linkage between interior and exterior' asserted by physiognomy is one of 'continuity.'[120] In such cases, 'the exterior is all we need,' writes Malik: 'there is no necessary effacement of the interior because the exterior maps it perfectly.'[121] In this description of Mrs Carberry, Murdoch overturns any such possibility of exteriority mapping interiority. It is as though, while Mrs Carberry is perceived only visually, there is some manner of visual blockage; the rigidity of her exteriority allows her to evade description. The implication is that Mrs Carberry's interiority is inaccessible even to the ostensible supreme creator, the author herself.

In the suggestion and simultaneous occlusion of the thinking mind, such descriptions hint at the potency of economy in drawing characters. With this in mind, it is crucial that a minor character is not the same as a flat one. Forster's flat characters are consistent, 'constructed round a single idea or quality' incapable of changing or surprising.[122] Woloch has suggested that Forster's 'discussion of 'flatness' relies on the convergence of two different processes, minorness and caricature,' and that flatness 'is the consequence of narrative distortion.'[123] More than ten years before the publication of Woloch's book, David Galef articulated the distinction succinctly in his study of flat and minor characters, *The Supporting Cast* (1989): 'Minor characters in their paucity of detail invite the reader's elaboration; flat characters, though lacking in depth, are finished creations, possessing what one might call contextual closure.'[124] Unlike flat characters, then, minor characters are necessarily incomplete; they are not identical with or defined by their delimited positions, but rather this delimitation gestures to an undisclosed

remainder, that which Deidre Shauna Lynch called the 'residue' or 'characters' excesses.'[125] The lifelike, autonomous quality of such characters is constituted by the very move that would seem to subordinate them.

Galef proposes that minor characters might be said 'simply to have less ontological pull on the reader, to insist less on their existence, as it were, because the writer offers less knowledge about them than about other, more significant depictions.'[126] What is critical here, however, is the strange way in which both the ontological pull and the insistence on existence become stronger as a direct result of the nondisclosure of 'knowledge about them.' As Galef writes, '[e]ven when a minor character is truly minor because of his insignificant role, he may not come across as flat. Rather, he may appear to have unplumbed depths, mainly because the light of exposition never fully illuminates him.'[127] Galef's argument aligns with Alex Woloch's claim for the strange way in which minor characters' referential pull seems sometimes to arise precisely as a consequence of their structural limitation; the 'strange resonance of minor characters,' Woloch writes, 'stems from the intricacy of a narrative process,' wherein a character 'is not directly or fully represented in the narrative, and […] comes to command a particular kind of attention in the partial occlusion of his fullness.'[128]

Minor characters might possess a vivid 'fullness' that is not rendered explicitly, meaning that their only partial inflection into the narrative universe becomes a source of mimetic power. 'Distortion and effacement,' as Rachel Malik observes, 'belong to a more general realist strategy whose effect is always to suggest that there is more than what has been said or told: a form of the representative that suggests a surplus (of the same order) beyond it.'[129] The difference between the representation of the minor character and the protagonist is thus both a difference in degree (*all* characters are represented metonymically, and in the case of the minor character this is just

particularly extreme) and in kind (the minor character's fullness is occluded rather than laid bare). The minor character thus comes to embody the quintessential referential character; minor characters do not disclose all, but rather gesture to that which cannot be disclosed.[130]

In the final pages of *An Accidental Man,* Murdoch negotiates the play of occlusion and privacy with regard to a specific minor character in precisely these terms. Rosalind Monkley's mother, Mary, appears briefly in the kitchen at the engagement party at the novel's very end. In a 2003 introduction to the text, Valentine Cunningham describes 'Proley Mary Monkley' as 'one of the several low-life characters Iris Murdoch has brought into this novel—perhaps in some endeavour to meet her complaining critics and widen her usual exclusive social clientele.'[131] Cunningham reads Mary's appearance here as that of the 'rare proletarian' who is 'tippling sherry like some Dickensian gargoyle in her apparently appropriate place, on the social margins, in the kitchen.'[132] Cunningham, however, is amiss in his understanding of Mary as both socially abject and characterologically grotesque.[133] Mary is indeed on the 'social margins' of the space, and is given no voice in the rapid-fire exchange of direct speech with which the novel concludes. The very last time the novel features narration (rather than pure dialogue), however, Mary's consciousness is focalised. Although she is sequestered in the kitchen while the others celebrate in another room, Mary is strangely centred by the narration. The final lines of the novel before the inane party chatter takes over observe Mary, motionless and alone in the kitchen, thinking:

> Outside in the kitchen Mary Monkley kicked off her shoes and sipped a tiny sherry. Norman was so kind to her these days, like a kind child. But she missed the bad old Norman whom she would now never see again. Funny, wasn't it. And if she had been still alive Rosalind would have been eight today.[134]

Murdoch's use of free indirect style in these final lines—'funny, wasn't it'—finally permit the reader to perceive Mary's mind in action. There is an arresting element of pathos to the scene, even in the tininess of the sherry she consumes; her family has been destroyed by the people

around her, and she has no power to do anything about it.

In *The Black Prince,* too, minor characters demonstrate a show of resistance to Bradley's tyrannical narrative control and to his propensity for turning others into minor characters in the narrative of his life. In the novel's postscripts, these other characters to seize control of the narration, and momentarily to become first-person narrators themselves, to articulate themselves in a forum outside Bradley's control and authority. There are moments of insurrection in this novel in which the characters break through, despite Bradley's efforts; we might turn, for example, to an instance of Bakhtinian 'hidden dialogue,' a type of active double-voiced discourse,[135] in the form of Bradley's anticipation of Francis's pseudo-psychoanalysis: 'My mother filled me with exasperation and shame but I loved her. (Be quiet Francis Marloe).'[136] When occluded, the other characters continue to lurk somewhere, and Bradley cannot shut them out entirely. Christian's postscript, too, contains another prime instance of the double-voiced discourse of Murdochian irony: 'Bradley has a way of seeing everything in his own way and making it all fit together in his own picture. Perhaps we all do that, but we do not write it down in a book,'[137] or Julian's comment that in the manuscript, 'sometimes too there are thoughts which I could not possibly have thought. Thoughts which have leaked in from the author's mind. (I am not a very convincing "character.")'[138]

The 'impenetrable human person': The afterlives of Murdoch's characters

'Long before her Alzheimer's disease set in,' Suzanne Keen writes in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), 'Iris Murdoch was well known for referring to the continued post-novel existences of her creations and would sometimes inform her visitors or correspondents about what the characters

had been up to recently.'[139] Such behaviour does not indicate that Murdoch was a proponent of a philosophical approach that has been named 'fictional realism,' whose adherents accept an ontological commitment to fictional characters, and hold that they are 'part of the "furniture of the world."'[140] In fact, Murdoch went much further, and seemed to make a claim for the extra-textual reality of characters and their ontological identicality with human beings in the world. Keen's reference to the disease with which Murdoch was diagnosed in 1995, and which would kill her four years later, perhaps implies that a reader might have otherwise expected the author to have referred her characters in such a way after, rather than before, she succumbed to neurodegenerative illness. We are not supposed to believe, maybe, that Murdoch *really* believed her characters' lives continued somewhere off the page. This would require understanding characters and human beings to be ontologically identical, whereas Murdoch was always precise in delineating the distinction between 'life' and 'art,' even as they illuminate one another. The question, however, remains: if readers ought to understand that Murdoch didn't really believe in the extratextual reality of her characters, why did she say she did? Taking this provocative idea of characters as autonomous seriously, if not literally illuminates post-war conceptualisations of literary ontology more widely.

The effects of literary character can never be fully explained in terms of formal textual features. As Deidre Shauna Lynch has productively argued in *The Economy of Character* (1998), the demystification of the illusion of character 'dismisses the plenitude it should explain' because it fails to 'account for how characters' excesses—the residue left over after the structuralist analysis of narrative roles, the augmented vitality that humanist accounts ascribe to characters who seem to lead lives off the page—have been effective in history.'[141] Lynch points

generatively to the 'residue' that cannot be ignored when accounting for the effects characters have upon readers.

Murdoch believed that authors should resist the imposition of form or the penetrating, hermeneutic operation of the urge to render psychological depth, motive, or personal history transparent. In 'Against Dryness' (1961), she argued that 'what we require is a renewed sense of the difficulty and the complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons,'[142] and advocated for 'turn[ing] our attention away from the consoling dream necessity of Romanticism, away from the dry symbol, the bogus individual, the false whole, towards the real impenetrable human person.'[143] If a 'character is presented with an excess of lucidity and transparency, a sense of futility may overcome the reader,' Murdoch wrote. She argued that the complexity and ontological robustness of human beings requires attention.[144] In Murdoch's view, impenetrability is a condition of humanity; she described 'real people' as 'unfinished and full of blankness and jumble,' and argued that 'only in our own illusioning fantasy are we complete.'[145] For Murdoch, then, it was an ethical imperative to represent this quality in the creation of characters. What she called the 'impenetrable human person' corresponds, in literary texts, to the 'opa[que]' character.

Murdoch's novels, then, make a yet more radical case for the significance of reference in conceiving of literary ontology. Murdoch wrote fiction at a time when experimental writers in Britain and Europe used the novel genre to make a claim for the reality of the world and the fictionality of the narrative and its characters.[146] The British experimental writer B.S. Johnson, for example, argued that the realist tradition was fundamentally dishonest in its reliance on the pretence that there were real people in the novel other than the author.[147] In this sense, Murdoch's conception of the ontology of characters appears to be starkly at odds with that of the French *nouveaux romanciers* of the 1950s or contemporaneous avant-garde novelists in Britain

such as Johnson or Christine Brooke-Rose, and it is perhaps for this reason that she has not historically been understood as an experimental writer. I want to suggest, however, that in ostensibly founding her conception of literary character on an ontological mistake, on the misrecognition of a representation of a human being for a real human being, Murdoch undertook a deliberate and radical creative act.

For the literary critic John Bayley, Murdoch's husband, the love of authors for their characters is a 'delight in their independent existence as other people, an attitude towards them which is analogous to our feelings towards those we love in life; and an intense interest in their personalities combined with a sort of detached solicitude for their freedom.'[148] For Murdoch, like Bayley, the finite nature of the space of the text comes to appear to be a rather minor problem, since the representation of a character is not bound to that which is explicitly stated in the text. What matters is not so much the material quantity of narrative space parcelled out to a character, but the attention allocated to them in these moments.

The attention for which Murdoch advocated should not be understood as something like 'attention to detail.' The distinction lies not in acquiring more information, but in the character of one's orientation towards the other, and indeed this attentiveness might require the curtailment of scrutiny in favour of a respect for and recognition of the other's ultimate inscrutability. Murdoch's undispatchable minor characters evade objectification and obtain, instead, a degree of autonomy not unlike the work that escapes the author's control that Bakhtin described in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* 'as if the character were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual world.'[149]

Notes

[1] Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 11-12.

[2] Iris Murdoch, 'A Dialogue with Iris Murdoch', interview by Barbara Stevens Heusel, in *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, ed. Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 198.

[3] Murdoch, 198. Many of Murdoch's philosophical works, such as 'On "God" and "Good"' and 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts' are heavily invested in the philosophical concept she calls 'the Good.' See *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter J. Conradi (New York: Penguin, 1999).

[4] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'What Are Characters Made of? Textual, Philosophical and "World" Approaches to Character Ontology', *Neohelicon* 45, no. 2 (December 2018): 415, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-018-0454-9. Ryan writes: 'Characterhood, worldness and narrativity are not binary features but scalar properties of the mental representations elicited by texts…If there is such a thing as an "unnatural character," it is not a fantastic creature representing a species that cannot be found in the real world, it is an entity that is not fully realized as a person, that appears in a text of low worldness and narrativity, and that belongs to the margins of the fuzzy set of characters.' Ryan, 428.

[5] Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 7.

[6] Those characters who are more name than number, of course, are more than name alone; the name is understood to index an embodied, conscious, autonomous individual.

[7] Iris Murdoch, 'Now Read On.' Interview. BBC. 27 October 1971. Quoted in Richard Todd, *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearean Interest* (London: Vision, 1979), 48.

[8] Ibid.

[9] While it would be wrong to conceive of existentialism more broadly as any formally codified form of philosophical enquiry, it is possible to identify a set of central tenets shared by the philosophers with whom it is foremostly associated. Following what he considers to be de Beauvoir and Sartre's 'original…defin[ition],' Jonathan Webber describes existentialism as the 'ethical theory that we ought to treat the freedom at the core of human existence as intrinsically valuable and the foundation of all other values.' *Rethinking Existentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2.

[10] The individual, that is, might be constrained by biological, psychological, historical, or social factors.

[11] Iris Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', in *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 2014), 36.

[12] Peter J. Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist: A Study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 32.

[13] The concept of *attention* is central to Murdoch's philosophy. In an essay titled 'The Idea of Perfection,' she wrote that she 'borrow[ed]' the term 'from the French philosopher Simone Weil, to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality.' 'The Idea of Perfection', 33. The essay began as a lecture in 1962, and was first published in 1964, before being included in *The Sovereignty of Good* in 1970. For Weil, Murdoch wrote, 'morality was a matter of attention, not of will.' 'Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch', in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter J. Conradi (New York: Penguin, 1999), 293. For Murdoch, attention was the only true means of recognising and respecting the reality and autonomy of other people; a 'just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality,'

she wrote, permits one to see the other 'as she really is,' and is the 'characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent.' 'The Idea of Perfection', 33, 36.

[14] Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 124.

[15] Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 27.

[16] Woloch, 13.

[17] For Woloch, in literary realism, the emergence of a protagonist as a self-reflective agent is structured by the subordination of other characters within the narrative structure, and any 'character-system' is the arrangement of these 'multiple and differentiated character-spaces.' Woloch, 14.

[18] In his analysis of *The Iliad,* Alex Woloch describes the minor character Lykaon's '*character-space*'—Woloch's term for the point of intersection between an 'implied human personality' and the 'definitively circumscribed form of a narrative'—as not having 'nearly enough time to unfold.' Woloch, 8. Woloch proposes that much of the emotive effect of Lykaon's death at the hands of Achilles is an effect of the very fact that so little ink is spilled in Homer's account of it; he writes, 'the compact space devoted to his fate is essential to our understanding of it, as the way Lykaon's tragic death gets squeezed into the episode forms an inherent aspect *of* the tragedy.' Woloch, 8. The amount of narrative space afforded to minor characters might be understood in terms of insufficiency or injustice. Woloch's explicitly 'socioformal' approach treats the unequal parcelling out of narrative space among fictional entities as the unjust allocation of attention *to* them. Woloch, 17. In other texts, the compression of character-space— the failure to devote narrative space to a minor character—seems to index a skewed set of faculties of judgement, of a significant failure to prioritise. In Nabokov's *Lolita,* for instance, Humbert Humbert famously compresses his mother's death into two words between parentheses—'(picnic, lightning)'—that signal his pathology. *The Annotated Lolita* (London: Penguin, 2000), 10.

[19] Levine, *Realism, Ethics and Secularism*, 196.

[20] Levine, 196.

[21] Murdoch told Frank Kermode that her novels 'oscillate rather between attempts to portray a lot of people and giving in to a powerful plot or story.' 'The House of Fiction', interview by Frank Kermode, *Partisan Review* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1963): 64.

[22] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch', 293.

[23] Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 17. Woloch that literary characterisation operates within a 'distributional matrix' in which 'the discrete representation of any specific individual is intertwined with the narrative's continual apportioning of attention to different characters who jostle for limited space within the same fictional universe.' Woloch, 13. This description seems nicely to distil the difficult dialectic of structure and reference, since to describe the characters are 'jostl[ing]' seems to be to conceive of them referentially, insofar as the image is decidedly anthropomorphic, but the description of the space as 'limited' invokes a structural conception of the fictional universe, since a referential one would understand it to be limitless.

[24] This position is exemplified by the theories of Roland Barthes, and found influential proponents in writers from Alain Robbe-Grillet to Hélène Cixous. The 'attack on reference,' Woloch writes, was propagated by 'French structuralists, poststructuralists, and the new novelists' who 'return to and elaborate Russian formalism, arguing, even more insistently, against the anthropomorphic component of characterization.' *The One vs. the Many*, 15–16.

[25] Iris Murdoch, *An Accidental Man* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), 45.

[26] Murdoch, 45.

[27] Murdoch, 50.

[28] Murdoch, 50.

[29] Murdoch, 359.

[30] Murdoch, 145.

[31] Murdoch, 146–47.

[32] Murdoch, 161.

[33] Murdoch, 161.

[34] Murdoch, 161.

[35] Murdoch, 162.

[36] Murdoch, 164.

[37] Murdoch, 202.

[38] Murdoch, 203.

[39] Murdoch, 272.

[40] Murdoch, 376.

[41] Rosalind Miles, *The Fiction of Sex: Themes and Functions of Sex Difference in the Modern Novel* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1974), 129–30. Miles defends this claim only by pointing to Murdoch's convincing characterisation of Pattie, a servant in her 1966 novel *The Time of the Angels.*

[42] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', 280.

[43] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 136.

[44] Murdoch, 'Philosophy and Literature: A Dialogue with Iris Murdoch', 9.

[45] Murdoch, 9. Murdoch described Shakespeare, whom she greatly admired, as having a 'recognizable style but no presence.' Murdoch, 9.

[46] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', 280.

[47] Peter Lamarque, 'Truth and Art in Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince*', *Philosophy and Literature* 2, no. 2 (1978): 222, https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.1978.0020.

[48] Bran Nicol, 'Iris Murdoch's Aesthetics of Masochism', *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 2 (2006): 149.

[49] Nicol, 161 (my emphasis).

[50] Lorna Sage, 'Female Fictions: The Women Novelists', in *The Contemporary English Novel*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and D. J. Palmer (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980), 70.

[51] Richard Todd and John Fletcher, eds., *Encounters with Iris Murdoch: Proceedings of an Informal Symposium on Iris Murdoch's Work, Held at the Free University, Amsterdam, on 20 and 21 October 1986*, 1 (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988), 104.

[52] Julia Jordan, *Chance and the Modern British Novel: From Henry Green to Iris Murdoch* (London: Continuum, 2011), 130.

[53] Christine Brooke-Rose and Brigid Brophy, 'Introduction', in *In Transit: An Heroi-Cyclic Novel* (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2002), iii.

[54] Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 389–90.

[55] Murdoch, 289.

[56] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2005), 81.

[57] Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (London: Vintage, 2002), 9.

[58] Murdoch, 279.

[59] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 77.

[60] Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 140. Bradley additionally describes Julian as having a 'dog-like face,' and claims to 'remember thinking of [Arnold] as a pet dog.' Murdoch, 56, 185. In *Under the Net*, Jake Donaghue must actively insist to himself that his Alsatian, Mars, has a less complex consciousness than he does: Mars 'would come and thrust his long nose into my face and give me a look of anguish which came so near to transcending his nature that I would push his face away and ruffle up the fur of his back to satisfy myself that he was only a dog.' *Under the Net*, 222–23.

[61] Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 15.

[62] Murdoch, 61.

[63] Murdoch, 33.

[64] James Wood, 'All Rainbow, No Gravity', *The New Republic*, 5 March 2007.

[65] Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 243.

[66] Marie-Laure Ryan writes usefully that '[t]he more strongly a character represents a theme or idea, the weaker his status as person and his perceived autonomy: allegorical figures are the puppets of the author, not creatures acting out of free will.' Ryan asks, 'Can one still call these creations characters? Only if one defines 'characters' as the referents of proper names in fictional texts.' 'What Are Characters Made Of?', 427.

[67] Iris Murdoch, *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 20. When asked by an interviewer about Leech's reappearance in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, Murdoch dismissed it rather hastily as metafictional play, describing it as 'just a little game to amuse a small number of readers.' Todd and Fletcher, *Encounters with Iris Murdoch*, 107.

[68] Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 270–71.

[69] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', 16–17.

[70] Murdoch, 17.

[71] Murdoch, 17.

[72] Murdoch, 36.

[73] Murdoch, 36.

[74] Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 81–82 (my emphasis).

[75] In a deliberate inversion of Woloch's account of the 'character-system,' Marta Figlerowicz finds in certain literary works what she names a 'flat realism.' Figlerowicz is interested in novels in which there's no contest for space, but rather little reason for the central figure to remain central. While Figlerowicz's examples span from the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth, the names of her four flat protagonist types—The prince, the writer, the misfit, the solipsist—seem very well to describe Bradley Pearson. Figlerowicz's focus is not a dearth of attention to many but excessive attention to one. Novels of flat realism, she argues, divert attention from the overvalued category of the individual, insofar as they 'gesture toward an unrealized fictional world much larger than the one they represent, a world within which the words and gestures they represent would be completely insignificant.' *Flat Protagonists: A Theory of Novel Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 14.

[76] Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 19.

[77] Murdoch, 407.

[78] Murdoch, 401.

[79] Of course, the metafictional irony here—especially legible in phrases such as 'a marked similarity in literary style'—emphasises the fictionality of the novel, and makes it difficult to forget that Murdoch as author presides over all.

[80] Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 79–80.

[81] Murdoch, 9, 415.

[82] The whole conceit seems to be lifted wholesale from Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), in which a Foreword attributed to 'John Ray Jr., Ph.D.' informs the reader that the author of the manuscript that follows died of heart failure in prison. As is the case in Murdoch's novel, in Nabokov's, the confessional manuscript produced by a monomaniacal narrator who insists that *love* has always been his guiding principle is distinguished from the novel that contains it by its name; whereas Bradley's manuscript was titled *The Black Prince—A Celebration of Love,* Humbert Humbert's is named *Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male.*

[83] Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 415.

[84] The apparent contradiction of Murdoch's rigorous authorial control with her avowed belief in the moral value of freedom and contingency has troubled many commentators. Valentine Cunningham reads the author of *An Accidental Man* as an authoritarian, the ultimate arbiter of what, to the characters, seems like a series of accidents. '[T]hese people,' he argues, 'do seem predestined to awful fates, if only by their novelist.' 'Introduction', in *An Accidental Man* (London: Vintage, 2003), xi.

[85] Raymond Williams, 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel (1958)', *Universities & Left Review* 4 (Summer 1958): 23.

[86] Williams, 23.

[87] Williams, 23.

[88] Williams, 23.

[89] Williams, 24.

[90] Williams, 24.

[91] Williams, 24. It is important to note that Williams's primary focus was the modernist novel. Woolf is his main example of the first kind of 'personal' novel, and Joyce's *Portrait* of the second. He is complementary about *Ulysses,* but critiques Amis and Wain as 'diluted' in achievement and technique. Williams, 24. In the version of 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel' published in *The Long Revolution* three years later in 1961, Williams made a number of telling edits; he suggested that for every Proustian novel, there a 'thousand' rather than a 'hundred' like him; he made specific reference to the 'strange case of the Virginia Woolf charwoman or village woman,' so as to emphasise that he included those monumental modernist writers in his assessment; and he removed the reference to 'graded levels of caricature,' writing instead that writers of the second kind of personal novel 'start with real personal feelings, but to sustain and substantiate them, in their given form, the world of action in which they operate has to be pressed, as it were inevitably, towards caricature.' 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel', in *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 282–84, https://doi.org/10.7312/will93760.

[92] Williams, 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel (1958)', 25.

[93] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 85.

[94] Anchoring her work in close readings of Jane Austen's novels, Auyoung emphasises 'how little can be sufficient to create an effect of verisimilitude. If even Mrs. Elton and Mr. Collins can feel real to Austen's readers, the claim that fictional characters seem lifelike is not necessarily a function of how much psychological depth they display. Rather, it can reflect the ease with which readers find themselves able to think about the characters represented in a text.' *When Fiction Feels Real: Representation and the Reading Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 40–41. Flatness, in other words, seems to produce intimacy.

[95] Grace Pregent, 'Peripheral Voices in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 138, no. 1 (2020): 214, https://doi.org/10.1353/vct.2020.0017.

[96] Kristen H. Starkowski, '"Still There": (Dis)Engaging with Dickens's Minor Characters', *Novel* 53, no. 2 (1 August 2020): 193, 195, https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-8309551.

[97] Starkowski, 196.

[98] Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 38. 'We feel interest and outrage, painful concern or amused consent at what happens to minor characters,' Woloch writes, 'not simply their fate within the story (whether they marry of die, make their fortune or lose it, find a home or become exiled) but also in the narrative discourse itself (how they are finally overshadowed or absorbed into someone else's story, swallowed within or expelled from another person's plot.)' Woloch, 38.

[99] Theorists of literary character tend to agree that minor characters have the capacity to make a major impression. David Galef, for instance, argues that Dickens's characters, 'though flat […] appear to move,' and that minor characters 'invite curiosity' because she cannot be considered a finished creation. *The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 2–3. Kristen H. Starkowski, more recently, has written of the vivid sense minor characters generate that a 'character or narrator's gaze may leave these figures at their doorsteps, but their worlds keep on beating just the same.' Starkowski, '"Still There"', 199. Starkowski refers to the minor characters of Dickens as 'ambassadors of spaces that the novel crowds out.' Starkowski, 198. Such arguments might be linked to the narratologist Gerald Prince's coinage of the term 'disnarration' to describe those events 'that do not happen but, nonetheless, are referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text,' and the peculiar pull such possibilities have for readers. 'The Disnarrated', *Style* 22, no. 1 (1988): 2.

[100] Murdoch, *An Accidental Man*, 225.

[101] Murdoch, 225.

[102] Murdoch, 216.

[103] Murdoch, 226.

[104] Murdoch, 228.

[105] Murdoch, 353. Unlike all of the text's other minor-character victims, Henrietta is the child of a wealthy family; her brother, Oliver, is a wearer of 'lace ruffles' and 'in the antique book trade,' her mother is a bridge-playing member of the middle-class social circle, and Henrietta herself is the winner of the 'under twelve bridge championship.' Murdoch, 112–14. The family's proclivity for bridge seems to be a metonym of wealth and frivolity.

[106] The demise of Henrietta, alongside those of Rosalind Monkley and Ronald Carberry, is indicative of a general economy of children's disposability within *An Accidental Man.* The privilege of inaccessibility to the mind seems to be, in Murdoch's schema, one that is classed, but also one that involves a normative conception of the maturation of subjectivity. In this way, Henrietta's disposability is akin to that of the animals in Austen referenced by Forster, or indeed that of *The Black Prince*'s Francis Marloe in the eyes of Bradley Pearson, who compares him to a dog.

[107] Finch and Bowen, 'The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury', 15.

[108] Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?*, 151.

[109] Vermeule, 151.

[110] A.S. Byatt has argued that the expansive cast of characters in *An Accidental Man* is indicative of Murdoch's 'rediscover[y of] the richness of adding apparently gratuitously interesting people and events' to her novels, including a 'number of people who are felt to have a life outside the

[95] Grace Pregent, 'Peripheral Voices in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 138, no. 1 (2020): 214, https://doi.org/10.1353/vct.2020.0017.

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[101] Murdoch, 225.

[102] Murdoch, 216.

[103] Murdoch, 226.

[104] Murdoch, 228.

[105] Murdoch, 353. Unlike all of the text's other minor-character victims, Henrietta is the child of a wealthy family; her brother, Oliver, is a wearer of 'lace ruffles' and 'in the antique book trade,' her mother is a bridge-playing member of the middle-class social circle, and Henrietta herself is the winner of the 'under twelve bridge championship.' Murdoch, 112–14. The family's proclivity for bridge seems to be a metonym of wealth and frivolity.

[106] The demise of Henrietta, alongside those of Rosalind Monkley and Ronald Carberry, is indicative of a general economy of children's disposability within *An Accidental Man.* The privilege of inaccessibility to the mind seems to be, in Murdoch's schema, one that is classed, but also one that involves a normative conception of the maturation of subjectivity. In this way, Henrietta's disposability is akin to that of the animals in Austen referenced by Forster, or indeed that of *The Black Prince*'s Francis Marloe in the eyes of Bradley Pearson, who compares him to a dog.

[107] Finch and Bowen, 'The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury', 15.

[108] Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?*, 151.

[109] Vermeule, 151.

[110] A.S. Byatt has argued that the expansive cast of characters in *An Accidental Man* is indicative of Murdoch's 'rediscover[y of] the richness of adding apparently gratuitously interesting people and events' to her novels, including a 'number of people who are felt to have a life outside the

plot,' which 'indicate[s] worlds outside the book they are in.' *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch* (London: Vintage, 1994), 319. In the cases of *An Accidental Man'*s child characters— Ronald Carberry, Rosalind Monkley, and Henrietta Sayce—I would suggest that Byatt's reading constitutes what Murdoch would call a consoling fiction, a fantasy that endeavours to occlude the fact that certain characters' lives *on the page* are so depressingly limited.

[111] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 5.

[112] Spacks, 5.

[113] Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?*, 154.

[114] Spacks argues that 'serious gossip' takes place 'among no more than two or three people' while Murdoch described her usual compositional method as involving a 'nucleus of two or three people in a situation.' Spacks, *Gossip*, 3. Murdoch, 'A Dialogue with Iris Murdoch', 198.

[115] Rachael Wiseman, 'What If the Private Linguist Were a Poet? Iris Murdoch on Privacy and Ethics', *European Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 1 (March 2020): 224, https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12538.

[116] R. W. Hepburn and Iris Murdoch, 'Symposium: Vision and Choice in Morality', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 30 (1956): 50–51.

[117] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Vintage, 2003), 97.

[118] Murdoch, *An Accidental Man*, 134.

[119] Murdoch, 46.

[120] Rachel Malik, 'We Are Too Menny', *New Left Review*, no. 28 (2004): 139.

[121] Malik.

[122] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 73.

[123] Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 129. While Forster proposes that major characters might be distinguished from minor characters on the grounds that major ones develop over the course of the novel and continually surprise us, which leads to the impression of autonomous existence, as Woloch has suggested, a story's unity depends upon 'narrative asymmetry'; that is, we can only imagine major characters as autonomous because the novel flattens minor ones. Woloch, 43.

[124] Galef, *The Supporting Cast*, 3.

[125] Lynch, *The Economy of Character*, 16.

[126] Galef, *The Supporting Cast*, 13.

[127] Galef, 6.

[128] Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 40.

[129] Malik, 'We Are Too Menny', 145.

[130] In *The Act of Reading* (1978), Wolfgang Iser proposed that the entire text is a series of gaps that the reader fills in. What Iser terms 'the imaginary correction of deficient realities' is the reader's attempt to eke out the text into a self-sustaining world. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 85.

[131] Cunningham and Murdoch, 'Introduction', xiii.

[132] Cunningham and Murdoch, xiii.

[133] It was George Orwell who, in 1939, called Dickens's novels 'all fragments, all details—rotten architecture, but wonderful gargoyles.' *George Orwell: Essays* (London: Penguin, 2000), 72. Dickens 'made his books blaze up,' Virginia Woolf famously claimed, 'not by tightening the plot or sharpening the wit, but by throwing another handful of people upon the fire.' *The Moment: And Other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1947), 68. In Woolf's view, then, the sheer

multiplicity of characters is the mainspring of vividness. As her metaphor intimates, however, this proliferation is perhaps necessarily destructive.

[134] Murdoch, *An Accidental Man*, 374.

[135] In instances of active double-voiced discourse, while a speaker directly addresses, anticipates, or reacts to another's discourse, that other voice is not actually present in the dialogue. The interlocutor's statements are implied in the speaker's discourse.

[136] Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, 15.

[137] Murdoch, 393.

[138] Murdoch, 408.

[139] Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 126.

[140] Tatjana von Solodkoff, 'Explaining Fictional Characters', *Ergo, an Open Access Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 20200523 (11 July 2019): 618, https://doi.org/10.3998/ergo.12405314.0006.022.

[141] Lynch, *The Economy of Character*, 16.

[142] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch', 293.

[143] Murdoch, 294.

[144] Iris Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (London: Penguin, 1989), 86.

[145] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 97. Murdoch articulates as much at the end of her 1978 novel *The Sea, The Sea,* via Charles Arrowby's argument that assessments of others are, too, always in flux, never monolithic or completed or finalised, because people are this way, too: 'Judgements on people are never final, they emerge from summings up which at once suggest the need of a reconsideration. Human arrangements are nothing but loose ends and hazy reckoning, whatever art may pretend otherwise in order to console us.' *The Sea, the Sea*, 512. In a letter to David Hicks in January of 1943, she wrote, 'Human lives are essentially not to be summed up, but to be known, as they are lived, in many curious partial and inarticulate ways.' *A Writer at War: Letters & Diaries, 1938-46*, ed. Peter J. Conradi (London: Short, 2010), 200.

[146] See, for instance, the writers of the *nouveau roman* in France; exemplary is the 1963 collection of theoretical writings by Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989).

[147] In 1964, Johnson famously interrupted the narrative of his novel *Albert Angelo* with a frustrated outburst: 'im my hero though what a useless appellation my first character then im trying to say something about me through him…Im trying to say something not tell a story telling stories is telling lies and I want to tell the truth about me about my experience about my truth about my truth to reality.' *Albert Angelo* (New York: New Directions, 1987), 167.

[148] John Bayley, *The Characters of Love a Study in the Literature of Personality.* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), 7–8.

[149] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 5.

Metonymy *In Transit*:

Brigid Brophy's Ontological Anxieties

> Clearly grammar supports self-confrontation. John[1] confronts John[1]. The rule of reflexivization requires a coreferentially repeated noun phrase in the deep structure to become prenominalized. And the definition of a personal pronoun?
> A pronoun is an anti-noun, an anti-name, an anti-person.
> A substitution.
> A simulation.
> An identification.
> A possession and a dispossession.
> Une fuite en avant.
>
> Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Remake'[1]

> Bah, any old pronoun will do, provided one sees through it. Matter of habit. To be adjusted later. Where was I?
>
> Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*[2]

In a special issue of *Contemporary Women's Writing* published in 2018, Brigid Brophy's daughter, Kate Levey, quotes from her mother's letters to her husband, Michael: 'Why is my mind so full? I think there will have to be two or three books. […] I wish there were two or three minds.'[3] Born in 1929, Brigid Brophy gave, throughout her career, the impression of having many minds full of many things. The author of eleven works of fiction, several biographies, and a vast quantity of essays and literary reviews, Brophy was also a campaigner and activist for the rights of women, authors, and animals. Since her death in 1995, Brophy has suffered unjust critical neglect; to date, the 1995 Special Issue of *Review of Contemporary Fiction* and the 2018 special issue of *Contemporary Women's Writing,* both dedicated to Brophy, represent some of the few significant critical appraisals of her work.

In Transit (1969) is Brophy's most experimental text, formally distinct from those novels published both before and after it, such as *Flesh* (1962), *The Snow Ball* (1964)*,* and *Palace Without Chairs* (1978). *In Transit* is a novel full of multilingual puns, jokes, parodies,

digressions, and literary allusions, its anxious narrator permanently 'in the grips of compunction.'[4] *In Transit* is set in an airport transit lounge, and begins with a first-person narrator, Pat, who becomes aware that his/her grasp of various languages is rapidly slipping away. It is not long after that Pat becomes unable to remember his/her own sex, and spends the rest of the novel attempting, fruitlessly, to recover this aspect of his/her identity.

I use the equivocal term 'he/she' in this chapter to refer to Pat when no sex or gender identity is explicitly referred to in the diegesis, since the novel's grammar and syntax makes talking about Pat difficult; *In Transit*'s narration oscillates between first- and third-person modes and Pat is referred to with varying names and pronouns.[5] The materiality of Pat's body, moreover, seems too to change at several points in the narrative. Pat's quest to recover his/her identity—precipitated by the ostensibly mundane urge to use a toilet, which necessitates knowing *which* toilet to use—sparks a surreal adventure throughout the airport, from its subterranean baggage-handling zone to its air traffic control tower, pastiching genres from hard-boiled fiction to opera.

While Brophy had an obvious interest in the formal and aesthetic possibilities of the novel, and none of her novels, least of all *In Transit,* might easily be termed 'realist,' neither did she count herself as one of small group of British experimental writers termed avant-garde, despite B. S. Johnson's inclusion of her in his list of writers who recognized the 'revolution that was *Ulysses*' and who wrote without leaning on the 'crutch of storytelling,' as 'if it really mattered.'[6] While Brophy's work is deeply invested in the formal innovations of modernism, it cannot be readily accommodated in a literary-historical continuum that posits neat divisions between realist, modernist, or postmodern modes. Such generic or periodic uncertainty is a productive difficulty; while this novel is, as Karl Miller suggests, 'admittedly quite strange,'[7] it is

at the same time quite strangely representative of its literary-historical milieu. Rather than provide a survey of her oeuvre, this chapter offers a detailed analysis of *In Transit,* Brophy's most relentlessly self-reflexive and self-scrutinising novel, the text that most explicitly grapples with anxieties involving fundamental ontological, epistemological and narratological problems.

Metonymic narration

When *In Transit*'s narrator, Pat, comes across an English translation of a book 'Parisian […] by provenance' on the bookstall of an airport transit lounge, the book's original title, *L'histoire de la langue d'Oc*, is translated in the airport copy as *The Story of Oc's Tongue*.[8] This book, which features extensively in *In Transit,* is a parody of *Histoire d'O* (*The Story of O*), a French erotic novel by Anne Desclos published in 1954 under the pseudonym Pauline Réage. The slippage between these titles exemplifies the ceaseless and multilingual processes of semantic transference and suggestion in this novel; the word 'tongue,' seemingly a naïve error in translation, is a metonym for both the language and the sexualised body. Metonymy, as Peggy Phelan observes, 'is additive and associative; it works to secure a horizontal axis of contiguity and displacement.'[9] Brophy is a metonymic writer; that is to say, her plots are structured horizontally, according to a logic of contiguity. An analysis of her digressive, associative writing style in *In Transit* via the trope of metonymy reveals that reference to one concept is the cause of the next. In this novel, word association is causation.

In *In Transit,* Brophy makes manifest something true of all narratives; the fact that the two central narratological concepts of 'narrator' and 'author' are linguistic constructs that are understood by readers to represent, by a process of metonymic transference, flesh-and-blood

human beings. What these metonyms obscure is that the persons with whom they are ostensibly contiguous have no existence in material reality outside the materiality of language. Brophy's continual foregrounding and problematising of narration and authorship in *In Transit* reveals an anxiety about the ultimate ontological absence that these textual constructs aim to conceal. Authorial traces in the form of signature, style, and metafictional reference can never reach a flesh-and-blood person, but only index a body that is ultimately absent; what Brophy foregrounds at this point in the history of novel is the ultimate gulf between the materiality of language and the materiality of the body that literature is unable to breach.

If metaphor involves making two things into one, metonymy holds these things apart to underscore the difference and peculiarity in their very relation, a process like the contronymic cleaving that *In Transit's* narrator experiences bodily, such that, 'cleft,' he/she 'flowed together again like ripe, secretly self-moving brie.'[10] Brophy's narration is characterised by indeterminacy, illustrating what the author names as calls a disintegration of 'Aristotelean logic' such that a thing might be 'both X and not-X.'[11] This narrative modality points to the ambiguous character of the experience of twentieth-century selfhood and subjecthood that Brophy seeks to represent. Meaning, she suggests, is ultimately indeterminate in both the narrative and the self.

Ultimately, Pat's sex-gender indeterminacy and the ontic specificity of his/her damaged passport point to the possibility that the legibility of a title, name or pronoun and the legibility of a sovereign subject might be indistinguishable from one another within the highly regulated space of the airport within a novel self-conscious about its own artifice. In this novel, Pat's being hailed as a man precipitates a change in perspective; the narrative shifts from first- to third-person narration with attendant male pronouns, which in turn precipitates a material change in Pat's body. The bringing together of the perspectival and the ontological is symptomatic of the

nature of the relationship between the use of a given narrative mode and the precipitation of

material change in the world, such that a certain kind of existence might be enabled via

discursive means. Brophy's perspectival oscillations, and the changes in embodied existence that

such oscillations precipitate, gesture to the potential of narrative for realising, in 1960s Britain,

material change that might be understood as socially, politically, or even ontologically

impossible.

Metonymy: narrative's engine

Early in *In Transit*, the narrator ruminates on the architecture of airports, and imagines what

might be 'nearest to a twentieth-century style':

> that sort-of-pop-brutalistic tabbying, those curds of canned plum-juice declining to
> integrate with custard, bits of a jigsaw free-drifting weightless in space: an amateur
> method of do-it-yourself exterior house-painting, developed out of military camouflage,
> whose purpose is, precisely, camouflage: to disguise the silhouettes of Victwardian
> buildings, to break up the outlines of their structure or pseudo-structure.[12]

The narrator's imaginative flight here takes the form of an associative chain that constitutes a

'rebus in language'—Brophy's term for language that 'both state[s] and illustrate[s]'[13] at once—

insofar as this account of 'twentieth-century style' performs, on a mimetic level, the same

stylistic virtuosity and concatenation of parts that it thematises in the diegesis. The movement of

this passage involves the metonymic accrual of concepts and the displacement of one concept by

the last. The 'tabbying' of shapes and colours that characterises brutalism and pop-art takes form,

after the comma, as 'curds' and 'custard' that themselves morph into 'bits' of a dispersed

'jigsaw,' which becomes a painted house and 'military camouflage' before ending at the

proteiform scene with which the sentence began, with 'outlines' and 'structure' rather than

concrete nouns. The association and recombination that the paragraph describes is that which it performs in language; parataxis binds its contiguous elements such that the overall effect is a style that might itself be described as metonymic. What first seems like metaphor—'style' *is* 'curds' or 'bits'— or a loose assemblage of associations in no particular order, is rather evidence of a logic of metonymic causality.

This description of 'twentieth-century style' is exemplary of the novel more broadly, wherein the narrative is propelled by contiguity. That is, in *In Transit*, causality functions paradoxically; the invocation of one thing causes the next via a metonymic process in a way that is both overdetermined and unpredictable, what the novel would call 'a percussive chain of accidents.'[14] The capaciousness of contiguity (whereby a given association might be sensory, sonic, paranomastic, or allusive, for instance) makes its next step both inevitable and impossible to predict. Cause is determined by contiguity, but because contiguity is a protean, unpredictable relation, it yields surprising results; the novel's causal chains thus have erratic, unexpected trajectories. This paradox whereby one concept is the unpredictable but inevitable corollary of the contiguous one it follows is made manifest throughout the novel in episodes ranging from the trivial to the fatal. For instance, the 'internal spiral staircase of lager foam' in a pint glass in the airport café at the novel's beginning recurs in a character's 'Maestro-plan' for overtaking the airport towards its end:

> Then he pointed out to his followers a mark on the diagram that resembled a coiled spring. "The spiral staircase," he said.
> "The spiral staircase?"
> "The spiral staircase," he explained, "leads, up the inside of a glass funnel, to the control tower. […] The plan, comrades, is simple. We shall take control of the controls."[15]

While this example might be read as an innocuous moment of foreshadowing, elsewhere in the text, the stakes of the novel's metonymic logic might be life and death. That is to say that *In*

Transit's metonymic causality is an ontological concern. A claim made in the novel's fourth section by an emeritus professor, for example, that 'new artistic forms come into being' via the 'setting off of bombs inside the existing framework of the arts' precedes the subsequent explosion of a real bomb in the airport that causes an avalanche of books fatal to the professor.[16] Just as the explosion causes the books to fall, it is the professor's reference to the figurative 'setting off of bombs' that, according to the physical laws posited by the novel, *causes* the real detonation of a bomb. The professor's words are an instance not of ironic foreshadowing, but ironic causation; while 'the minor dislodgements' that the bomb 'had set in train in the stock of the bookstall reached the culmination of their chain effects,' this chain effect began with the first, figurative, reference to bombs.[17] Brophy's term for the avalanche of books is 'collapsus linguae,' a pun that connects the *lapsus*, a linguistic slip, with the slippage of texts that causes death.[18] The mistake and the collapse are brought together metonymically in 'collapsus,' sutured together by the shared morpheme 'laps,' and the books and the pun itself are brought together in the word 'linguae.' There is slippage, moreover, between figurative language and the material instantiation of actual events in the world; in its ironic literalisation of the power of words to maim, the episode reveals the capacity of figurative language to instantiate events in the world materially, beyond the novel's boundaries.

The novel concludes, moreover, with an explicitly ontological problem; the narrator's ultimate fate, it seems, is determined according to a metonymic principle. *In Transit*'s final section begins with the declaration that 'out of that egg, ego too am re-hatched.'[19] The apparent substitution of the word 'I' for 'ego' perhaps only appears because of the word's adjacency (here, alphabetically rather than conceptually) to the word 'egg' that immediately precedes it. In this section, the narrator is perched on a girder high above the transit lounge; looking down to the

floor below 'is like looking down onto my first father's head with its little egg-cosy of baldness at the summit,' because the gathered crowd 'have cleared a bald spot immediately beneath where I on my hands and knees am.'[20] Here, too, the appearance of one concept seems to be the causal motivation for the next; one can trace the 'ego' rehatched from an 'egg' to the 'egg-cosy of baldness' to the 'bald spot' on the floor of the transit lounge, as one concept hatches out of the one before it. It is this 'space the crowd had cleared' into which the narrator 'fell plumb' to his/her death a moment later.[21] *In Transit*'s metonymic logic is evidence of a relinquishment of authorial control, whereby Brophy casts metonymy—rather than her own design—as the primary generator of plot.

The author as metonym

On several occasions in *In Transit* the narrating 'I' betrays a complicated and equivocal relationship to its author. An 'Interlude' signed 'Yours to the end of alienation, (p.p. B.B.), E.H. (P.) O'R' is one of three instances of direct referral in the novel to Brophy's name.[22] The other two moments constitute reasonably straightforward indications of authorial ownership, crediting Brophy in a manner similar to a name on a novel's title page: The 'final roller captions' of the TV show 'What's My Kink?' on which Pat briefly appears state 'programme devised by Brigid Brophy,'[23] and a dustjacket review of *L'histoire de la langue d'Oc* reads 'straightforward commercial pornography: and what's wrong with that?, *Brigid Brophy*.'[24] The parenthetical 'p.p. B.B.,' however, suggests a more ambiguous relationship between author and narrator, not least because the meaning of the Latin expression *per procurationem* is ambiguous if used with undeclinable, non-Latinate names—or, indeed, with initials—and as such can mean both

'through the agency of' and 'on behalf of.' It is not, then, possible to identify the relationship between the letter's pair of signatories, 'B.B.' and 'E.H. (P.) O'R'; that is, to identify which authorises, enables, or represents the other. The relation that is implied, rather, is an equivocal, ambiguous one of bidirectional ventriloquism: neither has clear ontological primacy over the other.

In 'What is an Author?' (1969), Michel Foucault critiques the notion of the individual author as the antecedent of a text. Foucault posits the existence of an 'author-function' rather than an author; while 'a complex operation […] constructs a certain rational being that we call "author"' and critics 'doubtless try to give this intelligible being a realistic status,' nevertheless, 'these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo.'[25] The corollary of this argument is a kind of ontological anxiety, whereby if author-functions are assigned to discourses or to intertextual constellations, the writer, however 'realistic' they might seem, is 'only a projection.'[26] So conceived, the writer becomes visible as being constructed in precisely the same way as the metonymically posited narrator discussed above. The author the novel offers is not the flesh-and-blood Brigid Brophy but rather a metonym for her, a linguistic construct constituted in and by the text, whose only materiality is the materiality of language. In this way Brophy makes plain something true of all novels. Brophy's representation of authorship thus radically undermines Uri Margolin's claim that an author is 'of course an actual person.'[27] Further, Jacques Derrida's writings on the artwork as pictorial artefact via philosophical aesthetics demonstrate how an artist might be metonymically signified in an artwork; that is, the ways in which an artist's style at once makes a subject legible and underscores the unbridgeable ontological gulf between the signifying traces and the signified

artist. In his discussion of Van Gogh's 1886 painting 'A Pair of Shoes,' Derrida describes the

shoes standing in for the self-portrait of the artist as 'diplomatic representation, if you like, by

metonymy or synecdoche.'[28] Derrida proposes a metonymic chain whereby the shoes signify,

metonymically, the self-portrait, which in turn signifies the artist. 'The top,' writes Derrida in the

same essay,

> that's where Vincent signed a self-portrait, and illustrated his signature, subject of the
> painted shoes, and if in this self-portrait he hid the feet, it would not have been in order to
> abandon empty (*restant*) shoes but because these shoes are the face of Vincent: the
> leather of his aged, wrinkled skin, loaded with experience and weariness, furrowed by life
> and above all very *familiar* (*heimlich*).[29]

The title of this essay, 'Restitutions of the truth in pointing' (1978), puns on the French terms

pointure and *peinture*, or pointing and painting. The *pointure*, according to the essay's epigraph,

is both a 'pointed blade' and 'the hole it makes in the paper.' It has, then, ambiguous, even

epicene, connotations pertinent to *In Transit*'s own critical preoccupations.[30] Derrida describes a

'lacing movement' from 'inside to outside, from outside to inside, his iron point passing through

the surface of the leather or the canvas in both directions, pricking and pointing [*par piqûre et*

pointure]' via which movement 'the trajectory of the reference is divided and multiplied.'[31] The

index is the sign that points, and this painting points to the man who painted it; the leather of Van

Gogh's shoes are, for Derrida, metonymic of the 'leather of his aged, wrinkled skin.' While the

painting points to bodily materiality, then, it cannot constitute or engender it; the painting

generates a signifying chain but never reaches the materiality of the signified, the artist's body.

Derrida attests in his hybrid, experimental 1974 text *Glas* that 'the great stake of literary

discourse' is 'the patient, crafty, quasi animal or vegetable, untiring, monumental, derisory too,

but on the whole holding itself up to derision, transformation of his proper name, *rebus*, into

things, into the name of things,'[32] which recalls *In Transit*'s 'rebus in language.'[33] Like Van

Gogh, Derrida leaves a siglum in *Glas*'s Wakean final line; the text ends, 'Today, here, now, the debris of (*débris de*),' in which the final words in French are a homophone of 'Derrida.'[34] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reads the text's overall 'layout' as 'a rebus,' and finds *Glas* to be 'a fiction of Derrida's proper name turning into a thing, of an autobiographical autotherapy or interminable self-analysis against the self-duping of self-sovereignty, crypting the signature so that it becomes impossible to spell it out.'[35] As *Glas* demonstrates, the author's signature is always an inscrutable, multiply-signifying mark.

Because contiguity is not a generalisable or objective relation or one necessarily predictable in advance, but rather one that involves subjective assessment of adjacency or association, an artist's choice of a given metonym is evidence of the peculiarities of that writer's style. Metonymy, as Roman Jakobson suggests, is a mode in which 'an individual exhibits his personal style, his verbal predilections and preferences.'[36] Conversely, style itself is a metonym for an absent stylist. *Glas* begins with a quotation from Jean Genet: '*what remained of a Rembrandt torn into small, very regular squares and rammed down the shithole*' in which Genet figures 'Rembrandt' as metonymic of both an artist and his oeuvre.[37] In this borrowing, *Glas* invokes the ways in which a name is a signifier that can index multiply, but also the ways in which this equivocation renders vulnerable the entities that are signified. The violence to which the painting is subjected in this act of vandalism is, by a reversed process of metonymic transference, implicitly inflicted upon its painter, too. *In Transit*'s repeated imperative, '*Déchirez*,' or 'rip up' is reminiscent of Genet's 'torn' Rembrandt, and in foregrounding the text's materiality, Brophy also underscores her own precariousness as a textually instantiated artist who might be destroyed along with her text.[38] If the novel's prolixity is a metonym for Brophy's creativity, '*Déchirez*' reminds her reader of her own precarious, ambiguous position. In

Genet's reading of Rembrandt, the artist's paintings represent not people, but rather the act of painting itself insofar as they draw attention to their own surfaces. '[W]hat remain[s] of a Rembrandt' is, precisely, his style, and this is an apposite opening to *Glas*, a text whose central line of enquiry is, perhaps, the ways in which the specificity of an authorial subject is neither wholly present in a text nor wholly detachable from it.

In Transit is signed not only in its paratextual features, the cover and title page. Brophy's signature, like Van Gogh's and Derrida's, is obliquely threaded through her artwork, legible foremostly, I want suggest, in her literary style. In one of *In Transit*'s interludes, in which the first-person 'I' purports to address an 'interlocutor' directly, the narrator proposes:

> you might conclude I'm playing games, like a painter who includes in his picture a mirror in which he shews himself standing outside the picture painting it. An alienation effect may be a fiction within fiction, purporting to thrust the spectator back into the real world outside the frame but in practice drawing him deeper into the fictitious perspective. A stuccoist may appear to open up arches in the wall you know stands next to the garden, but it may be a frescoed sky and garden he shews you between them. Perhaps these interludes are holes I have torn in my canvas through which you can see the veritable wall on which the picture hangs. Or perhaps I have simulated on my canvas both torn canvas and the wall you see through.[39]

This passage's first-person address to a 'you' and its explicit invocation of artifice and verisimilitude in literature via a metaphor from the visual arts encourages an understanding of its 'I' as Brophy's own. This description of a *trompe l'oeil* induces a kind of metaleptic dizziness whose effect is to collapse, or at least momentarily to obscure, the distinction between author and narrator.[40] This is perhaps the reason for this passage's tonal distinction from much of the rest of the novel, perhaps more readily associated with a postmodernist than late modernist tradition in its explicit foregrounding of metalepsis as technique. And yet Brophy also marks this passage with an authorial trace much more subtle than its apparently straightforward insistence on the illusory nature of *any* text for which a biographical reading is required. Brophy, as Carole

Sweeney writes, was 'one of the last devotees of the Shavian 'shew,' a spelling variant of the word 'show' that was almost entirely obsolete by the nineteen-sixties.[41] Earlier in the novel, indeed, Pat is described as putting 'himself on show in public, as if he has something to Sh⒢w.'[42] This typographic play—the stacking of graphemes to create a word that unites 'show,' 'shew,' and 'shaw'—is another kind of 'rebus in language' insofar as it is has both diegetic and mimetic functions, at once 'stat[ing] and illustrat[ing]' its point.'[43] In the suggestion that the artist 'includes in his picture a mirror in which he shews himself standing outside the picture painting it,' Brophy shows herself in her spelling variant; 'shew' is a metonym for the author—here ironically transformed into the male or generic 'he'—who shows herself 'standing outside the [novel] [writing] it.'

In Transit's description of the 'commietsar who sat before the control panel in the control tower,' with 'commanding synoptic view of all beneath and before him,'[44] is an explicit parody of the godlike author in strict control of the literary text:

> Most of all, perhaps, he might liken himself to the great nineteenth-century novelists. For did not they, too, deploy whole battalions across their wrap-around canvases, as well as trapping villains as it arbitrarily suited them in the pincer of coincidence, ridding themselves at lordly will of unprofitable characters by contrived accidents of god and killing off babies on the racks of their stretched-out deathbedscenes to make a good { read cry } for mothers? His, the commietsar thought, was the heroi-Homeric or the grand, the Tolstoyan, the *Whore and Peace* view of human affairs.[45]

The relationship of authorship to representation Brophy offers in *In Transit* is far more equivocal than the one the 'commietsar' imagines. Brophy's narrator, instead, is inclined to address the reader directly: '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.'[46] The page divides into two columns, detailing in the third person and past tense the actions of 'Patricia,' on the left, and 'Patrick,' on the right. As the narrative perspective shifts from that of a first-person narrator

describing an unfolding experience to a third-person one detailing the actions of two named characters, it is as if the reader is obliged to move in to occupy the space the narrator has vacated. In capitalising the second-person pronoun in the sentence prior to the shift in perspective—'So You'll have to make the choice'—Brophy endows it with the positionality of the first-person pronoun, 'I.' The reader, in turn, must occupy the narratorial position, invested with the power to 'play god.'

The metonymic narrator

In the first of many 'interludes' addressed directly to the reader, *In Transit's* narrator asks, '[h]as it occurred to you there may be a specific determining reason why this narrative should be in the first person?'[47] The answer to this question becomes apparent shortly after, when the narrator, the ambiguously named Pat, having already succumbed to a bad case of 'linguistic leprosy,' realises that 'I could no longer remember which sex I was.'[48] What is at first assumed to be as 'a moment's mental slipped disk' becomes a permanent state of ambiguity.[49] The answer to the narrator's question is thus revealed; articulating this narrative in the third person would require a commitment 'to a main character at whose every appearance in my narrative I would be obliged to write he/she, his/her, etc.'[50] As the narrative progresses, meanings become increasingly unmoored from things in the world and the narrator finds the processes of signification in the multilingual space of the airport to be increasingly confounding. The narrative theorist Uri Margolin defines the narratological concept of the narrator as 'the inner-textual (textually encoded) speech position from which the current narrative discourse originates.'[51] Margolin writes,

Through a due process of metonymic transfer and anthropomorphization, the term narrator is then employed to designate a presumed textually projected occupant of this position, the hypothesized producer of the current discourse, the individual agent who serves as the answer to Genette's question *qui parle?* The narrator, which is a strictly textual category, should be clearly distinguished from the […] author, who is of course an actual person.[52]

As Margolin explicates, a written discourse leads its readers to imagine a mind responsible for that discourse, and a person responsible for that mind. By this process, the narratological concept of a narrator is a metonym, a textual function that merely simulates the appearance of a human mind and body. The related concept of narrative voice, moreover, is also a metonym, since it involves the process of transference whereby written words are understood to *be* the very capacity for speaking them. While voice and body are contiguous concepts due to their common association outside of narrative—the existence of a voice implies, often, the existence of a body—within a narrative, this association does not necessarily exist. Put simply, narrative voice, unlike human voice, is not even remotely a reliable signal of corporeality. To call a textual voice 'disembodied' raises the ambiguous sign of the *embodied* textual voice, and indeed narrative worlds can support voices without bodies. As Brian Richardson writes, while 'on the one hand, [narrators] may well resemble actual people who tell stories; on the other hand, there may be no "they" there.'[53] My contention is that in *either* case, there is no 'they' there; as Richardson suggests, the closest narrators come to 'actual people' can only ever be 'resembl[ance],' however convincing this illusion may be.

While this ontological absence, then, is true for all narrative texts, in *In Transit,* Brophy draws attention to the metonymic nature of the concepts of both 'narrator' and 'voice' with particular intensity and anxiety. That is to say that her narrative relentlessly foregrounds the ontological problem of the narrator. On the novel's first page, *In Transit*'s narrator formulates 'consciousness' as a process whereby 'thoughts are thought *to*' an 'imaginary interlocutor.'[54] In

imagining that 'all self-conscious beings' address this interlocutor, the narrator brings together—

via the polysemous word 'self-conscious'—the reflexive consciousness of one's own existence,

the metafictional self-awareness of this explicit claim that consciousness is like narrative, and the

ontological anxiety that this kind of rumination elicits. Brophy's narrator continues to worry

about his/her materiality throughout the novel; the suggestion that the reader 'read it in your head

with the trace […] of an Irish accent, which is how I myself speak,' for instance, is pointedly

ironic, since with this very statement Brophy emphasises that the voice readers imagine the

narrator having is the only voice the narrator has.[55] At the novel's conclusion, moreover, when

the narrator imagines being devoured by 'harpies,' the destroyed body is figured as linguistic; 'so

you do, your mercilesses, dissolves the nucleus of my nominatives. You suck up my fatty

adjectives and ingest my interjections.'[56] This is both a novel and a century, Brophy suggests, in

which 'characters' are 'increasingly not there.'[57]

    In Transit is narrated in the first-person until a shift occurs half-way through the novel;

while an 'I' walked 'to the stairs,' a perspectival shift occurs before the stairs are reached, and it

is 'O'Rooley' who 'ran lithely down' them.[58] From this moment onwards, the narrative

perspective oscillates from first to third person and back again, and the character's identity

multiplies, appearing variously as 'Pat,' 'Patrick,' 'Patricia,' and 'O'Rooley.'[59] These

vacillations of perspective mean it is dangerous to assume that the antecedent of any of these

names is ontologically the same as any other, or the same as the pronoun 'I'; we can assume no

definitive equivalence, that is, between the narrator and the character(s) the narrative presents.

As the French semiotician Émile Benveniste suggests in his influential essay 'The Nature of

Pronouns' (1956), since the first-person pronoun is a 'mobile sign,' it is also an 'empty' sign that

is 'non-referential with respect to reality.'[60] Since the first-person pronoun is a deictic,

Benveniste suggests, 'Each *I* has its own reference and corresponds each time to a unique being who is set up as such.'[61]

Henrik Skov Nielsen has observed that there 'need not always be an existential indexical continuity between the character referred to in the first person and the referring voice in first-person narrative fiction' in general.[62] *In Transit* exhibits a particularly fraught relation between the pronoun 'I' and the proper name 'Pat.' Brophy's narrative equivocation underscores the fact that a pronoun is a sign pointing to another sign, one that indexes only a name, and never a material person. Given the proliferation of proper names in the novel, moreover, one can never be certain *which* name the pronoun 'I' indexes. While the narrator forgets 'what sex I was,' he/she does recall both the name 'Pat' and the fact that this name is of no use when it comes to determining sex, since, '[i]n my case, Pat was not short for anything at all.'[63] In its resilient ambiguity, the name 'Pat' aligns itself with the narrator's pronoun 'I' insofar as, like a first-person pronoun, it does not divulge the sex of its referent. Instead of indexing sex, 'Pat' might be antonomastic, referring metonymically to the narrator's nationality—'a botanical tag of my Irish origin'— or, yet more ambiguously, it might index only a moment of equivocation long ago. That is, the narrator imagines that perhaps his/her parents, 'having thought one thing at the font, thought better of it on their way out through the porch.'[64] There proves to be a contiguous relationship between the narrator's recollection of both name and parents; in an early memory, hoisted up on a father's hip to look at the Irish coast, the narrator recalls that '[m]y father faintly patted me with the hand I was in fact sitting on—a stunted pat.'[65] Given Brophy's proclivity for wordplay, one can identify a certain patness in the name she gives to her protagonist; the word 'Pat' indexes appropriately plurally, insofar it is at once a verb, noun, adjective, gender-indeterminate name and national shorthand. As the linguistic anthropologist Greg Urban writes,

the 'referentially empty character of "I" arises from' its indexicality, and that reference is achieved 'at the token level through an actual continguity between the instance of language use in which *I* occurs and the utterer of that instance.'[66] 'I,' as 'an abstract type,' thus has 'no associated class of objects.'[67] Third-person pronouns are very different, in that they are 'more like common nouns than like the true personal pronouns,' since they 'can be glossed purely at the level of type, e.g., *he* is an entity conceptualized as of male gender.'[68] Urban's apparent mistake in the form of a portmanteau word, 'continguity,' is a felicitous one; in combining 'contiguity' with 'continuity,' Urban points to both the means by which the pronoun 'I,' an indexical, is continuous with the utterer insofar as it points to that person, as well as the way in which these concepts—the utterance 'I' and the speaking human—are contiguous. That is, there is a strong association between these concepts because, at least outside narrative fiction, 'one normally thinks of utterers as human.'[69] To say I, in the slippery process of metonymic transference, is to have a mind, and to have a body. The example Urban chooses to illustrate the non-indexicality of third-person pronouns, moreover—'*he* is an entity conceptualized as of male gender'—is a similarly pertinent choice when it comes to considering pronomial use in *In Transit.* The fact that there is no 'abstract type' for the pronoun 'I' is something Brophy wilfully exploits; the 'cardinal cog' in 'the machinery of my narration,' the narrator confesses, is 'being an I.'[70] While a third-person 'he' can at least very broadly be categorised as being 'of male gender,' the first-person narrator is *only* abstraction, with the particularities of sex obscured even to him- or herself.

Narrative oscillations

In *In Transit*, Brophy's deployment of psychoanalytic motifs is often heavy-handed; the airport map, for instance, details 'the main intercourse, leading to the castration complex,' the bomb that later explodes inside it is sparked by a 'sapphallic-symbolic candle,' and one 'SIEGLINDE FREUD' even makes an appearance.[71] In *In Transit,* as Karen Lawrence suggests, Brophy 'parodies the myth of the phallus as transcendental signifier,' and indeed the novel might well be read as a romp through phallic imagery, castration anxiety, repressed memories and sexual perversions.[72] The 'linguistic leprosy' with which *In Transit* begins is a parody of castration; 'my languages gave their first dowser's-twig twitch,' the narrator remarks, 'and I conceived they might be going to fall off.'[73] Pat is identified as the 'missing member' of both the panel show and the lesbian revolutionary group, and yet his/her membership in both scenarios is the result of misrecognition.[74] As the novel progresses, scenes of castration—threatened or realised— proliferate. Shortly after realising that 'I could no longer remember what sex I was,' the narrator ponders: 'Was *I,* perhaps, castrato/a? Was the truth behind my oblivion that I *had* no sex?'[75] This equivalence between 'castrato' and 'no sex' is an indication that by 'sex' the narrator means, specifically, sex organs; that is, sex, the narrator clarifies, 'only in its categorizing or old-fashioned sense' indicated by 'direct physiological disclosure.'[76]

In a key scene in the men's toilets, the narrative modality shifts such that while it is 'Patrick' who enters the toilet cubicle, undoes his trousers and finds 'nothing there,' it is 'Patricia' who *reacts* to this revelation. In the shift of pronouns, Brophy's character is at once the witness to and the subject of a putative castration. Patricia, in an effort to avoid embarrassment at being caught in the men's toilets by exiting through its window, straddles the 'steel edge,' and reflects that 'if she *had* been a man in the first place, [it] would surely by now have castrated her (him).'[77] The narrative voice's equivocation here—'her (him)'—indicates the lack at the heart of

the ambiguity around biological sex in this novel; while the absence of a penis is one purported indicator of sex, the absence of an absence—namely, the lack of a sensation of castration—is another. This episode foreshadows an episode at the novel's denouement, albeit in inverted form, when, in an effort to back away to safety off the girder high above the Lounge, Patrick's 'right knee slipped over the edge' of the girder, putting him in 'a posture of castration agony' such that 'Lurching out of it, he slipped wholesale' and fell to his death.[78] In a parallel column, 'Patricia' similarly falls and dies, though she 'swung her legs over the side,' 'hung' and 'let go,' and the novel's conclusion so disturbs the equivalence between genitals and gender as to decentre the importance of genitalia altogether. The narrator's genitals, as these passages indicate, are metonymic of the sexed body. As the genitals ostensibly change from page to page, so too does the body and, by another shift of metonymic transference, so does the narrator's identity.

Brophy was outspoken in her belief that Freud was 'our era's peer to Aristotle in analytic imagination,'[79] and his was 'one of the supremely commanding minds.'[80] Drawing on Freud's writings of the 1920s, I turn to the related concept of the fetish to read fetishism as metonymic of the narrational oscillations that Brophy employs to represent the ambiguous character of the experience of twentieth-century selfhood and subjecthood. In *In Transit*, fetishism appears most conspicuously and comically in the context of the panel show 'What's My Kink?' onto whose set Pat is unsuspectingly thrust. The aim of the game, it is revealed, is for various contestants to make guesses at a given man's 'particular fetish'; Pat, having seen the man earlier in the airport café, wins the game by correctly identifying his penchant for plastic mackintoshes.[81] I take as my focus not the fetish qua hypercathected object—in this particular case, plastic mackintoshes—but rather the way in which the functions of the fetish might be usefully mapped, by a process of metonymic transfer, onto Brophy's narratological investments.[82]

In his 1927 essay 'Fetishism,' Freud describes the process by which a male subject substitutes a fetish as a 'permanent memorial' to his initial experience of horror at his mother's lack of penis. The fetish, Freud determines, is both a 'token of triumph over the threat of castration and a safeguard against it,' and this substitution is the result of a paradoxical 'compromise,' both a 'disavowal' and an 'affirmation' of the castration of women.[83] The fetish, then requires simultaneous knowing and not knowing; as Peggy Phelan suggests, paraphrasing Freud, 'it is at the level of '[I know very well, but] just the same' that the fetish functions.'[84] In a 1976 interview with Leslie Dock, Brophy described *In Transit* as being ultimately 'about whether Aristotelean logic might disintegrate, whether we are mistaken in thinking that a thing cannot be both X and not-X.'[85] Brophy's interest in the potentiality of the paradoxical formulation, 'both X and not-X,' resonates with the conflicting beliefs held in the mind of Freud's subject, whereby one disavows and affirms in the same move, or knows very well, 'but just the same.'[86] In a formulation that closely resembles the description in *In Transit* of the 'monster' that the narrator is—the 'Amphisbaena (trans. colloq. The push-and-pull or the have-it-both-ways)'[87]—cultural theorist Stuart Hall describes fetishism as a 'strategy for having-it-both-ways.'[88]

With *In Transit*, Brophy anticipates Jacques Derrida's play with Freud in 1974's *Glas* and theorises the same concerns independently. As Freud's work delineates, the subject in fetishism incessantly alternates between identification with the mother and identification with the phallic object; this abyssal, vacillating structure marks fetishism as something in transit.[89] In *Glas*, Derrida takes up Freud's theories in linking the fetish to the 'glas' or bell's toll; it 'oscillates like the clapper of a truth that rings awry.'[90] Derrida reads the scenes of sex and sex work in Jean Genet's novel of 1949, *Journal du voleur,* or *The Thief's Journal*, as those in which

a 'double, undecidable sex activates itself sheathing father and mother all at once.'[91] In *In Transit*, similarly, the double and undecidable sex is a metonym for the doubleness and undecidability of narration, and Brophy too references Genet explicitly in a scene in which 'Patrick,' interpellated as a 'boy […] peacocked and peacocquetted' in front of male 'bidders at auction' on an 'invisible Mincing Lane.'[92] Brophy puns on the names of queer French writers as Patrick, prostituting himself, wishes he had a 'rimbaud for his hair' for the 'fast-approaching cocteau hour' in order to 'make sure of a good price […] as a sexual refinement.'[93] On the promenade, Patrick 'bounced and flounced' in loose-fitting trousers, obeying 'his governing compulsion, which was perhaps archaically psychic, perhaps Jean-genetic, towards furbelows.'[94] Like Derrida, Brophy explicitly puns on Genet's name, finding the English word 'genetic' where Derrida saw the French 'genêt,' a flower. Brophy's pun is a richly suggestive one, insofar as the notion of a 'Jean-genetic' 'compulsion' invokes the Lacanian 'compulsion to repeat,'—itself a repetition insofar as it is a literary allusion—and binds it to the word 'genetic,' suggestive of lineage or inheritance. Brophy, like Derrida, explores the relationship of narrative experimentation to sexuality via Genet, positioned, like Rimbaud and Cocteau, as a queer literary ancestor. Brophy's compound adjective 'Jean-genetic' serves as a metonym for those things for which Genet is famous; the themes of homosexuality, illegitimacy and theft that recur in his non-fiction works and novels. In invoking Genet, both a writer and a thief, Brophy points obliquely to her intertexts; *In Transit* is thick with allusions to Joyce and to baroque symphony, for instance, and pastiches literary genres from pulp fiction to the picaresque, insisting that all discourse is at origin indirect.

The conceptual equivalent of *In Transit*'s shifting narrative modes and its many motifs of doubling is the undecidability of the fetish. Having had two pairs of parents killed in two

separate aeroplane accidents, the narrator imagines him- or herself as 'a successful double Oedipus—an Oedipus who orphaned himself twice,'[95] and indeed the novel's motifs of doubling are often linked parodically to its psychoanalytic motifs, sites of childhood memory and trauma. The narrator specifically links sexuality to trauma via Freud, claiming that 'Whenever Freud writes of the double onset of human sexuality, once in infancy and again at puberty, like double-entry book-keeping, I think of myself deparented at three and again at thirteen.'[96] 'For Freud,' Diana Fuss writes, 'every fall into homosexuality is *inherently suicidal* since the "retreat" from oedipality entails not only the loss of desire but the loss of a fundamental relation to the world into which desire permits entry—the world of sociality, sexuality, and subjectivity.'[97] In Freud's famous 'The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman' (1920), a woman attempts suicide by jumping from a bridge, and Jacques Lacan emphasises here that the word Freud uses, *nieferkommt*, means both 'falling' and 'falling pregnant.'[98] In his reading of Freud, Lacan describes the woman's symptom as a metonym; for Lacan, the word stands metonymically for the ultimate term, that of violent death. Perversion is thus understood as an oblique way of speaking about something else, whereby the screen memory is a metonym, a stop in the symbolic chain, that veils the next part via repression. Lacan thus sees the woman's 'perversion,' homosexuality, as having a metonymic function: 'We find, in the perversion, a signifying behaviour indicating a signifier which is furthest in the signifying chain, insofar as it is connected to it by a necessary signifier.'[99] In *In Transit,* the woman's suicide attempt is ironised in Pat's own double-death scene at the novel's conclusion, in which both 'Patrick' and 'Patricia,' in their parallel columns, fall from the girder to their deaths below. The bicolumnar narrative presents, at once, both falling and jumping, both heterosexual man and homosexual woman, converging in an overdetermined ending. This account is followed by the phrase 'Explicit

fiction.'[100] An adjective in English and a noun in Latin, the denotation of the word 'explicit' is inexplicit insofar as it might suggest that the fiction is either ended (the opposite of incipit) or conspicuous (the opposite of implicit); or, in Brophy's typically paranomastic way, both at once. 'Explicit fiction' thus signals that there is ultimately nothing explicit about this fiction; the status of this text, and the identity that is articulated through it in narrative is irresolvably indeterminate and ambivalent.[101] What we are left with at the novel's end, moreover, is total ambiguity regarding identity—two mangled bodies, one male and one female, are on the floor of the transit lounge, but the narrative continues for three final paragraphs in the first person. The gender, number, location in time and space of this first-person narrator are not disclosed; what something like 'identity' might mean for this narrator is more obscure now than it was at the novel's beginning.

In *In Transit,* Brophy displaces Freud's phallogocentric conception of fetishism by theorising it as a general economy of indeterminacy, undecidability, and liminality. Again, we approach an ontological concern; the notion that meaning cannot be fixed, but rather oscillates, points obliquely to a method of conceiving of both identity and the articulation of such an identity in narrative. The selves Brophy presents in *In Transit* are always split: the divide between Pat as narrator and character, for instance, is foregrounded in metafictional moments such as the one in which the narrator admits having 'trickered you off with mirror effects,' suggesting that he/she might be 'trying to produce an effect of verisimilitude by the non-realistic method of pretending that I cannot now remember remembering what, it is admitted by internal evidence, I did at that time remember quite clearly.'[102] Brophy foregrounds the incommensurability of narrator and character, of the represented and representing moments, in

these fissures in the text in which the subjectivity of the past Pat meets the subjectivity of a present one.[103]

The formal divisions between the columns that recur in the novel and formally represent the undecidability of the fetish indicate irreconcilable splits in either the narrator's mind, 'set on by two simultaneous trains of idea,' or body, when the columns detail the actions of 'Patrick' and 'Patricia' simultaneously.[104] The narrator's account of reading *L'histoire de la langue d'Oc* involves a similar bifurcation of subjectivity that is mirrored in the chiasmic articulation of the experience: 'What was this Oc to me: self-subject-identified or submissively, supinely subjected object?'[105] Finding that 'While I read, I *was* […] Oc. […] While I read, I also *saw* Oc—from the outside,' the narrator ultimately recognises him- or herself to be 'victim of a narrative method whose eye must by its nature be bifocal, peering sometimes through the subject, sometimes through the object.'[106] At the level of the word, the novel's many puns manifest ambiguity, polysemy, oscillation; as Derek Attridge suggests, puns are 'the product of a context deliberately constructed to *enforce* an ambiguity, to render impossible the choice between meanings, to leave the reader or hearer endlessly oscillating in semantic space.'[107] Every identification, as Judith Butler has articulated in *Gender Trouble*, is inevitably a failed identification, and no identification is ever brought to full closure.[108] As Diana Fuss reminds us, identifications are acts of 'repetition and remembrance'; they are 'only ever partially secure and never complete,' they are 'mobile,' 'elastic,' 'volatile,' 'erratic and eccentric.'[109] In *In Transit,* Brophy dramatises the ways in which any sense of selfhood necessarily involves multiple, labile, and often conflicting identifications.

Surveillance and the body

In *In Transit*, Brophy is preoccupied with the twentieth century in a characteristically ambivalent

or ambiguous way. Brophy understands the airport setting of *In Transit* to be a microcosm of her

era, an 'airpocket' that is a 'droplet of the twentieth century,' a fraught, liminal, indeterminate

space and time that might declare 'Avaunt, anxiety,' but within which 'Anxiety is in sight.'[110]

Brophy's descriptions of the airport in *In Transit*— 'curds of canned plum-juice' and 'bits of a

jigsaw free-drifting'[111]—resembles Alastair Gordon's account of the 'topsy turvy' architecture,

'martini-modern aesthetic,' 'slow motion, spacy feeling,' and 'jet-baroque tendencies' of 1960s

airport buildings in his *Naked Airport: A Cultural History of the World's Most Revolutionary

Structure* (2008).[112] Gordon argues, indeed, that the 'first generation of jets' itself 'decreed the

1960s aesthetic, and changed the look of everything from furniture to fountain pens.'[113]

Brophy's narrative continually returns us to the realm of the body, which turns out to be

as variously legible and indeterminate as the text itself. If modernity produced what Heinz Kohut

calls a 'reshuffling the self,' ontological anxiety might be a salient feature of the experience of

post-war modernity.[114] The anthropologist Marc Augé claims in his book *Non-Places* (2008) that

'supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological

places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places.'[115] Augé's

description of the experience of non-places resonates with *In Transit*:

> As soon as his passport or identity card has been checked, the passenger for the next
> flight, freed from the weight of his luggage and everyday responsibilities, rushes into the
> "duty-free" space; not so much, perhaps, in order to buy at the best prices as to
> experience the reality of his momentary availability, his unchallengeable position as a
> passenger in the process of departing.[116]

What *In Transit* does is indefinitely extend this 'process of departing' to the point at which it

must be challenged, until it becomes a contradiction in terms. His/her flight already having

departed, Pat cannot leave the airport; the space may be 'circumscribed […] newer, cleaner than everyday life,' but at the same time it both circumscribes and constrains.[117] *In Transit* marks a shift in aesthetics and politics in the late 1960s as exemplified by the architecture, functionality, and cultural significance of the airport.

Brophy does not disclose the name of the city or even country of the airport in *In Transit*; the fact that we know only that it contains passengers speaking a variety of European languages, and airlines operating from various European countries, which further reinforces the airport setting's status as a non-place.[118] From the novel's very first sentence—'Ce qui m'étonnait c'était qu'it was my French that disintegrated first'—Pat experiences a sudden and debilitating lack of competency with an international register, a register that is, in the highly regulated and international space of the airport, a crucial form of semiotic capital.[119] The effect is epistemological crisis; Pat viscerally experiences the loss of the polyglottism that might mark a globalized subject in modernity as a kind of 'linguistic leprosy,' and at the same time loses their bearing in the world and their capacity for interacting with others within a social world and correctly interpreting the behaviours of others.[120] The effects—fracturings of the linguistic and epistemic orders—are both comic and deeply unnerving. As Augé writes, 'a person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. […] Subjected to a gentle form of possession, to which he surrenders himself with more or less talent or conviction, he tastes for a while—like anyone, who is possessed—the passive joys of identity-loss.'[121] Such loss might be freeing but might also be the mainspring of what the Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing, writing in the 1960s, names 'ontological insecurity,' a pervasive state of anxiety in which the afflicted feel 'precariously differentiated from the rest of the world,' such that one's identity and autonomy are always in question' and 'the ordinary circumstances of everyday life constitute a continual and

deadly threat' to one's existence.[122]

Pat's confidence in the continuity of his/her own self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments ebbs away as the narrative progresses, and this is a loss reflected in the radical shifts in narrative point of view, mode, voice, and tense. Laing suggests that the sense of the precariousness of one's own bodily boundaries and the sense of being adrift in the 'real world' of everyday interactions provokes the ontologically insecure person to devise contorted strategies to 'secure' him- or herself in this world. This sound very much like the sorts of desperate quests that Pat undertakes in *In Transit*: 'If the individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways […] of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it, to prevent himself losing his self.'[123] 'In fact,' as Laing writes, 'we are all only two or three degrees Fahrenheit from experiences of this order. Even a slight fever, and the whole world can begin to take on a persecutory, impinging aspect.'[124] Brophy draws Pat, then, as exemplifying an experience of which all of twentieth-century humanity is on the brink; existing in this hyper-regulated, hyper-surveilled and at the same time anonymous, globalised, and international space might be precisely what precipitates it.[125]

While the passport is a document that has a certain collectively endowed status-function that permits a successful navigation of the process, in *In Transit* the ontic specificity of the passport as document, the features of the body, and the tenor of the voice all refuse access to any ontological significance, to any significant social meaning, and the sex and gender of the body remain resolutely ambiguous. An analogous process occurs at a linguistic level, as evidenced in Pat's exchanges with other travellers in the airport in which the materiality of the word is all there is, divested of its social, political, cultural significance, such that no meaningful dialogue

can take place. While ontic entities are described in the text, then, any effort by Pat to grasp at, negotiate or comprehend his/her being, or the relationship between that being and Pat's existence as a subject, turns out to be futile. The ontology of the word and of the body are inscrutable beyond their ontic specificity and permit no analysis, no comprehension, by the mind ostensibly in possession of them.

Brophy sets her novel in a post-war Europe in which airport staff are gatekeepers of the state and the infrastructures of the airport are sociopolitical apparatuses that determine who is granted entry to that state and who is denied. Further, it is in the airport that an individual's life is rendered equivalent to or validated only by *text*; in the space of the airport, the passport is both evidence of and constitutive of subjecthood. As Pat sits with a cup of coffee at the café table, the hail of the public-address system causes a 'shock' such that a 'tiny polyp of cappuccino erected itself higher than the rim of the cup.'[126] The droplet 'splurged, though very small, directly onto my passport,' on its 'soft paper heart' where the 'eyedentity of the soul' is documented, and 'obliterated nothing more vital than my title (or form of address). [...] Even I am not so alarmist that I truly supposed that little starwort to have bodged the document's or my validity.'[127] This is, however, precisely what happens—the legibility of the title and of the subject are one and the same; the title *is* vital, and what the words of the public-address system precipitates is the loss of identity via the destruction of a textual marker of it.

The irony of such questions of 'legibility' is, of course, only heightened with the knowledge that Pat is a character in a novel, a character whose consciousness and material existence is necessarily textually represented and textually constituted. The unintentional vandalism inflicted upon the passport by the droplet of coffee dissolves both text and subjecthood; when a document is both evidence of an identity and constitutive of that identity,

there is no clear ontological difference between obliterating the textual mark of the identity and obliterating the identity itself. The passport offers a specific interpellated identity that cannot exist without some version or existence of the nation-state. As the 'form of address,' then, is rendered illegible, so is the body, and thus in a Butlerian sense the before turns out to be an effect of the after; the written mark precedes sex insofar as it constitutes it.[128] In this novel, Pat is a subject who is not translatable to paper or other material form of evidence, meaning that the choice to remain in transit turns out not to be a choice at all. The effect of the aporia in Pat's identity is that the state will be unable to account for them legally; as Augé has it, 'the passenger through non-places retrieves his identity only at Customs, at the tollbooth, at the check-out counter.'[129] The non-place can thus be a liminal space of suspended or indeterminate subjecthood. An indeterminate subject with a damaged passport, Pat cannot pass through the state's checkpoints but can only remain in limbo.[130]

The airport, of course, is where Pat ultimately dies. As Augé suggests, '[a]lone, but one of many, the user of a non-place is in contractual relations with it (or with the powers that govern it),' and this user is 'reminded, when necessary, that the contract exists.'[131] Augé thus highlights the paradox of existence within the space of the airport: an experience of freedom (that which Brophy names being 'duty-free'[132]) and surveillance, identity checks and the threat or lure of anonymity. As Augé puts it, 'so the passenger accedes to his anonymity only when he has given proof of his identity; when he has countersigned (so to speak) the contract. […] In a way, the user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence. […] There will be no individualization (no right to anonymity) without identity checks.'[133]

Given the scrutiny and control to which bodies are subjected in the airport, then, I want to turn to the specifics of the toilet within the airport as an especially fraught site of gendered and

sexual politics, and one in which a key transformative episode in Brophy's novel takes place. In

Female Masculinity (1998), Jack Halberstam writes:

> The policing of gender within the bathroom is intensified in the space of the airport, where people are literally moving through space and time in ways that cause them to want to stabilize some boundaries (gender) even as they traverse others (national). […] It is no accident, then, that travel hubs become zones of intense scrutiny and observation.[134]

The toilet within the airport is legible as the ultimate site of surveillance and the biopolitical

regulation of bodies; nowhere are the signifiers of gender more painfully acute and subject to

surveillance. In *In Transit,* Pat is dismayed and humiliated that 'my quest for happiness should

be foiled by a bladder,' and yet 'the bladder' inevitably, as the sociologist Sheila L. Cavanagh

reminds us, 'functions like a leash.'[135] Establishing sex becomes an urgent matter precisely

because the narrator 'urgently had to pee,' and in 'social reality, which is every bit as tough as

material reality, I could not go to the lavatories as long as I did not know whether to go to the

men's or women's.'[136] Segregated toilets reproduce what Judith Butler calls the heterosexual

matrix, a 'grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are

naturalised,' and as this episode shows, Pat's indeterminate identity cannot register in an

economy of absolute difference.[137] Gender ambiguity, then, precludes access to toilets; as N.

Katherine Hayles reminds us, 'because embodiment is individually articulated, there is also at

least an incipient tension between it and hegemonic cultural constructs.'[138] As Cavanagh puts it,

following Michel Foucault: 'the institution of the public toilet is designed to discipline gender

[…] through the gendered codes of conduct and the hygienic and panoptic designs of the modern

lavatory.'[139]

The 1960s saw, more than any decade before, the intense policing of men's toilets in

Europe and America. In Hamburg, Germany, for instance, police placed one-way mirrors in

select public toilets in the hopes of catching men engaging in sexual activity, and in the United

States, 'campaigns against gays by local police departments, spurred by the national political identification of homosexuality with domestic subversion, made use of new modes of subterfuge and dissimulation, including the surveillance of public rest rooms.'[140] In Britain, the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 partially decriminalised 'homosexual acts' conducted in private by men over the age of 21, but acts which fell outside of its rubric of 'privacy' remained criminal. As such, the very section of the Act that effectively 'legalised' homosexuality also contained the provision that criminalised sex in public toilets.[141] The 1967 Act legalised only conduct that was hidden from view on the basis that their visibility was deemed offensive to public morality. Homosexuality was understood to be so threatening to public morality that specific legal regulation was needed to criminalise male homosexual sex outside the socially controlled boundaries of the private sphere and to embed authoritarian morality into English law. Insofar as it regulated the sexual geography of public toilets, the 1967 Act was proposed as a legislative solution to the practical problem of policing behind closed doors.

The particularity of public toilet architecture is such that the cubicle perhaps functions as a refuge within this heavily surveilled and disciplined space. In this cramped private space within at least two infrastructural layers that prioritise intense surveillance, the cubicle becomes the space for Pat's resistance in the form of graffiti, as well as a brief refuge for the indeterminately gendered body.[142] The space's privacy, though, is limited; the cubicle is not a fully enclosed space, and Pat is deeply anxious about the possibility of sounds, the direction of the feet, and the position of the lock, imagining surveillance from the public area of the bathroom encroaching on the space of the cubicle. Imagining themself to be subject to persecutory eyes and ears, Pat panics.

Gender misreadings are negotiated through a visual economy of power that is dependent on what Foucault calls techniques of surveillance.[143] As Foucault suggests, in such spaces the supervisory gaze is concerned with both disciplinary power and self-government, and in this case, the toilet attendant in the airport bathroom is both surveillant and supervisor in the guise of a helper. While the panopticism that Foucault describes prioritises vision, Pat's cubicle turns out to be a safer refuge than we might have thought due to the attendant's deafness: 'Patricia did not know it: but the lavatory attendant was deaf. While she was making her exit, he continued to sit hunched over his paperback, which was a translation into Dutch.'[144] The attendant neither hears nor sees—what is important is that Pat thinks he does.

Pat's lack of knowledge about this fact causes the bathroom to function as a strange parody of panopticism; in a variation on the panoptic mode in which the prisoner self-regulates in the knowledge that the surveillant *might* be watching, Pat effectively disciplines him- or herself as a result of the fear that a surveillant might be *listening*. Voice, in this instance, would be a signal of transgression and evidence of criminal activity. As Cavanagh notes, 'the spatial signifiers of sexual difference are […] troubled by sound.'[145] While Cavanagh describes the negotiation between the 'performative unhearing' of certain toilet sounds and the intense scrutiny to which other sounds and sights are subjected, Brophy emphasises those specifically vocal markers that were utterly ambiguous to Pat when attempting to read his/her own identity but are here dangerously conspicuous enough to expose and endanger.[146] When Pat, ensconced in the circumscribed space of the toilet cubicle, discovers that instead of a penis there is 'nothing there,' there is no space for the ambiguously sexed person in the binarised space of the airport toilets.[147] As Butler argues, the materialisation of regulatory norms in 'bodily formation' necessarily produces 'a domain of abjected bodies, a field of deformation, which, in failing to

qualify as the fully human, fortifies those regulatory norms.'[148] The abject designates 'those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unliveable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.'[149] When indeterminacy returns to Pat, the only exit is through the bathroom window.

The scene inside the men's toilets is one that marks, in narrative terms, a rupture between stringent self-discipline and transgression. Pat had been desperately trying to obey every rule he/she could intuit—something happens in the space of the toilet that precipitates a sudden and rash act, the act of leaving the toilet by the window and sneaking into the baggage handling area. The initial act of apparent trespass into the men's toilets leads to vandalism in the form of graffiti in the stall, and then to a much more significant act of trespass, into the airport's baggage handling zone. Pat descends into a space repeatedly referred to as the 'underworld,' a location in the airport that is strictly off-limits to all unauthorised persons, and one that only serves to remind us that Pat is an unauthorised person anywhere.[150] This accrual of acts of trespass underscores the panic around security and sovereignty—both bodily and state—that attend to the perceived presence of 'wrong,' unvalidated, or unauthorised bodies in particular spaces. Trespassing in airports and in toilets, especially in airport toilets, risks accusations of criminal intent, violation, and violence.[151] Indeed, the experience of reading *In Transit* in the twenty-first century cannot but be inflected by those abundant geopolitical security narratives which necessarily produce the perception of threat, whereby the airport is narrativised as a site of surveillance and of terror. While the 1950s has been remembered as a golden age of air travel, *In Transit* marks an ambivalent moment in aviation history when the glamour of the airport and the aeroplane were beginning to wane, and decadence came to be overshadowed by paranoia. Writing the late 1960s, Brophy anticipated the major changes to international airports that would

appear just a few years later, in the early 1970s, when security screenings became mandatory, and involved body searches as well as bag inspections.[152]

Understood metonymically, the airport and the human body are metonymic inversions of one another—the airport setting foregrounds the inherent historical and empirical contingency of borders, borders that in their very contingency resemble the borders and boundaries of bodies both social and individual. The airport toilet, then, is a space of ontological anxiety, by which I mean anxiety *about* the ontological, insofar as the systems of sex and gender depend upon an absolute distinction between two sexes such that any perceived loss of a binary gender axis necessarily incites anxieties about gender incoherence. The space of the toilet in particular creates what Calvin Thomas calls 'scatontological anxiety' (a portmanteau word that Brophy would appreciate) defined as 'the fear of being abjected, of being something not worth having.'[153] In *In Transit,* Pat's experience of bodily ambiguity in the stall reveals the toilet to be a place where masculinity is threatened in its most intimate corporeality.[154] After having his/her gender identity cast again into ambiguity, Pat alters the graffito that he/she had drawn moments before, 'BLESS YOU, BETTY BOUNCER' to 'BUGGER YOU, BETTY BOUNCER.'[155] While the relationship between Pat and Betty earlier alluded to by Donahue had given Pat the self-assuredness of a heterosexual man, the revelation of an absence in the realm of Pat's body both reveals something about and is constitutive of Betty's identity, too: 'thus was an emended Betty Bouncer set to strut eternally along the quays of a garish, shabby waterfront, her body no longer that of a bawd but flat and hard as a board. […] she liked, and liked only, being buggered.'[156] The materiality of Pat's body thus spurs of chain of apparent revelations, ones about Pat's identity, about Betty's identity, and about Betty's body. The conclusion that Pat draws from his/her own bodily evidence (or, indeed, the lack of it) is that Betty is a lesbian or

bisexual woman, and it is this conclusion that leads to the written incitement to sexual assault on the wall of the exclusively male space of the men's toilets.[157] The incorporeal transformation of bodies, *In Transit* insists, is effected through language.

Perspectival change and its material effects

The theory of the discursive formation of bodies is central to the relationship, in Brophy's novel, between perspectival and material change. Sex, as Judith Butler argues in *Bodies that Matter,* is 'not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize "sex" and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms,' and sexual difference, moreover, 'is never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices.'[158] Following Butler's related claim in *Gender Trouble* that there is no body prior to cultural inscription, that gender is 'performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results,' we might ask how the literary text might itself constitute a macro 'expression' that constitutes, rather than solely represents, embodied gender.[159] In the case of *In Transit,* it is specifically *narration* about bodies in this novel that is shown to be constitutive of those bodies, and, moreover, Brophy makes a claim, in her typical metonymic fashion, about the power of language to instantiate material change in the world.

It is necessary, in order to demonstrate what I mean, to retreat briefly from Butler's theorisations of sex and gender and to consider it in the light of a narratological argument. In *Transparent Minds,* her seminal study of narrative modes, Dorrit Cohn considers Virginia Woolf's representation of consciousnesses in the form of narrated monologue:

> From Clarissa to Peter, from Rezia to Septimus, from Mrs. to Mr. Ramsay, narrated
> monologues pass from hers to his and back again, often without intervening narrative
> sentences. But in transit the tone can change, and it often does when the gender of the
> pronoun changes.[160]

In Woolf's novels, Cohn argues, pronominal shifts mark the shifts in focalisation of free indirect

style, since a change of pronoun deftly signals a change of antecedent in each of the three

opposite-sex pairs Cohn provides as examples. This kind of sophisticated narrated monologue,

Cohn suggests, is accomplishable because in each pairing there is only one character to whom

each pronoun could refer. In *In Transit,* by contrast, instead of the dexterity with which Woolf's

narration oscillates between different characters' consciousnesses, Brophy's pronominal use is

deliberately obfuscating in the production of a subject whose body undergoes material

transformation. While in Woolf, then, a change of pronoun indicates a change in character, in

Brophy this is more like a change *within* character—that is, a pronominal shift precipitates a

material change. Unlike her high modernist precursors, then, Brophy offers a model whereby

pronominal changes mark ontological ones. In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*

(1997)*,* Judith Butler describes the body as always already interpellated in discourse, arguing that

language:

> sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather, it is by
> being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body
> first becomes possible. […] [the body] becomes accessible on the occasion of an address,
> a call, an interpellation that does not 'discover' this body, but constitutes it
> fundamentally.[161]

In *In Transit*, Brophy literalises the argument Butler makes here—we might say that language

sustains the body by bringing it into being 'in a literal way.' Since the novel's characters are

constituted by language and have no material existence outside of it, 'the constative claim […] is

always to some degree performative,' as Butler would have it; to describe is necessarily to

create.[162] In an Interlude, the narrator asks, 'How can I address you, interlocutor, when the only

language I so much as half command is one in which the "you" does not even reveal […] how many there are of you and of what sex?'[163] This question is curiously inverted, since its grammar suggests that it is the pronoun itself that ought to 'reveal' to the addressee the details of person or people being addressed, as if the deployment of 'you' could, in some other, less deficient language, reveal or even constitute the particularities of that 'you.' In the realm of the novel, of course, this odd logic can pertain, and the deployment of a name or a pronoun in narrative precipitates change in—even constitutes—the antecedent.

In the limbo of the airport café, Pat desperately wants to be interpellated, and expresses consternation at several near-misses. Frustrated that the bespectacled '37-year-old toy exporter' at the café table addresses them with the generic 'Pardon,' Pat laments, in a parody of interpellation, that that the neighbour 'might, without cost or effort to himself, have solved my immediate enigma, prolonged my stay in transit and thus eventually have perhaps secured my life's happiness, if only he had thought to add two more syllables and call out "Pardon, monsieur" or "Pardon, madame."'[164] Some time later, a chance encounter with Donahue, the husband of Betty Bouncer—a woman that Donahue assures Pat he/she knows, though Pat does not remember her—ends with Donahue's pronouncement that Pat was either her 'first date' or 'first mate.'[165] Despite the ambiguity of this statement, Pat is thoroughly optimistic that it is the key to determining his/her own sex; 'after so many single clues which had turned out to point to two-headed conclusions,' Pat is delighted that 'here at last was a bifurcated clue both of whose prongs converged on a single, unequivocal piece of information.'[166] While Pat imagines a neat convergence whereby 'first mate' and 'first date' denote the same thing—namely, that Pat is a heterosexual man—in the fictional world Brophy creates, ambiguous signifiers can never be reduced to a single, stable referent. The prongs of this 'bifurcated clue' diverge rather than

converge, since both hearings, 'first mate' and 'first date' garner multiple associations, and signify heterogeneously. Pat has the wrong end of the stick; in *In Transit*, nothing turns out to be unequivocal.

The episode recalls Jacques Lacan's famous challenge to the indivisibility of the sign and the prioritisation of the signified over the signifier, two of the fundamental premises of Saussurean linguistics. In 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious' (1957), Lacan replaces the Saussurean algorithm of the tree with the image of toilet doors, behind which are simply two identical toilets. The difference between the two toilets, 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' is created by the signifier on the doors themselves rather than what is actually behind them. In Lacan's diagram, what he describes as the 'laws of urinary segregation' produce the signifiers 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' become, through the misrecognition of the girl and boy sitting opposite one another on a train, 'two homelands' subject to the 'immeasurable power of ideological warfare' though they are 'in fact the same homeland.'[167] As Jacqueline Rose observes, in Lacan's parable, 'anatomical difference comes to *figure* sexual difference, that is, it becomes the sole representative of what the difference is allowed to be.'[168] As Lee Edelman argues: the 'men's room, whose very signifier in this fable enshrines the phallus as the token not only of difference, but of difference as determinate, difference as knowable, is the site of a particular heterosexual anxiety about the inscriptions of homosexual desire and about the possibility of knowing or recognizing whatever would constitute the "homosexual difference."'[169] With this parable, Lacan argues for the metonymic process of signification; none of its elements actually 'consist' of the meaning or the signified, but rather each signifier 'insists' upon a meaning as it presses forward to the next signifier.

In her 2002 introduction to *In Transit,* Christine Brooke-Rose writes that the narrator's

encounter with Donahue 'convinces her/him that he is a man (the pronouns follow).'[170] At this point, indeed, the narration shifts from the first-person 'I' to the third-person, definitively gendered 'Patrick.' I would add to Brooke-Rose's formulation here, though, that the actual sex of the body follows the pronouns. The conversation with Donahue does not reveal the narrator's sex but rather convinces them that a definite sex already exists and is legible to others; it is precisely this conviction that constitutes sex in the body and in the mode of narration (which in fiction, Brophy implies, are one and the same thing). Pat does not visit the toilets until a gender-specific name and accompanying pronouns appear after apparently being hailed as a man, at which point the character is suddenly reinstated with embodied knowledge: 'shoulders effortlessly squared, back vertical, O'Rooley ran lithely down the steps: a man at ease in, and with, his own body.'[171] The novel's textual and sexual ambiguities ironise this description of a palpably masculine gait and undermine what a phrase like 'his own body' might mean, an issue which is itself only exacerbated by the ambiguity of pronouns and of prepositions, 'in, and with.' Sex then, while misrecognised as a pre-existing truth, is shown to be constituted only through a belief in it. The constitution of sex is a kind of confidence trick; while bodily, documentary and discursive forms of apparent evidence always turn out to be equivocal, in each situation, sex is constituted by the character's belief that the evidence is irrefutable. The narrator's 'ludicrous oblivion' thus inverts the relationship between pronouns and their antecedents. The knowledge of a person's sex is not a necessary prerequisite for the deployment of a pronoun to describe that person; rather, the deployment of a pronoun is what constitutes sex.

Despite the novel's preoccupation with sex indeterminacy and fluidity, this indeterminacy is revealed to be unsustainable both within the narrational modality and, with it, within the cultural and sociopolitical context that the narrative posits. After revealing that 'I

could no longer remember what sex I was,' the narrator claims that the 'specific determining reason why this narrative should be in the first person' is in order to evade the 'cumbersomeness' of being 'committed […] to a main character at whose every appearance in my narrative I would be obliged to write he/she, his/her, etc.'[172] Brophy is not usually wary of the cumbersome; her puns and plots are ostentatiously baroque.[173] What this admission—housed in what the narrator calls an '(at last openly) Open-Letter'—makes open is that there was anything hidden at all; that is, this very claim to openness is a conceit, since it reveals that the deployment of a pronoun like 'he/she' has to be absolutely avoided until the moment in the diegesis that we learn 'I could no longer remember what sex I was,' because it would have made this indeterminacy conspicuous too early.[174] *In Transit's* narrative strategies, then, provide an exemplary case of what Gérard Genette terms 'paralipsis,' the underreporting of information that would conventionally be provided by a particular narrator or focaliser.[175] What is actually hidden is not the narrator's sex, but rather the narrator's ignorance of it and, moreover, his/her ignorance of that ignorance. Sex, in the novel, is not lost but rather forgotten; the narrator reports that it was 'during the scudding of the back of the spoon across the opaque liquid that I realized I could no longer remember which sex I was.'[176] The episode resembles an ironic inversion of Proustian involuntary memory whereby an embodied ritual triggers not remembrance, but the awareness of having forgotten. The experience of sex indeterminacy presented in *In Transit* is a kind of embodied cognition; what is lost is not sex but the memory of its past instantiations. The suggestion that the experience is a result of 'gross forgetfulness' is wryly litotic, but with an ominous undertone; the narrator's reference to 'my ludicrous oblivion' connotes both forgetfulness *and* destruction, the evacuation of subjecthood and one's own place within cultural memory.[177] Prose narrative, as *In Transit* demonstrates so starkly, is as a medium in which identity signifiers do not have to exist;

the textual production of ambiguous markers, or the paralipsis that leaves certain things unmarked, provides an implicit critique of entrenched social categories by foregrounding the principles of their construction. What Brophy continually reminds us via Pat as narrator and as character is that there is no unified way of speaking as a woman or as a man.

Later in the novel, Brophy does indeed adopt the 'he/she' pronominal designation, but not for long. Many critics have foregrounded the novel's insistence on sex and gender fluidity and amorphousness; Sonya Andermahr, for instance, writes that Brophy 'presents gender as an "illegible" or indeterminate category,'[178] and Carole Sweeney highlights Brophy's 'insistence on the fluidity of identity,' citing a contemporaneous review in *Life* magazine that describes a person as 'many things, many appetites, all genders.'[179] And yet permanent sex and gender transitivity is not what *In Transit* offers; in this novel, the binary categories of sex and gender coalesce and reify, are shored up in moments of pseudo-revelation. Via these narrative modalities, Brophy suggests that transitivity is unsustainable in the third person. It seems only tenable in the first person, and when nobody is paying much attention to it, and when an epicene existence moves into focus, it vanishes. Significantly, those passages narrated in the third person in *In Transit* rarely name their protagonist 'Pat,' but rather adopt the apparently gender-specific names 'Patrick,' and 'Patricia' accompanied by definitively gendered pronouns. 'Pat' cannot exist for long in a third-person modality. The question such a mode prompts is whether such an existence is necessarily brief truly because it is too 'cumbersome' for the reader, or rather because existence itself is too cumbersome for the ambiguously gendered self.

What such an opposition gestures to is the nature of the relationship between the use of a given narrative mode and the precipitation of material change in the world, such that a certain kind of existence might be enabled via discursive means. Brophy's perspectival oscillations, and

the changes in embodied existence that I argue such oscillations precipitate, gesture to the potential of narrative for realising, in the world, material change that might be understood as socially, politically, or even ontologically impossible. In the novel's first section, Pat is incapable of leaving the café because 'I was at the time sitting, alone but in public, in front of a coffee I had not so much as sipped because it was much too hot,' and '[y]ou cannot publicly abandon a coffee to wither in its cup unless you can brandish a whither by way of pretext.'[180] Brophy at once counterpoints and brings together material-physical and socio-political forms of constraint via zeugma: 'Nothing of a technical nature held me. It was my chair which, weighted by one of those loaded metal bases, was as good as stuck fast in front of the bar. But I was affixed by social usage.'[181] In this episode, the 'stuck' chair and the 'affixed' 'I'—themselves respectively metonymic of literal and figurative senses of constraint—are brought together in the body. Pat may have forgotten his/her own sex, but does remember 'Clause One of the Social [Non-Aggression] Contract'; namely, that 'one does not mention sex to strangers.'[182] Pat is a product of the disjunction between the recollected and the forgotten; Pat both forgets his/her sex and recalls that this forgetting of sex—indeed, even *talking* about sex—is socially unacceptable. The tension between the two is expressed in the dual meaning of 'impossible' in Pat's panicked internal conversation with him- or herself, ironically highlighting the distinction between the materially or physically impossible and the socially impossible: 'I promised myself that it was impossible for an adult human to forget what sex he/she belonged to—and then added, in an effort to undo the strangulation of panic which set about me, that it was doubly impossible for an adult human in public.'[183] What Brophy is at pains to emphasise here is that 'social reality […] is every bit as tough as material reality'; indeed, that there is no discernible difference between the two.[184]

Later in *In Transit,* Pat, reading a translation of a French novel, imagines that the 'fatigued' translator must have 'forgotten to invert the absurd French habit of using the possessive adjective to inform the reader of the sex not of the possessor but of the object possessed; and the translator has thereby coined a character who, to an English-thinking mind, simply cannot exist: namely, "his husband."'[185] The reference to a 'French habit' implies a connection between the 'habit' of French adjectival use and the habit of the 'English-thinking mind' of conceiving of the institution of marriage, wherein 'English' here is metonymic not only of the English language, but also the country's institutions, laws, and politics. Earlier in the novel, moreover, documentary evidence fails to signal sexual identity or the rules that pertain to it: 'Every passport contains a space for the holder's wife, but the fact they've drawn a line through it signifies only that your wife is not travelling on your passport […] not that you have no wife—and still less that you're not of the sex that *could* have a wife.'[186] *In Transit* was published nearly half a century before legislation to allow same-sex marriage in England and Wales was passed by UK Parliament. In these scenes of reading, pronouns and titles—ostensible textual indexes of gender—evoke Michael Bronski's description of Brophy's insight that 'the imagination is shameful because it can literally conjure up alternative realities outside of lived experience' as 'germane to a great deal of LGBT Studies thinking about the power of the aesthetic in relationship to political struggles.'[187] As John Bayley has written, the idea that Brophy's work suggests is that 'We read therefore we are'; that is, that personal identity might only be discovered 'by means of stories and novels, and that this is why philosophers, who seldom or never read them, have been unable to find it.'[188]

Via the 'fatigued' translator's subversive moment of 'forgetting,' Brophy proposes that literary representation might be the means by which the existence of social and political

categories, as well as embodied identities, that apparently 'cannot exist' might be summoned into existence, thus forging a link between literary and political versions of 'representation.' The vital link between the translator's 'forgetting' and Pat's own foundational experience of forgetting that sparked the chain of events that the novel represents—'I could no longer remember what sex I was'—is evidence of the generative potential of forgetfulness and apparent failure for realising social and political change.[189] As Jack Halberstam argues in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011)*,* for women and queer people particularly, 'forgetfulness can be a useful tool for jamming the smooth operations of the normal and the ordinary. […] forgetfulness becomes a rupture with the eternally self-generating present, a break with a self-authorizing past, and an opportunity for a non-hetero-reproductive future.'[190]

The publication of *In Transit,* then, marks a significant milestone in British literary history. Brophy's metonymically generated plot, her multiplication of perspectives and her refusal to assign anything like a fixed identity to her narrator-protagonist or fixed positions in the textual dynamic of author, narrator, reader and character constitute an unprecedented undermining of her own literary authority. Brophy's novel thus has much in common with the interrogations of singular authorial authority seen in texts by Muriel Spark and Iris Murdoch. In her radical textual experimentalism, Brophy goes still further, in her dizzying exposure of the flimsiness of the 'author' as textual construct in the same move that she endows the multiple, ambivalent, shapeshifting narrator-character at the centre of her novel with ontological weight.

Notes

[1] Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Remake', in *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose*, ed. Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995), 20–21.

[2] Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 57.

[3] Kate Levey, 'Mr. and Mrs. Michael Levey', *Contemporary Women's Writing* 12, no. 2 (15 September 2018): 148, https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpx025.

[4] Brophy, *In Transit*, 36.

[5] Brophy disliked the use of the singular 'they.' In the early 1980s, she composed a rather scathing review of a book titled *The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing for Writers, Editors and Speakers,* whose authors advocated the replacement of masculinised language with ungendered terminology, including the use of the singular 'they' in place of a generic 'he.' Brophy wrote, '[g]iven that it has no hope of reforming society, there is no useful point in the enterprise.' The book's authors, she argued, only exacerbate the problem whereby English has become 'a collection of dangerous taboo objects' and thus 'can only speed the national degeneration into inarticulacy.' 'Small Boys and Girls', *London Review of Books* 4, no. 2 (4 February 1982), https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v04/n02/brigid-brophy/small-boys-and-girls.

[6] B. S Johnson, *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), 15.

[7] Karl Miller, 'Brigid Brophy: A Memoir', in *Dark Horses: An Experience of Literary Journalism* (London: Picador, 1998), 96.

[8] Brophy, *In Transit*, 101.

[9] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 150.

[10] Brophy, *In Transit*, 31.

[11] Leslie Dock and Brigid Brophy, 'An Interview with Brigid Brophy', *Contemporary Literature* 17, no. 2 (1976): 166, https://doi.org/10.2307/1207662.

[12] Brophy, *In Transit*, 23.

[13] Brophy, 13.

[14] Brophy, 217.

[15] Brophy, 183.

[16] Brophy, 197.

[17] Brophy, 215.

[18] Brophy, 215.

[19] Brophy, 234.

[20] Brophy, 234.

[21] Brophy, 236.

[22] Brophy, 67. E.H. (P.) O'R' stands for 'Evelyn Hilary (Pat) O'Rooley,' Pat's full, entirely gender-ambiguous name. Leslie Dock also notes the anagram of 'HERO' in Pat's initials, another kind of pointing. Quoted in Sheryl Stevenson, 'Language and Gender in Transit: Feminist Extensions of Bakhtin', in *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, ed. Dale M. Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry, SUNY Series in Feminist Criticism and Theory (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 192.

[23] Brophy, *In Transit*, 138.

[24] Brophy, 100. Brophy's decision effectively to 'sign' her text in multiple places might be understood as a means of exerting authorial control and reminding her readership of her power as literary creator. On the other hand, as Elaine Freedgood suggests, the inclusion of fictionalised versions of real people as characters in a novel—in this case, the author herself—can have unpredictable effects, insofar as 'in sharing an ontological plane with fictional characters,' such characters might 'enhance the fictional world, becoming less real and more fictional, dissolving rather than solving reference.' 'Metalepsis in Real Time', *Arcade* (blog), n.d., https://arcade.stanford.edu/content/metalepsis-real-time.

[25] Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 110.

[26] I use the term 'ontological anxiety' in distinction from the experiences of 'ontological insecurity' articulated by R.D. Laing, to which I will turn in detail later in this chapter: see R. D Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Penguin, 2010). While 'ontological insecurity' refers to real persons imagining themselves to be ontologically unstable, I emphasise that any character, narrator or implied author is, of course, ontologically distinct from those 'real' people that exist outside texts, and thus textually-posited and 'real' people harbour quite different sets of ontological anxieties. Here, then, I ask what it might mean not only to experience dissociation and to doubt one's own existential security or fixity within a social world, but rather to know that oneself is not 'real,' to be aware of one's own position of comparative ontological inferiority. In this way I interrogate the paradox whereby a character, narrator or implied author—narratologically speaking, a textually encoded speech position—could be said to 'know' anything at all.

[27] Uri Margolin, 'Narrator', in *Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Hühn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 351.

[28] Jacques Derrida, 'Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*Pointure*]', in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian MacLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 283.

[29] Derrida, 370.

[30] Derrida, 255.

[31] Derrida, 301.

[32] Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 5.

[33] Brophy, *In Transit*, 13.

[34] Derrida, *Glas*, 262.

[35] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Glas-Piece: A Compte Rendu', ed. Jacques Derrida, *Diacritics* 7, no. 3 (1977): 24, https://doi.org/10.2307/464880.

[36] Roman Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language and Aphasia* (De Gruyter, 2018), 68, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110889598.

[37] Derrida, *Glas*, 1.

[38] Brophy, *In Transit*, 139.

[39] Brophy, 72.

[40] Julia Jordan usefully describes *In Transit* as 'characterised by a fantastical excess of the fictive.' *Late Modernism and the Avant-Garde British Novel: Oblique Strategies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 50.

[41] Carole Sweeney, '"Why This Rather Than That?": The Delightful Perversity of Brigid Brophy', *Contemporary Women's Writing* 12, no. 2 (15 September 2018): 234, https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpy019.

[42] Brophy, *In Transit*, 140.

[43] Brophy, 13.

[44] Brophy, 219.

[45] Brophy, 220.

[46] Brophy, 235.

[47] Brophy, 66.

[48] Brophy, 11, 71.

[49] Brophy, 73.

[50] Brophy, 71.

[51] Margolin, 'Narrator', 351.

[52] Margolin, 351.

[53] Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, Theory and Interpretation of Narrative (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 86.

[54] Brophy, *In Transit*, 22.

[55] Brophy, 67.

[56] Brophy, 221.

[57] Brophy, 45. Brophy's critical work similarly exhibits a preoccupation with the distinction between the ontic specificity of the book and ambiguity of its ontology. As she writes in her 'defense of fiction,' *Prancing Novelist*: 'A novel is something in the real world whether or not it is a naturalistic novel. But the naturalistic convention consists of pretending that the novel is a nothing, that it isn't there.' *Prancing Novelist: A Defence of Fiction in the Form of a Critical Biography in Praise of Ronald Firbank* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 6.

[58] Brophy, *In Transit*, 114–15.

[59] Although the last name 'O'Rooley' is not gender-specific in the way that 'Patrick' and 'Patricia' traditionally are, in *In Transit* this name is used exclusively to denote a masculine gendering. Like the name 'Pat,' this recognisably Irish surname is vividly and easily recalled by the narrator while so many other memories have vanished. When the name 'O'Rooley' is deployed, it is when the protagonist is cast into the role of the 'deadbeat-dick; weeper peeper; down-at-heel heel; no-account, never-amount, all but buddy-can-you-spare-a-dime, virtually peg-leg leg man,' one who makes use of his 'frank Irish countenance' to solve crimes, instructing those around him to '*see* my shabby integrity written all over my endearingly beat-up face.' Brophy, 155–57. O'Rooley resembles those heavy-drinking, curmudgeonly detective-protagonists of (Irish-)American hardboiled fiction such as Chandler's Marlowe or Hammett's Spade.

[60] Émile Benveniste, 'The Nature of Pronouns', in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971), 219.

[61] Benveniste, 218.

[62] Henrik Skov Nielsen, 'The Impersonal Voice in First-Person Narrative Fiction', *Narrative (Columbus, Ohio)* 12, no. 2 (2004): 139, https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2004.0002.

[63] Brophy, *In Transit*, 71, 85. With such statements, Brophy points obliquely to the ambiguous ontology of literary characters; as Maria E. Reicher argues, for instance, 'fictional characters are not the sort of objects that may have a sex, literally speaking.' 'The Ontology of Fictional Characters', in *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*, ed. Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider (Berlin ; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 111.

[64] Brophy, *In Transit*, 85.

[65] Brophy, 16.

[66] Greg Urban, 'The 'I' of Discourse', in *Semiotics, Self, and Society*, ed. Benjamin Lee and Greg Urban, 2015, 28, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110859225.

[67] Urban, 28.

[68] Urban, 28.

[69] Urban, 28.

[70] Brophy, *In Transit*, 66.

[71] Brophy, 182, 207, 206.

[72] Karen Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Reading Women Writing (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 233.

[73] Brophy, *In Transit*, 12.

[74] Brophy, 132, 181.

[75] Brophy, 71, 75.

[76] Brophy, 76, 79.

[77] Brophy, 121.

[78] Brophy, 236.

[79] Brigid Brophy, 'Mozart's Cross', *London Review of Books* 8, no. 14 (7 August 1986), https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v08/n14/brigid-brophy/mozart-s-cross.

[80] Brigid Brophy, 'Transference', *London Review of Books* 4, no. 7 (15 April 1982).

[81] Brophy, *In Transit*, 137.

[82] Fetishism is an ontological concern, since to be fetishised is to be turned into an object. As a representational practice, fetishism's effect is the substitution of a part for the whole, or of a thing—an object, an organ, a portion of the body— for a subject.

[83] Sigmund Freud, 'On Fetishism', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1999), 154–66.

[84] Phelan, *Unmarked*, 107.

[85] Dock and Brophy, 'An Interview with Brigid Brophy', 166.

[86] In an essay titled 'Shaviana,' Brophy wrote of Freud:

> [He] has demonstrated that our conscious endeavours are at risk of subversion by our unconscious wishes: we should be safer from ourselves if we recognised the allure of violence, which we could then combat by rational means; otherwise, we (conscious, rational, pro-life, wouldn't-hurt-a-fly we) are in danger of being gulled by our own subterranean destructive fantasies into seeking to avoid destruction by measures precisely, though unconsciously, calculated, like neurotic symptoms, to bring about what we persuade ourselves we are trying to avert.
>
> Psychoanalysis is a technique that can bring the mechanism of a neurotic symptom (that is, of an unconscious hypocrisy) to the attention of the conscious mind, but it can't and shouldn't tell the conscious mind what to do about it then.

'Shaviana', *London Review of Books* 4, no. 22 (2 December 1982), https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v04/n22/brigid-brophy/shaviana.

[87] Brophy, *In Transit*, 55.

[88] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall, Culture, Media, and Identities (London: Sage, 1997), 268.

[89] Many of Brophy's other works share this inclination towards the abyssal or recursive. In her 1964 novel *The Snow Ball,* for instance, Brophy chooses one of her own footnotes from *Mozart the Dramatist,* a critical work published the same year.

[90] Derrida, *Glas*, 227.

[91] Derrida, 247–48.

[92] Brophy, *In Transit*, 151.

[93] Brophy, 151–52.

[94] Brophy, 152.

[95] Brophy, 38.

[96] Brophy, 38.

[97] Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 77.

[98] Jacques Lacan, *La Relation d'objet: 1956-1957*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007), 162.

[99] My translation. Lacan's original passage reads: 'nous avons à faire dans la perversion à une conduite signifiante indiquant un signifiant qui est plus loin dans la chaîne signifiante, en tant qu'il lui est lié par un signifiant nécessaire.' Lacan, 145.

[100] Brophy, *In Transit*, 236.

[101] Brophy's 1967 book of 'views and reviews,' *Don't Never Forget,* derives its title from an entry in Joseph Franz Von Jacquin's album by one of Brophy's heroes, Mozart, which reads, 'Don't never forget your true and faithfull friend.' Otto Erich Deutsch, *Mozart: A Documentary Biography*, trans. Jeremy Noble, Peter Branscombe, and Eric Blom (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 290. The marginalia that so captured Brophy's attention itself manifests doubled doubling, in its double negative, 'don't never forget,' and the double 'l' in 'faithfull.' Otto Erich Deutsch notes that Mozart 'wrote this sentence under the double canon K.228' Deutsch, 290. A double canon is a composition that unfolds two different canons simultaneously, not unlike *In Transit*'s formal rendering of a 'stereo-thinking apparatus' Brophy, *In Transit*, 101. The paradox of the double negative in 'don't never forget'—the fact that it connotes two contradictory meanings at once, both positive and negative at once—turns out to be a germane mistake.

[102] Brophy, *In Transit*, 72.

[103] In an article of 1982, Brophy described what she called a 'semantic conundrum': 'I wish I were a different person' is in a way an unwishable wish: if it came true, the I who wished it would no longer be there to receive the gratification. Likewise, to wish oneself free of the factors, whatever they are, that determine one's personality, including one's wish to be free of them, is to wish that personality and its wishes out of existence.' Brophy, 'Transference'.

[104] Brophy, *In Transit*, 93.

[105] Brophy, 105.

[106] Brophy, 105.

[107] Derek Attridge, 'Unpacking the Portmanteau, or Who's Afraid of *Finnegans Wake?*', in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters; [Based on a Conference…in Sept. 1985]*, ed. Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 141.

[108] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[109] Fuss, *Identification Papers*, 34, 8.

[110] Brophy, *In Transit*, 22–23.

[111] Brophy, 23.

[112] Alastair Gordon, *Naked Airport: A Cultural History of the World's Most Revolutionary Structure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 2, 219, 2, 204.

[113] Gordon, 174.

[114] Heinz Kohut and Paul H. Ornstein, 'Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage', in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut, 1950-1978* (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 623.

[115] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 2008), 78.

[116] Augé, 101.

[117] Brophy, *In Transit*, 20.

[118] The airport is, at the same time, a place in itself. 'Jet-age' international airports of the 1960s, Gordon writes, were like 'self contained cit[ies],' and 'would have their own police departments, power plants, fuel dumps, dentists, doctors, hotels, conference centers, and, in some cases, theaters, nightclubs, and churches.' *Naked Airport*, 209, 184. In Europe, the Leonardo da Vinci Airport, built in Italy in 1960, was 'roughly the size of Florence.' Gordon, 213.

[119] Brophy, *In Transit*, 11.

[120] Brophy, 11.

[121] Augé, *Non-Places*, 103.

[122] Laing, *The Divided Self*, 43–44.

[123] Laing, 44.

[124] Laing, 48.

[125] If ontological insecurity is understood to be the corollary of a failure at achieving subjecthood, Brophy's literary style is inseparable from both the narrator's ontological insecurity in *In Transit*'s plot and the wider phenomenon of post-war ontological insecurity of which the novel might be understood as a symptom. In her account of the 'zany' as a postmodern mode of being, Sianne Ngai proposes that zaniness is the aesthetic category produced by a particular relation between gender and 'affective labor,' one that turns on its charged ambivalence about gender; as Ngai writes, 'the question of the style's own gender is never resolved,' and, significantly, zaniness 'highlights its own inability' to convert 'the pain of failure and loss into victory and enjoyment.' *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 222, 12. As Len Gutkin suggests, via Ngai, '[z]aniness is an art of failure.' 'Muriel Spark's Camp Metafiction', *Contemporary Literature* 58, no. 1 (2017): 65.

[126] Brophy, 30.

[127] Brophy, 30.

[128] As Diana Fuss writes, 'Judith Butler is especially adept at relentlessly interrogating the specious logic of before and after, exposing how every before (what ostensibly comes first) is really an effect of the after (what it was thought to precede) […] *pre*formatives are read as *per*formatives in Butler's deconstruction of false foundationalisms.' *Identification Papers*, 79.

[129] Augé, *Non-Places*, 103.

[130] As Gordon observes, '[o]ne of the paradoxes of jet travel in 1960s was its lack of sensation,' which would be compensated for by the 'jet terminals themselves,' which 'would become environments of pure sensation and supply the missing narrative: a sense of movement, transition, and excitement that flight itself no longer provided.' *Naked Airport*, 176–77.

[131] Augé, *Non-Places*, 101.

[132] Brophy, *In Transit*, 24.

[133] Augé, *Non-Places*, 101–2.

[134] Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 21.

[135] Sheila L. Cavanagh, 'You Are Where You Urinate', *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 18, no. 4 (August 2011): 1206.

[136] Brophy, *In Transit*, 111, 78.

[137] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 151. Butler contends that gendered morphology is mediated by a symbolic that incites fictitious certainty about the co-determinate relationship between the body, the genitals, gender identity, and sex. *In Transit's* bathroom episode demonstrates one way in which a bodily ego fails to correspond to corporeal coordinates, one that is a kind of inverse of the 'lesbian phallus' to which Butler refers as an instance of a psychically invested body part that fails to correspond to visible anatomy. See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 57–92.

[138] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 197.

[139] Sheila L. Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 5.

[140] Lee Edelman, 'Tearooms and Sympathy; or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet', in *Nationalisms & Sexualities*, ed. Andrew Parker et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 269–70.

[141] The 1967 Act specified homosexual acts not to be private in circumstances 'when more than two persons take part or are present' or when they take place 'in a lavatory to which the public have or are permitted to have access, whether on payment or otherwise.' Quoted in Paul Johnson, 'Ordinary Folk and Cottaging: Law, Morality, and Public Sex', *Journal of Law and Society* 34, no. 4 (2007): 520.

[142] As Paul Johnson remarks, '[i]n discussions about such sexual activity it is always the 'publicness' of lavatories which is emphasized. Yet, ironically, it is the very privateness of public toilets which afford the possibilities for the sexual encounters which take place within them.' Johnson, 535. Lee Edelman, too, observes this strange doubleness: 'Already set aside as a liminal zone in which internal poisons are cast out and disavowed, the institutional men's room typically emblematizes the uncertainty of its positioning between the public and the private through its spatial juxtaposition of public urinals and private stalls.' 'Tearooms and Sympathy; or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet', 270.

[143] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991) *,* esp. 'Panopticism,' 195-230.

[144] Brophy, *In Transit*, 123.

[145] Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms*, 114.

[146] Cavanagh, 116. '[T]he speaking voice' gave Pat no clue to gender identity because it is 'pitchless, claimed not by the external ear as notes but by inner, prior knowledge as, simply, *mine.*' Brophy, *In Transit*, 93–94.

[147] Brophy, 121.

[148] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xxxiv.

[149] Butler, xiii. As Julia Kristeva specified in her theorisation of abjection in *Powers of Horror* (1980): 'It is […] not a lack of cleanliness of health that cause objection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.' *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 4.

[150] Brophy, *In Transit*, 128.

[151] Likely legal disputes surrounding the use of the 'wrong' toilet are all importantly linked to surveillance. The person identified as an intruder in this space might be charged with indecent exposure (that is, exposing oneself *more* openly to the surveilling eyes of others); voyeurism (the intruder's own excessive and prurient surveillance) or trespassing (the intrusion of a body into a space to which it has not been granted access; in the case of the bathroom, this is a space at once heavily surveilled *and* relatively hidden from the gaze of security cameras).

[152] Gordon suggests that it was only after terror attacks on airports in the late 1960s and early 1970s that airports began to adopt strict security measures. He writes, '[p]assengers who had once been treated like royalty were now assumed guilty until proven innocent. They were questioned before boarding. Individuals who looked suspicious or seemed nervous were singled out for interrogation.' *Naked Airport*, 233. Pat's anxieties in *In Transit* anticipate the transformations of international airports in the 1970s, when '[a]ntiterrorist measures turned the airport into an electronically controlled environment rivalled only by the maximum security prison.' Gordon, 238.

[153] Calvin Thomas, *Masculinity, Psychoanalysis, Straight Queer Theory: Essays on Abjection in Literature, Mass Culture, and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 69–70.

[154] 'In gay male culture, the principal scenes of criminal intimacy have been tearooms, streets, sex clubs, and parks—a tropism toward the public toilet,' write Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, in their own twist on the conservative American pundit William J. Bennett's declaration of his aversion to heterosexual therapy culture. 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 560, https://doi.org/10.1086/448884.

[155] Brophy, *In Transit*, 120.

[156] Brophy, 120.

[157] As Lee Edelman has written, the 'reification of homosexuality is inherently unstable, its marking always subject to doubt and the anxiety of retroactive interpretation.' 'Tearooms and Sympathy; or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet', 278.

[158] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xii, 1.

[159] Butler, 25.

[160] Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 118.

[161] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 5.

[162] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 11.

[163] Brophy, *In Transit*, 41.

[164] Brophy, 107.

[165] Brophy, 113–14.

[166] Brophy, 114.

[167] Jacques Lacan, 'The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud', in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 417.

[168] Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction II', in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1985), 42.

[169] Edelman, 'Tearooms and Sympathy; or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet', 272.

[170] Christine Brooke-Rose and Brigid Brophy, 'Introduction', in *In Transit: An Heroi-Cyclic Novel* (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2002), vi.

[171] Brophy, *In Transit*, 115.

[172] Brophy, 71.

[173] In an essay published in the *London Review of Books* in 1987 titled 'In Praise of Brigid Brophy,' John Bayley wrote that the baroque 'acts both to fantasise the personal and explore, in the most searchingly realistic way, the human personality,' and that personality 'can move simultaneously in many dimensions, and baroque does the same.' 'In Praise of Brigid Brophy' 9, no. 5 (5 March 1987), https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v09/n05/john-bayley/in-praise-of-brigid-brophy.

[174] Brophy, *In Transit*, 71.

[175] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 195.

[176] Brophy, *In Transit*, 71.

[177] Brophy, 79.

[178] Sonya Andermahr, 'Both/And Aesthetics: Gender, Art, and Language in Brigid Brophy's *In Transit* and Ali Smith's *How to Be Both*', *Contemporary Women's Writing* 12, no. 2 (15 September 2018): 249, https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpy001.

[179] Sweeney, 'Why This Rather Than That?', 245.

[180] Brophy, *In Transit*, 19.

[181] Brophy, 19.

[182] Brophy, 76.

[183] Brophy, 73.

[184] Brophy, 78.

[185] Brophy, 145. In an essay of 1982, Brophy again suggested that the English language derives some 'advantage […] from linking its possessive adjective to the possessor instead of the possessed, with the result that English can give new information (his table or her table) where in Italian *la sua tavola* is condemned to giving you, twice over, the anyway erroneous information that the table is female.' In the same essay, she described 'feminists' as 'the most gullible section of the present-day book market.' Brophy, 'Small Boys and Girls'.

[186] Brophy, *In Transit*, 84.

[187] Michael Bronski, 'Brigid Brophy's Black Ship to Hell and a Genealogy of Queer Theory', *Contemporary Women's Writing* 12, no. 2 (15 September 2018): 181, https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpy014.

[188] Bayley, 'In Praise of Brigid Brophy'.

[189] Brophy, *In Transit*, 71.

[190] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 70.

'I will knock them in the Old Kent Road with my language alone':

Representation and Misrecognition in Sam Selvon

> To identify oneself absolutely with oneself, to identify one's 'I' with the 'I' that I tell, is as impossible as to lift oneself up by one's hair.
>
> Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*[1]

In Sam Selvon's 1965 novel *The Housing Lark,* a group of Caribbean migrants living in London take a day trip to Hampton Court Park and relax beside the Thames.[2] Selvon writes,

> It don't matter what the topic is, as long as words floating about, verbs, adjectives, nouns, interjections, paraphrase and paradise, the boys don't care. It like a game, all of them throwing words in the air like a ball, now and then some scandalous laugh making sedate Englishers wonder what the arse them black people talking about, and the boats on the river, every time a boatload pass Syl waving to them, and you could see them white people getting high kicks as they wave back. You could just imagine the talk that going on on the boat: "Look dear, come and see, there's a party of Jamaicans on the bank."[3]

Selvon ironises the perspective of the 'Englishers' on the boat by means of a complex negotiation of narrative perspectives. Karen Mah Chamberlain has observed that in this account, the 'Englishers' 'fail to understand the scene they are seeing, fail even to understand *who* they are seeing, and rather mischaracterising the group as a singular, vaguely Caribbean mass, a "party of Jamaicans."'[4] While the narration presents what is apparently direct speech within speech marks— 'Look dear, come and see, there's a party of Jamaicans on the bank'— I would suggest that it is not the case that this speech belongs to the 'Englishers.' Perhaps the most significant feature of this moment of failed recognition is that Selvon does not represent the Englishers' voices, but rather the Caribbeans' representations of those voices. The narrator frames this ostensible direct speech by asking us to '*imagine* the talk that going on,' implying that the source of the words is a member of the Caribbean party, not one of the Englishers; this is more a case of 'fail[ing] even to understand who [we] are [*hearing*].'

The Caribbean characters Selvon represents are acutely aware of the ways in which they are misidentified by the white British public. An additional irony is that in representing the kind of thing the Englishers would say in parodic form, the discourse undertakes its own flattening of the non-Caribbean public into the generic, ignorant 'Englisher.' The use of the collective noun 'Jamaicans' to refer to Caribbean migrants in general was favoured by major British cultural institutions such as the BBC in the 1950s and 1960s. Selvon famously ironises this tendency at the beginning of his 1956 novel *The Lonely Londoners,* in which Moses, a Trinidadian migrant in London, is misread by a journalist as a brand-new arrival from Jamaica and asked for an interview. The narrator explains, 'Now Moses don't know a damn thing about Jamaica—Moses come from Trinidad, which is a thousand miles from Jamaica, but the English people believe that everybody who come from the West Indies come from Jamaica.'[5] In *The Housing Lark,* the narrator's statement that the group's revelry makes 'sedate Englishers wonder what the arse them black people talking about' is indicative of the fraught negotiation of discourses and contexts that comes to characterise the 'double vision' of Selvon's prose. The use of 'them' signals a movement into free indirect discourse in somehow opposite directions; in marking out 'black people' as 'them,' it seems to focalise the 'Englishers,' and at the same time the use of 'them' as a demonstrative pronoun locates the language in the vernacular forms of the group on the riverbank. Ultimately, it turns out that the parody is depressingly spot-on. As the party prepare to board the hired coach to return to Brixton, they are subjected to racist abuse in the exact terms that they mimicked: '"You don't want a coach mate," the Englisher say maliciously. "They should put the lot of you on a banana boat and ship you back to Jamaica."'[6]

This scene of recognition and misrecognition in *The Housing Lark* is, like much of Selvon's work, fertile ground for investigating the ontology of identities both collective and

individual in Britain after the war. More precisely, my contention is that Selvon's work

illustrates with particular starkness the ways in which *narration*—in the form of interpellation,

naming, and literary representation—actively forges identity in mid-century Britain in ways both

negative and positive, sometimes violently reductive and at others generative and utopian.[7]

Selvon's work is preoccupied with the ways in which misrecognitions of identities are at the

same time constitutive of those identities, as well as the circular logics of misrecognition and

misrepresentation produced by this process in literary forms. In particular, Selvon saw that even

if the illusion of the unified ego was beginning to be dismantled, it seemed to persist in the 1950s

and 1960s at the level of the collective, as though the essentialising impulse merely shifted focus

from the individual to the group.[8] This problem pertaining to both representation and recognition

is one to which Selvon would return again and again in his novels set in London, particularly *The

Lonely Londoners, The Housing Lark,* and also *Moses Ascending* (1975)*,* whose protagonist is

Moses, a Caribbean migrant and would-be memoirist, who declares that he 'will knock them in

the Old Kent Road with my language alone […] my very usage of English will have them rolling

in the aisles.'[9]

'[T]he sensibility of a whole society': Selvon and collective representation

In 1950, Sam Selvon, a journalist and former Royal Naval Reserve wireless operator, moved

from Trinidad to Britain following the 1948 British Nationality Act, which officially extended

rights of full British citizenship to colonial subjects. Selvon wrote and published ten novels in

Britain before he moved to Canada in 1978, where he spent the rest of his life. In London in the

1950s, Selvon recognised that the literary marketplace into which he intended to enter set certain

limits on migrant writers based on stereotype. In the 1990s, Selvon described the ways in which he was expected to represent migrant experiences of oppression and isolation within the commercially popular comic and picaresque forms already associated with writers of colour. 'In my own years in London,' he wrote, 'any hardcore material I wrote about Blacks had to have ha-ha' before any English publisher would come near it.[10] As a first-generation Caribbean novelist in Britain, Selvon has been understood by Caryl Phillips as an ancestor in a black British literary tradition,[11] and by Onyekachi Wambu as part of a first generation of writers representing the 'post-Empire black imagination.'[12] As a Trinidadian of South Asian heritage writing about black migrants from the Caribbean in Britain, Selvon's relationship to the politics of race, to political, cultural and literary ancestry, and to various forms of 'representation' is necessarily complex. In an essay titled 'Finding a West Indian Identity in London' (1987), he describes how his 'first novel [*A Brighter Sun* of 1952] was written while I was working as a clerk with the Indian Embassy,' but '[e]ven here there was flack—how could I be an 'Indian' if I did not come from India?'[13]

Selvon's capacity to represent black Caribbean migrant experience has been understood in strikingly differing ways ever since the 1950s. 'Political blackness' as a term originated in the united struggle of working-class African-Caribbean and Asian communities against racism and imperialism in the 1970s when particular issues converged to foreground 'black' as the basis for mobilising people of African and Asian decent to engage in collective activism. Though their marginalisation was of course not identical, migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean who settled in Britain after the war found themselves occupying a broadly similar structural position, and collectively experienced the racialisation of their class position through a rhetoric that underscored 'non-whiteness' as a common thematic.[14]

Since the 1950s, criticism of Selvon's work has been marked by a certain imbalance that is the effect of the misrecognition and misrepresentation of Selvon as an individual, the characters in his novels, and the relationship between the two. Early reviews of Selvon's novels, for example, tend to confirm the author's fears of misrecognition in their inclination towards reductive and essentialist conceptions of Caribbean writers and writing. In a 1958 review of *The Lonely Londoners*, a novel in which Selvon depicts a group of migrant men living and working in the capital, a critic argued that '[u]nless he narrows the range artificially or returns to the West Indies he has no alternative. The problem of idiom can only increase as the circle of his identity expands.'[15] As Jeannette B. Allis has argued, the 'British approach' to the work of Caribbean writers including Selvon in the 1950s tended towards 'the patronizing and simplistic,' and early reviews overemphasised 'certain characteristics associated with the West Indies or considered to be West Indian.'[16]

Since then, Selvon's writings have been the subject of sophisticated critical assessments that engage with his work in terms of theories of diaspora and postmodernity, attend to his innovative use of language, and place his work within historical and ideological contexts.[17] These are a far cry from the reductionism of the 1958 review cited above. While an impressive corpus of criticism of Selvon's literary works by scholars such as Susheila Nasta, Roydon Salick, Curdella Forbes, Bill Schwarz and others has made him an increasingly well-known post-war British writer, such criticism has nevertheless been imbalanced. In particular, emphasis upon the social realist quality of Selvon's depiction of groups of migrant men in post-war London has tended to come at the expense of attention to his creation of individual and specific characters, and a result, these readings have tended rather towards abstraction. Selvon's use of 'modified dialect' in the narrative voice of *The Lonely Londoners,* for instance, has been described by

Michel Fabre as a means of 'reducing the distance between the European reader and the characters,'[18] while Curdella Forbes has argued it 'bridges the gap between European reader and West Indian consciousness,'[19] and Kathy Birat has more recently proposed it creates a 'pathway for bringing a Caribbean voice […] a voice coming from outside the non-Caribbean reader's experience, into the novel.'[20] Such descriptions divert scrutiny from what, exactly, this 'distance' or 'gap' comes between. Homogenous concepts such as the 'European reader,' 'Caribbean voice,' and 'West Indian consciousness' imply a universality or generalisability that Selvon resists in both the diversity of the experiences he represents in the novel as well as the manifold linguistic registers in which these experiences are articulated.

The language of *The Lonely Londoners*, according to one commentator, 'contains and expresses the sensibility of a whole society.'[21] In this chapter, I suggest that the very existence of a phenomenon such as 'sensibility of a whole society' is something that Selvon's novels problematise relentlessly. In conceiving of Selvon's representations of individuals primarily as representative of larger collectives, such arguments involve a form of misrecognition insofar as they necessarily wrench those individual characters into the abstractness of the typical. By way of a corrective, this chapter offers a reading that attends to the significance of his representation of particular and peculiar literary characters. Selvon was preoccupied with the ethics of speaking on behalf of others, and with his own responsibility (and culpability) as an author of literary work. Like other key post-war novelists in Britain, his novels demonstrate a striking commitment to the relinquishment of authorial authority and the refusal of the position of the spokesperson. Instead, he was committed to representing the proliferation of distinct textual voices, and moreover to investing these myriad positions with ontological stature.

Conceptions of collective identity in Selvon's early novels

Selvon's adoption of a distinctive literary creole[22] in the third-person narration of *The Lonely Londoners* has been hailed as a literary innovation insofar as it presents a challenge to the 'subordinate position of creole to Standard English' insofar as it refuses a 'hierarchy between such linguistic variations and the English literary canon to which the text equally aspires to belong.'[23] Selvon was clear that his representation of Caribbean uses of language in the novel's narrative voice and dialogue should not be understood as ethnography. He told an interviewer that he 'never wrote for Caribbean people,' but rather to 'show Caribbean people to other parts of the world and to let people look and identify.'[24] When asked by Michel Fabre if he 'would go so far as saying that [he] fabricated the dialect' in *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon explained that he

> did not pick the Jamaican way of talking in London. I only tried to produce *what I believed was thought of as a Caribbean dialect*. The modified version in which I write my dialect may be a manner of extending the language. It may be called artificial and fabricated. The way I treat the language is not the way it is spoken in Jamaica, or Barbados, or Trinidad either, for that matter. I only resorted to a modified Trinidadian dialect because, much more than Jamaican or Barbadian English, it is close to 'correct Standard English,' and *I thought it would be more recognizable to the European reader*.[25]

Tellingly, Selvon identifies the salient quality of his 'modified' dialect to be not fidelity or authenticity, but 'recognizab[ility].' The language of *The Lonely Londoners* involves a form of mimicry; it does not index voices with material existence in the world, the reality of any speech forms used by Caribbean people, but rather the expectations of Selvon's imagined readers, of British cultural imaginings of Caribbean voices. Accordingly, his depiction of language is necessarily a misrepresentation founded on his awareness of a collective misrecognition of the language(s) of the Caribbean. Considered in terms of Raymond Williams's claim that a new

experience of the social in the nineteenth century fractured the 'traditional method' of the novel as a 'knowable community' wherein novelists offer to 'show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways,' Selvon might be understood to have been expected, in the post-war moment of mass migration to Britain, to offer a knowable version of minority community to a mainstream reading public.[26]

This 'modified' dialect is employed in both the narration and in the direct speech of all migrant characters in *The Lonely Londoners*. While the narrator makes the different origins of the characters clear, their direct speech has a rather paraphrastic quality; it is as though, to use Selvon's own words, the reader gets the 'flavour' of Caribbean speech in place of the specificity of spoken or lived language. The language of *The Lonely Londoners* is specifically—exclusively, even—literary. Selvon stated that some 'diehard Caribbean critics' claimed that the text 'lost authenticity' as a result.[27] While there is not scope in the present project to interrogate the authenticity of the relationship of the novel's language to the real people and languages of the Caribbean, I want to suggest that if the novel's 'modified dialect' diminishes the 'authenticity' of its characters, it is due to the homogeneity it ascribes to collectivity. That is, a misrecognition results in a misrepresentation; Selvon's concession to his anticipated readership has the effect of flattening its characters insofar the novel's monologic collective voice seems to index a monolithic social group.

This homogenisation is an ironic exploration on Selvon's part of the methods and the ethics of representing individuals' relationships to collectivity, and is characteristic of his early novels. Susheila Nasta has recognised the ironic tenor of Selvon's conception of homogenous collectivity; she described *The Lonely Londoners* as 'emblematic in its literary translation of a pluralist Trinidadian and "calypso aesthetic" into the ironically constituted monolith of a "black"

colony in the heart of the city.'[28] Selvon would go on to explore the same problem the following

decade, in *The Housing Lark,* as the ironic depiction of misrecognitions of identity categories

such as 'Englishers' and 'a party of Jamaicans' in the passage quoted above demonstrates.

Selvon's novels repeatedly demonstrate the misrepresentation and misrecognition of the city's

black and migrant populations as an undifferentiated mass, as well as the negative material

effects of such misreadings on those very populations. In *The Lonely Londoners,* Moses

recognises a fundamental collective misrecognition in the form of prejudice whereby the

behaviour of one migrant is all too often understood as representative of all. Moses is frustrated

by Cap's shenanigans, insisting, 'is fellars like that who muddy the water for a lot of us.'[29] Cap is

Nigerian, not Caribbean, but the English are indiscriminate in their discrimination; for the

English, it is the colour of Cap's skin that connects him inextricably to the other men.[30]

On the subject of Caryl Phillips's work, Timothy Bewes has observed that '[m]any critics

have noted Phillips's ability to "ventriloquize" his characters,' but suggests that it is 'far from

clear that the voices Phillips gives to his characters are really intended to belong to them; that his

characters meaningfully own the discourses they make use of; or that, as an author, Phillips is

remotely engaged in an attempt to capture authenticity of voice.'[31] Bewes argues that Phillips 'is

not interested in constructing a people or speaking on behalf of anyone,' but rather that the

'purpose of what has been called ventriloquism in Phillips's texts is, rather, the systematic

evacuation of every discursive position that might claim freedom from implication in

colonialism, beginning with that of the third-person narrator.'[32] Like Phillips, Selvon in his early

novels is invested specifically in the affordances of non-representation; that is, in the possibilities

of refusing to produce literary work with an ethnographic or diplomatic function. He implicates

his reader as complicit in colonialist thinking by positing a direct relationship between readers'

failure to apprehend differences between characters and the British public's failure to apprehend differences between people of colour. Near the beginning of *The Housing Lark*, for example, the third-person narrator names the central characters, only then to suggest that giving additional detail about them beyond this is futile, since readers will undoubtedly misrecognise the group of migrants as an indiscriminate mass:

> The get together happen a few nights later, right there in the basement room: It had Alfonso, Fitzwilliams, de Nobriga, Sylvester, Gallows, and Poor-me-One.
> To introduce you to all these characters would take you into different worlds, don't mind if all of them is the same colour! […] To go into more detail—tell you where he come from originally, whether he six foot tall or five foot six, whether he have big eyes and a small nose—what difference it make to you? All you interested in is that he black—to English people, every black man look the same. And to tell you he come from Trinidad and not Jamaica—them two places a thousand miles apart—won't matter to you, because to Englishers the West Indies is the West Indies, and if a man say he come from Tobago or St. Lucia or Grenada, you none the wiser.[33]

The detailed description that would transport us into 'different worlds,' the narrator insists, would be wasted on readers of this novel. 'If you look at my work,' Selvon remarked, 'you would see that I don't go into very much elaborate description of my characters. You know, they could be tall or short or whatever. It's what they say and what they do that becomes very, very important.'[34] In *The Housing Lark,* physiological description—'whether he six foot tall or five foot six'—gets lumped together with nationality or origin—'where he come from originally.' Selvon suggests that the white British reader's perception of a character's blackness overwhelms every other detail about that character, such that physical appearance and personal history are entirely eclipsed by this solitary determining characteristic. In his anticipation of readers' misrecognition of the individuals the novel represents—or, more accurately, those he refuses to represent, since the text refuses to 'go into more detail' and thereby 'take you into different worlds'—Selvon articulates his disinterest in speaking on anyone else's behalf, on speaking for

or explaining the men 'in the basement room' or the communities to which they might be understood to belong.

Selvon saw that to characterise a text as capable of representing or speaking for an entire culture or community would be necessarily to rely on a monolithic identity that exists nowhere. This moment in *The Housing Lark* puts pressure on the subsumption of the individual into the collective and, specifically, the conception of London's black and migrant populations as equivalent or interchangeable. The novel comes to suggest that in this context, ethnographic techniques such as thick description are inadequate, and Selvon's recourse is to speech, not physicality; the narrative strategy available is 'the ballad and the episode,'[35] or, as he told his interviewers, 'what they say and what they do.'

Misrecognition and narration

While the faithful representation and recognition of certain groups or individuals in literary, journalistic, or political discourses are fundamental to the formation of subjecthood, Selvon's novels at the same time emphasise the impossibility of the total disclosure of an identity. Jacques Lacan famously theorised the mechanism whereby an individual emerges into consciousness as involving a fundamental instance of *méconnaissance*—that is, of misrecognition—wherein an infant sees, in the mirror, an ideal-I where there is really a fragmented, chaotic body.[36] This misrecognition, Lacan argues, subsequently 'characterizes the ego in all its structures.'[37] That is to say, throughout the rest of the individual's life, the ego sustains its sense of singularity and autonomy through an ongoing misrecognition of the actual conditions of its existence. Both representation (both artistic and in the form of the fair and faithful political advocacy on behalf

of a group in a political arena, of that group's visibility) and recognition (in the form of being identified accurately, having one's legality, validity, or even existence affirmed) are crucial to the formation of subjecthood. The misrecognition or misrepresentation of individuals as belonging to a certain group might be a categorical error (for example, referring to a Trinidadian as a 'Jamaican') or an epistemological one (such as understanding all migrants as alike and interchangeable, wherein the word 'Jamaican' indicates everything one needs to know about a person).

Selvon's work of the post-war period is illuminated by theory from a black diasporic tradition, beginning with Frantz Fanon's influential argument in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) that when a colonised subject assimilates to an identity that is dictated by the terms of colonial discourse rather than transforming the terrain upon which that identity is constructed, recognition represents no victory for the colonised, and the effect is that the individual is overdetermined from without, and becomes 'the eternal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible.'[38] Rather than being free to make a meaning for himself, the colonised individual is locked in a 'vicious circle' of misrecognition, and he encounters a meaning that is always 'already there, pre-existing, waiting' for him, and he is unable to return the gaze of the coloniser.[39] The social categories within which subjects become socially visible beings nevertheless work in the service of subjection, and Fanon thus elaborates the bind of recognition; the colonised can 'turn white or disappear.'[40] The process of misrecognition that Fanon describes fixes the individual's identity and figures it as ontologically different from the identities of the coloniser, insofar as by understanding it as fully mastered, it denies the contingency of an identity. Fanon writes, 'I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence.'[41]

In his London novels, Selvon represents the experiences of individuals whose political and legal statuses were continually questioned, invalidated, and denied by housing boards, employment offices, and other apparatuses of the state. While to be misrecognised is to be thwarted in one's desire for authenticity, the ideal of authenticity tends at the same time to reify existing identities. Given this focus on the precariousness of being a subject after the war—that is, both being a citizen and being in possession of subjecthood—the processes by which identities are understood to be authentic, valid, or otherwise are pertinent concerns in Selvon's work.

For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on Selvon's later and less well-known novel *Moses Ascending,* whose titular protagonist has proved somewhat frustrating for critics since the book's publication in 1975. In *The Lonely Londoners,* Selvon represented a Trinidadian migrant character named Moses Aloetta who generously helps new arrivals from the Caribbean adjust to life in Britain. Nearly twenty years later, Moses reappears in *Moses Ascending,* now decidedly less altruistic, and the landlord of a house in Shepherd's Bush. While *The Lonely Londoners* was a third-person narrative involving diverse and loosely connected events in the lives of many migrant men in 1950s London, *Moses Ascending* purports to be the first-person manuscript of Moses's memoir, a project he feels compelled to undertake after several decades living and working in London.

The Moses of *Moses Ascending* turns out to be a frustrating narrator to both the novel's other characters, who malign his selfishness and failure to back any political cause, and also to the novel's readers, since his eccentric and often contradictory behaviours have him resist any reading that would understand him as a representation with allegorical or stereotypical significance. His decidedly awkward status as a thoroughly unlikely—or even insufficient—

spokesperson or representative for anything at all is perhaps the reason that *Moses Ascending* has been relatively underread, and at the same time is the foundation of the novel's fruitfulness for a consideration of the ontology of literary character. Rather than struggle to read as Moses as typical, and submit to the reductiveness of what Fredric Jameson has called 'collective abstractions,' we might instead focus on the ways that Moses's manifestations of individualism—his eccentricities, insecurities, and ostensible apathy towards political activism—produce the unexpected effect of an authentic and autonomous character.[42] It is precisely the non-representational character of both Moses and Selvon's work that affords its political stakes.

Moses Ascending and memoir

While both *The Lonely Londoners* and *Moses Ascending* feature a character named Moses Aloetta, the Moseses represented in the two novels are strikingly distinct. The Moses of *The Lonely Londoners* is a reluctant 'liaison officer' who helps new arrivals from the Caribbean adjust to life in Britain in a third-person narrative that features diverse and loosely connected events in the lives of many migrant men in 1950s London.[43] The Moses of *Moses Ascending*, on the other hand, is a rather despotic first-person narrator, who has in the intervening years become the proprietor of a house in Shepherd's Bush. Like V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), the text of *Moses Ascending* purports to be the manuscript of its protagonist's written memoir.[44] Like Naipaul's novel, *Moses Ascending* is a dual text insofar as it is both its author's work of fiction, and its narrator-protagonist's work memoir. In each case, the memoir and the novel are indistinguishable and yet nonidentical.

As a memoirist, Moses draws on the conventions of canonical English literary modes of

self-narration, such as Shakespearean soliloquy and the epistolary novel. Moses's obsession with English letters reveals an anxiety about the worth of his own narrative; he insists that his work is 'just as good as anything Shakespeare or Billy Wordsworth ever write.'[45] His English affectations are at a remove from reality; expressions like 'Fie, I say' and 'God's blood' are part of no contemporaneous vernacular but, rather, constitute efforts to imitate English literary traditions of many centuries prior.[46] Moses's recourse to literary authority in the form of Shakespearean idiom is frequently aligned with his denigration of the black British community, and his insistence on his own separation from it: 'I could withstand the slings and arrows of misfortune,' Moses writes, 'but when it come to my penmanship, you are treading on dangerous ground. I turn the pages of my manuscript blindly, just to feel the parchment and remind myself that there are finer things in life besides black people.'[47] Here it is as though Moses's desire to out-English the English inevitably involves adopting the racist discourse that he recognises to be something of a national tradition. Selvon foregrounds ironically the imperialist structures that have made such discourses familiar to the Trinidadian writer, since the English canon is the literary history on which Moses was raised; as the characters in *The Housing Lark* remark pointedly, 'English history' is 'all they used to teach we in school' in the colonised Caribbean.[48]

In an essay titled 'The Occasion for Speaking' (1960), the Barbadian writer George Lamming described the 'West Indian's education' as 'imported in much the same way that flour and butter are imported from Canada':

> Since the cultural negotiation was strictly between England and the natives, and England had acquired, somehow, the divine right to organise the native's reading, it is to be expected that England's export of literature would be English. Deliberately and exclusively English.[49]

Selvon foregrounds Moses's malapropisms and mangled aphorisms—those linguistic markers of his maladroitness at deploying self-consciously 'literary' turns of phrase—by the use of italics

that emphasise his mistakes: 'The hero will gird his *lions*,' '[t]hat sound like a *parabox*,' and '[t]he *coop de grace*.'[50] These italics cannot be attributed to Moses; indeed, the irony depends on his unawareness of such errors, and they emphasise the discrepancy between Moses's aspirations and his accomplishments.[51] *Moses Ascending*'s very title points ironically to Moses's perpetual aspirations towards ascent but their eternally postponed realisation.[52] He fails to rise even in a very literal sense: while he begins the novel living in the comic-pathetically capitalised 'Penthouse' of his townhouse, he ends up in its basement, as his mock-heroic account of events attests: 'Thus are the mighty fallen, empires totter, monarchs dethrone and the walls of Pompeii bite the dust. Humiliated and degraded I took up abode in Bob's erstwhile room while he and Jeannie moved into the Penthouse.'[53]

Throughout the novel, Moses aspires to distinguish himself from other migrants. He recalls that soon after he acquired the house, 'the rumour went around town that I was a different man, that I had forsaken my friends, and that there was no more pigfoot and peas and rice, nor even a cuppa to be obtained.'[54] While he puts the rumour down to jealousy, he soon reveals his own inclination towards reiterating the racist and anti-migrant sentiments he has absorbed over decades living in London and inflicts them on the black and Asian migrants around him, especially those less wealthy than he is. While he was glad to have secured a house in Shepherd's Bush, Moses admits to his reader that he 'would naturally of preferred a mansion in Belgravia or a penthouse in Mayfair, without too many black people around.'[55]

The shame Moses evinces about his own relationship to a black community might be understood in terms articulated by Timothy Bewes in *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (2011). Bewes describes shame as 'an experience of discontinuity, of the incommensurability that is the self, in situations where that incommensurability is being suppressed or counteracted. I am

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ashamed not of myself, but insofar as I am enjoined to step forward *as* a self, to assume the formula of self-identity.'[56] Incessantly read by others not as a complex assemblage of intersecting and even conflicting identities and motivations, but rather misrecognised and overdetermined in reductive racial terms, Moses overcompensates by subscribing to the very same racist logic according to which he is oppressed. Moses is motivated to own a house because, he feels, if 'you are a tenant, you catch your arse forever, but if you are a landlord, it is a horse of a different colour,'[57] but his old friend Galahad reminds him that his rise in social standing through property acquisition will never influence his position in British racial hierarchy: 'You can buy a house or a limousine, and eat caviar and best end of lamb, but you can't get a white skin if you beg, borrow, or steal.'[58]

Curdella Forbes describes Moses's behaviour as a 'failure of appropriation,'[59] while Susheila Nasta argues that he 'in some ways represents the archetypal caricature of a colonial mimic man.'[60] In this novel, the subject of Selvon's critique is not so much Moses's pretentiousness as something more pernicious; that is, the ideologies that gave birth to the characterisation of Caribbean idiom as 'natural' and Englishness something that the migrant might only try on. In his account of his arrest by the police, for example, Moses details his own heavy-handed codeswitching: 'If I had time I would of said, "Unhand me, knave," but instead I say, "Let me go, man, I ain't done nothing."'[61] Ironically, here, Selvon represents the arcane English expression as an affectation, and the vernacular as the natural mode that Moses slips back into when caught unawares.

In 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' (1984), Homi Bhabha famously articulates a theory of 'colonial mimicry' as 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*'—or, as he

puts it later in the same essay, '*but not white.*'[62] Such mimicry, as Bhabha puts it, is 'constructed around *ambivalence*,' and is 'stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.'[63] Bhabha's description of colonial mimicry bears a striking resemblance to Selvon's description of the 'characteristics that are [Moses's] trademark—the mimicry, the convolutions of irony and satire, the ambivalences.'[64] In *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002)*,* Rey Chow takes up Bhabha's theory in order to articulate the ideological processes whereby the colonial subject is denied authenticity and forced to imitate whiteness relentlessly, despite the futility of such an action. Chow describes the imperative,

> created by Western imperialism and colonialism of the past few hundred years, of the white man as the original. […] the white man, and the white man alone, is authentic. Condemned to a permanent inferiority complex, the colonised subject must nonetheless try, in envy, to become that from which she has been excluded in an a priori manner.[65]

This forced mimicry is always a failed effort. The 'harder [the ethnic] works at being bona fide, the more of an inferior representation she will appear to be,' Chow writes, and indeed what she describes is the perpetual and iterative processes of misrecognition and misrepresentation that are constitutive of an identity founded on the very principle of its own inauthenticity.[66] Lisa Lowe, further, produces a genealogy of constructions of the liberal subject. By 'modern liberalism,' Lowe means those

> branches of European political philosophy that include the narration of political emancipation through citizenship in the state, the promise of economic freedom in the development of wage labor and exchange markets, and the conferring of civilization to human persons educated in aesthetic and national culture—in each case unifying particularity, difference, or locality through universal concepts of reason and community.[67]

As Lowe observes, 'even as it proposes inclusivity, liberal universalism effects principles of inclusion and exclusion,' insofar as its logic requires that 'populations in the colonies' are

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differentiated as 'less than human.'[68] Thus, 'the genealogy of modern liberalism is simultaneously a genealogy of colonial divisions of humanity,' and indeed this differentiating logic inevitably plays out in Moses's fantasy of the validated identity of the landlord, author, and citizen:

> "Er, Mr. Moses, er, I'm sorry about this procedure, but we usually ask if our customers know anyone who will be prepared to act as guarantor? Perhaps your landlord?"
> "I beg your pardon, *I* am the landlord."
> "Oh… how silly of me…if you'll just sign the form here, SIR…sit down…use my chair."
> I can also be on the other side of the door when people come to look for rooms.
> "Is the landlord in?"
> "*I* am the landlord.'
> "Oh… I'm looking for a room."
> "I don't let out to black people."
> SLAM.
> I might even qualify for jury service.
> "I hereby deem you a rogue and a vagabond. You will go to jail, you worthless scamp, and await Her Majesty's pleasure."
> These are only some of the privileges that would be mine.[69]

Moses's ambition of authorship is a means of social ascent, and, as he sees it, of validating his status as a sovereign subject. While the 1948 Nationality Act in Britain officially granted full citizenship to colonial subjects, its primary interest was not the creation of legal equity among all imperial subjects of Empire nor indeed the encouragement of mass migration, except beyond the immediate need to recruit cheap foreign labour to stem the acute shortage hampering post-war efforts at national reconstruction. As Claudia Jones put it in 1964, 'Britain sought West Indian Immigration as an indispensable aid to the British economy; indeed, encouraged it!'[70] The rights bestowed by the 1948 Act, moreover, were swiftly stripped away by a succession of further acts in the following decades. Consequently, in post-war London, Moses must aspire to a threshold of subjecthood different to those white British citizens born in Britain. As such, he performs his subjectivity according to very traditional means in an effort to consolidate his sense of self.

These processes are specifically linguistic; in Moses's view, it is narration, by himself and others, that constitutes his identity.[71]

In *Moses Ascending,* Moses understands the formation of his subjecthood to be crucially connected to his narrativisation of his life in the form of memoir. Throughout, Moses makes persistent claims for the truthfulness of his account.[72] 'None of this narrative is fiction: if I lie I die,'[73] he says, promising that he is 'giving it to you sic,' and that we 'have it straight from the horse's mouth.'[74] His relentless insistence smacks of paranoia; he states, 'I am aware that so far the whole thing sound as if I making it up, as if after Galahad's caustic comments I am fabricating a cock and bull story to augment my Memoirs. You are at liberty to think what you will.'[75] As David Lodge has suggested, post-war writers' insistence on the veracity of first-person accounts might stem from the epistemological anxieties produced by the foundational uncertainty and relativity of scientific understanding after two world wars. 'In a world where nothing is certain, in which transcendental belief has been undermined by scientific materialism,' Lodge writes, the 'single human voice, telling its own story, can seem the only authentic way of rendering consciousness.'[76] Moses, as the fictional author of a memoir whose fidelity to the truth he insists is absolute, narrating the self in the form of memoir, understands 'telling [his] own story' to be not only the 'only authentic way of rendering consciousness,' but the means of validating that consciousness's very existence.

Understanding literary representation to be both evidence of and constitutive of identity, Moses knows accusations about the integrity of the text to be always-already also accusations about his own integrity. While he insists to his friends that his memoirs are 'personal and intimate,' he always envisages a readership, as his repeated, rather obsequious address to 'gentle and perspicacious R'— a technique reminiscent of the nineteenth-century novel's popular 'dear

reader' trope—shows.[77] Moses's gruff insistence that the reader is 'at liberty to think what you will' betrays his anxiety that both his text and his identity might only be validated intersubjectively.[78] His literary project might be understood in terms of a self-referential turn that was a reaction to the pressure placed specifically on writer of colours to represent—that is, both to depict in narrative form and to speak for—others. As Lisa Lowe puts it, 'liberalism requires mediation through an aesthetic form that encourages readers to understand the emancipation of the individual *as if it were* a collective emancipation.'[79]

As Rey Chow suggests, any such compensatory strategy is founded on misrecognition in the form of a belief that a self is capable of representing its own reality. Chow writes:

> The trap that many fall into when they turn to self-referential genres as a way out of metanarratives, out of the crime of speaking for others, is that of the age-old realist fallacy, which allows them to attribute to self-referentiality the capacity for an unproblematic representation of reality, in this case, the reality of the self.[80]

Moses's belief that speaking on behalf of oneself rather than for another is a means of escaping misrepresentation is itself a misrecognition. While he sees representation as a means of political, social, and ontological validation, there turns out to be no such thing as 'an unproblematic representation of […] the reality of the self.' As Chow argues, the idea that 'the act of referring only to the self can finally redeem us from the fundamental and contentious binary structure of representation in which one is always (inevitably) speaking of/for something or someone else' is only 'fantasy.'[81] Self-referral is never 'unmediated,' is never capable of the 'miraculous […] transcend[ence of] the limits of representation, a type of representation that, however trivial and self-aggrandizing it might be, is morally justifiable because it is (thought to be) *non-representational.*'[82] While Moses' efforts to authenticate his identity are stymied both by the fraught condition of his political and legal status as a migrant in 1970s Britain and by the

inevitable failure of his written manuscript to provide a comprehensive account of himself, this very apparent failure turns out to be an index of his integrity as a character.

Selvon made precisely this crucial issue of Moses's distinction from both the novel and its author the ironic focus of the preface he added to *Moses Migrating,* his 1983 sequel to *Moses Ascending*, in 1991.[83] Its title, 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.', clearly marks the narrator as Moses, rather than Selvon. The title in this title, 'Esq.', seems quintessentially Moses, summing up his persistent self-aggrandisement in a particularly English fashion.[84] In the text that follows, however, the first-person pronoun slips around. Selvon describes his own experiences as a novelist in the English literary marketplace in the first person, and refers to both 'the author' and to 'Moses' in the third person, the latter in quotation marks:

> The author has often been asked how much of the books is himself, or the fictional character, or the actual person who inspired him. In the process of creativity, unknowingness is the quintessence that propels me—I want to know as much as the reader what happens next, or what shit "Moses" is going to come up with, and when I emerge, your guess is as good as mine as to who is the culprit.[85]

While Selvon suggests here that his interlocutors ask for ontological distinction between '[the author] himself,' the 'fictional character,' and the 'actual person,' he refuses to provide a definitive answer. Indeed, he describes his own writerly 'creativity' as impelled by 'unknowingness.' It is the relinquishment of his knowledge of Moses's actions that drives the plot, such that the author seems only to 'emerge' after Moses has been left to his own devices. In insisting that the reader's 'guess is as good as [his own] as to who is the culprit,' Selvon passes control of the narrative to Moses, the autonomous character who 'come[s] up with' things by his own agency.

The preface points to Selvon's interest in the question of authorisation and entitlement. Selvon, an Asian Trinidadian, represents a black character who is too easily misrecognised as a

straightforwardly fictionalised version of Selvon himself. In an essay titled '*La fausse monnaie*' ('Counterfeit Money') of 1992, Jacques Derrida puns on 'title' as a claim to property, describes both money and titles as promises, and calls books that betray the promise of their titles 'counterfeit.' 'In the civil code concerning ownership of literary works,' Derrida writes, 'the fiction is attributed to its signatory, Baudelaire, and is entitled by him.'[86] For Derrida, the 'referential structure of a title is always very tricky' insofar as it is paratextual; the title 'is not one of the sentences that the narrator will utter. […] The narrator is not the author of the title.'[87] 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.' is signed 'M.S./S.S., January 1991,' which renders things all the more ambiguous, insofar as its equivocatory slash obscures who controls the discourse. Who or what is 'M.S.' remains uncertain; it might refer to Moses (whose initials are M.A., like those of *Moses Ascending*), or denote the word 'manuscript,' or even be a hybrid name, 'Moses Selvon.'[88] Selvon writes: 'Truth is stronger than fiction. Who knows what ballads and episodes more graphic and pertinent than any I have tried to describe in the books he might have taken away to reminisce over in his rocking-chair days?'[89] In doing so, Selvon seems to suggest that Moses is capable of having experiences external to the author's knowledge or control; in short, that his character eludes him.

'Authentic' politics and versions of representation

Moses's insular project of writing his memoir, which is undertaken mostly in the attic rooms of his townhouse, contrasts sharply with the political activism in his building's basement. Early in the novel, he is introduced to Brenda, a leader in the Black Power movement, through his old friend Galahad, who is now an ardent activist. Moses's motives for allowing Brenda to live in his

basement rent-free are driven by individualistic sexual desire rather than political solidarity: 'I got to thinking that in for a penny, in for a pound, and that it might not be a bad idea to have she available on the spot,' he admits in the pages of his memoir.[90] Moses swiftly loses control of the situation, and his house becomes a hub of political activity as Brenda begins to conduct meetings, plan marches, and produce a radical newsletter from the basement. Nonetheless, despite his physical proximity to it, Moses's attention to the Black Power struggle is strictly limited to his efforts to seduce Brenda, or in order to find something juicy for his book; he describes himself as 'playing it cool, watching how the scene would develop, and only thinking if I would include the episode in my Memoirs.'[91]

While Moses aspires to achieve recognition for his own exemplarity and distinction from those around him, his friends understand him to misrecognise his own indebtedness to black literature and political thought, and expect to see a recognition of this history in his work of memoir. Galahad accuses Moses of producing work that is insufficiently political, and therefore insular, selfish, and motivated by personal gain rather than collective good. 'Nobody ain't going to be interested in anything you have to say,' Galahad tells Moses, because he doesn't 'know one fucking thing about what's happening.'[92] He insists that if Moses had been 'writing about the scene today, and the struggle, I might of got the Party to back you. In any case, who tell you you could write?'[93] Galahad expects there to be some social, cultural or political motivation that would legitimise Moses's literary aspirations, and sneers when he admits he has 'never heard of' George Lamming or Andrew Salkey: 'Man, Moses, you're still living in the Dark Ages! You don't even know that we have created a Black Literature, that it have writers who write some powerful books what making the whole world realize our existence and our struggle.'[94] For

Galahad, the names of Lamming and Salkey, Selvon's own direct contemporaries and interlocutors, become bits of cultural capital that he can wield in order to humiliate Moses.[95]

Moses defends himself by arguing that 'Memoirs are personal and intimate' and 'don't have to be topical nor deal with any social problems.'[96] He feels, in other words, that he and his work ought to be free from the burden of political representation. Moses's confidence is shaken, however, and he wonders if there might be 'an element of truth in what Galahad say,' that 'when I finish, and ready to present my Memoirs, nobody want to read them,' and whether he shouldn't, after all, have written about 'Black Power, and ESN schools, and the new breed of English what are taking over the country.'[97] His insistence that the 'Queen's language has 'always been [his] forte' indicates his investment in proving himself as part of a specifically English cultural lineage rather than a black diasporic one, two aspirations he understands to be incompatible.[98] Brenda recognises Moses's priorities, and tries a different tack; her criticism, unlike Galahad's, is of his poor handling of English grammar. 'Your conjunctions and your hyperboles are all mixed up with your syntax,' she tells him, and 'When you have punctuation you should have allegory and predicates, so that the pronouns appear in the correct context.'[99] Because Moses's manuscript is 'ignorant' and 'unschooled,' she insists, he ought to 'stick to oral communication and leave the written words to them that knows their business.'[100]

The responses of Brenda and Galahad illustrate the ways in which Moses is pressured to mimic not just the white man, but also what Rey Chow calls the image of the 'ethnic.' A process Chow names 'coercive mimeticism' is instructive here. In this 'identitarian, existential, or cultural' process, Chow writes,

> those who are marginal to mainstream Western culture are expected to resemble and replicate the very banal preconceptions that have been appended to them, a process in which they are expected to objectify themselves in accordance with the already seen and

thus to authenticate the familiar imaginings of them as ethnics.[101]

What is authenticated via this process, crucially, is not the person, but the 'imaginings of them.' As the imaginings are rendered authentic, the authenticity of the person is never validated. As Chow writes, the 'original that is supposed to be replicated is no longer the white man or his culture but rather an image, a stereotyped view of the ethnic,'[102] and, moreover, 'if it is difficult for the ethnic to become a perfect imitation of the white man, it is even more difficult for her to become a perfect imitation of herself.'[103] Understood this way, Moses is doubly displaced; he is to be understood not as an imitation of the 'authentic,' but an imitation of a 'familiar imagining,' an 'image.' Chow's description of the processes by which coercive mimeticism leads to attacks within the already marginalised community reads like a description of *Moses Ascending*'s plot:

> most disturbing of all, precisely because it occupies such an ideologically overdetermined position in modernity, such ethnicity can be used as a means of attacking others, of shaming, belittling, and reducing them to the condition of inauthenticity, disloyalty, and deceit, despite the fact that this historically charged, alienating situation is a collectively experienced one. Such attacks are, moreover, frequently issued by ethnics themselves against fellow ethnics, that is, the people who are closest to, who are most like them ethnically in this fraught trajectory of coercive mimeticism.[104]

In *Moses Ascending,* Moses is told, repeatedly, what the function of a black literature should be, and is told moreover that writerly aspiration with no direct political motivation is pretentious, selfish, and shameful, as if it is not the purview of the black writer to writer only about himself. As Susheila Nasta remarks, it is 'because he is a *black* writer that the conflict between his personal wishes to write his Memoirs and the demands made upon him by a fast-developing political situation are exaggerated.'[105] The conflict Nasta describes might be articulated as being between his desire for recognition of his individual distinction and the weight of collective representation forced upon him.

The difficulty Selvon represents, of course, is an ironic reflection of the one he himself faced as an author in post-war Britain. The thorny issue of what an 'authentic' representation of migrant experience in London might look like—if it were even possible to speak of something like a general 'migrant experience'—is complicatedly intertwined with the relationship of the writer to both his community and to the literary marketplace. As Peter Kalliney has written, postcolonial writers are 'routinely pigeonholed by the publishing industry as representatives of and spokespeople for a marginalized corner of the globe from which they hail—whether they embrace such a role or not.'[106] Unlike his white British contemporaries, as a Caribbean novelist, Selvon was burdened with the weight of collective representation, and forced into a metonymic relation to his migrant status. Selvon was expected to be an *example* according to two somewhat contradictory metrics; he was required to stand for his community as an indicative representative, but at the same time stand out from them as an especially eloquent spokesperson.[107] In Kobena Mercer's words, '"[r]epresentation" concerns not only practices of depiction or textual production, but practices of delegation and substitution such that, at the point of reception, the black artist is expected to *speak for* the black communities as if she or he were its political "representative."'[108] Crucially, as Mercer observes, 'whereas politicians and other public figures are elected into positions from which they speak as "representatives," this role has fallen on the shoulders of black artists not so much out of an individual choice but as a consequence of structures that have historically marginalised their access to the means of cultural production.'[109] Ultimately, '[s]peaking in the role of a "representative" is a highly ambiguous performative speech-act; the transition from "I" to "we" has an empowering communifying effect, but by the same token, its use can disempower others by denying them the specificity of their voices and viewpoint.'[110] The process by which Selvon was forced into the role of the spokesperson finds its

analogue in the ways in which his characters were understood as representative, in some abstract way, of a whole community. The idea that the personal experience of an author or a character might be scaled up to represent an overall collective one assumes the equivalence and interchangeability of persons.

Ana María Sánchez-Arce's theorisation of the discourse of 'authenticism' illuminates the complex intersections between Selvon, an Asian Trinidadian; Moses, his black Trinidadian character; and cultural imaginings of ethnic, racial and social groupings such as 'Caribbean,' 'migrant,' 'diasporic,' and 'black British.' Authenticism, writes Sánchez-Arce, might be understood as a 'grand narrative that legitimizes knowledge on the grounds of it originating from essential identity characteristics or subjectivities' and that 'permits and precedes the "celebration" of difference whilst enforcing a repressive discourse that restricts the articulation of those differences.'[111] Within the structures of authenticism, it becomes possible for readers to accept the discrepancy between Selvon's background and that of his characters but nonetheless to read the text as possessing, through Selvon's Caribbean identity, a particular value that is transmitted as authenticity. The world of the novel seems knowable, not necessarily because of the use of any realist style or mode, but rather because of the perceived identity of the ethnically marked author.

Selvon's Asian rather than African heritage does not spare his text from overdetermination or assumptions about its capacity to represent. Dave Gunning describes the 'burden of representation' that it is expected will be borne by the 'minority author in Britain,' wherein an '"implied author," created within the text, frequently struggles to be heard over an imputed authorial persona, brought into being by a reductive notion of multiculturalism that imagines homogeneous ethnic communities and positions literary authors as their

spokespeople.'[112] We do not need to read the creation of Moses and his environment as Selvon's attempt to offer an authoritative documentary account of a minority experience, however much the discourse of authenticism might encourage us to do so, but neither need we resort to suggesting that it refuses the burden of representation through the embodiment of universals.[113] For this reason, it is necessary to push against arguments such as that of Deleuze and Guattari, who posit that in 'minor literatures,' 'everything […] is political,' and as such these texts are 'positively charged with the role and function of collective, even revolutionary, enunciation,'[114] or Fredric Jameson, who argues that all so-called 'third-world texts are necessarily […] *national allegories*…particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel.'[115]

Instead, a turn to other theorisations of diasporic and post-colonial collectivity illuminates questions of collective representation in literary and cultural discourses in the second half of the twentieth century. Paul Gilroy, for example, in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) criticises those 'overintegrated conceptions of pure and homogeneous culture which mean that black political struggles are construed as somehow automatically expressive of the national or ethnic differences with which they are associated' and instead advocates for the possibility of a non-identitarian relation to identity.[116] As Moses stands on the riverbank at the end of *The Lonely Londoners*, he imagines about a version of authorship characterised by financial gain and the glamour of celebrity; he ponders writing a 'best-seller,' and having his 'name and photo' in every paper. [117] In *Moses Ascending,* Moses never writes the book that 'everybody would buy' that he fantasised about in the 1950s, and yet while his memoir is evidently flawed, it becomes legible as an innovative political undertaking in its very apoliticism.[118] In insisting on the insular, personal nature of his project, Moses refuses to create a representation whose primary function is

to advocate for political representation, and in doing so retains something like the privacy that is a necessary condition of the autonomous individual.[119]

Throughout his life, Selvon insisted unwaveringly on the specificity and quiddity of his characters even while readers saw abstraction and symbolism. To critics who saw biblical allusion even in the choice of Moses's name, Selvon said 'no, the name is common in Trinidad, and I just pull it out of a hat.'[120] When Kevin Roberts described Moses to Selvon as 'more or less a moral centre' of the novels, Selvon responded by stating, '[m]y character Moses actually was an actual person, an actual immigrant.'[121] Selvon's repeated insistence on Moses's sheer actuality is an assertion of his specificity, his ontological stature, and is a tacit refusal of the generalised terms of Roberts' question. Later in the same interview, Selvon went further, stating:

> I think what Moses represents is really what I think to be a typical, normal human desire. It isn't everybody who wants to go into politics. If you ask the majority of people, nobody wants to have anything to do with politics. They just want to be left alone, to have a nice job, a nice house, maybe a car to drive, and to live comfortably. These are universal desires. It has nothing to do with being a black man, or being a man from the Caribbean.[122]

Selvon is here characteristically ironic, even glib, about the mundane kind of materialist values that might be 'typical, normal human desires.' In doing so, though, he thoroughly undercuts the stability of the meaning of something like 'the typical.' What Selvon suggests, here, is that the typical turns out to *be* the unexpected; what would seem to be the mark of something 'universal' character is precisely that which precludes him from such abstractness. Moses doesn't have to 'go into politics' to 'have anything to do with politics,' whether he wants to or not. He is not the abstract or allegorical figure that refers overdeterminedly to a preconceived idea of collectivity, and nor is he, by that same token, an anomaly too eccentric or insular to be taken into account.

Like the parodic text, the colonial mimic must allude to, reproduce, and reenact an 'original' in a manner that makes unmistakable not only the allusion but also the difference so as

to preserve the hierarchy, setting original above parody and coloniser over colonised. Also like the parodic text, however, the colonised's mimicry will never unambiguously signal its own deferential and derivative secondariness and confirm the primacy and the originality of the original. Colonial mimicry in fact, as Homi Bhabha writes, 'problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the "national" is no longer naturalizable. What emerges […] is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable.'[123] Thus, the '*menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.'[124] The very fact of the coloniser's imitability makes inescapable the constructedness of that identity, thus eroding the priority accorded that identity by myths of naturalness, of essentiality, of intrinsic stability, and of internal homogeneity. If Moses is a 'mimic man,' he ought to be included in that group Homi Bhabha names the 'parodists of history,' who, '[d]espite their intentions and invocations […] inscribe the colonial text erratically, eccentrically across a body politic that refuses to be representative, in a narrative that refuses to be representational.'[125] In *Moses Ascending,* Selvon produces a novel whose foremost preoccupation is the ambivalences of representation both political and aesthetic. Instead of the subordination or subsumption of many voices to a single authoritative one, the novel is characterised by the proliferation of different textual voices that are not subordinated to anything like the master-voice of the novelist. Instead, the writer disrupts his own authority by foregrounding what he cannot represent, know, or be master over: as Selvon puts it, 'I want to know as much as the reader what happens next, or what shit "Moses" is going to come up with, and when I emerge, your guess is as good as mine as to who is the culprit.'[126]

[1] Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 52.

[2] In using the term 'migrant,' I follow Kristine N. Kelly's distinction between 'migrant' and 'immigrant.' Kelly uses the former term to designate those 'individuals who travel between Britain and its colonies under the auspices of the British Nationality Act of 1948' and the latter to refer to 'post-colonial or Commonwealth travellers to Britain from former British colonies who did not qualify for citizenship or subjecthood under later legal provisions.' 'Nomadic London: Reading Wandering in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Ben Okri's "Disparities"', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 50, no. 1 (2019): 87–88, https://doi.org/10.1353/ari.2019.0003.

[3] Samuel Selvon, *The Housing Lark* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1990), 126.

[4] Karen Mah Chamberlain, 'The Caribbean Without Frames: Narrative Structure in Sam Selvon's London Novels', in *Caribbean without Borders: Literature, Language, and Culture*, ed. Dorsia Smith, Raquel Puig, and Ileana Cortés Santiago (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 13.

[5] Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 7.

[6] Selvon, *The Housing Lark*, 128.

[7] With this claim, I aim to pursue the ramifications of Timothy Bewes's contention that the question might not be 'Can the subaltern speak?' but rather 'what does it mean to 'speak' in a literary form such as fiction?' *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 12.

[8] As Fredric Jameson has argued, some degree of stereotypy is inevitable in the conception of collective identity: the 'relations between groups,' he writes, 'are always stereotypical insofar as they must always involve collective abstractions of the other group, no matter how sanitized, no matter how liberally censored and imbued with respect.' 'On Cultural Studies', in *The Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman (New York: Routledge, 1995), 274. This said, it is clear that certain groups and identities tend to be essentialised more than others, and not least non-white migrant populations in post-war Britain.

[9] Samuel Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (London: Penguin, 2008), 103.

[10] Selvon, 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.', 128. In the same text, Selvon articulated an understanding of stereotypy and authenticity as directly in tension with one another: 'If I as author consciously strived at anything, it was to keep some thread of authentic commentary of the tribulations of Black people surviving away from their roots, which I tried to weave into the kiff-kiff laughter.' Selvon, 128.

[11] Phillips writes that because 'in the seventies there was not, in this country, what we might term a black British literary tradition,' he looked 'to the United States and to a familiar roster of writers' including Amiri Baraka and Nikki Giovanni. Upon discovering the work of Selvon and George Lamming, however, Phillips suggests that '[t]hose of my generation who were going to write found in the work of these two authors recognisable subject matter and a restlessness associated with formal invention, which meant there was no longer any necessity for us to keep looking to New Jersey or Chicago or Detroit for our literary fixes.' 'Following on: The Legacy of Lamming and Selvon', *Wasafiri* 14, no. 29 (March 1999): 34, 36, https://doi.org/10.1080/02690059908589629.

[12] Wambu includes in the introduction to his anthology, *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing about Black Britain* (1998), a list of a first generation of writers including Selvon, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, and Andrew Salkey, as well as later generations including Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi. The inclusion of many writers of Asian origin—Selvon included—makes an ideological claim for a capacious understanding of 'blackness,' though is also worth noting that the Caribbean-born novelist V. S. Naipaul, who is also of Asian descent, declined to be included in the anthology. See Onyekachi Wambu, ed., *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing about Black Britain* (London: Phoenix, 1999).

[13] Samuel Selvon, 'Finding a West Indian Identity in London', *Kunapipi* 9, no. 3 (1987): 36.

[14] Lisa Lowe writes: 'Asian and Black diasporic communities have always mixed, made lives, and found common struggle together in various places within the Anglo-American empire, whether in the British colonized West Indies, East Africa, or South Africa, or among immigrants in the United Kingdom, Canada, or the United States.' *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 172. In his 1986 critical survey of black British literature, Prabhu Guptara argued that '[b]eing "black" is a matter of visibility, with social and political consequences. Being a writer is a matter of culture. Being "British" is a matter, not of culture, but of what passport you carry. In my view, therefore, "black Britons" are those people of non-European origin who are now, or were in the past, entitled to hold a British passport and displayed a substantial commitment to Britain.' *Black British Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1986), 14. Guptara's definitions contrast with those of critics who would limit the term 'black British' to writers of African or Caribbean descent born in Britain, and 'political blackness' has been criticised by some for misreading the complex and global nature of racism and a non-strategic essentialism. While the term was used by many in the British anti-racist movement during the 1970s (when several of Selvon's novels were composed and set), such unity was deliberately attacked in the 1980s by the Thatcher government with the imposition of more police powers and the term 'black and minority ethnic' as a generic term. By the 1990s—the decade in which Selvon died—'political blackness' was a term largely out of fashion.

[15] Quoted in Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (London: Routledge, 1996), 209.

[16] Jeannette B. Allis, 'A Case for Regional Criticism of West Indian Literature', *Caribbean Quarterly* 28, no. 1–2 (March 1982): 2, https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.1982.11671998.

[17] See, for instance, Roydon Salick, *The Novels of Samuel Selvon: A Critical Study* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), Curdella Forbes, *From Nation to Diaspora: Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and the Cultural Performance of Gender* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2005), and Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

[18] Michel Fabre, 'Samuel Selvon', in *West Indian Literature*, ed. Bruce King (London: Macmillan, 1995), 116.

[19] Curdella Forbes, 'Revisiting Samuel Selvon's Trilogy of Exile: Implications for Gender Consciousness and Gender Relations in Caribbean Culture', *Caribbean Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (December 1997): 59, https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.1997.11671857.

[20] Kathie Birat, 'Hearing Voices in George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* and Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 32, no. 1 (Autumn 2009): 20.

[21] Kenneth Ramchand, 'An Introduction to This Novel', in *The Lonely Londoners*, by Samuel Selvon, Longman Caribbean Writers (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1987), 13.

[22] Particular features of this use of language include the use of nominative pronouns in place of possessive pronouns, the use of first- or third-person verb conjugations with second-person subjects, or the use of base forms of verbs to convey past or perfective meanings.

[23] Janice Ho, *Nation and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 126. While in fact the Jamaican writer V.S. Reid's *New Day*, published in 1949, was probably the first novel to adopt Caribbean vernacular forms in its narrative voice, Selvon was the first to use literary creole narration for a novel whose subject was migrant experience, since Reid's novel takes as its focus the late nineteenth-century political history of Jamaica. In doing so, by refusing to privilege one discursive mode over the other, Selvon refuses to conform to what Catherine Belsey has identified as the 'hierarchy of discourses' of classic realist fiction, which 'works above all by means of a privileged discourse which places as subordinate all the discourses that are literally or figuratively between inverted commas.' 'Constructing the Subject, Deconstructing the Text', in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 171.

[24] Samuel Selvon quoted in Austin Clarke, *A Passage Back Home: A Personal Reminiscence of Samuel Selvon* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1994), 76.

[25] Michel Fabre, 'Samuel Selvon: Interviews and Conversations', in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. Susheila Nasta (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1988), 67 (my emphasis).

[26] Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), 14.

[27] Selvon, 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.', 127.

[28] Nasta, *Home Truths*, 63.

[29] Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 51.

[30] In *The Housing Lark*, similarly, Teena is ashamed of 'bacchanal' behaviour of her fellow Caribbeans in front of the crowd of 'Englishers', insisting that 'Shame, shame and sorrows, is what scalliwags and scoundrels like you bring on the heads of OUR PEOPLE.' Selvon, *The Housing Lark*, 145. Echoing Moses's words in *The Lonely Londoners*, Teena complains that '[f]ellars like you muddy the waters for West Indians who trying to live decent in the country. They should line the lot of you up against a wall and shoot you!' Selvon, 145.

[31] Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*, 63–64.

[32] Bewes, 64.

[33] Selvon, *The Housing Lark*, 24.

[34] Samuel Selvon, 'Christened with Snow: A Conversation with Sam Selvon', interview by Andra Thakur and Kevin Roberts, *World Literature Today* 69, no. 3 (1995): 99, https://doi.org/10.2307/40151557.

[35] Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 138.

[36] Lacan argues that the infant initially exists in an imaginary realm in which there is no distinction between the self and the other. At the mirror stage, upon seeing its own reflection, the infant begins to conceive itself as being, separate from the rest of the world. The ego emerges at the moment at which it simultaneously identifies with and alienates itself from the mirror image; it is both formed by and takes its form from the organising and constituting properties of an illusory image of wholeness and mastery. See Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* [1949]', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2001), 1–8.

[37] Lacan, 7.

[38] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 35.

[39] Fanon, 134, 12.

[40] Fanon, 100.

[41] Fanon, 229. Fanon argues that the oppressed colonial subject must undergo radical forms of political disidentification in order to be free, creating new forms of identity in the process.

[42] Jameson, 'On Cultural Studies', 274.

[43] Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 2.

[44] See V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (London: MacMillan, 2011).

[45] Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 147.

[46] Selvon, 10.

[47] Selvon, 57–58.

[48] Selvon, *The Housing Lark*, 125.

[49] George Lamming, 'The Occasion for Speaking', in *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader*, ed. Kwesi Owusu (London: Routledge, 2003), 41. In the same essay, Lamming refers to the 'historic novelty of our situation' whereby post-war West Indian writers like Selvon were the originators of something like their own rise of the novel: 'We have seen in our lifetime an activity called writing, in the form of the novel, come to fruition without any previous native tradition to draw upon. Mittelholzer and Reid and Selvon and Roger Mais are to the new colonial reader in the West Indies precisely what Fielding and Smollett and the early English novelists would be to the readers of their own generation.' Lamming, 42.

[50] Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 84, 80, 72.

[51] Such moments in *Moses Ascending* are, in my view, at odds with George Lamming's claim that Selvon 'never sneers at his characters,' that he was 'always with them in what they are doing, the foolish things as well as the beautiful things.' *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 229.

[52] Some fifteen years after its publication, Selvon described the novel in the following terms: 'Moses has ascended to being a landlord, and his language has escalated from the basement to the penthouse, a kind of hybrid mixture of ye-olde and what-happening.' 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.', 126.

[53] Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 177.

[54] Selvon, 5.

[55] Selvon, 4.

[56] Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*, 77.

[57] Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 2.

[58] Selvon, 15.

[59] Forbes, 'Revisiting Samuel Selvon's Trilogy of Exile', 60.

[60] Nasta, *Home Truths*, 88.

[61] Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 48.

[62] Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October* 28 (1984): 126, 130, https://doi.org/10.2307/778467.

[63] Bhabha, 126.

[64] Selvon, 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.', 127.

[65] Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 104.

[66] Chow, 124.

[67] Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 2–3.

[68] Lowe, 6. Locke's definition of the right to property, in which 'labor entitles one to possession of land,' Lowe explains, justified settler powers. Lowe, 10.

[69] Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 2–3. Mike and Trevor Phillips suggest that, in the 1950s, 'to be an immigrant anywhere else in London meant that, out in the open, you ran a gauntlet of hostility until you were safely forted up behind your own locked doors.' *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 108.

[70] Claudia Jones, 'The Caribbean Community in Britain (1964)', in *Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment: Autobiographical Reflections, Essays, and Poems*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies (Banbury, Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke, 2011), 169. The Act served, in Ashley Dawson's words, primarily as a 'powerful symbolic reaffirmation of the imperial system' in order to 'defuse anticolonial nationalist movements' after the war. *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 10.

[71] Lowe describes the autobiography as 'the liberal genre par excellence'; it is 'the narrative genre of liberal political subjectivity that affirms individual right,' and the 'predominant genre for narration of the liberal life: the accomplishment of exemplary freedom of person and nation through industry, moral regeneration, and civic duty.' *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 46, 50, 51.

[72] This is of course ironised by the discrepancies between the text as historical document (Moses's memoir) and the text as fiction (Selvon's novel). As discussed above, such discrepancy is occasionally rendered vividly, in moments such as those featuring italicised words.

[73] Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 106.

[74] Selvon, 18.

[75] Selvon, 83.

[76] David Lodge, *Consciousness & the Novel: Connected Essays* (London: Penguin, 2003), 87.

[77] Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 56, 99.

[78] Fanon writes: 'Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, the other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed.' *Black Skin, White Masks*, 216–17.

[79] Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 50.

[80] Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 113.

[81] Chow, 113.

[82] Chow, 113.

[83] In *Moses Migrating,* Selvon depicts Moses's life several years after the events *Moses Ascending*. In the early 1980s, Moses is still proprietor of the house in Shepherd's Bush, and ventures on his first return visit to Trinidad since his migration to Britain in the early 1950s. Selvon added his 'Special Preface' to the 1991 edition of the novel.

[84] Selvon, 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.', 126.

[85] Selvon, 126.

[86] Jacques Derrida, *Given Time. I: Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 93.

[87] Derrida, 84–85.

[88] It is perhaps significant that the signature does not appear in the version of the preface published in *Kunapipi* journal in 1995.

[89] Selvon, 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.', 127.

[90] Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 26.

[91] Selvon, 28.

[92] Selvon, 56.

[93] Selvon, 56.

[94] Selvon, 56.

[95] The commodification of black literature becomes overtly, ironically literalised as the novel continues: Moses stumbles over obstacles in the cramped basement headquarters including a 'big crate of Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*' and a 'batch of Lamming's *Water For Berries*.' Selvon, 183. The latter title is inaccurate; Lamming's book of 1971 is *Water with Berries.* Like Moses's memoir, Lamming's novel, a rewriting of the paradigms of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, narrates the experiences of black artists' often frustrated efforts to prove themselves in post-war London.

[96] Selvon, 56.

[97] Selvon, 59.

[98] Selvon, 139.

[99] Selvon, 138.

[100] Selvon, 138.

[101] Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 107.

[102] Chow, 107.

[103] Chow, 116.

[104] Chow, 124.

[105] Nasta, *Home Truths*, 88.

[106] Peter Kalliney, 'Jean Rhys: Left Bank Modernist as Postcolonial Intellectual', in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark A. Wollaeger (Handbook of global modernisms, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 419. For a thorough account of the vexed relationship of the Caribbean writer within the post-war British literary marketplace, see Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[107] Janice Ho summarises the dilemma thus: 'Crudely put, the author's success lies in appropriating the community's tribulations, which, even as they are brought to public light for political visibility, are strategically repackaged for consumption in the literary marketplace: to represent the life stories of West Indian immigrants is also to sell them.' *Nation and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, 130. According to this view, the author who commodifies the experiences of migrant communities—particularly experiences of suffering—for the benefit of a white British readership and financial success might run the risk of looking more like a traitor than an advocate.

[108] Kobena Mercer, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation', *Third Text* 4, no. 10 (1 March 1990): 65, https://doi.org/10.1080/09528829008576253.

[109] Mercer, 65.

[110] Mercer, 72.

[111] Ana María Sánchez-Arce, '"Authenticism," or the Authority of Authenticity', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 40, no. 3 (2007): 143.

[112] Dave Gunning, 'Ethnicity, Authenticity, and Empathy in the Realist Novel and Its Alternatives', *Contemporary Literature* 53, no. 4 (2012): 787–88, https://doi.org/10.1353/cli.2012.0031.

[113] It is worth noting that though Fanon stresses the need to transcend the terms of coloniser and colonised in which the recognition-relation is predicated, he nevertheless stresses the importance of reasserting a stigmatised identity. In seeking to affirm that difference or 'non-identity' that exceeds the reduction imposed by recognition, there is a temptation to 'leap into a radical negativity,' in Fred Dallmayr's words, that eschews the terms of identity entirely. Fred Dallmayr, 'The Politics of Nonidentity: Adorno, Postmodernism-And Edward Said', *Political Theory* 25, no. 1 (1997): 38. Dallmayr argues that the aspiration among postmodern thinkers to affirm non-identity or difference sometimes slides into a celebration of 'non-distinction (or no-identity)' that can take the form of 'intellectual nomadism or an indifferent cosmopolitanism.' Dallmayr, 34.

[114] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 17.

[115] Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, no. 15 (1986): 69, https://doi.org/10.2307/466493. Several critics have pushed back vehemently against the essentialism of such theories pertaining to 'third world' or 'minor' literatures. Aijaz Ahmad criticises the essentialism of Jameson's understanding of 'the Third World,' and describes the notion as 'a polemical one, with no theoretical status whatsoever.' Ahmad argues that therefore 'there is no such thing as a "Third World Literature" which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge. There are fundamental issues […] which simply cannot be resolved at this level of generality without an altogether positivist reductionism.' *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 96–97.

[116] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 31.

[117] Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 142.

[118] Selvon, 142.

[119] In an essay on Trollope's *Phineas Finn,* David A. P. Womble argues that the 'constitution of character through collectivity […] serves to disrupt liberal theories of personhood that rested on a residual Enlightenment conception of individuality as autonomous and self-enclosed.' 'Phineas Finn, the Statistics of Character, and the Sensorium of Liberal Personhood', *Novel* 51, no. 1 (1 May 2018): 17, https://doi.org/10.1215/00295132-4357381. Womble finds in *Phineas Finn* not a political bildungsroman, but rather 'a pattern of subjectivity' wherein characters are constituted 'through collectivity' which 'turns the individual inside out, displacing interiority onto the groups to which one belongs.' Womble, 17. The result is a model of political personhood that has much more in common with Selvon than with Lockean liberalism.

[120] Selvon, 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.', 126.

[121] Selvon, 'Christened with Snow', 96.

[122] Selvon, 110.

[123] Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man', 128.

[124] Bhabha, 129. That is, mimicry operates subtly in the apparatus of colonial power to undermine the very 'monumentality' on which its authority depends.

[125] Bhabha, 128–29.

[126] Selvon, 'A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.', 126.

'There's nothing new under the sun':

Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and Parodic Realism

> That library had provided a raised stage for the unforgettable scene of the Burning Barn; it had thrown open its glazed doors; it had promised a long idyll of bibliolatry; it might have become a chapter in one of the old novels on its own shelves; a touch of parody gave its theme the comic relief of life.
>
> Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*[1]

Anna Freeman, the protagonist of Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), is a novelist, ambivalent Communist, and keeper of five notebooks in which she records the details of her political and personal life. Marion Portmain is a relatively minor character in the novel, the second wife of Anna's former husband, Richard. While Marion has spent much of her life being silenced and ignored, she experiences a political awakening part-way through the novel, and resolves to claim agency for herself by living the rest of her life as an advocate for others. Brandishing a pen and her *own* notebook, Marion asks Anna for the address of an imprisoned South African political activist, and Lessing's third-person narration focalises Anna as they interact:

> "Do you remember that black leader, the African man you used to know? Mathews, or something like that?"
> This was not at all what Anna had expected. "You don't mean Tom Mathlong?" Marion had actually taken out a notebook and was sitting with a poised pencil.
> "But he's in prison," said Anna.
> […] "Yes of course he's in prison, but what's his name?"
> "But Marion, what are you planning to do?"
> "I told you, I'm not going to live for myself any longer. I want to write to the poor thing, and see what I can do for him."
> "But Marion…" Anna looked at Marion, trying to make contact with the woman she had been talking to only a few minutes before. She was met by a gaze from brown eyes glazed with a guilty but happy hysteria. Anna went on, firmly: "It's not a nice organized prison like Brixton or somewhere like that. It's probably a shack in the bush, hundreds of miles from anywhere, about fifty political prisoners, and very likely they don't even get letters. What did you think? — that they had visiting days and rights and things like that?"

> Marion pouted and said: "I think that's an awfully negative attitude to take about the poor things."
> Anna thought: negative attitude is Tommy's—echoes from the Communist Party; but poor thing is all Marion's—probably her mother and sisters give old clothes to charities.[2]

As Lessing's direct transcription of Anna's thoughts demonstrates, Anna does not accept

Marion's 'transformation' as authentic, but rather understands her words to be a weak synthesis

of her stepson Tommy's communist stock phrases and her own family's aristocratic ones. The

omniscient narration shows Anna tracking Marion's speech in real time and reading each of her

utterances as clipped from various newspapers:

> "I mean," said Marion happily, "it's a continent in chains, well, isn't it?" (*Tribune*, thought Anna; or possibly the *Daily Worker*.) "And measures ought to be taken immediately to restore the Africans' faith in justice if it is not already too late." (*The New Statesman*, thought Anna.) "Well at least the situation ought to be thoroughly gone into in the interests of everybody." (*The Manchester Guardian*, at a time of acute crisis.) "But Anna, I don't understand your attitude. Surely you'll admit there's evidence that something's gone wrong?" (*The Times*, editorializing a week after the news that the white administration has shot twenty Africans and imprisoned fifty more without trial.) "Marion, what's got into you?"[3]

While Marion has chosen to engage in political activism in pursuit of an authentic voice,

Lessing's narration repeatedly ironises and undercuts the possibility of any such thing, insofar as

the parenthetical insertions between Marion's words mark her as a mere conduit for, rather than

origin of, politically conscious discourse. Anna is, of course, confident that she already knows

what has 'got into' Marion; the words of all these journalists. The third-person narrator of this

passage controls the interaction effortlessly, cutting rapidly back and forth between direct speech

and thought representation to give a sense of Anna reading Marion in real time. Tracy

Hargreaves argues that the episode suggests the political rhetoric Marion employs is

'overextended, as it can only mimic commitment,' and that it 'struggles to overcome merely the

image of engagement in lieu of deeply held conviction.'[4] The novel's narration, indeed, seems to

insist on this interpretation, that Marion's politics are shallowly imitative and fraudulent. Marion

is *read,* and overdetermined, by Anna, and, in the very representation of Anna's mental processes, by *The Golden Notebook*'s third-person narrator, whose position as organiser of the discourse generates a strong sense of interpretive authority.

In Anna's reading of Marion, the multiplication of voices becomes strangely monologic; Anna's identification of the sources of each of Marion's pronouncements leads to a rather stunted conclusion, that Marion's politics are only parroted, and that they are therefore devoid of genuine commitment.[5] This episode might be understood as a strange kind of parody of Bakhtinian dialogism, wherein recognition of an utterance's double-voicedness is short-circuited such that it serves as evidence of that utterance's singular non-authenticity. This chapter begins by tracing other instances and invocations of parody in *The Golden Notebook* in order to chart the ways in which Doris Lessing interrogates her own discomfort with the authoritative authorial position that she saw as a troubling inheritance of literary realism.

In 1998, Lessing told Cathleen Rountree that the 'difficulty when you're writing, is to find what I call the "tone of voice,"' or 'the appropriate way for this particular book or story,' and said that 'if you get it wrong you might just as well throw it all away—it's got no life in it.'[6] It is my contention that the 'tone of voice' of *The Golden Notebook* is a parodic one, that Lessing established a critical orientation towards realism in the novel with the development of a mode that I name 'parodic realism,' which at once interrogates and renovates the genre through parody in order to release it from the singularity of the confident authorial stance. For Lessing, the eschewal of authorial control was a vexing undertaking, particularly given her (oft-voiced) concern with the dangers of thoughtless or indeed 'wrong' interpretations of her literary work. As this chapter argues, however, Lessing ultimately recognised this risk to be preferable to risking producing didactic or even indoctrinatory texts in which the author's voice serves as a

singular source of literary authority. The alternative that Lessing offers with her literary

strategies is the proliferation of voice and perspective that accompanies the quintessential

double-voiced modality of parody (parodic and ironic discourses are necessarily double-voiced,

because two distinct consciousnesses with differing evaluative attitudes operate within a single

utterance). An attentiveness to Lessing's parodic 'tone of voice' in *The Golden Notebook*

illuminates upon what Gayle Greene has called 'the political implications of Lessing's critique of

"the forms"'[7] because it reveals the implications that literary modes of double-voicedness,

coupled with an interrogation of authorial authority, might have for national and global politics.

That is to say, Lessing's literary innovations not only have implications for understandings of the

development of the novel in the second half of the twentieth century, but can be understood

further in their capacity to model dialogic and anti-authoritarian alternatives to established and

entrenched cultural forms more widely. Where Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch, Brigid Brophy and

Sam Selvon sought to produce novels that resisted the authoritarianism of authorial control, for

Lessing, this was no metaphor; Lessing understood the novels she wrote to be a vital part of her

anti-authoritarian politics.

Parodic realism and the position of the author

In *The Golden Notebook,* a third-person narrative titled 'Free Women' is interspersed with

entries from five coloured notebooks in which Anna records various aspects of her life, including

her experiences in Africa as a member of the Communist Party, her romantic affairs, and her

efforts to write another novel. The relationship of 'Free Women' to the notebooks proved to be a

contentious matter from the outset. In 1971, Lessing added a preface to the novel in which she

described 'Free Women' as 'a skeleton, or frame […] which is a conventional short novel, about 60,000 words long, and which could stand by itself.'[8] In 1975, she described 'Free Women' as 'an absolutely whole conventional novel, and the rest of the book is the material that went into making it.'[9] As Lessing suggests in her preface, these claims of 'conventional[ity]' were, crucially, intended ironically. '[I]f the book were shaped in the right way,' she elaborates,

> it would make its own comment about the conventional novel. To put the short novel *Free Women* as a summary and condensation of all that mass of material, was to say something about the conventional novel, another way of describing the dissatisfaction of a writer when something is finished: "How little I have managed to say of the truth, how little I have caught of all that complexity; how can this small neat thing be true when what I experienced was so rough and apparently formless and unshaped?"[10]

Lessing, then, conceived of 'Free Women' as a testament to her own 'dissatisfaction' rather than a sincere and straightforward instantiation of the 'conventional novel,' and crucially her commentary seems to invoke questions of tone as much as genre and form. In 2008, she stated that *The Golden Notebook* was 'meant to be sarcastic,' since 'what it is is a conventional little novel, fitted into the West.'[11]

Over the years, a number of literary critics have found the realist trappings of the 'Free Women' sections of *The Golden Notebook* to be a rather baffling literary choice, especially alongside the self-conscious experimentalism of some of the notebook entries. Joan Didion, for instance, found the novel's ostensible didacticism exhausting, and in a 1971 essay parodied the version of Lessing that she understood as the author of *The Golden Notebook*. '*Look here*,' Didion writes, aping Lessing: '*The Communist Party is not the answer. There is a life beyond vaginal orgasm. St. John of the Cross was not as dotty as certain Anglicans would have had you believe.* She comes hard to ideas, and, once she has collared one, worries it with Victorian doggedness.'[12] For Dennis Porter just a few years later, the effect of reading the opening 'Free Women' section of the novel was readerly 'disappoint[ment]':

The trouble is that, in spite of the contemporaneity of her themes, there is something distinctly old-fashioned about her determination to evoke twentieth-century reality directly. After the experimental writing of the 1920s and 1930s and after the *nouveau roman*, it is only natural to experience a certain weariness when one is confronted once again with the techniques of a literary realism that hardly seems to have been updated since Stendhal or George Eliot. There is something depressing about the realistic dialogue between immediately recognizable, modern intellectuals with which the work opens. It seems we hardly need to be told once again about the boorishness of the English upper classes or the world-weariness and high-mindedness of London's literary fringe in the 1950s.[13]

The insurmountable difficulties facing the artist aspiring to 'evoke twentieth-century reality directly' is, indeed, the central problem that Lessing interrogates in *The Golden Notebook.* But the self-conscious 'old-fashioned[ness],' the 'immediately recognisable' quality of the dialogue, the visibly unrenovated nature of Stendhalesque techniques are conspicuously *parodic* elements. As Judith Kegan Gardiner observes, moreover, the five sections of 'Free Women' are 'labeled like a nineteenth-century novel with teasing plot summaries.'[14] What Didion and Porter neglect is *that* the 'Victorian doggedness' that Didion critiqued with parody is itself parody.

In the 1920s, Russian formalists such as Viktor Shklovsky and Yuri Tynyanov theorised parody as function rather than form. For these critics, parody as a literary phenomenon was indicative of a crisis, and symptomatic of the breakdown of established formal systems. While the Russian formalists' understanding of parody as indicative of a crisis and breakdown of meaning is of course pertinent to *The Golden Notebook,* more interesting still is parody in Mikhail Bakhtin's extended sense. In Bakhtin's philosophy of language, parody held a decidedly different status; as Lars Kleberg writes, '[t]o Bakhtin, the fact that *when we read a text we are actually dealing with two or more texts* is not a quality peculiar to the parody, making it unique. […] Just the opposite.'[15] In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), Bakhtin applies his theory of dialogism to literature, asserting that in a novel there are no monological, univocal words or utterances. Every utterance, rather, is full of intentions; the words are 'inhabited.'[16] For

Bakhtin, parody is not straightforwardly a criticism of an original rather but a dialogical dimension in literature, not a particular kind of literary work, but rather a mode in which the dialogic receives special emphasis. According to Kleberg, parody is 'the retention of the double modality, the modality which cannot be translated into an unambiguous language'[17]; it might be understood as an 'elusive shadow or a kind of 'double' stalking a text or class of texts with which it overlaps and yet from which it is distinguished.'[18]

Bakhtin argued that the European prose novel was born and developed through a process of free and transforming translation of the works of others, and understood the novel to be unique as a genre in its ability to internalise or constitute a self-criticism of its own form. Parody offers a means of reworking those discourses whose weight has become tyrannical, not in the form of imitation or the monologic mastery of another's discourse, but as a dialogic, parodic reappropriation of the past. The principle of the polyphonic novel—strives against any view of the world which would valorise any one singular or official point of view, one ideological position, and thus one discourse, above all others—is precisely the principle upon which Lessing identified it as crucial to found ethical forms of artistic production. For Lessing, parody—specifically, the kind of parodic *realism* that constitutes 'Free Women'—permits a kind of radical scepticism that does not result in total inertia. In maintaining a dialogue with realism but subverting its modes through parody, the author is able to combine, as Nick Bentley has it, 'scepticism towards monolithic, inherited structures of truth and the possibility of a continued political critique for fiction.'[19]

The double-voiced ambivalence of parodic realism is exemplified in *The Golden Notebook*'s apparently unassuming first sentence: 'The two women were alone in the London flat.'[20] Near the end of the novel, it is revealed that Anna has finally been able to produce a new

novel—her first after a hiatus of many years—beginning with these very words.[21] As N. Katherine Hayles observes, at this late stage in the novel the 'imputation of authorship retrospectively makes the Anna of the notebooks the creator of 'Free Women,' unsettling the entire preceding action by inverting the presumed hierarchy of embeddings.'[22] Hayles is right to observe the radically destabilising effects of this metafictional manoeuvre; it is only at this extremely late moment in the novel that the very first sentence becomes legible as parody. The gesture is tantamount to a relinquishment of authorial control (even, of authorship) insofar as it necessarily raises the possibility of multiple alternative, potentially authoritative stances. It is as though Anna, who suffers for much of *The Golden Notebook* from writer's block, is incapable of writing her own book, but can write Lessing's, and vice versa. This moment of parody scrambles any attempt to hierarchise diegetic levels or to determine the origin of voice and assign literary authority.

In 'Free Women,' Lessing's use of free indirect discourse in particular—a literary mode long associated with literary realism—illuminates the ways her parodic realism operates. At one moment in 'Free Women,' Lessing's reader is permitted apparently direct and unmediated insight into Anna's mind via direct thought quotation that then moves into free indirect style:

> She was thinking: If someone cracks up, what does that mean? At what point does a person about to fall to pieces say: I'm cracking up? And if I were to crack up, what form would it take? She shut her eyes, seeing the glare of the light on her lids, feeling the pressure of bodies, smelling sweat and dirt; and was conscious of Anna, reduced to a tight knot of determination somewhere in her stomach. Anna, Anna, I am Anna, she kept repeating; and anyway, I can't be ill or give way, because of Janet; I could vanish from the world tomorrow, and it wouldn't matter to anyone except to Janet. What then am I, Anna?—something that is necessary to Janet. But that's terrible, she thought, her fear becoming worse. That's bad for Janet. So try again: Who am I, Anna? Now she did not think of Janet, but shut her out. Instead she saw her room, long, white, subdued, with the coloured notebooks on the trestle table. She saw herself, Anna, seated on the music-stool, writing, writing; making an entry in one book, then ruling it off, or crossing it out; she saw the pages patterned with different kinds of writing; divided, bracketed, broken—she felt a swaying nausea; and then saw Tommy, not herself, standing with his lips pursed in

concentration, turning the pages of her orderly notebooks.[23]

The passage begins as direct thought quotation signalled by a narrative tag: 'She was thinking.' After a sequence of questions, the narration reverts to a third-person mode signalled by the third-person pronoun in the phrase 'She shut her eyes.' From this moment onward, Lessing moves into a free indirect modality; we learn that 'She […] was conscious of Anna,' and this use of the proper name, rather than the reflexive pronoun 'herself' or 'myself,' seems to exemplify the duality of this mode, neither quite entirely objective or subjective, somehow both third- and first-person.

With her eyes shut, the 'glare of the light,' 'pressure of bodies' and 'sweat and dirt' that Anna sees, feels and smells are imagined—virtual rather than material—and generative of a 'tight knot of determination somewhere in her stomach.' For Anna, trying to conceive of herself externally produces a similar effect; when she sees 'herself, Anna' from and the outside, the result is 'a swaying nausea.' Here, too, 'Anna' seems to be not quite identical with 'herself,' or else has a doubled subjectivity. in the phrase '[s]he saw herself, Anna, seated on the music stool,' Lessing's use of a pronoun, reflexive pronoun and proper name as three of the first four words seems to index this strange kind of doubling or non-identicality. Lessing's mode of narration, free indirect discourse, both represents and produces Anna's fraught negotiation of subjective and objective perspectives, her negotiation of herself from inside and outside.

'She saw herself, Anna, seated on the music stool' is reminiscent of the famous opening to Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove* (1902): 'She waited, Kate Croy, for her father to come in.'[24] Kevin Ohi writes that the syntax of *The Wings of the Dove* is 'marked by a doubling of the subject […], a renaming by pronoun or appositive that has the effect of a reflection—or a stutter.'[25] Ohi argues that 'On the level of character, these syntactical structures suggest a

dynamic expropriation legible as "alienation," a distancing, for instance, of a proper name […] or a descriptive phrase.'[26] In the case of *The Golden Notebook*, the effect seems to be even more pronounced, as signalled by the use of a reflexive pronoun, too; while Kate Croy, 'wait[ing],' is reflected in the mirror, Anna Wulf's sole focus is manifesting and observing herself. The impossibility of a stable, convincing perspective is reproduced in the 'divided, bracketed, broken' condition of Anna's writing as well as in the experiences of dissociation to which she attests repeatedly across the notebooks. The scene's multiple overlapping instances of voyeurism—Anna observes herself writing, and also observes Tommy observing her writing as a reader—are all, necessarily, misreadings and misinterpretations.

In this parodic version of free indirect discourse, readers gain no genuine insight into the character's consciousness. Instead, we are alienated from her. In her deployment of free indirect discourse—that classic realist literary mode usually thought to give insight into a character's interiority while, at the same time, showcasing the author's verbal dexterity and ultimate control, as she maintains a precise balance between the positions of character and narrator—Lessing foregrounds instead her own incapacity to transcribe interiority, and the ultimate impossibility of such an undertaking.

Parodic realism and the notebooks

The final words of the first instalment of 'Free Women' describe Anna, alone in her room, laying out her four notebooks on the trestle table:

> She used an old-fashioned music stool for this occupation, and she now spun it high, almost as high as the table itself, and sat, looking down at the four notebooks as if she were a general on the top of a mountain, watching her armies deploy in the valley

below.[27]

These words mark the point of departure from the apparently realist novel 'Free Women' and the beginning of the experimental multiplicity that characterises the rest of *The Golden Notebook*. High on her stool, like a 'general on top of a mountain,' Anna occupies a self-consciously authoritative position, but this textual authority is elusive. The notebooks refuse to be texts contained statically within another text; the 'armies' below have minds of their own, and threaten insubordination in the form of the violation of diegetic boundaries.

In what follows, Anna strives towards a kind of omniscient and omnipotent authorship that she never attains. Her many quandaries serve as a perverse kind of illustration of the perils Lessing herself identified for authors who try to exert a dubious authority over the insubordinate text. As a child, Anna developed a coping mechanism in order to feel a modicum of control over the things that frightened her:

> before I slept each night I lay awake, remembering everything in the day that had a quality of fear hidden in it; which might become part of a nightmare. I had to "name" the frightening things, over and over, in a terrible litany; like a sort of disinfection by the conscious mind before I slept.[28]

She recalls, further, that in less anxious moments in childhood, she would 'sit up in bed and play what [she] called "the game,"' and the fantasy invoked is a kind of parody of authoritative authorship:

> I create the room I sat in, object by object, "naming" everything, bed, chair, curtains, till it was whole in my mind, then move out of the room, creating the house, then out of the house, slowly creating the street, then rise into the air, looking down at London […] but holding at the same time the room and the house and the street in my mind, and then England […] then slowly, slowly, I could create the world.[29]

Having attained a position in space from which she could observe the vast panorama of the cosmos, she would then 'try to imagine at the same time, a drop of water, swarming with life, or a green leaf. Sometimes I could reach what I wanted, a simultaneous knowledge of vastness and

of smallness.'[30] Anna's strategy of naming is, evidently, an effort to gain a sense of reassurance by insisting on one's own position at the ultimate centre of things, as the author responsible not only for representing, but actually for manifesting the universe into existence in a parodic version of a divine calling-into-being. As Molly Hite writes, 'the kind of "simultaneous knowledge" that she seeks—in effect the omniscience of the nineteenth-century narrator combined with the omnipotence of the refined-out-of-existence twentieth-century artist—presumes a position of externality for the "creator" that is a kind of control.'[31] Hite notes that Anna 'envisions herself as placed above the spinning world that her mind encompasses,' and '"[k]knowledge" of this sort presumes that there is a position of observation, and thus an angle of vision, that is "correct" and in this way imposes a particular form: the thing known is contained, distanced, and fixed.'[32] Indeed, Lessing's text works constantly to undermine the impossibility of such an external position, and insists, repeatedly, on Anna's incapacity to separate her narrating self from the events and experiences she tries to make the subjects of her writing.

The strategies of Lessing's parodic realism are not limited only to the 'Free Women' sections of *The Golden Notebook.* They permeate each of Anna's notebooks, in which Anna tries on one representative strategy after another as part of her endlessly fruitless efforts to find a literary mode that feels in some way commensurate to her experiences. These involve a kind of parodic realism not like that of 'Free Women,' in which Lessing imitates the trappings of nineteenth-century realist novels, but rather insofar as Lessing's parodies pressurise one of the very principles upon which realism is founded; the belief in the capacity of the work of art to represent the truth of the lived experience of the world. In *The Golden Notebook,* Lessing represents Anna struggling with one narrative form after the next to demonstrate the impossibility of achieving the kind of 'truthful' artistic expression that she wants to accomplish.

Anna's blue notebook in particular documents her efforts to undertake experimental textual projects in an effort to approach truth and represent reality directly. Each fails because to write by oneself about oneself always produces a remainder; the representing and experiencing selves can never be made commensurate. One such effort involves 'newspaper cuttings, carefully pasted in [to her notebook] and dated.'[33] One headline, from April 1951, reads: 'WOMAN ATOM SPY TO DIE. Husband too sent to Electric Chair. Judge: You Caused Korea.'[34] The understanding of both cause and effect and of the inextricability of individual responsibility and global event suggested by the claim that individual might 'cause' Korea suggested by the logic of the clipping is thoroughly reductive; 'Korea' must stand, metonymically, for a sprawling and complex network of international and transhistorical events. When Anna's attempt to write a diary fails to ring true, the other forms of narration to which she turns also get things utterly wrong—the judge's narration of events, the journalist's narration of that event as fact—which cannot but suggest that there exists no occupiable authoritative position from which an author can narrate the events of history.

Elsewhere in the blue notebook, Anna attempts to produce a truthful representation of events by keeping a diary. In an entry dated '15th September, 1954,' Anna writes:

> Last night Michael said (I had not seen him for a week): "Well, Anna, and so our great love affair is coming to an end?" Characteristic of him that it is a question mark: he is bringing it to an end, but talks as if I am. I said, smiling but ironical in spite of myself: "But at least it has been a great love affair?" He, then: "Ah, Anna, you make up stories about life and tell them to yourself, and you don't know what is true and what isn't." "And so we haven't had a great love affair?" This was breathless and pleading; though I had not meant it. I felt a terrible dismay and coldness at his words, as if he were denying my existence. He said, whimsically: "If you say we have, then we have. And if you say not, then not." "So what you feel doesn't count?" "Me? But Anna, why should I count?" (This was bitter, mocking, but affectionate.) Afterwards I fought with a feeling that always takes hold of me after one of these exchanges: unreality, as if the substance of my self were thinning and dissolving. And then I thought how ironical it was that in order to recover myself I had to use precisely that Anna which Michael dislikes most; the critical and thinking Anna. Very well then; he says I make up stories about our life together. I

shall write down, as truthfully as I can, every stage of a day. Tomorrow. When tomorrow ends I shall sit down and write.

It is an attempt to counter the feeling of dissolution that the conversation produces that Anna determines to produce a full account of the subsequent day; that is, it is because Michael has accused her of 'mak[ing] up stories about life' to the point at which she cannot distinguish truth and fiction. Her aim is to produce a piece of writing 'about life' that is produced 'truthfully.' In Anna's view, writing about oneself must involve standing outside oneself in order to articulate one's own experience from a 'critical' perspective, and it is this process that she hopes will reinforce her 'thinning and dissolving' sense of self and replace experiential 'unreality' with the firmness of reality.

This ambition, however, already shows signs of compromise even as she articulates her plans for it. Lessing's reader is firmly reminded of the impossibility of achieving the suspension of temporality that would be required for such an account. Anna presents events through several layers of retrospection; the diary entry is dated the 15th of September, but depicts the events of the previous evening, the 14th. Only one of these events is her unpleasant conversation with Michael; another is her subsequent reflection on the conversation, the 'feeling' that arose '[a]fterwards.' There are, then, already at least three distinct experiencing moments with which Anna as narrator must contend; the interaction with Michael, the 'feelings' experienced afterwards, and the resolution to write 'every stage of a day'—a moment which itself may or may not be coincident with the moment of writing.

Anna feels, moreover, that she must start her new project the following day; perhaps tellingly, she does not countenance the idea of writing down, immediately, everything that has happened that very day, the 15th. The implication here is that Anna feels she needs to know, while she is having the experience, that she will later attempt to write down its 'every stage.'

From the outset, her experiment only serves to emphasise the impossibility of having an

experience and recording that experience simultaneously, or indeed of having those experiences

in a manner uninfluenced by the recording of them or the knowledge of one's intent to record

them. Indeed, in stating that '[w]hen tomorrow ends I shall sit down and write,' she recognises

that the experience and its account will forever be asynchronous. Where the record of the day

should be, there is a significant absence; the blue notebook includes no entry at all for 16th

September 1954. Instead, the entry of the 15th is followed by one dated the 17th:

> I could not write last night because I was too unhappy. And now of course, I am
> wondering if the fact that I chose to be very conscious of everything that happened
> yesterday changed the shape of the day. That just because I was conscious I made it a
> special day? However, I shall write it and see how it looks.[35]

Anna moves immediately into an account of the day in the past tense, beginning with the

moment she wakes, but shifts quickly into verbless sentence fragments that evoke shapes, light,

and pattern as glimpses unembedded in something like her own consciousness:

> I woke early, about five, tensed, because I thought I heard Janet move in the room
> through the wall. But she must have moved and gone to sleep again. A grey stream of
> water on the window-pane. The light grey. The shapes of furniture enormous in the vague
> light.[36]

As her narrative continues, the temporal space between the moment she represents and the

moment of representing shrinks until it seems to vanish entirely, and Anna shifts, tellingly, into

parody: 'It must be about six o'clock. My knees are tense. I realize that what I used to refer to, to

Mother Sugar, as "the housewife's disease" has taken hold of me.'[37] This present-tense narration,

however, rings false; the experience and the writing of the experience are never so synchronous

as the account would have us believe. As Mark Currie argues in *About Time*: *Narrative, Fiction*

and the Philosophy of Time (2010):

> The nature of the confessional narrative is to offer an unfolding allegory of the
> temporality of all language. It presents an example of the collapse of temporal distance in

the act of self-narration. As the self of the past catches up with the self of the present, and as narrated time threatens to coincide with the time of the narrative, a crisis beckons.[38]

In the passage from *The Golden Notebook,* Anna's account becomes unavoidably false the more she strives to eliminate the gap between experience and its representation, between what Currie calls 'narrated time' and 'the time of the narrative.' Synchronous narration, as Anna's failed efforts demonstrate, gets her nowhere nearer to self-knowledge.

Elsewhere in the notebooks, parody seems at first to permit a kind of creative productivity; when a dream reminds Anna of June Boothby, an acquaintance she has not seen in many years, Anna finds immediately after waking that her 'mind slipped into a gear foreign to me,' and she at once 'began writing a story about June Boothby,' despite the writer's block from which she has been suffering. Anna finds herself 'unable to stop the flow of words, and I was in tears of frustration as I wrote in the style of the most insipid coy woman's magazine: but what was frightening was that the inspidity was due to a very slight alteration of my own style, a word here and there only.'[39] N. Katherine Hayles argues that in this moment, in 'being able to distinguish her authentic voice from a parody, Anna retains a sense of the reality of her subjectivity, and consequently of its potential as a source for her art.'[40] Jean Wyatt is similarly optimistic, and writes that Anna can 'become "part of" June Boothby, imagine more readily how June Boothby thinks, and slip into a style that expresses June Boothby's subjectivity,' since Anna has an expanded 'capacity to empathize and thus to capture the inner life of people in her prose.'[41] Hayles and Wyatt are perhaps overly sanguine about Anna's ability to represent June's 'subjectivity' or 'inner life' in her writing. When Anna tries on this general, 'insipid' style parodically, 'words' and 'tears' both 'flow,' and her writer's block vanishes. She can 'do' June Boothby because the version of her that she produces is necessarily exaggerated and reductive; the impression works only because it does not go beyond June's 'style' to June herself. In *The*

Golden Notebook, parody emphasises the inadequacy of available means for representing human beings in literary texts. When Anna parodies June, she recognises that she does so because it is ultimately much easier than attempting to create a truthful representation of an individual.

Lessing's invocation of parody here is ultimately indicative of authorial discomfort with authorship. The appearances of these parodies in Lessing's novel—itself a highly parodic text—works metafictionally to underscore her recognition of her own authorial limits. When a writer speaks in what seems to be her own voice, she may be able to obscure the fact that this is a representation of herself, but Anna's experimentation with parody makes plain that there is no non-representational form of self-expression.

Interrogating authenticity

Linda Hutcheon finds the 'initial concern' of the postmodern in general, as she puts it in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), to be to 'de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as "natural" (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact "cultural"; made by us, not given to us.'[42] *The Golden Notebook* is a postmodern work especially invested in the denaturalisation of gender and sex, and in the recognition of bodies and desires both as socially and historically constructed through representation. Lessing used parody as both theme and compositional technique to critique the ideological processes by which certain bodies, identities, or institutions are coded as 'authentic' while others are excluded from such categories. This critique permits, in turn, a questioning of the author's authority—the author's ability, even—to decree what is authentic, and to make claims about meaning.

Peter Kalliney finds each of *The Golden Notebook*'s intersecting narratives to involve a 'frustrated search for cultural authenticity—a "real" man, the "true" working class, the "normal" English family.'[43] As Kalliney's quotations from the novel indicate, when words such as 'real' or 'true' appear in *The Golden Notebook*, their double-voicedness is often explicitly marked with inverted commas. In the novel, both Lessing's and Anna's uses of diacritical marks have a dialogic function; they indicate the simultaneous complicity with and subversion of the values they seem to inscribe.[44] After all, parody often works, as Hutcheon has it,

> rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or "highlight," and to subvert, or "subvert," and the mode is therefore a "knowing" and an ironic—or even "ironic"—one. Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale "nudging" commitment to doubleness, or duplicity.[45]

The convolutions of Hutcheon's phrasing—'wholesale "nudging" commitment'— convey the contradictory, ambivalent nature of the 'commitment' she invokes. While 'duplicity,' however, suggests the replacement of singularity with binarism, in *The Golden Notebook* Lessing might be better understood to be committed instead to a yet more supple, dialectical conception of the relationship of language to experience *and* of the author's ability to decree something like a final 'meaning' of the words used.

An account in 'Free Women' of Anna's interactions with her lodger and his male partner reveals the essentialism of Anna's understanding of what constitutes 'a real man,' and the 'real' in general. For Anna, the homosexual man is a parody of the real man. '[W]ith "a real man,"' she feels, 'there would be a whole area of tension, of wry understanding that there can't be with Ivor,' while 'the mockery, the defence of the homosexual, was nothing more than the polite over-gallantry of a "real" man, the "normal" man who intends to set bounds to his relationship with a woman, consciously or not.'[46] When she hears Ronnie sing, she feels he does so 'also on a note

of parody,' and understands him as 'mocking "normal" love; and on a jeering, common, gutter

level.'[47] Anna understands Ivor and Ronnie's behaviour as inauthentic, parodic versions of both

masculinity and femininity. In this case, Lessing uses parody as motif rather than narrative

technique to probe the categories of the authentic and the original. For Ronnie to be a parody of

the 'real man,' such a category must exist as an original, and thus the parodic version is an

imitation of it. In the case of parody, moreover, there must be some form of legible discrepancy

between the original and the imitation; no parody can be recognised as a parody without a

perceptible divergence, even if not everyone successfully perceives it. Anna's perception of

parody in the behaviour of Ivor and Ronnie functions ironically to highlight the limitations of

these essentialist categories, to suggest that the 'normal' or 'natural' might only ever be the

normalised or naturalised. Anna gestures towards this possibility, asking herself 'what do I mean

by "a real man"?', but swiftly retreats from contemplating an answer.[48]

In this sense, *The Golden Notebook* might be understood to anticipate Judith Butler's

celebrated defence, three decades later in *Gender Trouble* (1990), of the parody of 'original or

primary gender identity' within contemporary cultural practices.[49] While in *The Golden*

Notebook Lessing offers an ironic representation of gay domestic life from their heterosexual

cohabiter and landlord, from which Butler's primary example—the cultural practice of drag—at

first seems a far remove. Butler writes:

> The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original
> which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an
> original: just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a
> fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is already a "figure" in that
> double sense, so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender
> fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production in
> which, in effect—that is, in its effect—postures as an imitation. This perpetual
> displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to
> resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture
> and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities.[50]

In suggesting that while these styles' 'gender meanings […] are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization,' Butler invokes the double process of parody.[51] Such modes serve to expose the construction of the illusion of a 'primary and interior gendered self' by parodying its mechanism.[52]

As Simon Dentith suggests, parody is 'radically destabilising, suggesting that all discourses are contingently (that is to say socially) constructed.'[53] Butler's argument illuminates the operations of parody—as well as misrecognitions of parody—in *The Golden Notebook,* where Lessing uses parody to destabilise a concept like 'authenticity.' Authenticity's trick, as it were, is to persuade us not only 'the original' precedes and outweighs the 'copy,' but that it exists at all. As Jonathan Culler argues: 'The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself, and hence not authentic in the sense of unspoiled.'[54] In parody, Leonard Diepeveen writes, 'the originating impulse of absurdity and fraud demonstrates the absurdity and fraud of the originals. Two similar works of art can't be made from, in one case, a satiric and, in the other, a sincere impulse, and still have both works be *real* art.'[55]

Parody's capacity to put the 'real' in inverted commas and problematise related concepts such as the original, authentic, or natural was, for Lessing, a sign of its usefulness for interrogating many different cultural phenomena. The author's parodic interrogation of ontologies—whether identarian, biological, or aesthetic—in *The Golden Notebook* reveals her to be an 'ironist' in the sense that the philosopher Richard Rorty expounds in his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989). Rorty suggests that all people have a 'final vocabulary' in the form of a 'set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives' and 'in

which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives.'[56] For Rorty, an ironist 'has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses' and 'does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself.'[57] Ironists are 'never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves.'[58] Rorty's ironism provides a useful perspective for considering Lessing's discomfort with the authority of the authorial position as well as related doubts about the capacity of language to accommodate lived experience. When Anna struggles to represent the people she knows in her novels and notebooks, she laments that words like 'good' mean 'nothing, when you start to think about them.'[59] In a moment of metafictional irony, Anna—herself, of course, a character in Lessing's novel—suggests that such descriptors are acceptable only in the phatic talk of the everyday, but not in literature: 'A good man, one says; a good woman; a nice man, a nice woman. Only in talk of course, these are not words you'd use in a novel. I'd be careful not to use them.'[60] She seems to suggest that if language has the power to constitute identities, it must be deployed with extreme caution, with recognition of its contingency, rather than with false belief in its power to reflect reality with authority.

In an interview with Jean-Maurice de Montremy, Lessing stated that while she was working on *The Golden Notebook* in the late 1950s, she 'didn't claim absolutely to be doing a thesis on the feminine condition, on the couple, or on the construction of the novel,' but was rather 'simply trying to understand what was happening to us, to all of us, who refused to live according to "conventional morality."'[61] In foregrounding the ways in which rigid notions of the 'conventional' might bring with them a kind of oppressive violence, as well as her own

commitment to questioning or deviating from naturalised conceptions of the ethical, Lessing echoes the language of her 1971 preface to *The Golden Notebook,* in which she describes 'Free Women' ironically as a 'conventional short novel.'[62] Lessing's parodic treatment in *The Golden Notebook* of so-called 'conventional morality' works to reveal its arbitrariness and its dogmatism. Parody proves to be a means of articulating the otherwise socially and culturally inarticulable; as Lessing put it, people 'often experience things they are afraid to admit to, being frightened of the label "insane" or "sick"—there are no adequate categories for this kind of experience,'[63] and literary work provides a means of 'exploring the phenomenon of the unclassifiable experience, the psychological "breaking-through" that the conventional world judges as mad.'[64]

Psychoanalytic parody

The Golden Notebook is replete with instances of parody that serve to critique the notion that both historical events and human subjectivity could be represented truthfully in clear and comprehensive narrative form. Such parodies by necessity also problematise the authority of those authors and narrators who claim to be able to provide such apparently unambiguous and objective accounts. Anna's relationship with her psychoanalyst, Mrs Marks, is a dynamic that brings precisely these concerns to light again and again in *The Golden Notebook.* Anna is openly critical of Marks's reductive Freudian generalisations and unwavering belief in the coherent, unified nature of subjecthood:

> Look, if I'd said to you when I came in this afternoon: Yesterday I met a man at a party and I recognised in him the wolf, or the knight, or the monk, you'd nod and you'd smile. And we'd both feel the joy of recognition. But if I'd said: Yesterday I met a man at a party and suddenly he said something, and I thought: Yes, there's a hint of something—

> there's a crack in that man's personality like a gap in a dam, and through that gap the future might pour in a different shape—terrible perhaps, or marvellous, but something new—if I said that you'd frown.[65]

In Anna's account, Marks diagnoses apparently aberrant behaviour as indicative of *type*, and moreover sees this diagnosis not as the opening to her analysis, but its conclusion. Anna recalls that Mrs Marks had a tendency to say things like '"you're Electra," or "you're Antigone," and that was the end, as far as she was concerned.'[66] Molly Hite rightly observes that Marks understands human nature as an 'unchanging essence that can manifest itself only in a fixed number of pre-existing forms, so that recognition amounts to attaching the right label, assigning an individual to the proper category.'[67] It is this conception of selfhood that Anna—and, through her, Lessing—seeks to challenge through parody. Despite Marks's self-assurance, Anna recognises that language cannot master identity, and that the narrativisation of experience does not necessarily provide an objective account of that experience, or even useful insight into it at all. Lessing's skewering of a straw-man version of Freudian psychoanalysis here is motivated by her recognition of a foundational link between Freudianism, narration, and self-knowledge. As Currie observes:

> In the Freudian tradition, psychoanalysis operates on the assumption that mental disturbance is a state of self-ignorance to be overcome in the moment of narration by self-knowledge. The past, in other words was a lie, and the present is the cure in the form of truthful, reliable self-narration. But in the act of self-narration, the unreliability of the narrator merely takes a new form, remembering the past not as it was, but in the light of the present. In order to tell the truth about a lie, one must tell a lie about the truth, both of which, as every philosopher knows, result in a lie.[68]

Anna, like her creator, favours parody as a mode of critique. In Anna's case, parody becomes a tool that can be deployed to resist her psychoanalyst's domineering authorial control over the narrative of her desires, her neuroses, and her life. When Anna's friend Molly (who also goes to Marks for psychoanalysis) declares that she has come to the realisation, in the year that they have

been apart, that 'we're a completely new type of woman,' Anna's response is to produce a

parody of Mrs Marks:

> "There's nothing new under the sun," said Anna, in an attempt at a German accent. Molly, irritated—she spoke half a dozen languages well—said: "There's nothing new under the sun," in a perfect reproduction of a shrewd old woman's voice, German accented.
> Anna grimaced, acknowledging failure. She could not learn languages, and was too self-conscious ever to become somebody else: for a moment Molly had even looked like […] Mrs Marks, to whom both had gone for psycho-analysis.[69]

Anna agrees with Molly's assessment that 'we're a completely new type of woman,' and so

anticipates the wholly unsatisfying response she knows that Mrs Marks would give and strives to

neutralise—even demolish—it through parody. Her parody, however, is only partly successful,

as she can't quite 'do' Mrs Marks convincingly; Molly's 'perfect reproduction' of the tone and

accent of Mrs Marks, and even the way she looks, hits its target. The phrase Molly is able to

reproduce in a spot-in parody of Mrs Marks is itself 'nothing new' in multiple senses: Mrs Marks

tends to say it, it is a cliché, and in repeating and repurposing it, Molly has imbued it with the

double-voicedness of parody. The parody works by reducing Mrs Marks in the very way that she

reduces others, through caricature, and in doing so continually underscore the failure of language

to accommodate or circumscribe individuals.[70]

Double-voicedness, authorship, and anti-authoritarian politics

As a quintessentially double-voiced mode, parody is a primary means by which Lessing

interrogates the authority of the authorial position. This strategy was not, however, without its

problems. A possible effect, however, is a crisis of identity; what, after all, is the author without

her authority? Further, as Beth A. Boehm observes, '[b]ecause it both legitimizes and subverts

that which it parodies, metafiction is a genre wide open to misreadings.'[71] In other words, precisely because parody is double-voiced, its practitioners are incapable of exerting total control over the reception of their works, and sometimes readers fail to recognise a parodic tone. In *The Difference Satire Makes* (2012), Fredric V. Bogel describes parody's conceivable pitfalls: 'A tribute may devolve into a hostile parody; a satiric mimicry may emerge *as* unwitting tribute; a poorly managed imitation intended to ridicule a bad poem may become simply another bad poem.'[72] Instances of all such difficulties appear in the plot of *The Golden Notebook*. Anna pastes into her red notebook, for example, a story sent to her by a 'comrade living somewhere near Leeds,' whose protagonist, 'Comrade Ted,' meets a benevolent Joseph Stalin, who is in possession of an 'honest kindly face' and 'twinkling eyes' and sits 'behind an ordinary desk, that showed much signs of hard use, smoking a pipe, in his shirt-sleeves.'[73] Anna had first understood the story to be 'an exercise in irony,' and then 'a very skilful parody of a certain attitude' before finally realising, with a sense of shock, that 'it was serious.'[74] Later, when she plays at parody with a friend in the party, their parodies are repeatedly read as sincere, to the point that they ultimately 'decided they were defeated' and abandon their task, feeling that 'something had happened in the world which made parody impossible.'[75]

Alice Ridout has written of the 'wonderful irony' whereby the novel's reception upholds Anna's very claim about the impossibility of parody.[76] As Ridout observes, *The Golden Notebook*'s reception quickly provoked the author's 'anger at what she sees as the *mis*readings of her novel.'[77] In her 1971 preface, for example, Lessing criticised what she understood to be widespread critical misinterpretation of her work, and bemoaned the fact that 'some books are not read in the right way.'[78]

In an essay entitled 'The Small Personal Voice' (1957), Lessing publicly articulated her discomfort with speaking as an authority on behalf of a group five years before she published *The Golden Notebook.* Lessing expressed her conviction that 'literature should be committed,' though '[n]ot to being a propagandist for any political party':

> I see no reason why writers should not work, in their role as citizens, for a political party; but they should never allow themselves to feel obliged to publicize any party policy or "line" unless their own private passionate need as writers makes them do so: in which case the passion might, if they have talent enough, make literature of the propaganda.[79]

Lessing's comments here are informed by what was already, by 1957, a vexed relationship to communism and organised political parties. As Adam Guy argues, in 'The Small Personal Voice,' Lessing was seeking to establish a 'dialectic between commitment's ethical demands and its political decisions.'[80] During the mid-1940s, Lessing was a member of the officially unrecognised Communist Party in what was at the time known as Southern Rhodesia, and during the mid-1950s a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. In the second volume of her autobiography, Lessing describes herself during the 1950s as 'still seeing the CP as something that could be reformed and rescued from the baleful influences of the Soviet Union,' but recalls that she joined the organisation for reasons she still did not fully understand; it was 'probably the most neurotic act of my life,' she writes, '[a]nd this at a time when my "doubts" had become something like a steady, private torment.'[81] In *The Golden Notebook,* Anna's relationship with communism is similarly fraught; she is a member of Communist Party in London, though announces her intention, time and again, to leave it.[82] As Judith Kegan Gardiner puts it, communism in *The Golden Notebook* 'becomes simultaneously a set of false beliefs, a hypocritical façade over Stalinist anti-Semitism and butchery, and a repository of social ideals.'[83]

Lessing's discomfort with communism—expressed, in *The Golden Notebook,* in Anna's own fraught relationship with the Communist Party and its politics—is symptomatic of her

distrust of any ideology that would insist on blind adherence to authority. Her political

convictions, as well as those feelings which, significantly, *lack* conviction, inform her literary

strategies. If *The Golden Notebook* can be said to have a voice, this voice is never monolithic or

rigid; instead, the novel is constituted by multiple overlapping and competing voices, each

invested with ontological stature, and without a hierarchy that would definitively distinguish

voices of authority from those discredited, imagined, or hallucinated. Indeed, Lessing intimates

that the same process by which she saw individuals freed from the monologism of rigid

ideologies as a generative model for her own text, which charts various forms of 'breakdown'—

ideological, psychological, societal—with a ambivalent, multiplicitous form designed not to

reflect them unproblematically, but to gesture to these realities in its radical double-voicedness.

The very form of *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing claimed, 'says that an over-aridity can

be cured by "breakdown"':

> As I had been observing so comprehensively during that period when communism
> cracked from top to bottom. It was the most rigid and dogmatic people who "broke
> down" and were amazingly improved by the experience, emerging into the light of
> common day where live ordinary mortals like you and me.[84]

For the author, a possible solution to the problem of speaking on behalf of the group was to

speak honestly for oneself. The paradoxical effect, she believed, would be a larger, collective

significance that exceeds the limits of the individual. The 'point of rest,' she wrote in 'The Small

Personal Voice,' 'should be the writer's recognition of man, the responsible individual,

voluntarily submitting his will to the collective, but never finally.'[85] What seems like a turn

inward, she suggested, is in fact a means of representing human experience:

> At last I understood that the way over, or through this dilemma, the unease at writing
> about "petty personal problems" was to recognize that nothing is personal, in the sense
> that it is uniquely one's own. Writing about oneself, one is writing about others, since
> your pains, pleasures, emotions—and your extraordinary and remarkable ideas—can't be
> yours alone. The way to deal with the problem of "subjectivity," that shocking business

of being preoccupied with the tiny individual who is at the same time caught up in such an explosion of terrible and marvellous possibilities, is to see him as a microcosm and in this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience […] into something much larger.[86]

If the novel involves a unique kind of communicative directness, then—Lessing described the novel as the 'only popular art form left where the artist speaks directly, in clear words, to his audience…The novelist talks, as an individual to individuals, in a small personal voice'[87]—this directness provides a means of representing collective experience without reduction or dogmatism. It gestures, rather, to the multiplicity, rather than singularity and homogeneity, of lived experience. Such representation meant letting multiple voices into the novel, and imbuing each of them with ontological weight.

This strategy necessarily involved imposing limits on her own authorial control. At certain moments, Lessing articulated this imposition of limitations as a productive kind of authorial ignorance; in her 1971 preface to *The Golden Notebook,* for example, she argued that authorial incapacity to produce a whole, clear, organised vision of the literary work was precisely that which allows it to have any meaningful relationship to truth. '[A] most fundamental point,' she wrote, 'is that the book is alive and potent and fructifying and able to promote thought and discussion *only* when its plan and shape and intention are not understood, because the moment of seeing the shape and plan and intention is also the moment when there isn't anything more to be got out of it.'[88] Lessing advocates for a kind of creative not-knowing, insofar as 'underst[anding]' and 'seeing' are antithetical to a novel's potential. In the same preface, she recalled that '[a]ll sorts of ideas and experiences I didn't recognise as mine emerged when writing.'[89] Reflecting on *The Golden Notebook* in 1980, she described the novel as a 'failure in a formal sense, because as usual I take on too much. It was so ambitious, it couldn't help but fail,'

but at the same time intimated that this formal 'failure' was also precisely the origin of its success: 'Oh, it spilled all over the place, didn't it? I don't mind because I don't believe all that much in perfect novels.'[90] In *The Golden Notebook,* Lessing's parodic invocations of myriad narrational strategies—omniscient third-person, synchronous, epistolary, et cetera—all result in representative failure, and inconsistencies in names, dates and the details of events across the novel's constituent parts resist any interpretive effort to assign authority to any single account or version of the story.

In a dream, Anna imagines herself creating a film of her life. She is interrogated in the dream by a film projectionist, who asks: 'And what makes you think that the emphasis you have put on it is the correct emphasis?' The word *correct* had an echoing parodic twang. It was a jeer at the marxist jargon-word correct. It also had a primness, like that of a schoolteacher.'[91] Molly Hite implicitly identifies the narrative sentences that follow the projectionist's words—the assessment of them as 'parodic,' as a 'jeer,' as 'prim'—as free indirect discourse that focalises Anna; that is, as *her* assessment. Hite argues astutely that the 'Marxist resonances that Anna notes in the phrase "the correct emphasis" suggest that to authorize one focus or perspective over another is to embrace a particular orthodoxy, a master-narrative, one purportedly authoritative view of the whole.'[92] The sentiment is certainly true, and this ambiguous narrative sentence, whose origin might be the narrator or might be Anna—there is no way to know for sure—seems to illustrate this very point; that there is no identifiable 'correct emphasis' even when it comes to identifying who, precisely, noticed the 'echoing parodic twang' of the projectionist's words. Correctness is ultimately the wrong lens, as *The Golden Notebook* consistently rejects 'one purportedly authoritative view of the whole' in favour of doubt and multiplicity. Lessing's reader is instead left with multiple contradictory possibilities, none privileged with epistemic or

ontological stature above another; there is no 'true' version to be excavated from *The Golden Notebook*'s many shifting parts. This formal resistance to the critical fixing of meaning has its analogue in the contradictory and multiplicitous character of Anna, the novel's centre of gravity; Anna is obsessed with the possibility that she has no authentic selfhood, and finds in her writing that she only produces endless imitations of herself without ever identifying a 'real' or 'authentic' identity.[93] While Anna finds this to be a source of existential anxiety, Lessing's novel raises the possibility of a more optimistic take; that subjecthood might be capacious, ambivalent, and contradictory, and so too might be the many voices of the novel.

Notes

[1] Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1969), 137.

[2] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 353.

[3] Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 353–54.

[4] Tracy Hargreaves, '"…to Find a Form That Accommodates the Mess": Truth Telling from Doris Lessing to B. S. Johnson', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 42 (2012): 210, https://doi.org/10.5699/yearenglstud.42.2012.0204.

[5] Fredric Jameson has famously argued that in situations in which there seems no longer to be a cultural norm to resist, when 'parody finds itself without a vocation,' the parody of dominant norms is impossible, and 'the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture.' *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 17–18. In the culture of late capitalism, Jameson argues, there can be no double-voiced phenomenon; a dialogic phenomenon such as parody becomes impossible, and intertextual practice collapses into a kind of purposeless resurrection of past styles and past voices. The result is the breakdown of the temporality necessary to focus the subject and 'make it a space of praxis,' and the effect is monologism. Jameson, 27.
In this chapter, I push against Jameson's claims of the evacuation of double-voicedness in the postmodern era, and instead theorise parody in *The Golden Notebook* in something closer to the terms of Linda Hutcheon, who writes that it is one of parody's paradoxes that a mode associated with 'seemingly introverted formalism' is able to bring about 'a direct confrontation with the problem of the relation of the aesthetic to a world of significance external to itself, to a discursive world of socially defined meaning systems (past and present)—in other words, to ideology and history.' *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 22. I am thinking also of Giorgio Agamben, who has recently gone so far as to say that parody, in 'twentieth-century literature […] goes from being a literary genre to the very structure of the linguistic medium in which literature expresses itself.' 'Parody', in *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 45–46.

[6] Doris Lessing, 'A Thing of Temperament: An Interview with Doris Lessing', interview by Cathleen Rountree, *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche* 2, no. 1 (2008): 66, https://doi.org/10.1525/jung.2008.2.1.62.

[7] Gayle Greene, *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 115.

[8] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 7.

[9] Doris Lessing, 'A Talk with Doris Lessing', interview by Florence Howe, in *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 81.

[10] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 13.

[11] Doris Lessing, 'Transcript from an Interview with Doris Lessing', interview by John Mullan, NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020, April 2008, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/lessing/25432-interview-transcript-2007.

[12] Joan Didion, 'Doris Lessing', in *The White Album* (London: Fourth Estate, 2017), 119.

[13] Dennis Porter, 'Realism and Failure in *The Golden Notebook*', *Modern Language Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1 January 1974): 56, https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-35-1-56.

[14] Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*', in *A Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945-2000*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 377. Each heading in 'Free Women' is italicised and given a smattering of capital letters: '*Anna meets her friend Molly in the summer of 1957 after a separation…*'; '*Two Visits, some telephone calls and a Tragedy*'; '*Tommy Adjusts Himself to Being Blind While the Older People Try to Help Him*'; '*Anna and Molly influence Tommy, for the better. Marion leaves Richard. Anna does not feel herself*'; and '*Molly Gets Married and Anna Has an Affair.' The Golden Notebook,* 75, 233, 329, 445, 561.

[15] Lars Kleberg, 'Parody and Double-Voiced Discourse: On the Language Philosophy of Mikhail Bakhtin', in *Dialogue and Technology: Art and Knowledge*, ed. Bo Göranzon and Magnus Florin (London: Springer, 1991), 96–97, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4471-1731-5.

[16] Bakhtin writes: 'When a member of a speaking collective comes upon a word, it is not as a neutral word of language, not as a word free from the aspirations and evaluations of others, uninhabited by others' voices. No, he receives the word from another's voice and filled with that other voice. The word enters his context from another context, permeated with the interpretations of others. His own thought finds the word already inhabited.' *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 202.

[17] Kleberg, 'Parody and Double-Voiced Discourse: On the Language Philosophy of Mikhail Bakhtin', 101.

[18] Kleberg, 96.

[19] Nick Bentley, 'Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*: An Experiment in Critical Fiction', in *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings*, ed. Alice Ridout and Susan Watkins (London: Continuum, 2009), 57.

[20] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 25.

[21] Lessing, 554.

[22] N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 485, https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501722950.

[23] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 344.

[24] Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, ed. Millicent Bell (London: Penguin, 2008), 1.

[25] Kevin Ohi, *Henry James and the Queerness of Style* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 65.

[26] Ohi, 65.

[27] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 68.

[28] Lessing, 535.

[29] Lessing, 280.

[30] Lessing, 280.

[31] Molly Hite, *The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 100.

[32] Hite, 100.

[33] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 219. This cut-and-paste aesthetic (which itself recalls the collage of headlines in Marion Portmain's speech to Anna referenced at the beginning of this chapter) is evocative of the concept of pastiche. Pastiche is a preferred literary term of Gérard Genette's, and has been used at least since the 1980s, as Margaret A. Rose notes, 'as a synonym for parody, and especially in French literature.' *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 72.

[34] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 220.

[35] Lessing, 296.

[36] Lessing, 296.

[37] Lessing, 297.

[38] Currie, *About Time*, 64.

[39] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 538.

[40] Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, 264.

[41] Jean Wyatt, *Reconstructing Desire: The Role of the Unconscious in Women's Reading and Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 157.

[42] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2.

[43] Peter J. Kalliney, 'The Elusive Englishman: Doris Lessing Goes to London Town', in *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 175.

[44] '[I]n parody,' as Adam Abraham remarks, 'one writes as the parodist and as the parodee at the same time, as if with two hands.' *Plagiarizing the Victorian Novel: Imitation, Parody, Aftertext*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 107.

[45] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 1–2.

[46] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 347.

[47] Lessing, 347.

[48] Lessing, 345.

[49] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 187.

[50] Butler, 188.

[51] Butler, 188.

[52] Butler, 188.

[53] Simon Dentith, *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000), 91.

[54] Jonathan Culler, 'Semiotics of Tourism', *The American Journal of Semiotics* 1, no. 1/2 (1981): 130, https://doi.org/10.5840/ajs198111/25.

[55] Leonard Diepeveen, *Modernist Fraud: Hoax, Parody, Deception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 78. Diepeveen sees in this a 'peculiar kind of doubling,' insofar as certain parodies thus 'conceive of themselves as parodies or replications of frauds.' Diepeveen, 78.

[56] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.

[57] Rorty, 73.

[58] Rorty, 73–74.

[59] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 114.

[60] Lessing, 114.

[61] Doris Lessing, 'A Writer Is Not a Professor', interview by Jean-Maurice de Montremy, in *Doris Lessing: Conversations*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994), 198.

[62] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 7.

[63] Doris Lessing, 'One Keeps Going', interview by Joyce Carol Oates, in *Doris Lessing: Conversations*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994), 35.

[64] Lessing, 35.

[65] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 416.

[66] Lessing, 27.

[67] Hite, *The Other Side of the Story*, 65. As N. Katherine Hayles has remarked, even Marks's name 'suggests that her Freudian generalizations are like Marxist analysis in their refusal to recognize the importance of local differences.' *Chaos Bound*, 248.

[68] Currie, *About Time*, 63.

[69] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 26.

[70] Later, Anna subjects Saul to a parodic psychoanalytic assessment in which she informs him that '[l]ike all Americans,' he has 'mother trouble' and that he has 'fixed on me for your mother,' but also insists that he 'should be ashamed, at the age of thirty-three, to be sitting there taking this kind of banal over-simplification from me.' Lessing, 507–8.

[71] *Beth A. Boehm,* 'Reeducating Readers: Creating New Expectations for *The Golden Notebook*', *Narrative* 5, no. 1 (1997): 89.

[72] Fredric V. Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 74.

[73] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 273–74.

[74] Lessing, 273.

[75] Lessing, 389.

[76] Alice Ridout, '"Some Books Are Not Read in the Right Way": Parody and Reception in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*', in *Contemporary Women Writers Look Back: From Irony to Nostalgia*, by Alice Ridout, Continuum (London: Continuum, 2012), 47.

[77] Ridout, 47.

[78] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 9.

[79] Doris Lessing, 'The Small Personal Voice', in *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews*, ed. Paul Schlueter (New York: Vintage, 1975), 6.

[80] Adam Guy, 'Early Lessing, Commitment, the World', in *Doris Lessing and the Forming of History*, ed. Kevin Brazil, David Sergeant, and Tom Sperlinger (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 12.

[81] Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949-1962* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 211, 57.

[82] 'Suddenly I decide I must leave the Party,' Anna writes, apparently decisively, of a day in autumn 1954. Shortly after, her words are significantly more equivocal: 'I see that I wrote yesterday, I would leave the Party. I wonder when, and on what issue?' Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 156.

[83] Gardiner, 'Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*', 380.

[84] Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, 267.

[85] Lessing, 'The Small Personal Voice', 12.

[86] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 13.

[87] Lessing, 'The Small Personal Voice', 21.

[88] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 21.

[89] Lessing, 10.

[90] Doris Lessing, 'Writing as Time Runs Out', interview by Michael Dean, in *Putting the Questions Differently: Interviews with Doris Lessing, 1964-1994*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll, Flamingo Original (London: Flamingo, 1996), 90.

[91] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 537.

[92] Molly Hite, '(En)Gendering Metafiction: Doris Lessing's Rehearsals for *The Golden Notebook*', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 34, no. 3 (1988): 487, https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.0.0231.

93 Anna's surname, Freeman, is an echo of 'Free Women,' the name of the text in which she appears, while her married name, Wulf, self-consciously recalls a major twentieth-century British literary forebear, Virginia Woolf, as well as Doris Lessing herself, since Anna and Lessing both trade their maiden names, 'Freeman' and 'Taylor,' for the names of their German spouses.

Coda

'Becoming quite other'

> I am a writer, and what I write is what I hear. I am a secretary of the invisible, one of many secretaries over the ages. That is my calling: dictation secretary. It is not for me to interrogate, to judge what is given me. I merely writer down the words and then test them, test their soundness, to make sure I have heard right.
>
> J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*[1]

Christine Brooke-Rose's 1991 novel *Textermination* is set at a narratological conference at the San Francisco Hilton named the 'Annual Convention of Prayer for Being to their Reader-God.'[2] The conference is attended by characters from novels by Austen, Flaubert, Eliot, Pynchon, Rushdie, and others. They take part in 'Rituals for Being'[3] and pray to readers in the hope of avoiding annihilation as a result of readerly neglect, and are aided in this endeavour by 'Interpreters,' another set of characters—this time invented by Brooke-Rose herself—of ambiguous ontological status. In the words of one of Interpreter, Jack: 'Some will say nothing happens in this novel, in this Convention, and they'd be dead right. It's not about events but about characters and their discourse.'[4] Taking Jack's claim as a point of departure, I conclude by turning to *Textermination* with the hope of illuminating the five preceding interlinked discussions of literary ontology and authorial control, as well as gesturing to the legacy of this particular moment in literary history.

Like Spark, Murdoch, Selvon, Brophy and Lessing, Brooke-Rose was a prolific novelist in the 1960s.[5] Her conception of the relationship between author, novel, ethics and experience had much in common with theirs, and she aimed in her writing to extend the forms of the realist novel via experimental narrative means.[6] In *Between* (1968), for instance, she omitted the verb 'to be' throughout in order to stress the narrator's disorientated sense of personal identity, a compositional decision that reveals her preoccupation with ontology both literary and

experiential.[7] The conceit of *Thru* (1975), further, engages with the same vexed question of the authority of the authorial position to which Spark, Murdoch et al. continually returned; in *Thru,* students on a creative writing course collectively construct the novel's narrative, and the resulting text includes elements of essay, handwritten annotation, mathematical formula, diagram, and musical notation. Brooke-Rose described the book as 'a novel about the theory of the novel,' written 'almost tongue-in-cheek for a few narratologist friends,' influenced profoundly by French structuralist and poststructuralist thought.[8] Indeed, Brooke-Rose was an eminent poststructuralist in her own right; she taught contemporary literary theory at the new Université de Paris VIII from 1968 onwards upon the invitation of Hélène Cixous. Like Spark, Murdoch, Brophy, Selvon, and Lessing, Brooke-Rose was committed, in her novelistic practice, to the multiplication and proliferation of textual voices. Like them, she saw the committed investment of those alternative positions with a sense of authority to be an ethical good—an imperative, even—borne of her own sense of discomfort with the authorial position.[9]

Like those other five writers, Brooke-Rose has proved resistant to taxonomies of post-war literature, and this resistance seems a reflection of the ambivalences that characterise both her life and her work; Heather Reyes describes her as 'always just outside, an exile both from her own country […] and from her adopted one, as well as from the theoretical groups with which she has much in common but to which she doesn't quite belong.'[10] Brooke-Rose was, moreover, familiar with the work of several of the authors with whom this thesis is concerned, and even counted a number of them among her friends.[11] She became friends with Muriel Spark, for instance, in 1952, when Brooke-Rose was finishing a Ph.D. on Middle English and Old French lyrical poetry, and Spark was beginning to become recognised as a writer after the recent success of a short story.[12] As a narratologist, Brooke-Rose engaged enthusiastically with both Spark's

The Driver's Seat and Brigid Brophy's *In Transit,* and in 2002 authored an introduction to Brophy's novel for Dalkey Archive Press.[13] *In Transit* has much in common with Brooke-Rose's *Between* (1968), published a year earlier. In the latter novel, in Brooke-Rose's own words:

> The I / central consciousness / non-narrating narrative voice / is a simultaneous interpreter who travels constantly from congress to conference and whose mind is a whirl of topics and jargons and foreign languages / whose mind is a whirl of worldviews, interpretations, stories, models, paradigms, theories, languages.[14]

She adds: 'Note that in this metastory the simultaneous interpreter has no sex.'[15]

Brooke-Rose's twelfth novel, *Textermination*, lies somewhat beyond the chronological scope of this thesis, which focuses on a collection of novels produced mostly in the 1960s, beginning with Spark's *The Comforters* (1957) and concluding with Selvon's *Moses Ascending* (1975). I conclude with *Textermination,* however, because the novel offers a glimpse of the legacy of what might be understood as an ethical theory of the novel that was begun a little more than a decade after the war by the authors whose work forms the basis of the preceding chapters. Where post-war novels by Spark, Murdoch, Brophy, Selvon, and Lessing are, certainly, metafictions concerned with the ontology of literary character and the ambivalence of the author's position, *Textermination,* published more than a quarter of a century after some of these earlier works, is distinct in its radically explicit focus on these questions. *Textermination* might be understood as the ultimate product of the literary work that began with *The Comforters* and was seen to develop with striking formal and narrative experimentation in *In Transit.* In concluding with a close reading of *Textermination,* then, I gesture forwards to the further development of literary modes that might endeavour to reject, complicate, fracture or multiply the authority of the author in the late twentieth century and beyond, into the twenty-first.

'He punishes us with inattention': Readerly attention and character ontology

Brooke-Rose's 1975 novel *Thru* ends, in the author's own words, with a list of all the names 'used or alluded to in the text, […] each given an alpha, or beta plus, and so on.'[16] This is an example of the author's self-professed habit of calquing; she describes *Thru*'s ending as a 'result of a play on Genette's phrase "il y a des degrés de presence."'[17] Brooke-Rose explains: 'Genette is referring to the absence of an explicit narrator […]. Absence is absolute, he says, but there are degrees of presence; in other words, a narrator can be an occasional "I", a dramatized but discreet observer, a participating character, or the main character.'[18] In *Textermination*, like *Thru*, characters seem to show *degrees* of ontological robustness that might wax and wane with the whims of the age, as Hadrian VII announces to the assembled delegates participating in the 'Rituals for Being': 'Some of us have more existence than others, at various times according to fashion.'[19]

In *Textermination,* characters become more vibrant, more alive, when people talk about them. Austen's Emma, for example, can sense when 'they are discussing her,' because even when someone 'reads a passage […] she revives, begins to feel the blood circulate in her veins again.'[20] For Emma, however—though she was one of English literary history's most famous characters—her own ontological status is precarious and uncertain; she 'wonders whether she exists,' and '[i]f she has blood, if she has veins.'[21] The novel's ontological conundrums might be understood as an allegory for what Brooke-Rose saw as a crisis in representation in the contemporary novel; namely, the dereification or 'dissolution of character,' as she named it in an essay published five years before *Textermination*, in which she criticised contemporary novelists for creating characters that were 'verbal structures,' 'swollen with words,' with 'no semblance of

a referent.'[22] These characters—which, 'like stray phalluses, wander our minds, cut off from the body of the text'[23]—are parodied in *Textermination,* where they are literally 'wrenched out of their contexts,'[24] free to wander around the hotel and the city beyond.

Brooke-Rose claimed that *Textermination*'s 'ominous' title had 'nothing to do with [her own] extermination as a producer of texts, but rather with the slow (or rapid?) dying out of reading capacity.'[25] The novel's conference is an 'international ritual for the revival of the fittest,'[26] and the characters' apparently Darwinian problem is a symptom of contemporary practices of reading and literary criticism; they languish from 'lack of involved attention,' and are 'ghosts' or 'Dead Souls' unless vivified by readers.[27] Crucially, the 'Implied Reader,' rather than the author, is the deity to whom they pray. The Implied Reader is figured as omniscient and capable of saving characters from annihilation, though—as Jack recognises—he is not always merciful: 'God, the Implied Reader, reads us, and forgets. I mean despite his infinite mind. […] He punishes us with inattention.'[28] Emma Woodhouse recognises this to be an especially contemporary problem; she sees that while she has, for 'roughly two centuries […] been totally sure of her personality,' and the Reader has 'been constructing her, moulding her, enjoying her, holding her in the mind and her only,' now 'everything has become confused, and she lacks reality, as if the Reader her Creator had somehow absconded.'[29]

Like the other novelists considered in this thesis—I am thinking especially of Murdoch and Lessing—Brooke-Rose insists on the ethical need for *attention* in the form of a committed and effortful reading practice, allegorised in the life-and-death stakes faced by *Textermination*'s characters. Without 'reading attention,' she wrote in *Stories, Theories, Things* (1991)*,* her novels themselves 'do not exist.'[30] Brooke-Rose's commitment to responsible and attentive reading practices might render her, like Murdoch and Lessing, vulnerable to accusations of insisting on

rather stringent authorial control over her works. She was given to expressing her frustration, for instance, that readers tend to get *Thru* 'most wrong, not noticing […] explanations that are clearly given,'[31] or that 'nobody noticed the absence of *to be* in *Between.*'[32]

Brooke-Rose aimed, however, precisely to resist and unsettle dogmatic control with the literary strategies she developed. In her own account, in literary criticism of the 'nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, the attention was all on the Sender, that is, on the author's intention,'[33] but the turn of the century saw a 'growing resentment of the author's guiding presence in every sentence, the enveloping of every fact with comment.'[34] The effect was that early twentieth-century novels made a 'huge effort' to 'shake off the authoritarianism of the traditional narrative mode,' in the form of either free indirect discourse or a 'far more direct speech mode, either inside the character […] or as dialogue with outside viewpoint but no comment.'[35] Brooke-Rose's primary criticism of modernism, however, was that the paradoxical effect of such techniques turned out to be a reinforced sense of rigid authorial control. 'By the thirties,' she wrote, 'the author's control was felt as omniscient and godlike.'[36] Instead, Brooke-Rose aimed to 'reject' what she understood to be the 'archly superior irony of Modernism, which is always a wink from author to reader about the weaknesses of the character.'[37] Since 1964's *Out*, Brooke-Rose recalls, she 'got involved early in the modern resentment at the author wrapping up every sentence in explanation, guiding the reader too much,'[38] and 'explored a narratorless present tense in the same paradoxical way Alain Robbe-Grillet had—as a neutral, detached narrative 'representing' or miming a consciousness, both reflective and unreflective.'[39] Her tactic of 'using it for multiple viewpoints and changing them without warning,' moreover, meant that 'the reader has only the content to identify whose consciousness we're in.'[40] Over three decades later, in *Next* (1998)*,* she attempted to write 'from inside the mind of each

character, without marked transition, only content showing that we're in a different mind.'[41]

Brooke-Rose, then, sought to write 'what Barthes calls the writerly text as opposed to the readerly text.'[42] She aimed, however, to interrogate the authoritative position of the author, not to eradicate it entirely; Roland Barthes's 'death of the author' was, in her view, unproductively hyperbolic, and in *Invisible Author* (2002) she tweaked his phrasing to stress the author's invisibility rather than death in order to dispel what she calls, in *Textermination,* the 'myth of the self-engendered text.'[43] In *Life, End of* (2006), she took Barthes's concept literally in order to demonstrate the interdependence of text and writer as she, the author, faced her own mortality; the book was published six years before she died at the age of eighty-nine. *Life, End of* insists that a text necessarily presupposes the existence of an author, including in Barthes's metaphorical terms pertaining to the demise of omniscient narration and overt authorial control, since no text writes itself, even if authorial intervention is not obvious:

> The authoritative author, to whom every sentence is traditionally attributed, has been pronounced dead decades ago.
> So I heard. How, dead?
> Good question. But since he's still there, writing every sentence in the book, everyone starts to call him 'narrator' instead, completely blurring a situation very clear till then. Traditionally, a narrator is always also a character inside the story, who can only know what he sees, whether he's the hero or a mere observer. Remember that the word author, like authority, comes from Latin *augeo*, I augment. And he sure does.
> […] Remember one thing, though. Unless presented clearly as narrator, the character can't and doesn't write, the author can and does.[44]

Her work offers an alternative understanding of literary creation to those that would insist, in turns, on the ultimate authority of the author, text, reader, or critic.

Textermination's focus is the proliferation of multiple sources of perspective and authority, not simply the replacement of one by another. For its author, the impossibility of omniscience on the part of author, reader or critic was a crucial fact of her ethical conception of the novel; 'I worked very hard,' she explained,

so that no single real reader should recognise every single character, for none of us has read everything, and most of us have experienced the anguish of arriving at a huge conference and knowing no one. The people running the conference are of course also fictional, but they are *my* fictions, even if they seem non-fictional to the visitors from other fictions.[45]

In *Textermination,* in other words, the 'implied reader is pure theory.'[46] No human being is capable of occupying this narrative position.[47] Brooke-Rose's description of the composition of *Textermination* resonates with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's account, in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990)*,* of that 'inexplicit compact by which novel-readers voluntarily plunge into worlds that strip them, however temporarily, of the painfully acquired cognitive maps of their ordinary lives (awfulness of going to a party without knowing anyone) on condition of an invisibility that promises cognitive exemption and privilege.'[48] For both Brooke-Rose and Sedgwick, the anxieties produced by plunging into the world of a novel—analogous to the 'anguish' or 'awfulness' of arriving at a conference or party and knowing no-one there—is the price of entry. The great payoff is that this kind of humility produces an experience in which one's part is characterised not by mastery, but by total immersion, even 'invisibility.'[49]

Brooke Rose's illogics

The literary strategies implemented in *Textermination*—which involved the proliferation of positions distinct from that of the author, and the investment of these positions with ontological stature—can be traced to those developed in the 1960s and 1970s by Spark, Selvon, et al. These strategies can be identified in nascent form, too, in Brooke-Rose's own novels of the same period; 1975's *Thru,* for instance, adopts no fixed narrational position, but rather shifts between multiple, ambiguous, and disembodied voices.[50] *Thru*'s narrative weaves through

consciousnesses without signposting these changes with tense markers or narrative tags, and continually posits Barthes's question from *S/Z,* 'Who speaks?', in various languages.[51] Without a source of narration, this textual conundrum, as Damian Grant observes, '[e]ach voice threatens to engulf, to be engulfed by, other voices. So "who speaks?" becomes an ultimate, existential question—like "To be or not to be?" a question addressed to origins and authority.'[52]

As Brooke-Rose herself observes,[53] the third-person narration of *Textermination* is perhaps easier to follow than her novels of the 1960s and 1970s, but readers' efforts to locate a singular, original source of authority are continually troubled by those characters' shifting statuses and sudden absences. In *Textermination,* readers cannot control or indeed definitively know the conference's characters, because these characters shift and change. Their very removal from their contexts gives them a quasi-autonomy, and they cannot be precisely how we remember them; they continually surprise us. Brooke-Rose's explicit depiction of the complicated negotiations between literary characters, 'Interpreters,' readers, authors, the 'Implied reader,' and professional academics is illustrative of her conviction that characters exist only as a corollary of these very interactions. Their existences, that is, are born *from* interpretation, and there is no static, objective version of each character. In Brooke-Rose's schema, none of these positions is dominant over all others.

This belief is illustrated strikingly in the novel's opening pages. *Textermination* begins mid-sentence: 'so that Emma found, on being escorted and followed into the second carriage by Mr Elton, that the door was to be lawfully shut on them, that they were to have a téte-à-tête drive.'[54] Over the course of a few paragraphs, Austen's Emma morphs into Goethe's Lotte and then into Flaubert's Emma Bovary; readerly recognition of each point of reference does little to steady things, and it swiftly becomes clear that 'names are not a private property.'[55] The

character's (or characters') identity is in flux, and boundaries are, from the very beginning, thoroughly unstable. 'Emma' is confused by the flashes of otherness that infiltrate her consciousness; 'she wonders how she comes to be speaking in German, and whether she can keep this up without becoming quite other.'[56] Thoughts occur to her, represented in free indirect discourse, but she is aware of the strangeness of the mingling of her own thoughts with that of other characters; 'where has this extraordinary thought come from?' she wonders, with a hint of the same existential panic that afflicted Spark's Caroline Rose in *The Comforters*.[57]

No character proves to be static, and representation at the conference is a fraught affair not only regarding papers delivered, but in the very material form that each character-as-delegate assumes. Kelly wonders, for instance, 'If Gulliver is here, what size can he be? And Orlando as page or as Vita?'[58] At other moments, characters meet younger or older versions of themselves, or versions of themselves by different authors. Mira wonders if characters are 'aware of their future':

> Does Emma Bovary know she will take arsenic? Does Dorothea Brooke at this moment know of Mr Casaubon's ungentlemanly codicil to his Will, that she is not to marry Ladislaw, of whom she has never consciously thought even as an admirer? Is she aware that Pfarrer Oberlin is out of another, earlier book? Does Gibreel know that he will shoot himself?[59]

These questions are never met with definitive answers. Younger versions of characters do not recognise their older counterparts, and while Rita is confident that characters 'can't know a thing beyond what goes on in their own narrative,' this is plainly untrue; their very presence at the conference gives them an existence outside the text, and they behave in unexpected ways.[60] Jack complains to Pynchon's Oedipa Maas, for instance, that her feminist pronouncements at the conference don't match his memory of her in *The Crying of Lot 49*: 'But you're not a feminist in the story at all!' he complains. Oedipa knows that she is 'also other things. In there, I just don't,

don't, coincide with myself.'[61] *Textermination* is a novel preoccupied with such contradictions and ambiguities of identity, and its characters grow in ontological stature for the reader of *this* novel (rather than those in which they originate) not when they are discussed in academic papers at the Hilton, but rather when they fail to 'coincide with [themselves].'[62]

The logical impossibility whereby the novel's characters are 'caught in one temporal aspect of themselves and yet behaving like real people, ignorant of their destinies, and yet listening to papers on themselves that take a godlike view' is, strangely, the source of our sense of their autonomy, and a belief in the necessity of the inchoate, unfixed nature of the literary character is the ethical foundation of Brooke-Rose's literary practice.[63] At the meeting of the Central Committee at the conference in *Textermination*, a board member insists that Interpreters are 'condemned to textuality, that is, to apparently making the apparently incoherent coherent,' but that the text has ambiguities on which survival depends. It's in illogics that the interpreter takes his pleasure.'[64] One instance of such 'illogics' at work in the novel is the appearance of the name of an Interpreter, Kelly, in the 'Index of Names Forbidden by the Canon,' where she is listed as a character in 'Textermination, by Mira Enketei.'[65] Mira is an academic who appeared in Brooke-Rose's own novels, *Amalgamemnon* and *Verbivore*, and also a delegate at *Textermination*'s conference; she is, then, author, 'Interpreter,' and literary character all at once, and this multifacetedness scrambles any effort to attribute discreteness or assign a hierarchy to such positions. Mira is aware of the permeability of diegetic levels and the logical inconsistencies of her ontological status; she tells Orion that she 'invented him,' and that the pair of them are thus 'situated at different narrative levels,' while the very fact of the possibility that the two could converse undermines the possibility that these levels could be distinct.[66] Mira knows, moreover, that though Orion is her 'invent[ion],' he is capable of possessing knowledge

she herself does not; she asks him, 'How do they build bridges? […] How do they plant those huge metal pillars in deep and often wild water?'[67]

In an 'Interlude' in *Invisible Author* titled 'Exsul,' Brooke-Rose observes that the etymology of 'exterminate' is 'to drive beyond boundaries.'[68] In *Textermination,* extermination is necessarily textual; the metaleptic crossing of diegetic boundaries seems at once to be a source of life and to pose the threat of extinction to the novel's precarious characters. Mira's time proves to be limited; ultimately she comes across her own name on the 'long list of forgotten names in alphabetical order': 'She can't resist […] and moves down to ENK. Yes, she too figures in it: Enketei, Mira. She can't go on. She doesn't exist.'[69] At this point, Mira vanishes from the narrative, and, at the beginning of the subsequent chapter, another voice intrudes. This striking departure from the previous mode of narration—which had shifted between various focalised characters—is worth quoting at length:

> If she can't go on, I suppose I'll have to. I am not Mira of course, though many readers think I am. For one thing I have little Latin and less Greek. Curious how one can invent knowledgeable people without possessing their knowledge. One cheats, quite simply. I didn't attend that I-narrator's little meeting—well, I wasn't even on the rollcall, any more than she was—because so far I haven't said I. As eye-narrator I've kept pretty quiet, effaced as they say, not a narrator at all, not fully-fledged, participating, not a character in my own right, *à part entire* […]
>
> I say not a narrator at all because, when came the fashion for the vanishing author, the silent author, the transparent text (not language at all but window on the world), the critics, always quick to adapt their vocabulary to the latest bandwagon, started calling narrator both the character who narrates and the producer of the text, that is, the author, not of course the real author, who misheard anthems as a child, who had marital troubles or who is undergoing a long and painful dental treatment of implants, but the Author, Implied, Ideal, or whatever, thus losing an important distinction: the character who narrates is limited to what he can know, the producer of the text can move among many knowledges. He used to be called Omniscient. Well, anti-God intellectuals (anti-authority) objected to that. Objected to the rigging, the fateful feel of divine providence. The author was out. All authority rested in the text. And later all authority rested in the Reader, Implied, Ideal or whatever. And so they passed imperceptibly from phrases such as "the author's intention here is clearly" to "the text clearly says", and then to "the reader clearly infers". But behind this lip-service to fads, what the author intends, what the text says, what the reader infers, is in every case what the one critic interprets. He too

is Reader, he too is God.

Be that as it may, I am the author, take it how you will, and I am still alive and well, if not in Texas, at least here, and for a little while yet.

Not that I am omniscient. That term was always over-interpreted. Even in clear cases of the omniscient author, he was, as human being, omniscient only within the little (or large) world he created. And sometimes not even there. For apart from cases where he can be omniscient but not omnicommunicative, as they say, in other words holding back, he could also make mistakes of coherence, or errors in his research or observation, and many of our canonical authors researched and observed a great deal. And even very well. That was the big idea, to reproduce the world as it was. This was why people read them, to have reproduced for them the world as it was. But that world was reproduced as the authors saw it, and received as the readers then interpreted that vision. Otherwise there'd be no point, would there? But much confusion arose. Until a sort of consensus was formed, or a nonsensus as Mira would surely say, that omniscience merely meant that authors created their world, arranged it according to their vision of it. Which they do anyway, with or without a narrator.

Even within that restriction, however, I am not omniscient. On the research side, I have not read every tale that has ever been written everywhere, in Jewish Literature, in Islamic Literature, in early and late Greek literature, Persian, Peruvian, Japanese, Siamese, Indian, Amerindian, African, Yugoslav, Polish, Finnish, Norwegian, Albanian (etc) Literatures. I have thus created a fiction too difficult for me to handle. So I omit what I don't know. A double absence. All authors omit, texts are full of double absences.

As to the arranging aspect, I too, like Mira, have no idea how to go on. I must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on (Beckett, The Unnameable). [sic]

Or: She was ended, the book could begin (Maggie Gee, Dying, in Other Words). I am a femme-recit, like Scheherezade, whose every tale means a stay of execution. Or as Muriel Spark says of vanishing Mrs Hogg: She had no private life whatsoever. God knows where she went in her privacy.

But does God know? If God exists, can He contain unontological moments? By God I mean of course, the Implied Reader. If He exists. Let's say He does, and can.

So I must bring them back. Oh, not all of them of course. Kelly and Mira are on the Index and gone for ever. But they were real, on their different levels, Kelly being on the staff, Mira having (she says) invented everything. Rewrite the last two sentences, keeping both versions, for both are true: But they were unreal, on their different levels, being invented by me, Kelly on the staff, Mira as inventor (she says) of everything. No, I meant the real fictional characters, those not (yet) on the Index.[70]

In this remarkable passage, Brooke-Rose identifies herself explicitly as 'the author,' not abstract and ideal but fallible and human, subject to 'painful dental treatment.' She recognises that her resistance to saying 'I' until this point in the narrative has made her invulnerable to the same obliteration that Kelly and Mira both faced; becoming narratively visible seems, paradoxically, to be the gateway to invisibility in the form of total annihilation. If paradiegesis implies 'control,

the power to arrest, redirect, or reflect on a narrative,' as Adam Abraham has it, in this case it also causes the author to be dangerously exposed.[71] She acknowledges her own lack of omniscience, and the fact that the text exceeds her own knowledge and control, that she has 'created a fiction too difficult for [herself] to handle.' Invoking two late modernist texts crucially concerned with questions of literary ontology—Spark's *The Comforters* and Beckett's *The Unnamable*—Brooke-Rose invokes the very same existential questions pertaining to fictional being and the author's authority that so preoccupied Spark, Murdoch, Brophy, Selvon and Lessing.

The opening line of Brooke-Rose's novel *Amalgamemnon* (1984)—'I shall soon be quite redundant at last despite of all, as redundant as you after queue and as totally predictable, information-content zero'—is, the author explains, 'calqued on Beckett's "I shall soon be quite dead at last despite of all" from *Malone Dies* (1958), the word *redundant* merely replacing the word *dead,* creating an equivalence, but only if one has the original first line in mind.'[72] Brooke-Rose's commentary is telling; in her account, 'redundant' becomes, in textual terms, equivalent to 'dead,' as though to be unacknowledged is tantamount to non-existence. A distinct irony is that since the reader unaware of the intertext to which Brooke-Rose's line alludes, the 'equivalence' she describes does not exist. The reader must be equipped with sufficient literary knowledge to recognise the reference for redundancy to signify death; that is, the conceit relies on Beckett's perpetuity, while her own remains in doubt.[73]

As Richard Martin has suggested, the initial 'I' of *Amalgamemnon* might apply to either (or both) the novel and its narrator, since 'both are faced with the fact of their own uselessness.'[74] Martin argues that 'no sooner has a text begun, has a narrator taken up the narration, an author begun to write and a reader to read, than they are all faced with their

inevitable existential inutility. Redundancy is a predicate of textuality—of narrative—and, on another level, of existence.'[75] This is true of all novels, as Martin suggests, but Brooke-Rose makes it her central preoccupation. In the 'redundancy-generation paradigm,' redundancy is not a negative concept, but rather essential to communication; the 'potentially redundant text generates further discourse.'[76] As Julia Jordan argues in the context of Brooke-Rose's *Amalgamemnon*, to be a literary character in one of Brooke-Rose's novels is always to teeter on the brink of redundancy and abundance, of annihilation and the kind of surging up that is an overspilling of diegetic boundaries and ontological limits.[77] The threat of non-existence always seems also to bring with it a kind of potency, a kind of extratextual existence outside of the control of narrator, author, reader.

The ethics of authorial authority in the post-war British novel

Each of the six novelists considered in this thesis was preoccupied by the same set of existential questions: What is the author without her authority? What is the character apart from the text? And how might a novel do ethical work if its perspectives are manifold and diffuse, and its epistemological foundation is precisely a kind of *not* knowing? Brooke-Rose's *Textermination* takes the tendency legible in novels by Spark, Murdoch Brophy, Selvon, and Lessing to its logical conclusion, in its striking literalisation of the very epistemological, ontological and ethical problems they probed; Brooke-Rose's novel articulates the existential anxieties of the other five authors' novels and characters with a particular explicitness, making these its theme, and with an attentiveness to the ethical questions of authorial authority and character autonomy that would not have been possible without the developments in the novel seen in the work of

these British writers of the 1960s.

The preceding chapters explored the ethical implications of the narrative strategies undertaken by a number of these authors. Muriel Spark's representation of Jean Brodie's tyrannical usurpation of the narrative voice of the novel that contains her serves as an oblique means of insisting on the ethical importance of respecting the privacy of the mind, including fictional ones. For Iris Murdoch, Bradley Pearson's attempted monologic flattening of all other textual presences illustrates the violent possibilities of singular authorial control. In the novels of both Spark and Murdoch, the refusal or failure to deploy free indirect style serves to disrupt understandings of conventional subject positions, since it both decentres the authorial voice and at the same time indexes something like the privacy or autonomy of the character. In Brigid Brophy's *In Transit,* Pat O'Rooley's oscillatory shifting between narrative perspectives, literary genres, and even anatomical forms are modes of resistance to singular points of vantage or accounts of experience. In this case, too, then, no conventional subject position is occupiable for long, as the pronouns the narrator uses to refer to the self and to other textual positions are in constant flux. In Sam Selvon's work, Moses Aloetta's autobiographical self-fashioning actively works against those discourses that would flatten the character into a representative 'type' rather than autonomous individual. Selvon's strategy becomes conspicuous as one of non-representation, wherein the author refuses to speak on behalf of anyone else, collective or individual. Finally, in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook,* Lessing's multiplication of narrative modes, grammatical tenses and discourses, and her protagonist Anna's turns as omniscient narrator, first-person confessor, and cultural historian all work to refuse a singular, authoritative account of events.

Textermination permits us a lens to look at the British novel of the 1960s retrospectively

with a difference. In the early 1990s, Brooke-Rose produced a novel that made character

autonomy and the question of authorial authority its very explicit theme, and *Textermination* is

evidence of the stakes of the innovations in form and the interrogations of authorial ethics that

began with the British novel in the 1960s. Any consideration of these British novels of the 1960s

now—in a cultural moment in which the enduring implications of Britain's colonialist histories

are continually surfacing, and continually met with denial—is necessarily inflected by the

complex relationships of their authors to empire and to dislocation, which shaped their

ambivalent intimacies with the characters, voices and perspectives in the novels they wrote.

Authors of the 1960s in Britain sought to undermine the authority of ostensibly authoritative

discourses—literary, personal, historical and political—and radically decentre the authorial

position, marking a profound shift in the way the novel approaches its task.

Notes

1 J. M Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (Spain: Random House, 2015), 199.

2 The San Francisco Hilton hotel was the actual venue for the Modern Language Association conference in 1991.

3 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Textermination* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), 16.

4 Brooke-Rose, 148.

5 Brooke-Rose's first novel, *The Languages of Love*, was published in 1957, followed by another in 1958, five more in the 1960s, and more still in later decades.

6 Paraphrasing Nathalie Sarraute, Brooke-Rose insisted that 'the true realists are those who look so hard at a new reality they have to invent new forms to capture it.' 'Self-Confrontation and the Writer', *New Literary History* 9, no. 1 (1977): 135, https://doi.org/10.2307/468441.

7 Brooke-Rose said on the subject: 'its omission should create the impression, without a banal verbalized search for identity, that my protagonist has none, not in the sense that she is seeking one but in the sense […] that neither she nor others have one: we none of us have. Each of us is many; identity is wholly constructed and deconstructed by our world.' 'A Writer's Constraints', in *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 44.

8 According to Joseph Darlington, *Thru* was very nearly titled *Textermination. Thru* was in fact Brooke-Rose's original title for the project, but she opted for *Textermination* 'prior to even the second draft.' Darlington writes, '[s]uch is the preference for this title that the very last proofs to be edited prior to the novel's publication still read *Textermination* on the front cover.' 'The Composition of Christine Brooke-Rose's *Thru*: An Afterlife of May '68', *Journal of European Studies* 45, no. 1 (March 2015): 59, https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244114553769.

9 At the beginning of *Thru*, in the author's words, 'there is no clear narrator: at first we have an anonymous text describing facts, but later this or that bit of text turns out to have been written by this or that student in the creative writing class, with comments from the teacher.' 'Is Self-Reflexivity Mere?', in *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 64.

10 Heather Reyes, 'The British and Their 'Fixions,' The French and Their Factions', in *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose*, ed. Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995), 58. Brooke-Rose addressed her own displacement in an essay titled 'A Womb of One's Own,' in which she described herself as having 'always been deeply suspicious of all movements and labels which create blind obsessions.' *Stories, Theories, and Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 225–26.

11 In *Invisible Author,* Brooke-Rose refers to Spark as her 'very old friend.' 'A Writer's Constraints', 42.

12 In the 1980s, Brooke-Rose went to stay with Spark, and wrote most of the first draft of her novel *Xorandor* during her visit. In a letter dated 1986, Brooke-Rose recalls their 'strange week together, locked away from the heat, writing under fans at different ends of the house.' Christine Brooke-Rose to Muriel Spark, 15 June 1986, from the Muriel Spark Archive in the National Library of Scotland, 10607/85/19.

13 Brooke-Rose called *The Driver's Seat* a 'minute-by-minute psychological thriller […] broken into as it is with omniscient prolepses in the future tense.' 'A Writer's Constraints', 40.

14 Brooke-Rose, *Stories, Theories, and Things*, 6. In her introduction to *In Transit,* Brooke-Rose describes how 1950s authors such as Robbe-Grillet 'explored the present tense, quite paradoxically […] *as* a Narrative Sentence (in which no-one speaks, events narrate themselves'),

a sort of 'scientific' present tense, thus restoring, contradictorily and only apparently, its authority.' Christine Brooke-Rose and Brigid Brophy, 'Introduction', in *In Transit: An Heroi-Cyclic Novel* (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2002), v. The 'chief difference between the central consciousness of *Between* and that of *In Transit*,' Brooke-Rose writes, is that while Brooke-Rose herself 'chose the paradox of these present tense NS, pronounless moreover,' Brophy instead 'chose the paradox of keeping the past NS but demolishing it in advance.'

[15] Brooke-Rose, *Stories, Theories, and Things*, 6.

[16] Brooke-Rose, 'Is Self-Reflexivity Mere?', 106.

[17] Brooke-Rose, 106.

[18] Brooke-Rose, 106.

[19] Brooke-Rose, *Textermination*, 25.

[20] Brooke-Rose, 15.

[21] Brooke-Rose, 9.

[22] Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 95.

[23] Brooke-Rose, 95.

[24] Brooke-Rose, *Textermination*, 56. Brooke-Rose described *Textermination* as a 'metafictional parody.' 'Interview by Lorna Sage: Subscript', in *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 177.

[25] Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Remaking', in *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 53.

[26] Brooke-Rose, *Textermination*, 8.

[27] Brooke-Rose, 2, 19, 148.

[28] Brooke-Rose, 162–63.

[29] Brooke-Rose, 14.

[30] Brooke-Rose, *Stories, Theories, and Things*, 15.

[31] Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Invisible Author', in *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 17. Her self-commentaries, guided by her training in narratology, allow her readers an interpretive freedom but one that is nevertheless subject to the author's approval, and to some extent, her control.

[32] Brooke-Rose, 'A Writer's Constraints', 49. *Invisible Author* includes a forty-five-page close reading and exegesis of *Thru*'s first twenty pages, seemingly as an effort to rectify what she understood to be critical misinterpretations. See Brooke-Rose, 'Is Self-Reflexivity Mere?'

[33] Christine Brooke-Rose, 'SplitLitCrit', in *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 29.

[34] Christine Brooke-Rose, 'The Author Is Dead, Long Live the Author', in *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 130.Brooke-Rose, 'Invisible Author', 135.

[35] Brooke-Rose, 'The Author Is Dead, Long Live the Author', 131. Of the latter mode, Brooke-Rose writes in another essay that 'With the author eclipse called for at the turn of the last century, writers began to use f.i.d. to filter complicated narrative information though the character's mind.' 'SplitLitCrit', 39. In *Textermination,* Jack describes the technique as one so 'ill-applied' in 'so many modern neorealist novels' that it is 'dead now, chiefly because modern writers have turned much more to direct discourse, but also because neorealists have gone on using it, or rather misusing it, as if its sentences were narrative sentences, to pass narrative

information to the reader, which can't always be convincingly filtered through a character's consciousness.' *Textermination*, 144.

[36] For Brooke-Rose, authorial intrusion saturates the past tense, and so necessarily this determinative authority is disrupted if narration shifts to the present.

[37] Brooke-Rose, 'Interview by Lorna Sage: Subscript', 175.

[38] Brooke-Rose, 175.

[39] Brooke-Rose, 'The Author Is Dead, Long Live the Author', 153.

[40] Brooke-Rose, 153.

[41] Brooke-Rose, 'Invisible Author', 19.

[42] Heather Reyes, 'A Conversation with Christine Brooke-Rose', in *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose*, ed. Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995), 35.

[43] Brooke-Rose, *Textermination*, 147.

[44] Christine Brooke-Rose, *Life, End Of* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006), 67–69.

[45] Brooke-Rose, 'Remaking', 53. Brooke-Rose described the 'sought-for impossibility of recognizing all the fictional characters' in *Textermination* as a 'constraint.' 'A Writer's Constraints', 43. In the novel, Kelly's bewilderment anticipates the reactions of Brooke-Rose's readers: 'She feels ashamed and rattled. Gaps, so many gaps in her reading, she'll never catch up.' *Textermination*, 22.

[46] Brooke-Rose, 'Invisible Author', 18.

[47] Brooke-Rose, 18.

[48] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 97.

[49] We might understand *Textermination* as a development of the ethical aesthetic practice that Julia Jordan identifies in Brooke-Rose's earlier novel *Such,* which she describes as a novel 'in which determining knowledge is explicitly shown to be problematic, and inherently metaphorically violent. The desire to know and to understand the world here articulates itself as dangerous to meaning itself, which survives best as undifferentiated potential. Observation and interpretation act as deadening static takes on the flux that is reality, and the novel articulates the possibility of and the desire for more mobile and tolerant modes of perception.' Julia Jordan, *Late Modernism and the Avant-Garde British Novel: Oblique Strategies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 173. As Jordan observes, Brooke-Rose is a writer 'interested in the potential value afforded to withdrawal, to ruling oneself out, to being elusive and fugitive to others' hermeneutic curiosity or suspicion.' Jordan, 163.

[50] As Julia Jordan remarks, for Brooke-Rose, 'letting possibility remain fuzzily indistinct is an aesthetic and an ethical good.' Jordan, 30.

[51] Brooke-Rose, *The Christine Brooke-Rose Omnibus*, 579.

[52] Damian Grant, 'The Emperor's New Clothes: Narrative Anxiety in *Thru*', in *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose*, ed. Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995), 122.

[53] Brooke-Rose writes: 'Because of the unfamiliarly of many of these characters, I made a few explanatory concessions in my (nevertheless still lipogramatic) narrative method.' 'Invisible Author', 18.

[54] Brooke-Rose, *Textermination*, 1.

[55] Brooke-Rose, 79.

[56] Brooke-Rose, 2.

[57] Brooke-Rose, 32.

[58] Brooke-Rose, 42.

[59] Brooke-Rose, 69.

[60] Brooke-Rose, 44.

[61] Brooke-Rose, 145.

[62] 'What the Reader constructs is the Other, and the Other is contained in his flight, the definition of the Other is flight,' Jack recognises in a moment of clarity. 'To fix the Other is to lose him, to let him flee and grow is to keep him.' Brooke-Rose, 140.

[63] Brooke-Rose, 69.

[64] Brooke-Rose, 36. '"I exist" shouldn't mean "I'm seeking an identity," or "an ego massage," but "I am content to be,"' Brooke-Rose told Lorna Sage: 'It's the individual being we must respect, life, all that someone is, not necessarily the identity construct.' 'Interview by Lorna Sage: Subscript', 176.

[65] Brooke-Rose, *Textermination*, 92.

[66] Brooke-Rose, 63.

[67] Brooke-Rose, 64.

[68] Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Interlude: Exsul', in *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 110.

[69] Brooke-Rose, *Textermination*, 104–5.

[70] Brooke-Rose, 106–8.

[71] Abraham, *Plagiarizing the Victorian Novel*, 97.

[72] Brooke-Rose, 'A Writer's Constraints', 50.

[73] In *Stories, Theories, Things,* Brooke-Rose probed the ontological and epistemological problems of precisely such claims of 'equivalence' stated unassumingly via a copula; 'Perhaps, after all, as poets have always "known,"' she writes, 'the formula of the identity principle A is A is just as fictitious as the tropic formula A is Z.' *Stories, Theories, and Things*, 33.

[74] Richard Martin, '"Stepping-Stones Into the Dark": Redundancy and Generation in Christine Brooke-Rose's Amalgamemnon', in *Breaking the Sequence*, ed. Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs (Princeton University Press, 1992), 180, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400859948.177.

[75] Martin, 180.

[76] Martin, 182, 180.

[77] Julia Jordan, 'Are Puns Mere? Christine Brooke-Rose's *Amalgamemnon.*' *Modernist Cultures* 16, no. 4 (2021): 529–545, https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2021.0351.

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