

**HENRY GREEN: AN OBLIQUE APPROACH
TO THE EVERYDAY**

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following short titles and the relevant editions used for Green's novels in this thesis are:

<i>Bl</i>	<i>Blindness</i> (London: Dent, 1926)
<i>Li</i>	<i>Living</i> (1929) in <i>Loving, Living, Party Going</i> (London: Vintage, 2000)
<i>PG</i>	<i>Party Going</i> (London: The Hogarth Press, 1939)
<i>PMB</i>	<i>Pack my Bag: A Self-Portrait</i> (London: The Hogarth Press, 1940)
<i>C</i>	<i>Caught</i> (London: The Hogarth Press, 1943)
<i>Lo</i>	<i>Loving</i> (London: The Hogarth Press, 1945)
<i>Ba</i>	<i>Back</i> (London: The Hogarth Press, 1946)
<i>Co</i>	<i>Concluding</i> (1948; London: Penguin, 1978)
<i>N</i>	<i>Nothing</i> (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950)
<i>D</i>	<i>Doting</i> (London: The Hogarth Press, 1952)

I, Nicholas Stephen Shepley, 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.

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Introduction

The Paradox in Green: The Oblique Approach

Irrelevancy means so much, it shows you what a person is & how he thinks, & conveys atmosphere in a way that is unconceivable if you have not seen Tchekov's Cherry Orchard. You did, didn't you? An amazingly beautiful affair.

Henry Yorke to Nevill Coghill, 1925¹

Henry Yorke's comment about Chekhovian irrelevance is an early pointer to "the oblique approach" which this thesis argues is at the core of all Henry Green's fiction. These private letters to the medievalist Nevill Coghill, then a young don who was a friend and mentor to Henry at Oxford, are a rare insight into the mindset of this enigmatic author. The emotional honesty and self-questioning nature of the letters offer a rare and valuable angle in on Green, yet until now the only critic to draw upon them has been Jeremy Treglown. What emerges from these letters is the aspiring author's distrust of his own romantic inclinations and his fear of "sickly sentimentality".² Take his refusal to describe Chartres Cathedral:

I went to Chartres, have only just got back. It is the most beautiful of all churches, so why describe it? ... Why is it that coloured glass produces the purest and most spiritual colours when it is old? I bathed in that blue all the afternoon. It was most romantic.

You see how afraid I am of romance. It appears to me as a weakness, too physical to be trusted.³

Or when he suggests sending his love with spit so as not to be deemed sentimental:

Trains to Oxford and London go through the garden of this house. If I spit on one it will be better than blowing kisses, more in keeping with Birmingham, safer from any suspicion of sentiment, but it'll be for you and Elspeth all the same. Henry⁴

These letters reveal, prior even to the publication of his first novel, *Blindness*, in 1926, Henry Yorke's strong antipathy for displaying emotional intensity head-on; such a

¹ Henry Yorke to Nevill Coghill, 8 April 1925, No. 19, Eton College Archives.

² Yorke to Coghill, 8 August 1925, No. 28, Eton College Archives.

³ Yorke to Coghill, 8 April 1925, No. 21, Eton College Archives.

⁴ Yorke to Coghill, 15 February 1927, No. 62, Eton College Archives.

direct approach would be mawkish. What is preferable to the nineteen-year-old is the indirect, crabwise approach – “all send their best wishes and congratulations and mine are all over this letter, between the lines somewhere!”; “you know me sufficiently by now to know how incapable I am to express anything directly”⁵ – which Henry Green would describe over thirty years later in his oft-quoted 1958 *Paris Review* interview, “The Art of Fiction”, with Terry Southern:

INTERVIEWER

I’ve heard it remarked that your work is “too sophisticated” for American readers... and “too subtle”, in that its message is somewhat veiled. What do you say?

MR GREEN

... Most of us walk crabwise to meals and everything else. The oblique approach in middle age is the safest thing.⁶

Green suggests here that the sideways approach is necessary only in middle age; however, this thesis looks at how all of Green’s fiction variously explores the literary potential of indirectness and indeterminacy, starting as early as the short stories published in the Eton ephemeral, *College Days*, and his first novel.

Chapter 1 unpicks the contradictory implications of such indirection as it is exemplified by Henry Yorke’s choice of a pseudonym, Henry Green. The selection of a pseudonym, particularly one as common as Green – “there are Greens of so many shades writing novels that one wishes he had selected another colour”⁷ – suggests a certain desire for anonymity, where the biographical and the literary personae are clearly demarcated. But Henry Green, as a nominal half of Henry Yorke, provides neither total anonymity, nor his real self; rather, it leads to a blurred bifurcation of self, where two separate yet inseparable selves are created. This incomplete split, as

⁵ Yorke to Coghill, 27 December 1925, No. 38, and an undated letter, No. 41, Eton College Archives.

⁶ Henry Green, “The Art of Fiction” in *Surviving: The Uncollected Writings of Henry Green*, ed. Matthew Yorke (New York: Viking, 1993), 237. The interview with Terry Southern was originally published in *The Paris Review* in 1958.

⁷ Harold Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete* (London: Methuen, 1948), 93.

chapter 2 uncovers, is multiplied further by the subsequent reintroduction of various Greens, Greenes and greens into the fiction, particularly *Blindness*. The focus on names and their “multiplicitous potentiality” in chapter 2, where a name can be general as well as particular, explores how Henry Yorke does not achieve anonymity with his pseudonym, but multiplicity; the potential to be more than one rather than no-one. This gradual fragmentation of one self, Henry Yorke, into multiple, fictional shades of Green, however, must result in the loss of any singular, direct focus of attention. Jeremy Treglown alludes to this necessary link between the oblique and the multiple with his own anecdotal aside:

Green lived as he thought – obliquely, through intuition and indirection. At a flamenco dance in Spain, he told Carol Southern, “Don’t watch the main event, watch the people.”⁸

With this comment, Green urges Carol Southern to distribute her focus multiply on the people watching the main event, even though this broader perspective must result in her missing most of the dance itself.

This oblique approach in Green’s non-literary life can be witnessed in his attitude towards publicity and, in particular, in his paradoxical stance towards being photographed: most of the time Green would simply refuse to be photographed or to provide photographs for publicity.⁹ At other times, though, he would make partial, carefully-staged concessions: the Cecil Beaton photographs, for example, where his back is turned to the camera; or the 1949 *Time* magazine article, which recalls

⁸ Jeremy Treglown, “The Secret Worlds of Henry Green”, *The New Yorker*, 15 February 1993: 73. See also Green, “A Novelist to his Readers: I” in *Surviving*, 140, where Green states: “life is oblique in its impact on people.”

⁹ See Jeremy Treglown, *Romancing: The Life and Work of Henry Green* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), 182, 224 for examples of this refusal to be photographed: “[he] continued to resist all forms of publicity. ‘I have no photographs and won’t have one done,’ he reiterated to Hogarth in 1946, when *Back* was about to appear” and “When the Norwegian house Gyldendal, which brought out *Loving* and *Nothing* in 1951, asked for biographical information, its staff were told firmly that ‘Mr Green does not care for personal publicity, and we have neither biographical notes nor photographs of him.’”

parenthetically how, “as a special concession, last month he allowed himself to be photographed for *Time*, but only in hands-to-face masquerade”,¹⁰ or the variety of photographs provided for and taken specifically for a 1952 interview with Nigel Dennis in *Life* magazine.¹¹ On these rare occasions when Green allows himself to be photographed, there is a simultaneous, self-conscious attempt to undercut or create doubt in that very moment. This series of photographs “pantomiming self-concealment” is both humorous and frustrating: the reader is offered a rare view of the author, but the view is obfuscated, the angle offered partial and insufficient; the photographs show Green but refuse to show Green, in the same way that Henry Yorke is and is not Henry Green.

The paradox of this partial or fragmented presence creates an uncertainty which lies at the heart of all Green’s work; an uncertainty which Green himself, as an individual and as an author, fosters and manipulates. This witty deviousness can be seen working on numerous levels in the *Paris Review* interview. Immediately after Green’s comments about “the oblique approach”, Southern tries to pin Green down to answer the second part of his earlier question:

INTERVIEWER

And how about “subtle”?

MR GREEN

I don’t follow, Suttee, as I understand it, is the suicide – now forbidden – of a Hindu wife on her husband’s flaming bier. I don’t want my wife to do that when my time comes – and with great respect, as I know her, she won’t...

INTERVIEWER

I’m sorry, you misheard me; I said “subtle” – that the message was too subtle.

¹⁰ Anon., “Molten Treasure”, *Time*, 10 October 1949: 104.

¹¹ See Treglown, *Romancing*, 224: “Some of the pictures were specially taken for the article: a moody, sidelong shot of him sitting at a bar in an overcoat, cigarette in hand, hiding his face, as well as a series pantomiming self-concealment: Henry with his long hands covering his eyes, or from behind as he scratches his head, stretches his back, and fools around with his hat. But the feature also included photographs of his wedding and of the Birmingham factory, which must have been provided by himself or by Dig”.

MR GREEN
Oh, subtle. How dull!

INTERVIEWER
... yes, well now...¹²

The mishearing deflects the direction of the interview away from Green's work and enters into a very funny and tantalisingly rare personal aside about Dig, Henry's wife, and Hindu tradition. A mishearing, according to Freud's argument in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, can be revelatory; it can reveal the otherwise barely perceptible presence of the unconscious in the everyday. But within the art of Green's fiction, and mishearing is used to great comedic effect throughout his writing career,¹³ there is less a sense of underlying revelation in these mishearings than there is a sense of a carefully contrived uncertainty.

This is also true of the *Paris Review* interview. In its original publication, Southern states that: "The following conversation was recorded there [Green's house in Knightsbridge], one winter night, in the author's fire-lit study."¹⁴ However, Matthew Yorke, the editor of *Surviving: The Uncollected Writings of Henry Green* and Green's grandson, justifies the inclusion of this "conversation" in his "uncollected writings" by pointing out a rather different gestation:

This interview may have been conducted in "the author's fire-lit study", but it was a written collaboration, the script passing back and forth between Green and Southern.¹⁵

¹² Green, "The Art of Fiction", 237-8.

¹³ See John Russell, "There It Is", *Kenyon Review* 26: 3 (Summer 1964): 449: "his finest fictional character, old Mr Rock of *Concluding*, has a remarkable facility for mishearing most things told him, and out of this malady Green has fashioned some of his best small Roman spectacles of people ramming head-on at cross-purposes" and also Lois Bragg, "The Hard of Hearing and the Hardly Heard in Henry Green's Novels of the 1940s", *Journal of Modern Literature* 26: 2 (Winter 2003): 100-12.

¹⁴ Green, "The Art of Fiction", 235.

¹⁵ Green, "The Art of Fiction", 234.

The interview, Matthew Yorke claims, is actually a carefully scripted piece of writing. It is, in and of itself, an example of the art of fiction. On delving deeper, it turns out that the initial interview didn't even take place in London in the winter, it did, in fact, take place in sunny Spain.¹⁶ The oblique deviation away from the question, caused by the mishearing of "subtle" as "suttee", is an exquisitely contrived ruse; one that is too unspoken for the majority of readers to pick up on. Not only does Southern repeat the term "subtle" twice, which make the chances of Green's mishearing less than likely, but the interview is scripted rather than spoken, so mishearing is impossible. The subtleties buried within this exchange, once unearthed, epitomise how this disingenuous approach can be "too subtle" for readers. But, if the complexities can be more fully realised by readers, such a response is more complete than any direct answer could hope to be. The collaboration between Green and his friend, Terry Southern, repeatedly alludes to this potential which lies within uncertainty and misdirection, as attested to by the way the interview ends elliptically:

INTERVIEWER

London and Fire, 1940 – a commissioned historical work. Well, well; I dare say you'll have to give up the crabwise approach for this one. What's the first sentence?

MR GREEN

'My "London of 1940"... opens in Cork, 1938.

INTERVIEWER

... I see.¹⁷

It is difficult to find a suitably neutral critical style to write about an author so preoccupied with the stylistic presentation of irrelevance and indirection. How does one register the humour, the obliqueness, the multiplicity and the indeterminacy of his

¹⁶ Lee Hill, *A Grand Guy: The Art and Life of Terry Southern* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 78-9.

¹⁷ Green, "The Art of Fiction", 250.

writing without reducing it or seeking to “explain” it, in the same way that a joke risks being stripped of its essence if it is explained? “Explanation”, for Green, “kills life.”¹⁸

The most recent critical collections containing essays on Green’s novels have often sought to place his writing firmly within its historical context;¹⁹ my thesis sidesteps, on the whole, this impulse to categorise. At the same time, though, it does aim to offer a more direct way into Green’s prose, perhaps more earnest and less devious than he himself was willing to give. With this in mind, it often favours a close analysis of the texts, through which it seeks to open up, rather than delimit, some of the many hermeneutic possibilities at work within Green’s unique and intricately crafted prose. Such close analysis is a joy for the critic. As John Updike explains:

At its highest pitch Green’s writing brings the rectangle of the printed page alive like little else in English fiction of this century – a superbly rendered surface above a trembling depth, alive not only with the reflections of reality but with the consolations of art.²⁰

There is a risk, though, in picking out certain texts from Green’s oeuvre for specific analysis: an emphasis on one text or passage might appear to raise its significance above another. My aim, within the confines of this thesis, has been to redress the critical balance somewhat, so that the potential for significance is brought to light on some of the less well-appreciated writing of Green.

The early fiction of Henry Green, *Blindness* and the short stories published in *College Days*, and his last two novels, *Nothing* (1950) and *Doting* (1952), have

¹⁸ Green, Quoted in Alan Ross, “Green, With Envy: Critical Reflections and an Interview”, *London Magazine* 6: 4 (January-June 1959): 23.

¹⁹ For the most recent, see Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge, eds., *British Fiction After Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Rod Mengham and N. H. Reeve, eds., *The Fiction of the 1940s: Stories of Survival* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) and Lynne Hapgood and Nancy L. Paxton, eds., *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel, 1900-30* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

²⁰ “Introduction” in *Surviving*, xvii.

generally received less and specifically less positive critical attention than that of his 1940s fiction. In a small-scale bid to redress this critical imbalance, this thesis dedicates six of its seven chapters to discussions of Green's writing before or after the 1940s. This despite, and in light of, the fact that the 1940s was his most productive decade, with the publication of four novels and an autobiography: *Caught* (1943), *Loving* (1945), *Back* (1946), *Concluding* (1948) and *Pack my Bag: A Self-Portrait* (1940). The two novels which are not given their own chapter in this thesis, *Loving* (1945) and *Concluding* (1948), have already received a great deal of praise and critical attention. Recently, *Time* magazine included *Loving* in their 2005 "All Time 100 Novels" and, over fifty years earlier, both Rosamond Lehmann, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and V. S. Pritchett, in the *New York Times Book Review*, picked *Loving* as the pinnacle of Green's writing.²¹ John Lehmann, in a 1961 article about the post-war state of English Letters, describes *Loving* and *Concluding* as his "two favourites among his [Green's] novels for their technical brilliance, wit, and poetic ambiance",²² while Jean Howard described *Concluding* as "Mr Green's tour-de-force" in a 1948 review.²³ This praise and attention is well-deserved and *Loving* and *Concluding* are both significant and relevant to this thesis. That one of the earliest published articles on Green focuses on paradox, specifically as it appears in *Loving* and *Concluding*, attests, in fact, to the particular significance of these two novels

²¹ See Rosamond Lehmann, "An Absolute Gift", *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 August 1954: xli: "It [*Loving*] stands... as the masterpiece of this disciplined, poetic and grimly realistic, witty and melancholy, amorous and austere voluptuary" and V. S. Pritchett, "Back From the War", *New York Times Book Review*, 1 October 1950: 4: "*Loving* – to my mind his high water mark. After an interlude of addiction to Kafka and Virginia Woolf, Mr Green returned to the earlier vernacular manner of his precocious beginning and *Loving* was the flower."

²² John Lehmann, "English Letters in the Doldrums? An Editor's View", *Texas Quarterly* 4: 3 (Autumn 1961): 57. See also Eudora Welty, "Henry Green: A Novelist of the Imagination" in the same special issue of *Texas Quarterly*, "Image of Britain": 253: "In *Loving*, the landscape pulses with a fairytale glow and the characters, themselves aglow, rarely even see it. The sinister world of *Concluding* is, if possible, still more beautiful".

²³ Jean Howard, Review of *Concluding*, *Horizon* 18 (November 1948): 368. See also Treglown, *Romancing*: "*Concluding* had been picked by *Time* as one of the three recent novels 'that would be standouts any year'" (219).

when exploring Green's oblique approach.²⁴ As such, these texts are not excluded from the thesis altogether; instead their indirect presence is felt in the margins of many chapters. There is an inevitable risk in placing much that is significant in the margins in order to create critical space for other areas of Green's work which might, up until now, have been deemed less significant or less relevant. But it is an appropriate risk for a discussion of Green's novels, where, for Martin Greenberg, "literature, expelled by the front door, comes in the back".²⁵

Insignificant Irrelevancy: The Oblique Approach and the Everyday

"I consider that the novel should be concerned with the everyday mishaps of ordinary life."

Henry Green²⁶

As notoriously difficult as it was to pin down Henry Green in his life – Terry Southern describes "attempting to delve past his steely reticence"²⁷ – it is even more precarious trying to capture the art of his fiction.²⁸ One facet of this challenge is the

²⁴ James Hall, "The Fiction of Henry Green: Paradoxes of Pleasure-and-Pain", *Kenyon Review* 19:2 (Spring 1957): 76-88. See also, Anthony Quinton, "A French View of *Loving*", *London Magazine* 6: 4 (January-June 1959): 26, 30, where Quinton discusses "the first really thorough and full-scale treatment of a novel [*Loving*] by Henry Green". In this treatment, "M. Vinaver turns to the sequence of events in the novel. These events seem at first to be fortuitous and inconsequent and to be designed only to show the insignificance of everyday life."

²⁵ Martin Greenberg, "Two Novels by Henry Green", *The New Leader*, 14 May 1951: 25. See also Welty, "Henry Green", *Texas Quarterly*: 252: "novels that have been this risky to write seem in an odd way so reliable for the reader to read, ... and I find in the paradox something characteristic of Henry Green. Certainly he risks more than we readers can know."

²⁶ Harvey Breit, "Talk With Henry Green - - and a P. S.", *New York Times Book Review*, 19 February 1950: 29.

²⁷ Green, "The Art of Fiction", 235.

²⁸ The most recently published study on Green reveals this difficulty. See Patrick MacDermott, *A Convergence of the Creative and the Critical: A Reading of the Novels of Henry Green through the Literary Criticism of T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2009), 264. MacDermott's study seeks to reveal the multi-dimensional nature of Green's fiction by looking at it through the contrasting critical ideologies of T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis: "The use of Eliot's and Leavis' criticism as a paradigm through which to view Green's novels facilitates an understanding of the synthesis that Green achieves between formal experimentation and social engagement in his work." The danger of this "reading of the novels of Henry Green" is that it becomes structured by the work of Eliot and Leavis rather than Green's own writing. For me, the comprehensive and indeterminate nature of the "everyday", and Henry Green's approach to it, provides a more suitably flexible and open-ended set of angles into his writing.

impersonality of his approach. The author is seen to be totally detached from his prose: “an ‘invisible artist’”, “aloof from his material”, “he permits his characters complete autonomy”; “Mr Green yields so completely to his theme that he is left with no opportunity to think about it.”²⁹ “Mr Green does not tell you what his characters think nor assume their points of view; he sees through no single mind.”³⁰ And yet, the same critics aver, “he is there at the centre of what he writes”, constructing “the most distinctive prose in contemporary writing.”³¹ Green himself attested to this paradox in an interview: “My novels are me but I tried to make them not personal, i.e. not private. If I am writing a novel why should I personally appear?”³² But for Green, unlike T. S. Eliot, this “continual extinction of personality” includes such a total immersion in the flux and multiple processes of characters’ daily living that any “consciousness of the past” must also suffer extinction.³³ It is this fictional immersion in the shifting multiplicities of everyday living, where the participial process (*Living, Party Going, Loving, Concluding, Doting*)³⁴ constantly overwhelms any singular theme or character, which provides a resilient and flexible enough constant for this thesis on Henry Green’s fiction to root itself in. The paradox of Green is, in many ways, the paradox of the everyday.

²⁹ Clive Hart, “The Structure and Technique of *Party Going*”, *Yearbook of English Studies* 1 (1971): 185; Allen, “Henry Green”, *Penguin New Writing* (1945): 146; John Pandy Kirby, “Tradition and Experiment”, *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 26 (Winter 1950): 147; Edwin Muir, Review of *Loving, The Listener*, 5 April 1945: 386.

³⁰ Welty, “Henry Green”, *Texas Quarterly*: 253.

³¹ Welty, “Henry Green”, *Texas Quarterly*: 254 and Allen, “Henry Green”, *Penguin New Writing*: 145.

³² Ross, “Green, with Envy”, *London Magazine*: 21.

³³ T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” in *Selected Prose* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 40.

³⁴ See James Gindin, “Henry Green’s Visionary Gerunds” in *British Fiction of the 1930s* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 136: “The gerund is grammatically the on-going process, the deepening continuity of the approach, *Living, Party Going, Loving*. These situations do not conclude or resolve themselves... they continue”.

The “everyday”, and particularly late nineteenth- and twentieth-century French thought on the everyday, has received a great deal of critical attention in English over the last ten years (initially as part of the rise of cultural studies³⁵ and more recently in literary studies). This introduction is not the place to plot a potted history of “everyday” thought; instead, I want to suggest ways in which Henry Green’s fiction uses language and narrative form as an oblique way into and an exploration of the indeterminacy of the everyday. This thesis demonstrates how Green’s inventive uses of names, symbols, narrative forms, repetition and variation, cliché and dialogue act as ways of framing or shaping the always-escaping formlessness of the everyday: “the everyday is what we never see for a first time but can only see again, having always already seen it by an illusion that is constitutive of the everyday.”³⁶ The effect of this is twofold. On the one hand, the “non-representational” nature of Henry Green’s work can be approached more directly through this referencing of the everyday: it provides a clearer vantage-point from which to see into the challenges and pleasures awaiting the reader of Green’s writing. On the other hand, Green’s fiction offers the unique voice of a different literary practitioner questioning notions of the everyday, which feeds into a much farther-reaching interdisciplinary discourse.³⁷ In this way, his novels provide suggestions for

³⁵ See Laurie Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction, 1850-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 29, where, quoting Richard Johnson, “What is Cultural Studies Anyway?”, *Social Text* 16 (1986/7): 38, she says: “cultural studies began when practitioners ‘turned [their] assessments from literature to everyday life’”.

³⁶ Maurice Blanchot, “Everyday Speech” in *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 240.

³⁷ Most recent literary studies on the everyday, with the partial exception of Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life*, have been concerned with its links to modernism. See Bryony Randall, *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Declan Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Living* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009) and Michael Sayeau, “Against the Event: The Everyday and the Evolution of Modernist Narrative” (unpublished MS.). The novelists and poets covered in this recent spate of studies on the everyday are: Gustave Flaubert, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, Marcel Proust, H. D. and Wallace Stevens. For the interdisciplinary nature of the discourse see Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002), *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002)

answers to a question Georges Perec wouldn't ask until the year of Green's death,

1973:

How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?³⁸

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Green's early interest in Chekhovian irrelevancy and "his addiction to Kafka"³⁹ also surfaces in one of the most concise and lastingly relevant essays on the "everyday", Maurice Blanchot's "Everyday Speech"

(1969):

We can evoke here the poetry of Chekhov or even Kafka, and affirm the depth of the superficial, the tragedy of nullity. The two sides always meet: the everyday with its tedious, painful, and sordid side (the amorphous, the stagnant); and the inexhaustible, irrecusable, constantly unfinished everyday that always escapes forms or structures.⁴⁰

In his letter to Coghill, Green extols Chekhov's irrelevancy: it "means so much, it shows you what a person is & how he thinks". The suggestion here, as with Blanchot, is that there is a depth or a tragedy to be found in the superficial, in what might be considered irrelevant or empty. Blanchot unpicks the difficulty of such a dichotomy further, by signalling the contrasting elements of the everyday: its stagnant, tedious side and its constantly unfinished, inexhaustible formlessness. Green's attention, via Chekhov, to the irrelevant is, on one level, a natural response to his fear of romance. It redresses "the depreciation of everyday life"⁴¹ carried in Wordsworth's "spots of time" which seek, with "renovating virtue", to nourish and repair "our minds" from

and Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁸ Georges Perec, "Approaches to What?" (1973) in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, trans. John Sturrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), 206.

³⁹ Pritchett, "Back From the War", *New York Times Book Review*: 4. Pritchett's comment is perhaps exaggerated but both *Party Going* and *Back* have been considered Kafkaesque. See Edward Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), 148 and Treglown, *Romancing*, 170.

⁴⁰ Blanchot, "Everyday Speech" in *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), 239.

⁴¹ See Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, 32: "Lefebvre rightly pointed out... that the depreciation of everyday life as trivial, meaningless, and antithetical to 'la vraie vie', sprang from Romanticism".

... aught of heavier or more deadly weight
In trivial occupations and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, ...⁴²

And yet, to invest irrelevance with significance – it “means so much” – is also to retain a trace of the Romantic impulse to transcend the everyday.

In his notebook of March 1926, whilst on his own travels on the Continent, Green made a “list of ways to remember” in which he wrote: “Remembering by the significant irrelevance.”⁴³ This recollection of a fragment, where the irrelevant facet is designated a more specific significance, does not, however, necessarily result in transcendence or in the “sudden spiritual manifestation” of Stephen Hero’s later, modernist epiphany.⁴⁴ As John Russell goes on to observe:

In Chartres, for example, he [Green] recorded that the choirmaster’s nose was all that remained memorable of “the one golden mass that I have ever attended”; and he decided that this retention was the result, the symbol, of what he hated about the Church. He called it an example of “insignificant irrelevancy.”⁴⁵

It is important to note, here, not just that the choirmaster’s nose is seen as a symbol “of what he hated about the Church”, but that, as a symbol, it becomes an “insignificant irrelevancy.”

Chapter 3 of this thesis takes a detailed look at how Green manipulates the symbol of the pigeon, particularly as it takes on multitudinous and increasingly ambiguous meaning and relevancy, in *Living* and on into *Party Going*. In these two novels, the symbol comes to “mean so much”, the question of its significance rises to

⁴² William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), Book XI, ll. 256-64.

⁴³ See Russell, “There It Is”, *Kenyon Review*: 424. Russell had access to notebooks which are now, sadly, inaccessible in Sebastian Yorke’s private archive.

⁴⁴ James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. John J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon (New York: New Directions, 1963), 211.

⁴⁵ Russell, “There It Is”, *Kenyon Review*: 444-5.

such a pitch, that it fragments into “significant irrelevancy”; just like the non-specific multiplicity held within the pseudonym Green, which fragments and complicates any static notion of Henry Vincent Yorke. This significant irrelevance within Green’s “symbolism” creates a tension out of ambivalence; the narrative structures grow increasingly devious, forming potentially frustrating, but also creatively fruitful, uncertainty in the reader from their unwillingness to specify what it is that stands out as deserving of attention, what is significant and what is irrelevant: “The reader [of Green] tends to plump for one reading,” says James Wood, “while being aware that multiple readings are also possible; we sew ourselves into the text, becoming highly invested in our version of events.”⁴⁶ For a critic, though, the challenge and attraction of writing on Green is to keep these multiple readings alive. A similar predicament confronts those investigating, rather than simply living in, the everyday:

we miss out when we lavish too much attention on it [the everyday], when we invest it with superior qualities, in a redemptive vision for example, or when we see it as the context for moments of transcendent illumination.⁴⁷

As Blanchot points out, there is also a “tedious, painful and sordid side (the amorphous, the stagnant)” to everyday life, which deserves as much (but not too much) attention.

Chapter 4 looks at how *Party Going* embodies a more total novelistic, rather than purely symbolic, depiction of the backdrop of the everyday. Chapter 5 then compares *Party Going* with three other one-day novels, *Ulysses*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Between the Acts*. This comparison further complicates the critical debate over Joyce’s “epiphanies” and Woolf’s “moments of being” and in so doing highlights the innovative nature of Green’s own one-day novel, which radically undermines the

⁴⁶ James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), 163.

⁴⁷ Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, 21.

power of the event or the epiphany to break through the fabric of the everyday. *Party Going*'s devious refusal to allow anything significant to happen reflects the ambivalence of its characters, whose conversations and appearances raise more questions than they answer. In this way, *Party Going* embodies the most intransigent paradoxes and indeterminacies of the everyday.

Sheringham's *Everyday Life* delineates with impressive even-handedness how some of the most influential investigators of the everyday developed their thoughts, whether it be Georg Lukács, Martin Heidegger and Agnes Heller, the Surrealists, the Situationists, Henri Lefebvre or Michel de Certeau. What is most interesting with relation to the fiction of Green is how their approaches manage to retain many of the tensions and ambiguities of the everyday. At different stages of their development, each one of these "theorists" might be accused of seeking to transcend, to denigrate, to transform, to defamiliarise, to revolutionise or to manipulate the everyday for their own singular visions. In the same way, there are numerous examples of critics seeking to poeticise the trivial or the irrelevant as it is experienced in Green's fiction, thereby threatening to negate its essential ordinariness: "in every book there are scenes and episodes, often apparently trivial or even irrelevant, which reverberate with mysterious feeling";⁴⁸ "his books are notable, too, for the fidelity with which they render ordinary speech without caricature; indeed listening to those muddled sentences... one finds a clue to the inner life and a kind of sad lyrical poetry."⁴⁹ Then there are critics who criticise Green's "Chekhovian symbolism", which "melts into a mess of sentimentality"; or, at the other end of the spectrum, critics who point out that Green "is eager to the point of occasional dullness and even ungainliness to reveal the

⁴⁸ Edward Stokes, "Henry Green, Dispossessed Poet", *The Australian Quarterly* 28: 4 (December 1956): 89.

⁴⁹ Pritchett, "Back From the War", *New York Times Book Review*: 28.

truth.”⁵⁰ These critics, in line with James Wood’s reader, often “plump” for a particular reading of Green – as most obviously evidenced by A. Kingsley Weatherhead’s monograph, *A Reading of Henry Green* and MacDermott’s *A Reading of the Novels of Henry Green*. But what these two chapters seek to show is how resistant Green’s symbols and novels are to singularity of any kind, just as thinkers about the everyday must be resistant to systematising or delimiting the everyday.

Re-absorbing the Event within the Everyday

For the ordinary of each day is not such by contrast with some extraordinary; it is not the “null moment” that would await the “splendid moment” so that the latter would give it a meaning, do away with it, or suspend it. What is proper to the everyday is that it designates for us a region or a level of speech where the determinations true and false, like the opposition of yes and no, do not apply – the everyday being always before what affirms it and yet incessantly re-constituting itself beyond all that negates it.

Maurice Blanchot⁵¹

Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis see *Party Going* making a dramatic move away from the notion of the event as transformative. Although *Ulysses*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Between the Acts* bring epiphanies and “moments of being” under close scrutiny, Green’s one-day novel sees the event immediately swept up by the flux of everyday life. Not only does nothing happen in *Party Going*, but the fact that nothing happens is of no apparent concern, as the last line of the novel emphatically asserts: “I can go where I was going afterwards.” The *dérive* is as important as, and arguably more important than, the destination. The speaker – and it isn’t clear if it is Max or Richard – may go to that unspecified where later, but equally they may not. The last two chapters of this thesis look at how more precisely defined events are reconciled with and re-absorbed into everyday life in *Caught and Back* (chapter 6) and then in

⁵⁰ See Julian Symons, “Doubting”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 June 1978: 695, and Valentine Cunningham, “Our Daily Bread”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 February 1978: 157.

⁵¹ Blanchot, “Everyday Speech” in *The Infinite Conversation*, 241-2.

Nothing and Doting (chapter 7). Before explaining these two chapters, though, I want to touch upon how *Loving* and *Concluding* also explore this reconciliation of the event with, and re-absorption of the event within, the participial process of daily living.

The formulaic, fairy-tale opening of *Loving* is misleading, as it welcomes the reader in under the pretence of an escape from everyday reality:

Once upon a day an old butler called Eldon lay dying in his room attended by the head housemaid, Miss Agatha Burch. From time to time the other servants separately or in chorus gave expression to proper sentiments and then went on with what they had been doing. (*Lo*, 5)

The opening words are an oft-repeated clichéd structure of the fairy tale which lulls us through the barrier of the first few words of the novel. By the time the third trochee is struck, however, our comfortable familiarity has been defiantly tweaked. The smallest of alterations from “Once upon a time” to “Once upon a day” pulls us from the generally unreal world of the fairy tale into a specific day within a country house, where an old butler lies dying. What is unique here, particularly in relation to most other modernist novelists, is Green’s interest in the routines of work: the dailiness and repetitiveness of domestic labour. In contrast to Max (or Richard), who can go where they were going afterwards, the servants are bound into their work routines. The treatment of these routines as narratable events is particularly unusual. Dying is conventionally and pre-eminently a narratable event, but here it is depicted as at odds with the life and work of the house, what must nonetheless go on. In this way, Green muddles the divide between what is and what is not narratable by making a death seem more to do with the process of normal living. Although the “proper sentiments” are expressed, there is no place for individual or unique expressions of sentiment. These are ritualised platitudes, phatic litanies distinctive in their repeatability and

thoughtless reproducibility, which can be recited “separately or in chorus”. They are the conversational equivalent of the fairy-tale opening, the comforting mantras of grief responses. As such, the empty words fill the discomfiting silence, until, with nothing resolved, everyone “went on with that they had been doing.”

This re-absorption of the event into the flux of everyday life without any sense of resolution is comic and tragic. Mr Eldon has “held on” as long as he can and, once he does pass away, Mrs Tennant will quickly replace him with another butler, who she will continue to call Arthur: Mr Eldon, as head butler, is both replaceable and repeatable. A similar, but more disquieting effect is created by the disappearance of two girls, Mary and Merode, in *Concluding*.⁵² The main event of the single day recounted in *Concluding* should be the sudden disappearance of Mary and Merode from their dormitories during the night, but this out-of-the-ordinary event is sidelined by preparations for the annual summer dance, which is scheduled to take place that night. Although one of the girls, Merode, is found by chance in a rather compromising situation, Mary never appears; and yet the dance goes on without remorse: “The Dance must go on of course” (*Co*, 19). The disappearance of Mary, one of the most popular girls in the school, is quickly forgotten by the staff; she is rather too easily replaced by a multitude of other girls with names beginning with *M*.⁵³ The trauma of Mary’s unresolved disappearance is replaced by a collective forgetfulness, where

⁵² See Hall, “The Fiction of Henry Green”, *Kenyon Review*: 86, where Hall points out this dread: “*Concluding* pegs the equilibrium so far on the side of dread that there is a question whether it is comic at all.”

⁵³ In the opening pages of *Concluding*, before her disappearance is known, Mary “was readily missed” by Miss Edge and Miss Baker (*Co*, 14) but only moments after the revelation Edge “did not think to ask after Mary a second time” (*Co*, 16).

fears of her abduction appear indirectly through the inappropriateness of the other girls' secret games. In *Concluding* "nothing is settled."⁵⁴

In chapter 6 I look in much more detail at how *Caught* and then *Back* present the psychological presence of past trauma within daily life. These two novels do not focus directly on the traumatic events themselves – the war, as in *Loving*, is predominantly the backdrop – instead they explore how extraordinary past experiences of child abduction, incest, death, and the physical and emotional trauma of war, may variously manifest themselves within the conscious, ordinary world. This chapter uses Freud's "Papers on Metapsychology" (1915) to examine the different ways in which the characters of Richard Roe and Albert Pye, in *Caught*, and Charley Summers, in *Back*, seek to reconcile their internalised traumatic pasts with the present. Malcolm Bowie describes the "everyday", for Freud, as "the erotic force field in which the unconscious makes itself heard";⁵⁵ these two novels provide a witty and devastating insight into the discrepancies which begin to appear when this "unconscious makes itself heard". Not only do these novels, when examined in tandem, provide a critique of Freud's multiply-layered unconscious, preconscious and conscious systems, but they also use humour, cliché, repetition and variation in ways which emphasise the power of the literary form to hold within it the complexities of such metapsychological systems, without being wholly bound by those systems. It is here that the literary, as exemplified by the oblique approach of Henry Green's novels, reveals its potential for simultaneously critiquing and representing the everyday.

⁵⁴ Philip Toynbee, "The Novels of Henry Green", *Partisan Review* 16: 5 (May 1949): 496. Toynbee goes on: "The book's title is misleading, for it is the most deliberately inconclusive novel which can ever have been written."

⁵⁵ Malcolm Bowie, *Psychoanalysis and the Future of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 21-2.

My final chapter explores how Green's last two novels, *Nothing* and *Doting*, run the risk of frustrating or boring the reader by retaining the ambivalent tension, the indeterminacy, of the everyday above all else. *Nothing*, as the title unwaveringly states, follows on from the stubbornly inconclusive *Concluding* and refuses to allow anything to happen. But where *Loving* might be considered to fall on the side of the comic and *Concluding* on the side of the tragic,⁵⁶ *Nothing* and then *Doting* are resiliently ambivalent: "Nothing happens, twice."⁵⁷ This repetition of the plots' uneventfulness is reiterated through the repeated context of the same two generations of the upper middle class and in the insistence on the same cliché-ridden dialogic framework. The majority of critics have been disappointed, if not infuriated by Green's final output. This chapter sets out to reveal some of the discrepancies, some of the spaces created by Green's repetition, and the potential which exists within these untenanted areas. It is a potential for everything from frustration and boredom to creativity and laughter; it is the potential, in many ways, of the everyday. Green himself was quite aware of the risks involved in such an all-encompassing open-endedness: "if the novel is alive of course the reader will be irritated by discrepancies – life, after all, is one discrepancy after another."⁵⁸ This chapter, and the thesis as a whole, does not simply seek to show the transformative nature of Green's fiction, where clichéd dialogues become vital and poetic, in the way that V. S. Pritchett often draws attention to – "human repetitiousness was a sort of poetry for him".⁵⁹ This

⁵⁶ See also Rod Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time: The Writings of Henry Green* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 188: "In effect, one could almost substitute for the titles [*Loving* and *Concluding*]... the terms 'Eros' and 'Thanatos', the two Greek words used by Freud and his followers in demarcating the 'life instincts' and the 'death instincts'."

⁵⁷ This now-famous phrase was originally used in a review of *Waiting for Godot*, published in *Irish Times*, 18 February 1956. See Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 74.

⁵⁸ Green, "The Art of Fiction", 244-5.

⁵⁹ Pritchett, "Henry Green: In the Echo Chamber" in *The Tale Bearers: Essays on English, American and Other Writers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), 118. See also Bruce Bain, "Henry Green: The Man and his Work", *World Review* (May 1949): 80: "He is the poetic recorder of the averageness of

chapter seeks to emphasise the huge potential that lies in wait for the reader of Green: the potential for poetry, yes, where the writing “is pure poetry, having something of the richness of a Keatsian ode”, but also for boredom – “Mr Green seems a little drunk with his own heady wine and, like any drunk man, repeats himself”.⁶⁰ The oblique, non-intrusive approach preferred by Green serves to allow the reader to forge their own more direct relationship with the prose and my ultimate aim with this thesis is to open up a number of ways in which the reader might establish such a direct relationship with writing which takes such an indirect approach.

Cliché: A Form for the Everyday

The very existence of Henry Green, as the first chapter argues, asserts the partial erasure or disappearance of Henry Vincent Yorke. This partial self-erasure continues with the growing narratorial impersonality and indirection of his novels – the multiplicity of symbolic uncertainty and the recurrent deflation of the event – until the impersonality reaches its absent apogee in the repetition of *Nothing in Doting*. The monotony of routine and thoughtless repetition suggested by the clichéd and circuitous dialogues points to “the everyday with its tedious, painful, and sordid side (the amorphous, the stagnant)”, but, as a short exploration into the cliché aims to show, it also opens itself up to “the inexhaustible, irrecusable, constantly unfinished everyday that always escapes forms or structures”.⁶¹ For the cliché, as a literary tool in the hands of Henry Green, takes on many of the characteristics of the everyday. The cliché, like the mundane, repeated aspects of the everyday, runs the risk of arousing

life, and his poetic naturalism conveys imaginative truths about people without the flat photography of documentary.”

⁶⁰ Greenberg, “Two Novels by Henry Green”, *The New Leader*: 26 and Robert Kee, Review of *Concluding*, *The Spectator*, 10 December 1948: 786. Both reviewers refer to *Concluding* with their comments.

⁶¹ Blanchot, “Everyday Speech” in *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), 239.

nothing but boredom and frustration. Take George Orwell's passionate 1945 essay, "Politics and the English Language", which rails against the worst of modern writing, with its "staleness of imagery" and its use of "dying metaphors" as "verbal false limbs":

modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else, and making the results presentable by sheer humbug.⁶²

Or, more recently, take Martin Amis's declaration that "all writing is a campaign against cliché."⁶³ However, when used as a literary device, the assumed thoughtlessness (what Eric Partridge, author of a *Dictionary of Clichés* [1940], deems "mental laziness"⁶⁴) and the casual spontaneity of the cliché have a much richer, open-ended potential; a potential which epitomises, at a word level, Henry Green's more broadly oblique approach to the everyday.

The cliché, like the everyday, is often defined by its foundation in repetition and repeatability; their existences as cliché or as everyday seem intrinsically to deny them the possibility of originality or newness. For Blanchot, "the everyday is what we never see for a first time but can only see again, having always already seen it by an illusion that is constitutive of the everyday";⁶⁵ in order to be understood by one, it must have been already voiced by many. But to see no potential for newness or mental creativity in such a construct is a reductively retrospective take on the cliché. It assumes not only that the author uses them thoughtlessly when writing, but also that the reader will pass over them passively and thoughtlessly. However, there is a history

⁶² George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language", *Orwell and Politics* (London: Penguin, 2001), 404.

⁶³ Martin Amis, *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews 1971-2000* (New York: Hyperion, 2001), xv.

⁶⁴ Eric Partridge, *Usage and Abusage*, ed. Janet Whitcut (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), 66.

⁶⁵ Blanchot, "Everyday Speech" in *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), 240.

of the cliché being used in literature with self-awareness and imagination. Take Jonathan Swift's *Polite Conversation* (1738), described by Christopher Ricks as "a tissue of eighteenth-century cliché",⁶⁶ in which Simon Wagstaff, Swift's pseudonym, attests to the pride in which he holds his "Collection of polite Discourse".⁶⁷ Wagstaff not only suggests that his readers should learn these polite conversations by rote, but he also declares that his own lines have been thoughtlessly recited: "[It] hath descended by Tradition, for at least an hundred Years, without any Change in Phraseology."⁶⁸ *Polite Conversation* calls attention to and satirically undercuts the thoughtless use of cliché by the author and the reader. The reader (urged to learn these conversational masterpieces by Wagstaff) cannot miss the biting humour directed at the futility of conversations which speak ten thousand words and communicate nothing. Swift, in characteristically satirical fashion, reveals some of the potential of the literary cliché and, more especially, the literary cliché as spoken word.

The clichés which fill the conversations of *Nothing* and *Doting* are less direct in their target. Green does not simply undercut or satirise his own or his characters' use of cliché for comedic effect, although the exchanges are themselves often extremely funny, but equally, the insistent use of cliché also refuses to transcend its inherent banality, in contrast with the way Coleridge and Wordsworth sought, with "profound thought", to transform the "forms, incidents and situations of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the

⁶⁶ Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 358. Although the term cliché did not come into existence until 1809, Wagstaff's "proverbial Maxims" are practical equivalents. See Jonathan Swift, *Swift's Polite Conversation* (London: André Deutsch Limited, 1963), 24.

⁶⁷ Swift, *Swift's Polite Conversation*, 31.

⁶⁸ Swift, *Swift's Polite Conversation*, 31.

dew-drops.”⁶⁹ Instead, when Green is at his best, “dealing with the monotonously quotidian, the feeling is aptly level and the language commensurately plain.”⁷⁰ One of the few consistent critical responses to Green’s novels has been the high praise given for his ability to record ordinary conversation:

No one but Green – except possibly Pritchett himself – has so accurate an ear for the way people talk, for the peculiar pattern or word choice of every type of person, and for the absurd or irrational that is always cropping up in their conversation.⁷¹

Such praise, though, does tend to dwindle where the conversations and clichés of *Nothing* and *Doting* are concerned: “Mr Green’s style, with all its subtlety, its sinuous flexibility, its poetry and wit, is marred by turns of phrase which have become mechanical.”⁷² Henry Green’s fiction is subtle, flexible, poetic and witty, but I will argue that attention is also due to what might be considered the more mechanical, thoughtless or uneventful aspects of his fiction. Blanchot defined the everyday as “uneventful” (*sans événement*), “insignificant” (*insignifiant*) and “overlooked” (*inaperçu*).⁷³ I consider how Green’s novels create and formulate multiple indirect ways to look at these unnoticed aspects of our day-to-day lives. Such a focus on the various shifting ways Green’s fiction goes about representing the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the everyday has been an extraordinarily rewarding and, at times, dizzying project.⁷⁴ My major hope is that this study might uncover a little more of the vast potential which lies within the unostentatious backdrop of Green’s writing. In this way, it does not seek to “explain” Green through one omniscient reading, but

⁶⁹ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), ed. George Watson (London: Dent, 1933), Vol. I, Ch. 4, 49-50. Coleridge continues: “In poems... genius produces the strongest impressions of novelty while it rescues the most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission.”

⁷⁰ Cunningham, “Our Daily Bread”, *Times Literary Supplement*: 157.

⁷¹ Jack Marlowe, “A Reader’s Notebook – V”, *Penguin New Writing* (April-June 1943): 158. See also Bain, “Henry Green”, *World Review*: 80: “His gift for dialogue is incomparable”.

⁷² J. D. Scott, Review of *Doting*, *The New Statesman*, 10 May 1952: 566.

⁷³ Blanchot, *L’Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 363, 364, 361.

⁷⁴ It has been a constant battle, whilst researching an author who is so conscious of his own stylistic register, to avoid my own critical style becoming self-consciously overwrought or parodic.

instead aims to play the role of a midwife, and gently bring out the novels of Green – with all their intrinsic potential – for a widening range of prospective audiences, from reading groups to undergraduates.

Chapter 1

“a fugue in Green”: Henry Yorke, Henry Green and the Early Fiction

The best way and that which comes nearest to my style of living, is not to mention names at all. When I think of someone I see their face or something about them, it may be their hands, and often have difficulty in putting names to faces. Names distract, nicknames are too easy and if leaving both out as it often does makes a book look blind then that to my mind is no disadvantage. (PMB, 87-8)

Henry Green's writing is predominantly inhabited by characters and situated in contexts which clearly reflect Henry Vincent Yorke, his upbringing and his social backdrop. All of his novels, except perhaps *Concluding* (1948), locate themselves in chronological order, in places or situations directly comparable to those of Henry's own life: in *Blindness* (1926) we read the diaries of an aspirant author attending Noat College, recognisable as Henry at Eton; in *Living* (1929), Dickie Dupret, the son of a Birmingham iron foundry owner, clearly draws on Henry and his own experiences learning the ropes from the floor up at his father's company, H. Pontifex & Sons, also situated in Birmingham; the affluent London youths setting off for a Mediterranean jaunt in *Party Going* (1939) more than resemble the famous “Bright Young Things” of the 1930s, who included Henry among their number; both Richard Roe, the protagonist of *Caught* (1943), and Henry were Auxiliary Fire Servicemen during the Second World War; *Loving* (1945) is set in a large country house which bears a marked resemblance to Forthampton Court, the Yorke's own estate; Charley Summers in *Back* (1946) is attempting to re-integrate into post-war Britain; whilst *Nothing* (1950) and *Doting* (1952) focus on marital and generational issues which would have been particularly pertinent to Henry, his wife, Dig, and their social class. There are clear and persuasive reasons why Henry Vincent Yorke should be considered as an essential part of Henry Green's fiction.

Despite these strong lines of biography, which are clearly traceable throughout Green's fiction, much of the criticism published on Green has deliberately avoided taking a biographical approach. It is fifty years since Edward Stokes published the first monograph on Henry Green and there have only been eight more since. The most recent of these, Jeremy Treglown's biography, *Romancing: The Life and Work of Henry Green* (2000), is the only one to pay more than cursory attention to the Yorke family and Henry's upbringing. Edward Stokes describes Green's writing as "demand(ing) close technical study" and puts together a "study of methods of presentation" focusing on six main elements: "Scene, Summary, Description, Character Exposition and Revelation, Commentary and Variation of Point of View."¹ This technical, statistical focus on Green's novels treats the prose as if it were poetry, emphasising the difficulty of the language, its symbolism and imagery:

Green connects his contemporary characters and situations with universal and timeless emotions... He does this not overtly and explicitly, but allusively and obliquely, by methods which are often thought of as belonging essentially to poetry (though they have also been used by, for example, Forster, Lawrence, Joyce and Virginia Woolf); chiefly through symbolical and mythological overtones and through the use of colour and imagery.²

This critical approach, with its origins in New Criticism,³ eschews the biographical and the contextual, preferring instead to focus on style and form as ways into "the poetic, symbolic and universal level" of the texts.⁴ Stokes's analysis had a huge impact on Green criticism over the following twenty years and has played no small part in the still uncertain position of Henry Green within the literary canon.

¹ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 69, 70.

² Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 18.

³ MacDermott, *A Convergence of the Creative and the Critical* gives a more detailed analysis of how Green's writing relates to the criticism of F. R. Leavis.

⁴ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 18.

Even those remaining monographs that approach Green's texts with a broader sense of social context, though, make very little mention of biography. Rod Mengham, in what is perhaps the most comprehensive critical study of Green so far – *The Idiom of the Time: The Writings of Henry Green* (1982) – opens with “the circumstances of Green's life only to make it perfectly clear that this study is not biographically-based”;⁵ whilst in *Henry Green and the Writing of His Generation* (1984), Michael North creates a literary biography out of Green and his contemporaries, but leaves the Yorke family out entirely.⁶ Treglown's invaluable biography, however, with its densely researched balance of biographical detail and literary criticism, clearly demonstrates the value of exploring in more detail the reasons why Henry Vincent Yorke chose to write as Henry Green.

Henry Vincent Yorke and Henry Green

This is a delicate process. There is always a risk of oversimplifying Green's fiction if we count too much upon biographical detail, constraining it within its own contextual backdrop and burying it with the roots of its originating author. Green himself warned his readers about searching for the identity of the writer – “the writer... has no business with the story he is writing”⁷ – and although Green allows, in an interview with Terry Southern, that *Blindness* and *Pack My Bag* are “mostly autobiographical”, he simultaneously draws that possibility into question:

But where they are about myself, they are not necessarily accurate as a portrait; they aren't photographs. After all, no one knows what he is like, he just tries to give some sort of picture of his time.⁸

⁵ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, vii.

⁶ Michael North, *Henry Green and the Writing of His Generation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1984).

⁷ Green, “A Novelist to his Readers: I”, 139.

⁸ Green, “The Art of Fiction”, 238.

On one level, this chapter yields to the temptation of biographical resemblances. In this way, such an approach might be seen to fly in the face of the anti-biographical stance taken by Green and much modern critical thought, from New Criticism to post-structuralism, by way of the 1967 Roland Barthes essay “The Death of the Author”. It is certainly an approach which had been neglected by Green criticism until the publication of Treglown’s biography. But this chapter is not simply seeking to make a neat link between the biography and the fiction.

Through a careful comparison of the biographical details of Henry Vincent Yorke and their relationship to the fictional representations of those details in Henry Green’s early novels and short stories, this chapter reveals the multiplicity of hermeneutic possibilities which lie within a biographical analysis. It starts with Henry Vincent Yorke’s creation of a pseudonym: Henry Green. This fictional existence creates a space between the notion of the author as wordsmith and the author as living individual. The awareness of such a space draws attention to a whole set of other strands at work and play in and around the writing of Henry Green: it allows for a “fugue in Green”. But the initial existence of such a space, the site within which such fugal uncertainties can be suggested, is created by the fixing structures of biographical identity and nomenclature held within Henry Vincent Yorke and Henry Green. It is here that this chapter begins.

Henry Green, it soon becomes clear, is adamantly plural: a composite character formed out of Henry Vincent Yorke’s desire to write fiction as another. As the author’s texts accrue, as the self and fictional self become more subtly intertwined, the notion of a single authorial identity takes on an ever-thickening layering of literary

disguises. And so the search for an identifiable or classifiable Henry Green retreats into the shadowy distance as the layers accumulate. As the reader grows more familiar with the variations at play in Green's texts, it becomes harder, and less necessary, to fix a definition on Green. "Who is Green?" "Where is Green?"⁹ In order to answer these questions we must establish a defining context:

The fascination in words is that by themselves they can mean almost anything; dictionaries get longer every day. It is the context in which they lie that alone gives them life.¹⁰

This definitive context is thwarted by Green, though. As a man, he selects an abstract pseudonym to replace his too easily classifiable identity: with the name Green, the man loses his individuality and his specificity. This lack of definitive context is further exacerbated by the early writings of the author in which he blurs his biographical context by writing and rewriting it in various forms. The name and the fiction work together then to embody the connotative potential of language and, more especially, of literature. Green is everyman and no man. Green is everywhere and nowhere.

Within this exciting and maddening breadth of possibility (and impossibility), it is important to start with a direct line in. Or, in this case, two direct lines in.¹¹ This chapter starts, specifically and purposefully, with two direct quotations from Henry Green. Each quotation, in Green's terms, offers a facet – a face or a hand – of Green.

⁹ The question "Where is Green?" is added as a nod in the direction of Derrida's "le vert est ou" – "the green is either". Derrida uses this combination of words to assert: "it is solely in a context determined by a will to know, by an epistemic intention, by a conscious relation to the object as cognitive object within a horizon of truth, solely in this oriented contextual field is 'the green is either' unacceptable. But as 'the green is either' or 'abracadabra' do not constitute their context by themselves, nothing prevents them from functioning in another context as signifying marks". See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context" (1972) in *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 12.

¹⁰ Green, "A Novelist to his Readers: I", 141.

¹¹ Although, as will become clear, Green was always reluctant to provide "anything to give any line in on what [he] was like" (*PMB*, 179).

In introducing two facets at once, I hope to draw attention to the polyphony of Green at the outset. Neither quotation comes from Green's fiction; each comes more directly from Green himself in an attempt to avoid the bias or subjectivity of a narratorial intermediary. The first curtailed quotation – “a fugue in Green”¹² – is taken from a letter written by Green to Nevill Coghill, the young don who Henry became friends with during his own curtailed time at Oxford between 1924 and 1926. There is a complication though. The letter to Coghill, dated August 8th, 1925, was written prior to the publication of Green's first novel, *Blindness*. In this respect, it was not written by Henry Green at all; for the pseudonymous Henry Green did not strictly come into existence until his first attributed piece of writing was published – the aforementioned novel, *Blindness*, first published by J. M. Dent and Sons in 1926. Our sure footing has already started to slip; our first direct line into Henry Green already swerving obliquely through the pen of a pre-existing identity, that of Henry Vincent Yorke. An identity further reinforced by the sender's address at the top of the quoted letter: Forthampton Court, the Yorke family's ancestral home.

The second quotation redirects us back to Green; it seeks the most direct line possible into Green. It comes from the memoir, *Pack My Bag: A Self-Portrait by Henry Green*. Clearly authored by Henry Green, it is a book about the author, by the author. But there is another complication. This is a pseudonymous autobiography; it is a *nom de plume* painting a portrait of that same *nom de plume*. Green was not only conscious of this complication, but he drew attention to and played with this nominal blurring. This is emphasised most clearly by one of the titles he suggested for the

¹² Henry Yorke to Nevill Coghill, 8 August 1925, No. 28, Eton College Archives.

memoir: Henry Green by Henry Green.¹³ The interchangeability of author and subject, revealed in this suggested title, playfully draws attention to the subjective and fictional nature of autobiography. But Henry Green by Henry Green goes further, giving the Green reader a valuable insight into the author's sense of writing and self. The suggestion of Henry Green by Henry Green as a title sees Green emphasise a self that is at once singular and repeatable. To have included the name Henry Vincent Yorke in the title – Henry Vincent Yorke by Henry Green, for example, or Henry Green by Henry Vincent Yorke – would be to draw attention to two separately identifiable selves: a man with a biography and an author with a bibliography. By reiterating the fact that the nom de plume is writing about the nom de plume, that the fictional character is at the same time the true author, Green's ruse cancels out the possibility of his individual presence: two Henry Greens rule out the possibility of only one Henry Green.

Green, it seems, will not allow the reader a direct, categorical line in. For each line simplifies, it is reductive. Take names: "Names distract, nicknames are too easy", he states, "and if leaving both out as it often does makes a book look blind then that to my mind is no disadvantage." Alistair Stead argues that this is an example of "typical hypallage" where Green misleadingly switches what is actually the reader's position of blindness and asserts that it is the book which appears blind. For Stead:

Taking away proper names is intended to blind the reader to irrelevant material or associations, making him concentrate on that idiosyncratic vision. The effect is unsuccessful.¹⁴

¹³ Treglown, *Romancing*, 130.

¹⁴ Alistair Stead, "The Name's Familiar: An Aspect of the Fiction of Green" in *The Uses of Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arnold Kettle*, eds. Douglas Jefferson and Graham Martin (Milton Keynes: Oxford University Press, 1982), 218.

Stead's argument is that Green wants his reader to focus on "that idiosyncratic vision", on Green's own "very personal view of things".¹⁵ But this interpretation misses the point. Or rather, it focuses too specifically on one point, on a singular authorial identity or vision, rather than branching out to see how multiplicity is intrinsic to any one aspect of Green. This is the polyvalent presence in Green's writing, as exemplified by his suggested title for the memoir: Henry Green by Henry Green. By removing the name Henry Vincent Yorke entirely from his own memoir, Green removed what was contextually, historically, nominally and biographically specific. But, perhaps more importantly, the reiterative and repetitive circularity of Henry Green by Henry Green casts off the notion of any meaningful dualism. The eventual selection of the title *Pack My Bag: A Self-Portrait by Henry Green* went on to replace the two Henrys with a triumvirate of selves: the owner of the bag, the "self" that has been drawn and Henry Green.¹⁶ But the numbers are always subject to change. There could, for example, be four selves, if we take into consideration the fact that the words "Pack My Bag" are reportedly the last words of the philosopher F. H. Bradley; or five if we count the role that John Lehmann had in suggesting these words as a title for Green's memoirs.¹⁷ The reductive duality of Henry Vincent Yorke and Henry Green, conveniently used as a frame by many critics, was purposefully demolished by the author. Henry Vincent Yorke was too specific, too traceable, and so was replaced by the abstract, non-specifiable Green. Neither, on its own, contains the whole.¹⁸

¹⁵ Stead, "The Name's Familiar" in *The Uses of Fiction*, 218.

¹⁶ Rather sadly the most recent edition of *Pack My Bag* (London: Vintage, 2000) removed the linking preposition "by" from the title. The title-pages of The Hogarth Press editions (1940, 1952, 1979, 1992) and the Oxford University Press edition (1989) of *Pack My Bag* have the first three words in large bold type with "A Self-Portrait by" on the next line in lower case and "Henry Green" in upper case on its own line below. This tying of the name, Henry Green, to the title itself further underlines my point that Green was keen to play with the blurred notion of authorship, a point lost by the latest Vintage edition.

¹⁷ Treglown, *Romancing*, 218.

¹⁸ See Treglown, "Preface and Acknowledgements" in *Romancing*, xiv, where he relates his own difficulties as biographer: "I at first wanted to use 'Green' for the writer and 'Yorke' for the industrialist and family man but this posed problems: the two are far from always distinct and in the

“A fugue in Green” represents the polyvalent abstractions and specificities of Green – as name, adjective, noun and verb; as man and novelist – within and synaesthetically bursting out of the flexible confines of its musical metaphor, full of its own polyphonic creativity. But it also provides the inspiration for this chapter, which begins its own “fugue in Green”. The initial quotation plays out the voice of a young Henry Vincent Yorke, searching for his sense of self; this is followed by the second, later quotation which introduces a more mature voice, that of Henry Green, establishing himself as author. My aim, in this section, is to explore how the voice of the early Henry Green, the author of the early short stories, *Blindness* and *Living*, was formed as a part of, from and in reaction to Henry Vincent Yorke. This exploration grows naturally out of the notion of names and naming, what it is to be named and to name. Green’s manipulation of names – his own and those of his characters – reveals a complex and rigorous examination of how one presents and re-presents identity and self through the written and spoken word.

My initial attention to the voice of Henry Vincent Yorke focuses on that which Henry Green clearly strove to move away from: Henry Green was Henry Vincent Yorke, but he was, just as vitally, not Henry Vincent Yorke. In demonstrating how these two personae are interwoven and rewritten in the early fiction, I will argue over the course of the thesis as a whole that the author we read today as Henry Green was decidedly not Henry Green, in as much as he was also not Henry Vincent Yorke. This approach aims to explore how Henry Green first set about denying, even annihilating the existence of Henry Vincent Yorke and then, as a prose stylist, set about denying

latter case there are inevitably many contexts in which several Yorkes figure. Most people who knew him well just refer to ‘Henry’, as if there could be no question whom they mean, and... I have found myself presuming to do the same.”

the presence of Henry Green, the author, in his own prose. As Nigel Dennis wrote in a 1952 review of *Doting*, a Green novel is “subtly designed in such a way that Green himself... seems to be the one personality who has had nothing to do with it.”¹⁹

The Family

Henry Vincent Yorke’s letters to Nevill Coghill in the years surrounding the publication of *Blindness* (1926) reveal an often self-conscious young man who, at times, lacked self-assurance, was uncertain about the quality of his writing and was eager to respond to the world in a weighty manner. A recurring self-doubt plays itself out in the course of the small amount of correspondence in which Henry confronts what he sees as his worrying romantic tendencies. In an undated letter, with a Magdalen College address, Henry attributes these tendencies to his youth:

It’s my 19 years that make me love the sun, so wrong aesthetically, but so nice to be unreasonably wrong. As Albert Rutherston once said to me “Everything looks nice on a gray day.” How deliciously heavy that reads.²⁰

The initial tone of carefree scorn aimed at his own lack of aesthetic conformity rather jars with his obvious enjoyment of Rutherston’s contrastingly weighty aside. The young Henry purports to enjoy his own naivety, but the flat use of “nice” and the repetition of being “so wrong aesthetically” and “unreasonably wrong” alludes to a deeper individual insecurity. It is an insecurity which he broaches more directly in a later letter:

Why is it that coloured glass produces the purest and most spiritual colours when it is old? I bathed in that blue all the afternoon. It was most romantic.
You see how afraid I am of romance. It appears to me as a weakness, too physical to be trusted.²¹

¹⁹ Nigel Dennis, Review of *Doting*, *Life*, 4 August 1952: 86.

²⁰ Yorke to Coghill, undated (c. 1923-24), No. 5, Eton College Archives.

²¹ Yorke to Coghill, 8 April 1925, No. 21, Eton College Archives.

Henry's youthful romantic instinct for a pure and spiritual enjoyment of the physical world is immediately clouded by a self-conscious sense of fear and distrust. The brightness of the sun is not to be revered, its singular simplicity and warm physicality are, instead, to be scorned and turned against:

Of all things in the world the sun is the most morbid, the most terrible, from the sickly sentimentality of it in England, to the burning nihilism of the Sun in the tropics, for the shade there must be infinity... where the sea is deep there are palaces in forests and there the old men sit, their thoughts a fugue in Green.²²

Henry's earlier, attested feelings of individual pleasure at being so "unreasonably wrong" in loving the sun have been replaced by a far wider-reaching, global denunciation of the sun: "Of all things in the world". What was once "most romantic" for Henry as a young man has become "most morbid" and "most terrible", stretching from the sibilantly "sickly sentimentality of it in England, to the burning nihilism of the Sun in the tropics". The sun is depicted as "morbid" and nihilistic rather than life-giving. Such a denunciation is unequivocal. It is in the depths and the shades, in the company of old men – away from the brightness of young things, away from the life-giving family – that "there must be infinity".

Henry Vincent Yorke, as an aspiring writer, sought to separate himself from the brightness of his family and his contemporaries. Through the selection of a pseudonym Henry Green, he sought the private shades of anonymity. In *Blindness*, the accident draws John Haye into an inner darkness, whilst retaining the familiar biographical backdrop of Henry Yorke. This creates a taut friction as it juxtaposes the family's distinctive presence with John's painful separation from that very life. The young Yorke recognised this autobiographical presence, distastefully suggesting to

²² Yorke to Coghill, 8 August 1925, No. 28, Eton College Archives. Yorke's capitalisation of what seems to be primarily the colour "Green" is an interesting prolepsis of his future adoption of it as name.

Coghill that the novel was “the latrine of too many of my youthful morbidities”.²³ In his second novel, *Living* (1929), Green left the romance of Oxford’s dreaming spires for an iron foundry in Birmingham. I hope to pick out some of the individual voices of this fugue in Green, and show how they grow more polyphonic and interwoven, by tracing the journey from the blinding influence of the Yorke family to the blindness of John Haye, to the dull anonymity of Henry Green and the “hundreds” and “thousands” of workers traipsing to the factories in *Living*. The bright singular voice of the son (and sun), with its romantic strain, is tempered by a heavier, deeper strain. The combination is darker, harder to define; but in the depths of this tonal shade one begins to see how “palaces in forests” are built; here, in the dark, we hear the unarticulated thoughts of old men shaping our own “fugue in Green”. The process is a gradual one, though, and first an acquaintance with Henry Vincent Yorke needs to be made.

Born in 1905, to Vincent and Maud (née Wyndham) Yorke, Henry was so named after his maternal grandfather, the second Baron Leconfield, and his father, Vincent Wodehouse Yorke. Baron Leconfield was “among the richest members of the British aristocracy and owner of one of the most magnificent houses in England: Petworth in Sussex”; Forthampton Court and the Yorke family were less famous, but “little less formidable”.²⁴ Vincent “had won scholarships both at Eton and at King’s College, Cambridge, where he took a double First in classics and became a Fellow”²⁵ before becoming “a prosperous businessman and a director of the Westminster Bank”.²⁶ Such status as a Yorke carried with it its own stifling pressure; as Henry

²³ Yorke to Coghill, undated (c. 1923), No. 1, Eton College Archives.

²⁴ Treglown, *Romancing*, 6, 12.

²⁵ Treglown, *Romancing*, 14.

²⁶ C. M. Bowra, *Memories, 1898-1939* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 164.

attests to in the opening line of *Pack my Bag*, with characteristically succinct intensity: “I was born a mouthbreather with a silver spoon in 1905” (*PMB*, 5). To be born a Yorke and then named Henry Vincent was to choke on the grandeur of expectation; a level of expectation only intensified by the standards set by his two elder brothers, Philip and Gerald.

Both brothers were academically strong and excellent sportsmen. Philip’s name was immortalised, in gold paint, at New Beacon Preparatory School, before Henry had even set foot there, for having won the school’s best ever scholarship to Eton;²⁷ whilst Gerald would be awarded the top degree in History at Cambridge in his year.²⁸ In 1917, though, Philip died of lymphatic leukaemia. The vast grief of Maud and Vincent must have proved particularly suffocating. As Treglown notes:

For forty years, Philip’s bedroom on the first floor of Forthampton Court was kept as a shrine. He was a star at Eton when he died, having won a scholarship to the school and distinguished himself at games. His mother preserved his bedroom display of sporting caps, team lists, and other athletic paraphernalia and solemnly brought home the furniture from his room at school – the traditional ottoman and bureau and a table with flaps, which had Yorke carved deeply into it.²⁹

Henry’s battle with the sincerity and expectations of his own grief is explored with debilitating honesty in *Pack my Bag*.³⁰ It was no simple time to be arriving as a new boy at Eton. Henry, so unlike his brothers, was fat (“I became an advertisement for

²⁷ Philip was a member of College House at Eton along with all the other scholars, whereas both Gerald and Henry started at Whitworth. See *Eton College Chronicles*, Eton College Archives.

²⁸ The only two telegrams from Henry which Maud kept in her scrapbook announced: “P. Yorke was read out as getting a scholarship [*sic*]” and “Gerald is in Pop”, private archive of John Yorke.

²⁹ Treglown, *Romancing*, 19.

³⁰ “I had a great sense of shock whenever Philip’s name was mentioned, and for some months had difficulty in not crying when someone said it out with no warning” (*PMB*, 82); “Some days later I was called into the old devil’s study to be told my brother was dead. It meant absolutely nothing to me at all. He took off his spectacles and became helpless because he minded Philip dying, and I remember being frightened I was not showing enough sorrow. I had not learned by then to ask for those details which in almost every case, and certainly in his, are such as to raise a feeling of pity which in turn will become self-pity; it was the first death, and when the old man told me to sit in his room alone I cried because I thought I had to cry, because there had been a disaster and because here I was sitting unfeeling in this school holy of holies, all alone” (*PMB*, 80).

their [the prep school's] cooking" [*PMB*, 18]) and not inclined towards sport – "Gym," he opens one chapter emphatically, "was harrowing" (*PMB*, 30). Nor had he done well in the Eton exam. In addition to all of this, as Treglown delicately sums up:

He knew, too, that when he got to the school he would be compared there not only with the dead Philip and with their prizewinning, games-playing father, but with the robustly alive Gerald. Gerald Yorke was on the cricket team, was head of his house, and was a member of the elite club known self-explanatorily as Pop. At Eton, Yorke was quite a name.³¹

It was indeed. But, in so many ways, it was the wrong name for Henry, with his authorial aspirations. No wonder, then, that from the very first story that Henry published in the Eton ephemeral, *College Days*, he was using a pseudonym.

It took a while, though, for Henry to find the right pseudonym. His first three short stories at Eton – "Their Son" (1922); "Emma Ainley" (1923); and "Bees" (1923) – were all published under the name Henry Michaels;³² whilst the typescript of *Young and Old* carried the name Henry Browne, until it was published in 1926, with a new title, *Blindness*, and a new authorial identity, Henry Green. The reasons why an author might select a pseudonym are explored in John Mullan's engaging study of anonymous and pseudonymous publications – *Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature*. Mullan suggests mischief, modesty, gender, danger, confession, mockery

³¹ Treglown, *Romancing*, 25. Gerald was also editor of the *Eton College Chronicle* and was regularly found in the pages of *College Days*. In one there is a caricature of Mr G. J. Yorke under the title *Floreat Etona* and a few pages later a light-hearted poem entitled: 'The Losing of the Bat (Condolences to G. J. Yorke (A. W. W.) on the loss of his bat)'. See *College Days*, 29 November 1919, No. 3, Eton College Archives: 87, 92.

³² All editions of *Pack My Bag* have Green state that he wrote under the pseudonym Henry Michaelis in *College Days* – "a nom de plume was chosen, of all names Henry Michaelis" (p. 163 in The Hogarth Press editions of 1940, 1952 and 1979; p. 159 of the 1992 Hogarth Press edition; p. 163 of the 1989 Oxford University Press edition; and p. 105 of the 2000 Vintage edition) – but the original stories in the Eton ephemeral are attributed to Henry Michaels. If this was a typographical error, it seems bizarre that it was repeated over so many reprints. Rod Mengham simply refers to "the unlikely Henry Michaelis" and Green's "obviously inveterate, pseudonymous impulse" (Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 62); whilst Matthew Yorke and Treglown refer only to "Henry Michaels" (See *Surviving*, 3 and Treglown, *Romancing*, 5). Whether the *Pack My Bag* spelling was a simple typographical mistake or a consciously oblique reinvention of another version of the author is difficult to verify, but it does add another strand to the polyphony of author's voices named in this fugue.

and devilry as reasons why writers have hidden their identities over the centuries.³³ In the case of Henry Green, rising above all of these is patricide. Using the terminology of onomastics, for example, the switch from the local name or toponymic, Yorke, to the relational name or patronymic, Michaels, emphasises the replacement of the father by another; a case which is further strengthened by the absence of the patrilineal middle name, Vincent. The loss of an individual identity implied in the plurality of Michaels is then reinforced by the more abstract nature of Browne, although the additional letter *e* does retain a link with the ancestral *e* on Yorke. This final link is ultimately removed with the selection of Green, the slashing of the final *e* in recognition, perhaps, of the patricidal act. The renaming of Henry Vincent Yorke as Henry Green might not destroy the father with the seemingly exclusive finality which we will later explore in *Blindness*, but it does provide Henry with a newfound autonomy away from Vincent Yorke's domineering and sometimes bullying presence.³⁴

The name-change decontextualises the author. It separates him from his own privileged background, his Eton and Oxford education, his family heritage, and it also places him at a further remove from the much-publicised parties and extravagances of his social circle, that of the "Brideshead Generation" or the "Bright Young Things".³⁵ "Henry Green" is purposefully constructed as a movement away from Henry Vincent

³³ John Mullan, *Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007).

³⁴ This is a word that Henry's son, Sebastian, uses to describe his grandfather: "Vincent Yorke had a donnish manner and little small talk; there was also a bullying side to his nature." See Green, "A Memoir" in *Surviving*, 287.

³⁵ See, for example, Humphrey Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation: Evelyn Waugh and his Generation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) and D. J. Taylor, *Bright Young People: The Rise and Fall of a Generation 1918-1940* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2007). Both Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford refer to the "Bright Young Yorkes" in their letters. See *The Letters of Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Charlotte Mosley (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 225, 241.

Yorke; it is a re-invention of that self without its specificities.³⁶ In contrast to many of his social contemporaries who were courting publicity, Henry Green worked hard to counter the reductive nature of publicity and fame. If he allowed photographs to be taken, he would often insist on being photographed from behind, with no shot of his face. Rather than seeking to be identified, to be immediately recognisable, the photographs reveal an anonymous individual. The process of individuation becomes a process of distancing. A personal act – the taking of a photograph, the creation of a *nom de plume* – draws attention to the impersonality of that very act.

With the name, Green, a proper noun is formed, but the abstract nature of its origin – its “greenness” – creates a shell of non-specificity. In selecting Green as the new name, as the new literary identity, Henry is self-consciously fragmenting the notion of a singular personality. Evelyn Waugh pointed out the “peculiar drabness” of the selection and Harold Acton disliked its lack of singularity.³⁷ Whether Henry Green was familiar with Julien Green’s 1924 *Pamphlet contre les catholiques de France* or whether he had read *Babbling April*, a book of poetry published the year before *Blindness*, by (Henry) Graham Greene is unknown. But Henry’s dropping of the *e* increases the connotative impact of the name and the anonymity suggested in Green, with its wealth of possible meanings ranging from youthful naivety to verdant productivity, was surely intended. The name might structure a singular identity, but it

³⁶ Henry Green’s *Who’s Who* entry (1948-1973) exemplifies this with its refusal to place a cross-reference to Yorke, or to name the specific school or college which he attended, or the company of which he was Managing Director: “**Green**, Henry; Managing Director of Engineering Co., Birmingham; *b* 1905; *m* 1929; one *s. Educ*: Public Sch; Oxford Univ.” Quoted in Treglown, *Romancing*, iv.

³⁷ Evelyn Waugh, Review of *Living*, *Graphic*, 14 June 1930: 588; Harold Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete*, 93: “There are Greens of so many shades writing novels that one wishes he had selected another colour.” F. L. Green published his first novel in 1934 and might, retrospectively, be on Acton’s mind as well.

is also easily repeatable or “iterable”.³⁸ Such iterability allows the one to be broken down into many others; a nebulous multitude of others that lack specificity, in a way reminiscent of Marvell’s garden:

The Mind, that Ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other Worlds, and other Seas;
Annihilating all that’s made
To a green Thought in a green Shade.³⁹

In order, though, to represent the multiplicity invoked by Green and his “palaces in forests”, perhaps green thoughts in green shades would be even more apt.

The choice of “Henry Green” as a signature of the author embodies one of the fundamental concerns of Green’s writing: to what extent can “an” identity – with its inherent multiplicity and singularity, with its constant accumulation and adaptation, both conscious and unconscious, serious and ludic – to what extent can such shifting notions be communicated through the written word? Green challenges the most fixed of word-forms, the name, by the semantic polyvalency of his choice – not only is it a real word, it is a word full of potential. Such a challenging manipulation of the name uncovers a rich space of uncertainty below the confident surface of the nominal. The literary identity, “Henry Green”, reveals the strength to stand alone, to reinvent the self. But this creation of self contains a paradox, where self must also retain the potential to be annihilated. And the term annihilation is particularly apt, for it holds the twin meaning of being reduced *ad nihil* whilst, more recently in the world of

³⁸ Derrida, “Signature Event Context” (1972) in *Limited Inc*, 7: “(iter, again, probably comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of a logic that ties repetition to alterity)”. For Derrida, its “iterability” implies a death, whereby the name separates itself in order to be spoken and repeated in the absence of that which is being named.

³⁹ Andrew Marvell, “The Garden” in *The Complete Poems* (London: Everyman’s Library, 1993), 50-51.

physics, describing the conversion of matter into radiant energy.⁴⁰ “Henry Green” nurtures this paradox within it. The repetition of the first name resuscitates the past, whilst the altered surname simultaneously refuses it life in that form. The new surname offers the fresh novelty of verdant pastures – it offers to convert matter into energy – whilst simultaneously introducing a redundantly forgettable, non-specific sign, which in its “iterability” requires the death of the “signified”.

This binominal “fugue in Green”, built around the shift from Henry Yorke to Henry Green, is redirected to accumulate depth and multiplicity in the early fiction. The acts of patricide and biographical annihilation played out in the reinvention of Henry Vincent Yorke as Henry Green should not be interpreted in terms of a clean break. The ancestral *e* on Yorke is cut neatly from Green, but its presence lingers not only in the earlier Browne but also in the later characters of Haye (*Blindness*) and Roe (*Caught*).⁴¹ Whatever biographical links are cut at any one time, the retention of the Christian name, Henry, will always point to a continuing lineage.⁴² It is this continuity, as a part of the process of annihilation, which provides such a depth of creative variety within the early fiction of Henry Green. In the early short stories and *Blindness* there are many different forms of familial annihilation taking place: patricide, matricide, fratricide and suicide. Each time a family member is rewritten, another strand is added to the polyphonic contexts of biography and fiction. The “fugue in Green” grows richer as a result.

⁴⁰ See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 484: “**annihilate**, *v.* 1. To reduce to non-existence, blot out of existence... **d. spec.** in *Physics*, to convert (a sub-atomic particle) into radiant energy.”

⁴¹ See Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 216, n.9. Mengham points out that “the fictional name Haye, and the name of the central character of *Caught*, Roe” continue this trait of retention.

⁴² This perverse and comic gesture (doing with the first name – demonstrating continuity – what is normally, by default, done with the paternal family name) is typical of Green’s subtle manipulation of expected norms.

The Early Fiction: *College Days* and *Blindness*

The “pseudonymous impulse”, the move from someone to no-one, is a forerunner for the weight and depth of anonymity and absence in Green’s fiction. Once Henry Green has been selected as the *nom de plume*, we might also expect the fiction to move away from the autobiographical. But whilst the proper name is expelled, Henry Vincent Yorke’s context is notable by its overt presence in his fiction. *Blindness*, for example, is full of autobiographical similarities. The protagonist, John Haye, is “Secretary to the Noat Art Society” (*Bl*, 3),⁴³ whilst at Eton “when the Society of Arts was formed... [Henry] had been made secretary” (*PMB*, 167). John Haye “was to have gone” to Magdalen, Oxford (*Bl*, 52); Henry went up to Magdalen College in Michaelmas, 1924. John Haye’s family have a large manor house in the country and he has a passion for fishing (*Bl*, 12-3); both of which were also true of the young Henry, fishing on the River Severn near Forthampton Court (*PMB*, 50-7). The use of autobiography to structure *Blindness* – the first part of *Blindness* is John Haye’s diary; Henry also kept a diary at Eton when he realised he wanted to be a writer⁴⁴ – is another facet of the annihilation/creation or absent presence paradox found throughout Green’s novels. The author’s tentative nature – “an amateur in writing like myself is always hopelessly unsure”⁴⁵ – and the young man’s uncertain search for individuality is reliant upon a past which he is simultaneously trying to eradicate and rewrite.

⁴³ A telling example of Green’s growing unwillingness to provide neat-fit derivations is the incomplete anagram of Eton (Noat) in *Blindness*. In its first form, in the unpublished short story “Adventure in a Room”, it was much more neatly palindromic: “It was his last night at Note” in *Surviving*, 6. The earnest formalist wordplay of the palindrome is replaced by a more mature, weightier and destabilising humour in *Blindness*: “Really, it might be Eton” (*Bl*, 7).

⁴⁴ Green, *Pack My Bag*, 163: “I determined to be a writer, the diary I began to keep with this in view was full of loud shouts about it”.

⁴⁵ Yorke to Coghill, undated (c. 1923), No. 1, Eton College Archives.

Henry Vincent Yorke's identity as a writer is initially submerged by his use of a pseudonym, but is then pulled back out of the water gasping as those aspirations are interrogated through the character of John Haye. Haye's family, and especially his stepmother, are uncertain of their son's authorial aspirations. In the words of Emily:

And this writing that he is so keen about, of course I encourage it, my dear, it is so good for the boy to have a hobby, but no one has ever written on either side of the family. Ralph even found letter-writing almost impossible. So that is so difficult to understand him, dear. (*Bl*, 218)

One feels that this patronising summation, based as it is on ancestral precedent, could have come straight out of the mouth of the strong-willed but uneducated Maud Yorke (née Wyndham).⁴⁶ Emily's offhand aside that "it is good for the boy to have a hobby" is likely to have been drawn from a letter which John Buchan wrote to Maud about Henry's early stories; Maud had sent some of them to Buchan, her friend, for an opinion. In his response to Maud, Buchan talks of her "boy's stories" and concludes that "writing is a delightful hobby".⁴⁷ This selective citing and reworking of Buchan's letter by Green to portray Emily's scepticism over Haye's writerly ambitions is a likely representation of Maud's own attitude towards Henry's writing, although it is a misrepresentation of Buchan's judgement. Buchan's letter begins by asserting: "whatever your boy's stories are, they are not a waste of time." Such an opening intimates that it was Maud's initial letter to her friend which had suggested that the boy's writing might be, in fact, a waste of time. Sebastian Yorke corroborates this when he states that Henry's "parents were suspicious about his writing".⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See Bowra, *Memories*, 164: "Mrs Yorke... was a remarkable example of how a personality will fulfil itself despite its education or lack of it" and Sebastian Yorke, Henry's son, describes her as "virtually uneducated" in "A Memoir", *Surviving*, 287.

⁴⁷ John Buchan to Maud Yorke, 22 August 1923, private archive of John Yorke.

⁴⁸ Sebastian Yorke, "A Memoir", *Surviving*, 291. Buchan's verdict on Henry's writing is then misrepresented again by Sebastian, who states: "early stories were shown to Buchan who strongly advised him to give it all up as a bad job." See Treglown, *Romancing*, 40 and n. 48, which quotes Buchan's letter in full in order to redress this misrepresentation of Buchan's response.

Despite or perhaps as a part of this parental unease, Henry rewrites his own attempts at short story composition into the story of John Haye. John writes a story called *Sonny* (*Bl*, 21); whilst Henry wrote “Their Son”.⁴⁹ John has tea with H. B. on 24th February after sending him “a story for this term’s Noat Days. It won’t be accepted, I suppose. It is an experiment in short sentences” (*Bl*, 27). The story is eventually accepted, although on rereading it John felt that he “had never read anything worse or feebler” (*Bl*, 29). Henry had “Emma Ainley”, with its overabundance of short sentences, accepted by B. H. (Brian Howard) for publication in the St. Patrick’s Day edition of *College Days*.⁵⁰ Green’s early short fiction is given its own meta-fictional position within and outside of his first novel. Such conscious self-referencing is potentially regressive (as many critics deem the descriptive passages of *Nothing* and *Doting*), turning interminably back in on itself, but it also has the capacity to reach outwards, forever reinventing itself in future contexts. A similar process can be witnessed in the parricidal acts of the early fiction: at times the individual might seem to disappear, only to reappear in another guise in another, later context.

Take the absence of John’s father in *Blindness* which, in terms of both the dedication (To my Mother) and the text (he is dead) seems total. Not only is he resoundingly dead but his nominal identity is blurring in the memories of those living: Emily refers to him as Ralph on six occasions, whilst Nanny refers to Emily as Mrs Richard Haye twice.⁵¹ In one example, Emily brings Ralph, or Richard, into the conversation, because she is struggling to tell her stepson directly that he will be blind

⁴⁹ *College Days*, 30 November 1922, No. 7, 224-8, Eton College Archives.

⁵⁰ *College Days*, 17 March 1923, No. 8, 246-7, Eton College Archives.

⁵¹ Green, *Blindness*, Emily refers to him as “Ralph” on 41, 46, 48, 62, 63, 65, 71, 218; but Nanny refers to Emily as “Mrs Richard Haye” on 169, 173.

forever. It is an intense moment of anguish for John, as he grapples with what he is not quite being told, and Emily feels helpless without her husband there to help:

“I wish he was here now, he was a wonderful man, and he would have helped, and – and he would have known what to do.”

“What was he like?” (So he was blind, how funny.)

“Dear boy, he was the finest man to hounds in three counties, and the most lovely shot. I remember him killing fifty birds in sixty cartridges with driven grouse at your grandfather’s up in Scotland. A beautiful shot. He would have helped.” (*Bl*, 44-5)

Emily’s reversion to hunting and shooting anecdotes and her sharply cut accent, like Maud’s own passions⁵² and grand diction, jar with John’s awkward, parenthetical acknowledgement of his situation – “(So he was blind, how funny)”. On one level, John’s bathetic and pathetic aside, its abrupt tone and its placement immediately after and on the same line as the open and potentially poignant question – “What was he like?” – acts as an emotional clampdown. John immediately recoils from hearing about his father and the past, finding it more “amusing” to concentrate on his own awful predicament. His nervous quip – “how funny” – is painfully incongruous with the severity of the situation; but it is nothing in contrast with the Wildean inappropriateness of Emily’s response.

John’s aside is infused with an awkward, self-negating pathos, but on another level it is prescient; his self-protective parenthesis is entirely justified. Were his father alive, “beautiful shot” that he was, the “finest man to hounds”, how would he have helped his poor, blind son? The huntsman, a man of action, “he would have known what to do”; had it been a hound, blinded accidentally, he would be taken out and shot – the best thing for him. This interpretation is bolstered by the repeated links made between John Haye and the family dog, Ruffles: “Poor blind old thing” (*Bl*, 63); “But

⁵² See Bowra, *Memories*, 164: “When she was a girl, she thought, as she said, ‘of nothing but horse and dog’, and she still kept outdoor tastes and bred horses.”

it would be kinder to put him out of the way. One must be practical. But he was blind!” (*Bl*, 63-4). In addition to these passing references there is also a darkly comic conversation which takes place later between the nurse, Mrs Haye and Jennings. The topic of the conversation flits between John, his blindness and the dog, Ruffles:

“Poor dog.”
“How old is he, Mrs Haye?”
“Twelve years old. He ought to be destroyed. One must be practical.”
“That’s right. Kill him.”
“But, my dear, it is cruel to let him live”...
“Perhaps it would be best.” It was a pity to shoot him, after he had been so good. How sentimental dogs were. Nan would be having one of her waves of silent grief. Their breathing descended in a chorus to where he lay, hoarse, sibilant, and tired. Were they thinking of Ruffles? (*Bl*, 92)

The implications are absurd and horrific. Not only is it necessary for the father to be dead, if the son is to survive, but the rest of the family also poses a threat. Perhaps because John’s survival, as a blind man, no longer guarantees the continuation of the family line:

It was so terrible, he would never marry now, she would have no grandchildren. The place would be sold, the name would die, there was no one. Ralph had been the last. “Granny.” He would not meet any nice girls now, he could never marry. A girl would not want to marry a blind man. All her dreams were gone, of her going up to live in the Dower House – that was why the Evanses had it on a short lease. (*Bl*, 71)

John is isolated in his dark new circumstances, trying to piece together a life out of what remains.

The early short fiction experiments more rigorously with what is left over, the space which is created in this process of annihilation, which began with the replacement of the author’s own name. “Their Son”, Green’s earliest surviving short story, published in Eton’s *College Days* on November 30th, 1922, is a ripe starting point. The title, with its anonymous, eponymous hero-object, draws attention to the

protagonist's lack of individual identity.⁵³ This builds on the plurality of the chosen pseudonym, Henry Michaels, and the forever blurred nature of ascertaining a single author. Most writing in *College Days*, for example, was unattributed, so the fact that Green used Henry Michaels not only draws the reader's attention to the presence of a fictional author, but also, arguably, urges them to identify a real author. This paradox which underlies the reading experience, whereby the innocuous surface of the prose (in this case a simple authorial attribution) covers a highly contradictory problematic, is at the heart of Green's fiction. Yet, whilst blurring the notion of one author, this early fiction (and, albeit to a lesser extent, Green's whole oeuvre) is deeply embedded in the biography of that one author.

In "Their Son", Mrs Pullin (the eponymous "son's" mother) is "a pork-farmer's daughter" who dedicates her life to climbing the social ladder of respectability.⁵⁴ She is comically mocked for her taste in the "strong, silent" heroes in the popular romance novels of Ethel M. Dell and Ruby M. Ayres; for her hat, which was "vaguely reminiscent of a fruiterer's on account of garden produce piled hideously and promiscuously on a mustard-coloured basis"; for her coarsely revealing tag line – "Money no object, y'know"; and for her confusion over how to enunciate her *h's*:

"Our house hat 'Arrow," said his mother; two h's running and two vowels had been too much for her. "Our 'ouse at Harrow," she corrected, "'as more substance not this."⁵⁵

This grotesque social climber seems to stand out in direct contrast to the overbearing upper-class figure of Maud (Wyndham) Yorke, who was known

⁵³ This technique of delayed naming is used again and again by Green. Another example, in *Blindness*, is Chapter II in Part II which is entitled: "Her, Him, Them", (vii).

⁵⁴ Henry Green (Michaels), "Their Son", *College Days*, 30 November 1922, No. 7, 224.

⁵⁵ Green, "Their Son", *College Days*, 226.

specifically for her grand diction. As the Oxford classics don, Maurice Bowra, recalled in his *Memories*: Maud “not only dropped the *g* from ‘huntin’ and ‘shootin’”, but managed somehow to drop it from words which did not contain it, as in ‘Cheltin’ham’ and ‘Chippin’ham.’”⁵⁶ But Maud’s ability to transform soft *hs* to hard, by inserting a non-existent back consonant, is not so far away from Mrs Pullin’s own over-compensatory complications.⁵⁷ And yet, however much Mrs Pullin corrects herself, the mistakes keep flooding in, for when she does manage to enunciate the *h*-aitch in Harrow correctly, she drops two other aitches and negates her own comparative by saying “more substance not this” instead of “more substance than this”.

These awkward moments of class discomfort have a cumulative effect on the son and on the reader. The son is unable to shake off the social stigma of his parents: his father, a butcher and war-profiteer; his mother, gaudy and pretentious. He cannot escape his early biography, the aspects of his context which he has not chosen. The son’s uncertain social position leaves him without a clear identity – he is “Joey” and then he is “Joseph... no Joeys, if you please”. At home “he sees his ‘people’ are not quite up to the mark” and “realises that he could never stand his home now”; at the same time, he also realises “that he would go through life for ever Josiah Pullin’s son.”⁵⁸ Whatever name he goes by – Joseph or Joey – he is still Josiah’s son. It would be a small lateral hop to read into this Henry’s self-conscious awareness of his own family’s “unglamorous but very profitable” manufacturing of apparatus for bottling

⁵⁶ Bowra, *Memories*, 164-5.

⁵⁷ There is even the suggestion of a missing *g* in Mrs Pullin’s name, especially if we read it as a type-name, whereby she is “pulling” her way up the social ladder.

⁵⁸ Green, “Their Son”, *College Days*, 226, 228.

beer and plumbing equipment for baths and toilets.⁵⁹ But the Fates “had in mind an easy way out for Joey Pullin”. In the rash but chivalric act of selflessness which sees Joey lose his life saving that of a damsel in distress, Green allows his protagonist a tragically heroic moment – “but the girl he had saved, and she was Sir George’s daughter.” This declaration, however, does not herald the end of the story. Joey’s glorious death achieves something more:

His mother, with the reflected glory of her son’s act, was assured free entry into Sir George’s mansion – a social climax. So she too was all right.⁶⁰

The son’s death frees him from fears of living his life in social limbo and assures Mrs Pullin’s “entry into Sir George’s mansion”. It is a disquieting end which resonates through the unconvincing platitude of the last sentence – “So she too was all right.” Mrs Pullin has achieved the social status she dreamed of, but she has no second generation to follow: Joey or Joseph Pullin will only ever remain “their son”, an individual only in relation to a multiple “them” – his parents.

The thoughtless destruction of self in “Their Son” is replaced in “Adventure in a Room” (c.1923)⁶¹ and *Blindness* (1926) by destruction of the family. In the short story and clear forerunner to *Blindness*, “Adventure in a Room”, the unnamed protagonist is an orphan: “for his parents were dead, and he had no relations to speak of.”⁶² The family have been cleanly excised; the mother replaced by Nanny.⁶³ When we come to *Blindness*, though, the situation has blurred somewhat. The authorial dedication has Maud present in the upper case: *To my Mother*. Vincent, however, is

⁵⁹ Bowra, *Memories*, 162 and Treglown, 40-41: Treglown relates how Robert Byron remembers Henry telling him, as they were getting to know one another: “My father, you must know, makes baths”. See Robert Byron, *Letters Home*, ed. by Lucy Butler (London: John Murray, 1991), 9-10.

⁶⁰ Green, “Their Son”, *College Days*, 228.

⁶¹ The short story remained unpublished until 1992, when it appeared in *Surviving*, 6-13.

⁶² Green, “Adventure in a Room” in *Surviving*, 7.

⁶³ It is interesting to note that Joey, too, finds the Matron “kind” in “Their Son” compared to the embarrassment and discomforting distance he feels around his own mother.

resoundingly absent. Within the text, Maud has a vividly recognisable presence as Emily, the stepmother. Emily literarily stands in for Maud as the stepmother, but in the recognisability of the stepmother as Maud, there is an implicit absence. The real mother has been demoted to stepmother and the “Mother” of the dedication thrown into more ambiguity. Where Joseph Pullin, even in death, is unable to separate himself from his parents (and particularly his mother), John Haye struggles to escape from the presence of his mother, even though she is dead.⁶⁴

Mengham explores this mother-son relationship with detailed reference to Sophocles and Freud, tracing the Oedipal resonances throughout *Blindness*. His suggestion that “all the mutilations of Oedipus are reproduced in John” and that “the specifically Oedipal relationship of mother and son colonizes the entire text” offer a fascinating perspective on the novel, although the framework threatens, at times, to restrict Green’s tendency to create characters of a fluid, composite nature.⁶⁵ Mengham argues, for instance, that:

Before he is anything else, before he is even a writer, John is a son; the first story he manages to write is actually called *Sonny*. His mother, who is in fact dead, is virtually the only mother in the book; she takes dramatic precedence over the stepmother, who resents the fact that “there was always her between them.”⁶⁶

This chapter argues that John’s role as son, similar to that of Henry’s role as son, is an essential strand of his personality; it is a voice that is raised repeatedly throughout *Blindness* and, unsurprisingly, through much of the early fiction. But Mengham’s focus on the “dramatic precedence” of the dead mother and his interpretation of this

⁶⁴ One of Maud’s friends complains of Henry’s depiction of Emily Haye: “Of course I cannot quite forgive him one thing – I told him so – He has tacked your tastes and superficial ways on to a woman with no sense of humour, and no grasp of a situation.” Letter to Maud Yorke, 29 September 1926, private archive of John Yorke.

⁶⁵ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 7, 8.

⁶⁶ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 3. It is also perhaps worth mentioning that *Sonny* isn’t the first story that John Haye manages to write, it is simply “by far the best I have done so far”. See Green, *Blindness*, 21.

as a dominant and domineering motif of the son's infatuation with his mother is misleading. It orchestrates a critical stasis by laying the interpretative weight on one facet of the text. Conscious of this contention, Mengham adds: "although it has an idea of itself as a novel of continuous advance ('Progression'), *Blindness* comes to a halt with a shock of revealed truth."⁶⁷ In terms of the "fugue in Green", Mengham focuses on a single, recurring monotone. His analysis, though, does provide an invaluable insight into the influences of literature and psychology on Green's writing; as such it is a resonant addition to the fugue.

And so the process never stops, the interpretations continue to amass and the characters grow in complexity the more they are studied. Green chose not to entitle the novel *Progression*, in the same way that he refused to finish "Their Son" with a chivalric ending.⁶⁸ The movement within the novel does not necessarily lead to any specific destination. In "Adventure in a Room" the "infinite romanticism" of the protagonist – his "desperate striving for the beautiful" – achieves an overly-neat and unconvincing resolution: "As he woke up a blackbird was welcoming the dawn. He was a man, now." In this story, it is the title which provides the perspective, rather than the undercutting of an ambiguous dénouement. This is only an adventure in a room. The adventure, more of a one-off event, does not even take place in the world; it takes place in one room. As such it is more theoretical than practical; it does not seek to convince us of any universal truth. By the time of *Blindness*, the outer structure and movement of the novel suggest a resolution, but the nuances of the text deny any such neatness.

⁶⁷ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 11.

⁶⁸ See Treglown, *Romancing*, 295, n.52: "typescript draft of *Blindness* entitled 'Progression', 71-2 (SY)" or Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 216, n. 1: "British Library Loan 67/1 consists of a typescript with the pencil addition, 'early typescript of *Blindness*'."

In the various drafts of *Blindness* we witness Green, as author, and John Haye, as protagonist, in the process of standing alone as adults. The static nature of prose is transcended to create a composite and cumulative sense of individuality in constant participial flux. The original working title for *Blindness* was *Young and Old*. This linking of the generations gains more positive momentum in *Progression*, the emended title to be found on a typescript draft of *Blindness*. Its momentum suggests a forward-moving fusion where the voices of the young and the old combine and complement to form something new. This formation of something new is picked up in the tripartite structure of the novel: Part I – Caterpillar; Part II – Chrysalis; Part III – Butterfly. And again in the further substructure of Part III – Butterfly, the last two chapters of which are entitled: “Finishing” and “Beginning Again”. The trite neatness of this structuring is then drawn into conflict with the selection of *Blindness* as the eventual title. This title draws our attention to the debilitating and violent consequences of a young boy’s impulsive act; the stone’s throw which robs the protagonist of the author’s world. The clichéd romance of transformation, from caterpillar to butterfly, earth to air, human mortality to authorial immortality, is undercut; the tone uncomfortable and uncertain. The arc of progress proffered by the section and chapter headings is built on a foundation of deep, irreversible loss. John Haye, in the final paragraph of Part III, has a quasi-angelic experience at the end of the novel: “He was rising through the mist, blown on a gust of love, lifting up, straining at a white light that he would bathe in. He half rose” (*Bl*, 252-3). The epiphanic moment is fraught with flaws and ultimately undermined. John’s inability to rise undercuts his dreams of angelic flight, which, a few lines later, are ridiculed by the dark bathetic humour of his calling for a ladder before passing out. In the

protagonist's moment of glory he is rendered powerless by an epileptic fit, unable to stand alone: "they carried him to his room" (*Bl*, 253). In the letter that concludes the novel, John casts a positive light on his fit, stating: "Apparently my father was liable to them, so that anyway I have one behind me after this" (*Bl*, 254). Even after the careful excision of the father from so much of the novel, his genetic flaw continues to run through the son. In acknowledging this, John Haye is not uncertain of how he feels; he is left with the more complex rhetorical question of why he feels this way: "Why am I so happy to-day?" (*Bl*, 254).

Whatever the parricidal impact of Green's early fiction might have been, it does not cut out the Yorke influence entirely. To the contrary, it is clear that much of the material of the early fiction is formed out of experiences and characters which are drawn directly from the Yorke or Wyndham family.⁶⁹ By writing a diary at Eton and then rewriting that diary as a fiction in *Blindness*, Henry Green uses his role as author and protagonist to explore the fluidity inherent in identity. Rather than simply cutting out or annihilating members of the Yorke family, Green's fiction rewrites identity in various cumulative forms. "Their Son", "Adventure in a Room" and *Blindness*, when considered in concert, resonate with a young man's struggle to assert himself as a multi-faceted individual outside of but also constructed through his family.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Another unpublished short story, written around 1923, was entitled: "The Wyndham Family". See Green, *Surviving*, 14-20.

⁷⁰ It is not unusual to have these family-focussed violent imaginings, as revealed by Freud's Oedipus and Mengham's reading, in fact it is more paradigmatic. See Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances" (1908) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Vintage, 2001), vol. 9, 240: "A younger child is very specially inclined to use imaginative stories such as these in order to rob those born before him of their prerogatives... the hero and author returns to legitimacy himself whilst his brothers and sisters are eliminated by being bastardized. So too if there are other particular interests at work they can direct the course to be taken by the family romance; for its many-sidedness and its great range of applicability enable it to meet every sort of requirement."

Chapter 2

“ones and threes”: The Potentiality of Names in *Blindness*, *Living* and *Beyond*

Chapter 1 took Green’s own musical notion of “a fugue in Green”, with its polyphonic and synaesthetic make-up, as a temporary starting point for exploring the early fiction of Green. It introduced the biographical, Henry Vincent Yorke, and the pseudonymous, Henry Green, as two strands or notations of that fugue. Such a focus, albeit temporary, on two specific strands of a broader polyphonic whole inevitably threatens to distort the overall effect. This early emphasis on creating a written biography and the possible psychological effects of such rewriting, as it is revealed through Green’s early fiction, threatens to explode any anonymity which Green may have sought in selecting his pseudonym. But it also serves to show that the Green pseudonym was not purely a quest for anonymity.

The author of *Blindness* and *Living* was not a carefully preserved secret; there was no public intrigue or search for his identity. Family, colleagues and reviewers knew, or could easily find out, that Henry Green was Henry Vincent Yorke. Treglown’s biography makes this point emphatically by explaining that Henry showed typescripts of *Blindness* to his parents for comment and approval; that Vincent had to sign the contract for the publication of *Blindness*, as Henry was “still legally a minor”; and that both Vincent and Maud sent numerous copies of *Blindness* to their friends.¹ Robert Byron talks about the impending publication of *Blindness* in a letter to his mother. For Christmas a couple of years later, Henry took a copy of

¹ See Treglown, *Romancing*, 64-66. See also letters from John Bailey, E. F. Benson and John Buchan, to both Maud and Vincent, which provide interesting reactions to *Blindness*, private archive of John Yorke.

Living prior to its publication to Vienna to give to Robert's mother, Margaret, to read.² In Oxford there was no secret, either, as to the identity of the author of *Blindness*: "one sign of recognition was that he was taken up by Lady Ottoline Morrell" and later, Henry would give an interview with the *Star* after the publication of *Living* (1929) – "Author's Work as Factory Hand" – which would embarrass his family with its public revelations. If the public had not been sure who Henry Green was, there was no doubting now: "Lord Leconfield's Nephew Finds 'Local Colour'".³

A Literary Name

Rather than seeking anonymity, the pseudonym proclaims the multiplicity of the individual. The man initially bifurcates into man and author; the author continues this process of fragmentation and splits into multiple others with each novel published; on each reading each novel spontaneously releases various other interpretations: the text contains the potential for limitless "dehiscence". This biological term, usually used to describe a spontaneous bursting open and release of seeds or pollen in fruits or flowers, is intended to recall Derrida's essay "Signature Event Context" and his use of the same term. In the context of his essay, "dehiscence" constitutes an utterance's structural potential to break from its own intention:

the intention animating the utterance will never be through and through present to itself and to its content. The iteration structuring it a priori introduces into it a dehiscence and a cleft [*brisure*] which are essential. The "non-serious," the *oratio obliqua* will no longer be able to be excluded.⁴

² *Robert Byron Letters Home*, ed. Lucy Butler (London: John Murray, 1991), 53, 96.

³ Treglown, *Romancing*, 64, 99. See also, 99-100, where Treglown notes that "the revelation was hardly startling, but his [Henry's] parents detested publicity of any sort" and quotes from an unpublished letter of Green's to Evelyn Waugh: "That interview you saw I gave in the paper has been the cause of endless trouble. My family rave and fury about it, even when they go to the lavatory I can hear the moans escaping from their mouths over it, between the stertorous breathing & volleys of farts."

⁴ See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context" (1972) in *Limited Inc*, 18.

In this sense it resonates well with what I see as the “potentiality”, what Derrida might call the “structural unconscious”, of Green’s writing. This use of “potentiality” strives to incorporate the twin layers of its Latin origin. Most obviously it derives from “potentia” and “potentialis” meaning “power”, but there is also an important residual sense from the Medieval Latin meaning “crutch”. In line with this, Green’s fiction is filled with a powerful potential, but one must also recognise that this power necessarily relies upon its reader to be put into motion. The reader without words is immobile, but the language can only provide support if it is integrated into the momentum of the reader. Together they can make powerful progress, but separately the reader remains lame and the crutch of the text lifeless. Just as Henry Green is created out of Henry Vincent Yorke but then splinters off from those origins, so the text is created by Henry Green but is only given life obliquely as it dehisces into multiple variations through the interpreting minds of its readers.

Green makes a nominal concession to the singularity of the individual by giving himself a singular authorial title, but, as we have seen, the selection – Green – multiplies its container’s interpretative potentiality: Green is limitlessly dehiscent outside of and away from Yorke. The nominal container is fixed as one unchanging, Platonic form, whilst the contents have the potentiality to be fluid, changing and multiple. We will see how Green’s fluidity of nominal interpretation resonates with the Greek notion of naming-as-search, as explored in Plato’s *Cratylus*, but it also expands upon this dialogue, drawing it into a more modernist fascination with multiple voices. As an example, we have already seen how the suggested title Henry Green by Henry Green implies circularity and iterability and how the final choice of *Pack my Bag: A Self-Portrait by Henry Green* proposes three, four or even five

potential voices. It is unsurprising, then, that Green's fictional uses of names are also packed with multiple spaces of potentiality – with all the connotations of power and reliance which are held within that word.

These initial interpretative forays into the transformative process of renaming Henry Vincent Yorke as Henry Green might suggest a scientific or empirical urge to demystify the name, where the name is seen to be characteristic of, perhaps even to characterise, that which it is naming: the verdant productivity or abstract anonymity of “Green” suiting the author's oblique approach rather better than the biographical confinement of the Yorke name, for example. But by looking rather more closely at Green's use of names (and various forms of the same name) in his fiction, we uncover a multifaceted and multifactorial exploration of the problematic of and potentiality within names and naming. Names are not only context-specific, they are contexts-specific, drawing significance metatextually as well as from within the text – I will look, as an example of this, at how the name “Green” is repeatedly reintroduced into *Blindness*. Names also become sites of linguistic play, welcoming a bewildering array of connotative forms which often stray outside of the realm of the proper noun – the profusion of (R)oses proliferating through *Back* (1946) will act as an example here. They are misheard, misremembered, used out of context, deliberately misused, shortened, confused and even allowed to function simply as names. Sometimes names are seen to characterise or generalise, other times they refuse to signify anything meaningful. In exploring the way in which Green plays with and juxtaposes nominal efficiency, we are made conscious of both the futility and the necessity of names and naming. Green destabilises and deconstructs the relatively firm housing of nomenclature, whilst amassing a dazzling variety of sites in which names play. In the

oblique manner that might be seen as one of Green's many signatures, the author obfuscates and complicates the roles of naming and being named to such an extent that heterogeneity becomes the expected norm and the everyday instances of calling someone by a name become problematic.

Henry Vincent Yorke's selection of the pseudonym Henry Green fulfils a potentially conflicting dual purpose of naming a real-life individual and also of rendering that very individual anonymous, non-specific and literary. The interest in this conflict might indirectly suggest that Henry Green is a type name or is, in an Aristotelian sense, characteristic,⁵ whereby the proper name is imbued with epistemological potential; it is viewed as being appropriate or meaningful.⁶ But this chapter alerts the reader to Green's multiple and fluid uses of the name in his fiction, where a name might represent something particular and/or universal and/or nothing in particular or universal. By focusing on this potential for fluidity and multiplicity in the name, the chapter moves away from the dualism of an "either... or" approach in concordance with what it argues is both a Greenian and modernist interest in "ones

⁵ See Chapter IX of Aristotle's *Poetics*, ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), [1451b], 59-60: "poetry is more philosophical and more elevated than history, since poetry relates more of the universal, while history relates particulars. 'Universal' means the kinds of things which it suits a certain kind of person to say or do, in terms of probability or necessity: poetry aims for this, even though attaching names to the agents" and [1454a33], 81: "With character, precisely as in the structure of events, one should always seek necessity or probability – so that for such a person to say or do such things is necessary or probable, and the sequence of events is also necessary or probable."

⁶ For a more detailed analysis of how early novelists of the eighteenth century broke from the Classical and Renaissance tradition of historical or type names, see Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957; London: The Hogarth Press, 1987). Watt convincingly depicts the increasing valuation of the individual (as epitomised through the rise of Protestantism, trade and capitalism, empiricism, the printing press, the novel and readers of the novel) as the unifying factor of the Enlightenment. In terms of names in eighteenth-century fiction, Watt argues that "[i]n literature... this function of proper names was first fully established in the novel", 18. Watt asserts that Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson use "ordinary contemporary proper names for their characters" and that Henry Fielding "made considerable and increasing concessions to [this] custom", 20. In this way, these authors manage to hold together what are two potentially warring characteristics of the name, whereby it is both appropriate and suggestive of an individual: "this appropriateness must not be such as to impair the primary function of the name, which is to symbolise the fact that the character is to be regarded as though he were a particular person and not a type", 20.

and threes” (PG, 15). Take, for example, Eliot’s similar fascination with an unidentifiable third in the fifth Canto of *The Waste Land* (1922):

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
- But who is that on the other side of you?⁷

This chapter distances itself from the first two consciously separated strands of this “fugue in Green” to look at how the potential for multiplicity, the polyphonic nature of the fugue, can be signified or heard through the singular form of a name. There are times, especially in Green’s early fiction, when binaries do unite to form a momentary synthesis or union:

They walked from cone of light into darkness and then again into lamplight, nor, so their feeling lulled them, was light or dark, only their feeling of both of them which was one warmth, infinitely greater. (*Li*, 132)

But such a neat synthesis, with its “one warmth”, is still undercut by the sense that we have been, like Lily and Bert, “lulled” into it by the moment. The reality is that the light and the darkness are separate, in the same way that Lily and Bert will eventually separate. The whole, in its momentary synthesis and singularity, promising to be “infinitely greater” than their two parts, is as unrealistic and temporary an illusion as that depicted in the fragmented landscape *The Waste Land*.

Green, as his letters to Coghill make clear, is conscious at this early stage of his writing career of the over-simplifying romantic urge, but cannot shake it entirely. In his early fiction we witness this process being worked through more rigorously, for instance, in *Blindness*:

⁷ T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922) in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 73. ll. 359-365.

Why couldn't there be something really romantic and laughable in life? With sentimentality and tuppenny realism. Something to wake one out of an existence like this, where day would follow day with nothing to break the monotony, where meal followed meal and where people sat still between meals letting troubles fall into their lap. (*Bl*, 95-6)

By the time of *Party Going*'s publication, Green is much more comfortable with the notion of monotony and circularity, of how the day fits into notions of the everyday, but in *Blindness* and *Living* binaries are under heavy scrutiny. The illusory oversimplicity of Lily and Bert's "one warmth, infinitely greater" and of John Hayes's wish for the extraordinary to break up the monotony of the ordinary reveal the remnants of Green's youthful romantic urge. But with the rigour and variety of Green's exploration of the problematic of naming, we see the search for a different type of logic altogether – a logic which Derrida has since discussed by means of

Khōra:

at times the *Khōra* appears to be neither this nor that, at times both this and that, but this alteration between the logic of exclusion and that of participation... stems perhaps only from a provisional appearance and from the constraints of rhetoric, even from some incapacity for naming.⁸

Green grapples with names and naming in a way which casts itself forward into a post-structuralist conversation on a theory of names whilst building on a philosophical debate which spans back centuries.

Proper and Common Names: Plato, Hobbes, Berkeley

The Greek term for names – "*onomata*" – covers "proper names, common nouns, adjectives, participles, and infinitives";⁹ it holds within it the particular and the

⁸ Derrida, "*Khōra*" (1987) in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 89. This essay starts with a quotation, which is also deeply relevant to my discussion, from Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Raisons du mythe," *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1974), 250: "the structural model of a logic which would not be that of binarity, of the yes or no, a logic other than the logic of the *logos*."

⁹ "Introduction", Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), xi.

universal, the individual and the many. For Green, too, the name is a multiple-use container: it might signify one particular individual in a certain context, but because a literary context is never singular or certain – the reader’s context can never match the writer’s context nor can that reader’s context ever be repeated, even when s/he rereads the same text – it might also signify many other things. In the Platonic dialogue, *Cratylus*, Socrates directs a dialectical investigation into names by examining the beliefs of Cratylus (“there is a correctness of name for each thing, one that belongs to it by nature”) and Hermogenes, who believes that names are much more arbitrary, “determined by... convention and agreement” – “any name you give a thing is its correct name. If you change it and give it another, the new one is as correct as the old.”¹⁰ The dialogic form holds an innate structural momentum, a built-in Heraclitean flux where, as Socrates quotes: “everything gives way and nothing stands fast”.¹¹ Green reverts to the dialogic form in his last two novels, *Nothing* (1950) and *Doting* (1952), but he builds this same flux and instability into his early work at the word level with names. *Cratylus*’s subtitle, “On the Correctness of Names”,¹² is also relevant for Green’s earliest works. This is most perceptible in the invasion¹³ of multiple Green, Greene and greens (“*onomata*”) in *Blindness*, which anticipates the later, more extended exploration of Rose, rose and roses in *Back*.

By inundating the text of his first novel with various forms of “green”, Green creates intra- and meta-textual spaces within which questions over the arbitrariness and the fixity of names can be explored. The first mention of someone named Greene is a boy at Noat; soon followed by Mrs Green; a house – Greenham; Green the

¹⁰ Plato, *Cratylus*, 1 (383a); 2 (384d).

¹¹ Plato, *Cratylus*, 33 (402a).

¹² Plato, *Cratylus*, 1.

¹³ See Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 9: “the text... allow[s] itself to be invaded by the word *green*.”

draper's; and finally Lorna Greene, who refers us back to the first Greene boy we met at Noat, whose mother she is.¹⁴ We have looked at how closely *Blindness* and Henry Vincent Yorke's biography run, but this profusion of Greens and Greenes adds another dimension by pulling the author's pseudonymous identity into the text and scattering it into multiple others. The notion of a single proper name is thrown into uncertain territory as it becomes two, Henry Vincent Yorke and Henry Green, and then is split further and extended into multiple other (G)reen(e)s.

Green has manipulated, distorted and expanded the proper name such that it is able to act like a common name. The term "(G)reen(e)", like the broader Greek category of "*onomata*", is shown in various forms with its shifting ability to specify and particularise, to universalise or, in some cases, to say very little. These various forms of infiltration and dehiscence are made clear by a selection of examples. Take the opening paragraph of Part Two of *Blindness*: "Beyond, the door, green, as were the thick embrasures of the two windows green, and the carpet and the curtain" (*Bl*, 39). The adjectival usage of "green" is held aloft by the bracketing commas; it is then repeated a clause later, only to be silently implied twice more in the next clause. The proper noun, Green, has become, in the terms of the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, "common to many things":

Of names, some are proper, and singular to one thing only, as Peter, John, this man, this tree. And some are common to many things, as man, horse, tree, every of which, though but one name, is nevertheless of divers particular things, in respect of all which together, it is called a universal, there being nothing in the world universal but names, for the things named are every one of them individual and singular.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Green, *Blindness*, 18, 40 and 135, 64, 139, 245. There is also a Mrs Green in "Saturday" (Unpublished, 1927-28). See *Surviving*, 51-58.

¹⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, Parts I and II* (1651), ed. A. P. Martinich (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Editions, 2005), I. IV. 6, p. 27.

This relationship between the “common” and the “proper” is further muddled by the plethora of “proper” name Green(e)s mentioned earlier, whereby the repetition of the proper name, with its assumed particularity, threatens to blur the specificity and make it universal. It isn’t clear who is who or what being green really means.¹⁶ The fact that the final Greene mentioned, Lorna Greene, is the mother of the first Greene in *Blindness* returns to the relative specificity of the name. It provides circularity and a specific point of reference which the young novelist was keen to draw the reader’s attention to: “she was saying something about his having known her son at Noat” (*Bl*, 245). For Hobbes “a proper name bringeth to mind one thing only, universals recall any one of those many”; for Green, the power of the name to “recall any one of those many” is under constant scrutiny.¹⁷

Green questions the effectiveness of the proper name by revealing its distracting or simplistic nature, whereby it fails to represent the specific individual in any purposeful way. Although Green reminds the reader that they have been introduced to the young Greene earlier in the novel, it is uncertain why we should remember him. His appearance was fleeting but memorably bizarre: he orders “several chickens’ heads, lights etc., to be sent up to White” (*Bl*, 18). And yet none of his actions have any consequences within the novel. The bizarre incongruity of chickens’ heads and lights is unexplained, they seem both significant and irrelevant, if lightly comic. The name reminds us of an individual but the reminder only

¹⁶ It is worth recalling the origins of “fugue in Green” as a reminder that this uncertainty is not necessarily seen as a bad thing by Green: “where the sea is deep there are palaces in forests and there the old men sit, their thoughts a fugue in Green”. Henry Yorke to Nevill Coghill, 8 August 1925, No. 28, Eton College Archives. For similar examples of the term “green” being linked to depth, uncertainty and incongruity in *Blindness*, see, among others, 83: “to swim on the current past mysterious doors in the bathing green” and 95: “A long way away there might be a country of rest, made of ice, green in the depths, an ice that was not cold, a country to rest in.”

¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), I. IV. 7, p. 27. Hobbes later describes how names make science possible: “a knowledge of all the consequences of names appertaining to the subject in hand; and that is it, men call SCIENCE”, I. V. 17, p. 37.

reinforces our sense of inadequacy in comprehending that individual's multi-faceted nature. So, if in autobiographical terms "(n)ames distract, [and] nicknames are too easy" (*PMB*, 88), what then is the role of names in Green's fiction?

A literary name can be much more informed and purposeful than a real name. The baby in real life is usually given a name before their personality is evident, whilst the character in fiction might be named in order to emphasise their personality or role. One might think of the three "Sans" brothers lacking faith ("*Sansfoy*"), law ("*Sansloy*") and joy ("*Sansjoy*") or the ironically named "*Fidessa*" (Faithful) in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.¹⁸ There are also numerous cases of names which act universally in fiction, where the proper name is imbued with generic qualities: the tellers of *The Canterbury Tale* – the Knight, the Miller, The Wife of Bath or the Clerk; or Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*; or Milton's reinvention of a universal Satan – "one of those many"¹⁹ – in *Paradise Lost*. The names of these characters tune into a reader's or society's pre-existing set of expectations and work within that shifting mythic space to expand or subvert the universal notion. On a much smaller level, *Blindness* works in similar ways by reinventing, and thus expanding, the autobiographical space of Henry Vincent Yorke as fiction or myth. At the time of publication, for those who knew or knew of the Yorkes, the spaces between what is known of Henry Vincent Yorke and the representation of him as the fictional character, John Haye, are filled with the interpretative potential for mythmaking. Similarly, the relationship between Henry Vincent Yorke and the newly-cast author, Henry Green, gains depth and variety as time passes and the number of novels authored by Green grows. As one entity expanding into the sites created between

¹⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (1590), ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. (London: Penguin Books, 1987), Book I, Canto II, 25, l. 6, 8 and 9; Book I, Canto II, 26, l. 2.

¹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), I. IV. 7, p. 27.

Henry Vincent Yorke and Henry Green, the author's individuality, his singular multiplicity is tentatively offered.

But Green simultaneously sets out to subvert this search for a realisable, static representation of individuality. The introduction of other, unrelated Green(e)s into the fiction of *Blindness* – by repeating the name but switching the individual; by retaining the pronunciation but altering the spelling – sees the author dismantling the particularity of a name. The particular fugal strand which we have temporarily become accustomed to, our attachment to the notion of Green as an individual, must be submerged back into the synaesthetic polyphony of the “fugue in Green” as a whole. It is in this omnipresent awareness of multiplicity – “now thoughts settled 3 by 3 in his mind” (*Li*, 114) – that Green's names insistently present themselves as both particular and general. George Berkeley's self-styled Philonous argues in the first of his dialogues with Hylas that “it is an universally received maxim, that everything which exists is particular”.²⁰ It is not the particular, for Green, so much as the inferred multiplicity of that particular when seen in relation to or as a construct of indefinable and shifting others. Rather than simply tagging a character with a reductive, ironic or historical name, Green broadens the relativity and uncertainty of that name; he widens the gap between the name and the named by his innovative play with various versions of one name. In this way, Green highlights the difficulties of presenting the multi-faceted nature of an individual by revealing the inadequacies of a singular name in representing such multiplicity. This resonates with the Socratic notion that the name is simply there to signal that the search for a being is in process, where “*onoma*” etymologically denotes “a being for which there is a search”:

²⁰ George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713) in *The Works of George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne*, eds. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1948-57), II, 192.

SOCRATES: Do you know what “*maiesthai*” means?
HERMOGENES: Yes, it means “to search” (“*zêtein*”).
SOCRATES: Well, “*onoma*” (“name”) seems to be a compressed statement which says: “this is a being for which there is a search.” You can see this more clearly in “*onomaston*” (“thing named”), since it clearly says: “this is a being for which there is a search (*on hou masma estin*).”²¹

The name is just one part of the fluid search for knowledge of a being. For Green, though, the name can act in many ways which reflect the multiples inherent in “a being” rather than in the Platonic search for a singularity of form. In this way it reveals more of a modernist fascination with multiple voices and the fragmentation of self.²²

Charactonyms: *Concluding* and *Party Going*

It is Green’s inclusivity and variety, his broad awareness and open-ended exploration of the potentialities within naming, which is so evident in his fiction. On a few occasions individuals are simplistically reduced by their name to a type or role. This is particularly the case in *Concluding* (1948), perhaps as part of that novel’s more general eschewal of psychological realism. The most extreme examples of this use of the “charactonym”²³ are with Mr Rock and the sisters, Miss Edge and Miss Baker. Without needing any further description, we can imagine the universal characteristics of these individuals and the text further encourages these associations. Mr Rock is “gray”, “old and deaf, half blind” and he describes early morning as

²¹ Plato, *Cratylus*, 64(421a). It is explained earlier in the text that the Greek “*on*” means “being”.

²² The most influential example of this fragmentation is, perhaps, *The Waste Land* (1922). See particularly Canto II, “A Game of Chess”, 64-66 and Canto V, “What the Thunder said”: “These fragments have I shored up against my ruins”, l. 430, 75. Also of interest is the note which T. S. Eliot writes for l. 411, 80, where he quotes “F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 306. ‘My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it... In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul.’”

²³ A term used to describe “names that obviously delineate character” in Leonard R. N. Ashley, *Names in Literature* (Great Britain: 1st Books Library, 2003), xiv.

coming “hard on a man my age... How hard? Oh, heavy” (*Co*, 5). Similar to the rock-like attributes of Mr Rock are the predictable body shapes and mentalities of the sisters: the sharp, flat silhouette of an edge points to the thin rather skittish nature of Miss Edge; whilst the connotations of the baker suggest the rather more rotund and calm character of Miss Baker: “Edge was short and thin. Baker, who hardly cared for early rising, fat and short” (*Co*, 13).

With Amabel, though, in *Party Going* (1939), we see how Green might obfuscate the expected limitations of the charactonym. Amabel, the character, encapsulates and is partly defined by the love and beauty held within Amabel, the name: “She was lovely and when she opened the door and came in they looked up and knew again how beautiful she was.” (*PG*, 137). This is depicted most clearly in Amabel’s celebrity status:

shop girls in Northern England knew her name and what she looked like from photographs in illustrated weekly papers, in Hyderabad the colony knew the colour of her walls. (*PG*, 140)

She is known by name across England and abroad, her beauty is universal. But this general recognition of her name does not suggest an opportunity to realise her character, as the reader has been specifically warned in advance, a few pages earlier:

Amabel’s flat had been decorated by the same people Max had his flat done by, her furniture was like his, his walls like hers, their chair coverings were alike and even their ash trays were the same... In this way Max and Amabel and their friends baffled that class of person who will judge people by what they read or by the colour of their walls. (*PG*, 133)

Recognition of a name, familiarity with a face, awareness of the colour of a person’s walls, all these “personal” facets of Amabel reveal her beauty and her social standing, but they are baffling in their very “sameness”; there is a mysterious lack of idiosyncrasy. Like the letters of her name traced in the steam of the bathroom mirror,

they offer a quick glance of her beauty whilst creating a simultaneous separation of that face from its bearer:

She leaned over and traced her name Amabel in that steam and that pink mass loomed up to meet her in the flesh and looked through bright at her through the letters of her name. She bent down to look at her eyes in the A her name began with, and as she gazed at them steam or her breath dulled her reflection and the blue her eyes were went out or faded.

She rubbed with the palm of her hand, and now she could see all her face. She always thought it more beautiful than anything she had ever seen, and when she looked at herself it was as though the two of them would never meet again, it was to bid farewell. (*PG*, 171-2)

The fragmentation offers a temporary faceted clarity: the “pink mass” becomes “bright”, the eyes blue when seen through the limited framing of the letters.

In this moment, there is the possibility that a name could encapsulate the essence of an individual: Amabel is in love with both her name and her face. But this possibility is simultaneously diminished by “the steam”, by “her breath” which “dulled her reflection” and by the separation of herself and the image of herself out there in the mirror (just as the name, too, is broken down into separate letters). The reductive naming of an individual within the confines of a charactonym, the focus on one facet rather than the whole, represents, on one level, the impossibility of anything but seeing the individual fragmentarily and momentarily. And yet, in the case of Amabel’s own frustrated narcissism, there is a moment when “she could see all her face.” In this moment: “She always thought it more beautiful than anything she had ever seen.” But this encounter with her own extreme beauty, as with Narcissus and his reflection, is inextricably associated with futility and separation. Where Narcissus tragically separates himself from the world, ultimately dying from self-love, Amabel must “bid farewell” to the transience and impossibility of this narcissistic moment. The facet, the fading A of her name traced on the mirror, represents an opening, a way in, but it also “makes a book look blind” (*PMB*, 88). If nothing else the particularity

of the facet, the focus on a singular aspect provides the reader with a moment of stillness, a moment of interpretative potential:

At the same time no one can be sure what others are thinking any more than anyone can say where someone is when they are asleep. And if behind that blank face and closed eyelids and a faint smile on closed lips they are wandering it may be in Tartary, it is their stillness which makes it all possible to one's wildest dreams. (*PG*, 144)

The stillness of the facet – take the charactonym as an example – where a temporary suggestion of meaning is offered is perhaps Green's most overt use of names. But there are many more occasions where Green uses names to obfuscate; where the refusal to name or the confusion of multiple names seeks to complicate and enrich the search for meaning.

Anonyms: *Blindness* and *Living*

By removing specificity, albeit a faceted and reductive specificity, through the absence of a name or by multiplying names, Green reveals another problematic of naming: the constant relativity of the object named. One way in which he brings this problematic to our attention is by means of what Leonard R. N. Ashley refers to as “anonyms”, whereby “names create a distancing effect... by anonymity”. Ashley goes on to provide Hemingway's “the girl”; “the toreador”; “the old waiter”; and Kafka's “K” as examples:

The characters on the one hand may be representative of a whole class of beings rather than individuals and on the other hand might seem so remote as to evoke no images in the reader's mind and so be functionally anonymous.²⁴

There are numerous similar examples of non-specific naming throughout Green's fiction, where characters are defined by their job as “moulder” (*Li*, 34) or “works manager” (*Li*, 1); or their role – “baby howled till mother” (*Li*, 13); “wife” (*Li*, 10). It

²⁴ Ashley, *Names in Literature*, xv.

is a method evident in the title of Green's very first short story, "Their Son" (1922), and is also clearly present in the "Contents" page at the front of his first novel: "Her, Him, Them" (*Bl*, vii). The use of the possessive determiner "their", in the title of the story, draws attention to the pre-existence of others to whom the son is related. But these others cannot possibly be known yet by the reader; just as it is impossible for the reader to know who the pronouns "Her, Him, Them" refer to. The possessive determiner and the pronoun both presuppose that a specific person or animal has previously been mentioned. They refer back to a specificity already provided. Green's use of them in the title thus draws attention to the inappropriate familiarity of his terms. It reveals the characters as knowable only in relation to others, their names gaining meaning only within a context where they are used rather than as stand-alone titles or signposts. Green's starting-point is resolutely problematic.

Green's oblique approach to naming, whereby he delays attaching specific and personal names to his characters, foregrounds the context or backdrop of the story ahead of the individuals living within it. When asked by Terry Southern in the interview for the *Paris Review* whether he began novels "with a certain character in mind, or rather with a certain situation in mind", Green's answer is simple: "situation every time".²⁵ And so it is with the opening of *Living* (1929):

Bridesley, Birmingham.

Two o'clock. Thousands came back from dinner along the streets.

"What we want is go, push," said works manager to son of Mr Dupret. "What I say to them is – let's get on with it, let's get the stuff out."

Thousands came back to factories they worked in from their dinners.

"I'm always at them but they know me. They know I'm a father and mother to them. If they're in trouble they've but to come to me. And they turn out beautiful work, beautiful work. I'd do anything for 'em and they know it."

Noises of lathes working began again in this factory. Hundreds went along road outside, men and girls. Some turned in to Dupret factory. (*Li*, 1)

²⁵ Green, "The Art of Fiction", 242.

The first words of the novel give a specific place and a specific time. The factual specificity of such an opening then jars incongruously with the vague approximation of the number of workers. This incongruity is further reinforced as the flatness of the workers' dull routine, their anonymity, is juxtaposed with the more energised, passionate tones of the "works manager's" spoken words. The two registers jockey with each other for position. The "works manager", though without a proper name, gains an individual depth through his voice, whilst the mass of workers remain depersonalised and non-specific. They are the metaphorical "sons" of the unnamed "works manager". The thousands soon drop to hundreds, though, until "some turned in to Dupret factory." Green pulls an undisclosed number – "some" – into the more specific context of the Dupret factory. This specificity will grow as the next five paragraphs bring in five specific named characters and twenty-six more will be named over the same number of pages.²⁶ Green moves quickly from the anonymous, non-specific multiplicity of the workers, as described with patronising simplicity from the superior position of the works manager, to a bewildering mass of individual characters, each more difficult to decipher from their counterpart.

In Part I of *Blindness*, Green introduces an array of forty different characters, schoolboys, schoolmasters and shopkeepers, to create the chaotic air of Noat School; in *Living*, though, the naming of individuals within the masses begins to take on a more socially-charged edge. There is an intimation of this in the way that John Haye arrogantly renames Joan Entwhistle "June (her name was June)" (*Bl*, 149). After his accident John projects his own needs onto Joan and creates a romanticised future with

²⁶ It is possible that Green produces a pseudo-pattern here by calling to mind the 5 vowels and 26 letters (characters) of the alphabet, where each character is meaningless until it is joined up.

her, idealised as June.²⁷ John realises that the name change, with its connotations of summer, “was an illusion – a lovely one” (*Bl*, 159); it is, however lovely, wrong. Of most interest here is the fact that Joan’s name is consciously deemed transferable, by both of them:

“My name isn’t June, it’s Joan, and always was.”

“But do you mind my calling you June? I think June is such a lovely name, so much nicer than Joan. You are just like June, too.”

“Why should I be like June? You are silly. But I don’t mind. You can have your own way if you like, though I don’t know why you shouldn’t like Joan, which is my name whether you like it or not.” (*Bl*, 163)

John denies the legitimacy of Joan’s name for him. Although totally aware of her real name, John prefers his version, he feels that it is lovelier, but also more apt – “you are just like June, too.” Joan is surprisingly meek in allowing John to call her June – perhaps due to her own lower social standing or pity; but she does make it clear that although he might like to call her June, her real name will always be Joan. Both John and Joan choose what is not real over what is in order to deal with the overwhelming nature of the situation, but it is John who comes out worst. He abuses his social position to rename Joan as June, a selfish attempt to mould Joan into something more appropriate to his needs, and in so doing he comes across as fickle and is more difficult to sympathise with:

“It is no good June, I must go. And June must go too, if there is anything in a name. Think of your August, and of how exciting that will be. It will come out right one day.” (*Bl*, 204)

The fickle shift from June to August reveals a laughable lack of rigour or depth in John’s feelings – only a few moments earlier in the same conversation he was asking her to go with him to London – and the closing cliché rings weakly hollow; John has

²⁷ “But June would be so charming; she must be, she had such strong hands” (*Bl*, 152); “How they would talk, both June and he, for she must and would understand how he needed someone young” (*Bl*, 153); “Would June be like this?”; “Still, June felt like that, and her loneliness would have taught her silence, for she could not have met many people” (*Bl*, 154).

misappropriated the power of his social standing to rename Joan. It might help for a while, but it is ultimately a failure.

A Multiplicity of Names

In *Living* we see more of the power struggles apparent in the process of naming. Rather than microscopically focusing on the relatively simple, individual scenario of an upper-class boy's relationship with a village girl, *Living* zooms out to cover broader swathes and complexities of social division. It has been noted above that the opening of *Living* shows Green's ability to specify location and time clearly, but that there is something much more approximate when it comes to the individuals involved in that specific setting. Right from the outset Green refers to individual characters with various permutations of their name relative to who is speaking. Not only is the reader introduced to a whole host of characters in quick succession, but each individual character is referred to in various, confusing ways. The stability of one unchanging name referring to one individual is pulled away and replaced by a more confusing multiplicity of names. Each different name applied to the same individual represents a particular speaker's take on that individual, a particular social register. But at this early stage of the novel the reader isn't even sure who is who yet, let alone what each character thinks about the other or where they stand socially in relation to that other. The next section of the opening of *Living* is a fitting example:

Some had stayed in iron foundry shop in this factory for dinner. They sat round brazier in a circle:

“And I was standing by the stores in the doorway with me back to the door into the pipe shop with a false nose on and green whiskers. Albert inside was laughin' and laughin' again but 'Tis 'im comes in through the pipe shop and I sees Albert draw up but I didn't take much notice till I heard, 'Ain't you got nothin' better to do Gates but to make a fool of yourself?' And 'e says to

Albert, 'What would you be standin' there for Milligan?' And I was too surprised to take the nose off, it was so sudden. I shan't ever forget that."
"And that was all that 'e said to you Joe?" (*Li*, 1-2)

This is a "clear" example of Green's oblique approach to naming: the specific name is delayed and then, immediately after providing that specificity, another name is thrown into the muddled mix. To start with we do not know who is telling the story nor do we know who or how many are actually listening. Within the story being told, Albert is introduced first, followed by 'Tis 'im, then Gates, who we assume is the "I" telling the story. 'Tis 'im then talks to Albert referring to him by what we assume is his surname, Milligan. The quotation ends with one of the listeners referring to the speaker as Joe. Three characters have been introduced – Joe Gates, Albert Milligan and 'Tis 'im – but it feels like we've met six different characters two of whom haven't even got a proper name yet. It won't be until later in chapter 1 that it is made clear to the reader that 'Tis 'im is the works manager (*Li*, 3) and even later when his surname, Bridges, comes to light (*Li*, 8); it's chapter 2 when we learn that he is a Colonel (*Li*, 17); in chapter 6 a first name appears when Walters calls him Arthur (*Li*, 67); and then, at the end of chapter 10, his wife calls him Phil (*Li*, 145). Each name reveals another facet of the individual and complicates the whole. The whispered warning of a superior's imminent arrival, using "'Tis 'im" as a name, clearly separates "Colonel Bridges" from his workers; it could be construed as derogatory or possibly admiring but it is not affectionate or tender in the way that the shortened form "Phil" is, nor does it signify the same level of acquaintance as "Arthur". This bewildering array of names for one individual gives us an insight into the character's singular multiplicity, but it also highlights how name selection shows the individual in relation to his or her society.

“’Tis ’im” is one example of many in which an individual who holds a position of power is not given a first name immediately. Mr Dupret, the owner of the factory, is not referred to as Jack until chapter 7 (*Li*, 85); Mr Tarver, the chief designer, is introduced in chapter 1 (*Li*, 7) but his first name, John, is not mentioned until chapter 4 (*Li*, 31). And in both cases it is only their wives who are able to be so familiar. A similar delay in the use of the personal name occurs with “the son of Mr Dupret”, who is first introduced as “the son of...” on the first page of the novel, reminiscent perhaps of Joey Pullin’s introduction as “Their Son”. It is not until chapter 7 that Dupret Junior is referred to, by his mother, in more familiar terms as Dickie, Dick and Richard (*Li*, 84, 92).²⁸ In *Living* the lack of familiarity, shown in the omission of a first name, is tied in with notions of power and respect. By remaining impersonal and titular these individuals assume a position of superiority whereby they are seen as above or inaccessible to the majority. As people seen to have first names, wives and mothers, these authority figures lose the individuality and the strength which their positions in society create for them. They become more like everybody else. Take “Colonel Bridges”: by the time the reader sees him as “Phil” his influence in the factory is rapidly diminishing, he is on enforced leave in Weston. Similarly, when “Mr Dupret” is called “Jack” he is sick in bed, surprisingly debilitated by a sore shoulder.

For his son, the problematic of naming is even more crucial. As Mr Dupret’s eventual successor he demands respect, but as a young man he is automatically lower on the social hierarchy; he is expected to defer to the wisdom of age and experience.

²⁸ Mrs Dupret uses the more formal Richard to describe the amusingly delicate job which her son has to perform in escorting a “well-known courtesan” to an ill Mr Dupret’s room one evening (*Li*, 91-3).

This dynamic plays itself out between Richard Dupret and Mr Walters – “our head man in London” (*Li*, 36). Mr Walters is angered by the seeming lack of respect in Richard Dupret’s calling him Walters: “Hoity toity Mr Walters thought and why wouldn’t he give him handle to his name, call a man ‘Walters’ who was old enough to be his father!” (*Li*, 131). But Mr Walters also struggles to find a suitable name for Dupret Junior. He has known and worked with Richard’s father, Mr Dupret, for many years. So to refer to Richard as Mr Dupret is difficult. But in order for Richard to take over from his father this is exactly what must happen; he must take on and be called by his father’s name:

“Good-morning Dick, how’s your father?”
Why should he call me Dick, young Mr Dupret said in his mind, his familiarity was jovial but then he went on thinking any joviality was offensively familiar. (*Li*, 98)

Rather than sinking in the shadow of his father’s name, it is important for Richard to be seen to take on the authority of that very title. The first name, particularly when shortened to Dick or Dickie, emphasises his youthfulness, which is a weakness if he is to stand in as boss. Richard wants the respect of being Mr Dupret, without being Junior. Another example of inheriting a name comes in the later novel, *Loving*. The Tennants have always, historically, referred to all their footmen as Arthur:

“Oh yes I rang didn’t I, Arthur,” she said and he was called by that name as every footman from the first had been called, whose name had really been Arthur, all the Toms, Harrys, Percys, Victors one after the other, all called Arthur. (*Lo*, 11)

But with the butler Eldon dying, Charley Raunce vies for a promotion. Mrs Tennant acknowledges this promotion to butler, not by raising his wages (“Mind I’ve said nothing about more wages”), but by altering the way she refers to him: “Very well then,” she announced, “I suppose we shall have to call you Raunce” (*Lo*, 10).

The name that one is called by, whether reflecting the status of a job title or a family name, can both empower and disempower the individual. We see this again in the later novel, *Concluding*, where all the girls in the school have first names beginning with *M*: Mary, Marion, Merode Manley, Maisy, Margot, Moira, Muriel, Melissa, Midget and Mirabel.²⁹ It is not just the girls either. There's Matron (*Co*, 14); Maggie the cook (*Co*, 21); Miss Edge is Miss Mabel Edge (*Co*, 104) and there's Ma Marchbanks, the nurse, too (*Co*, 65). The soft, consonantal repetition in the names provides a low hum of white noise; it is difficult to distinguish anything particular about any one of the girls:

It hid the line of girls beyond... They were no more to him than light blue shadows, and their low voices, to his deafness, just a female murmuring, a susurrant of feathers. (*Co*, 21)

In fact, although much of the novel centres on the disappearance of two of the girls – Mary and Merode – there is a disturbing lack of panic or dismay throughout the school. Miss Edge and Miss Baker still go into London for their weekly meeting, the girls still pick flowers for that evening's celebrations and the dance goes ahead; even though, by the end of the novel, Mary still isn't any nearer to being found.

Although each girl is individually given a first name, one senses that each could disappear without leaving much of a trace. In fact, in a clear nod towards George Orwell's recently published *Animal Farm* (1945), Mr Rock's bizarre trio of farmyard pets seem to have more individuality and insight than all the other human characters in the novel. Together they are portrayed as significant, with the potential to understand more than all the other characters. All three – Ted, the goose; Alice, the Persian cat; and Daisy, the pig – are introduced on the first page of the novel with identifiable individuality. As the novel progresses, their heightened senses and

²⁹ Green, *Concluding*, 14, 20, (Manley – 128), 26, 28, 47, 126, 184 and 185.

abilities are often highlighted. At one stage, Mr Rock, a famous scientist himself, attests to Ted's superior knowledge: "Mr Rock knew now there must be a flight of birds fast winging, – Ted knows where he thought" (*Co*, 5).³⁰ Later on, Moira is being questioned about the disappearance of Mary and Merode and she suggests that Alice, the cat, might know something: "What might'nt Alice be able to tell?" (*Co*, 50). Finally, when out searching for the missing girl, Daisy the pig is attributed with the ability to see: "Daisy would be his [Mr Rock's] eyes" (*Co*, 147); whilst Miss Baker is convinced that the pig can speak and cast moral judgement:

Baker noticed the pig watched them with disrespect, thought it seemed to hold a muttered conversation half under its breath, judging by the petulant squeaks which issued from its muddy mouth. (*Co*, 151)³¹

It is the goose, the cat and the pig who manage to retain their colourful identities and their individual skills within the monochrome machinations of this anonymous state-led girls' Institute.³² This is comically reinforced by a letter which Miss Edge receives from "O. M. S.",³³ in which a directive is issued, whereby:

- (1) ... those girls under tuition for State Service, throughout the various Institutes, ... take part in practical management.
- (2) That, for this purpose, it is advisable they should be provided with pig farms. (*Co*, 124)

It is time for the girls to learn about "practical management" from the pigs.

Green's treatment of the multiple uses of names in his fiction is a rigorously inclusive but also humorous examination. Names are revealed as deeply relevant and significant to characters themselves. Richard Dupret, for example, and Charley

³⁰ Ted even acts as a comical replacement for God in a twist of the well-worn phrase: "God knows where".

³¹ This nod towards George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is also picked up at a more microscopic level with Green's humorous reworking of pigs into a couple of clichés: "water off a pig's back" (*Co*, 36) and "like cats and pigs then" (*Co*, 100).

³² There are constant references to the black and white nature of the Institute run by Miss Edge and Miss Baker, with particular reference to Miss Baker's fondness for black and white animals (*Co*, 69-70; 100; 105 and 125).

³³ Mr Rock explains the initials earlier in the novel: "(On Majesty's Service; they had left out His, long since, being unworthy of the times)" (*Co*, 33).

Raunce are attuned to how the names that they are called by are essential to the way they are perceived in general, especially in the workplace. But the frustration they feel at their lack of control of this usage is often comical for the reader. Names can offer a quick, amusing way into a character, offering an easily remembered facet, as with Amabel, Mrs Tennant or Mr Rock. The use of a variety of names can add to the growing knowledge of one character as they are witnessed in different contexts, as emphasised by the variations of character situated between 'Tis 'im, works manager, Bridges, Colonel, Arthur or Phil. In contrast, names can blur or distance the individual, creating a multiple anonymity rather than singular specificities. We see this on one level in the meta-textuality of the various forms of Green or, on another, in the Institutionally-tagged *M* girls of *Concluding*. The names are given but the repetition and variation obfuscates any sense of a character involved.

In addition to all these varieties of nominal usages, and very much tied in with Green's sense of humour, is the mistaken use or hearing of a name. Mrs Tennant, after unwillingly relenting on the use of Charley's surname – "I *suppose* we shall have to call you Raunce" (my italics) (*Lo*, 10) – reverts to using Arthur again with comic haste.³⁴ Richard Dupret, so keen to be called by the correct name himself, admits to being "so bad at names" (*Li*, 50) that he can't even remember the name of the girl he purports to love: "anyway what was her name" (*Li*, 52); "What had been her name? A – a – Anne – Anya – Nunk – HANNAH GLOSSOP" (*Li*, 61). I have discussed how John Haye renames Joan Entwistle as June in *Blindness*. But there are also examples where names are mistaken, perhaps through being misheard or distorted. In *Concluding*, Mr Rock comically mishears the name of the sergeant's cat:

³⁴ See less than half a page later: "We really know we can rely on you you know Arthur" (*Lo*, 11).

“Yes, very strange,” the sergeant mused aloud. “We have a cat at home, a tom, we call her Paula.”

“Poorer?” Mr Rock enquired, in his deafness.

“Why how’s that?” the policeman asked.

“I don’t know,” the old man answered, putting on an idiotic look, as he often did. (*Co*, 72)

Similarly in *Back*, Charley Summers has a distorted reading of “rose”. Whatever the context in which it is used, whether as a common or a proper noun, an adjective or a verb, Charley only ever hears the proper noun: Rose, the name of his old lover. When Mrs Frazier talks of flower prices rising, using the past tense of the verb (“they rose, they’ve rose...”) Charley is “pierced right through” by the words (*Ba*, 35); he is brought back “sharp” when he hears the record “Honeysuckle Rose” “oozing out next door” (*Ba*, 57); and when Dot mentions the effect of the port (“I suppose it was the fumes rose...”), “she saw a spasm pass across his face” (*Ba*, 63). The impact of a name or the way that a name is interpreted and remembered, it becomes clear, cannot be controlled or predicted. In Derrida’s terms, the proper name is “the absolute aphorism”:

9. The aphorism or discourse of dissociation: each sentence, each paragraph dedicates itself to separation, it shuts itself up, whether one likes it or not, in the solitude of its proper duration. Its encounter and its contact with the other are always given over to chance, to whatever may befall, good or ill. Nothing is absolutely assured, neither the linking nor the order.³⁵

Green is constantly playing with the notion that the name, in its encounter or its contact with the other, must always be “given over to chance”. There is always a chance of a mistake, of over-simplification or of anonymity in the name and in using names. Green uses the name as a multiple-use container, but there is also the potential in having no name at all.

³⁵ Derrida, “Aphorism Countertime”, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 433, 417.

In chapter 9 of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus declares: “My name is nobody”.³⁶ This empty container acting as a name famously stops Cyclops’s friends from helping him in his pain and blindness: “Who is doing this to you?” they ask. Through naming himself “nobody”, Odysseus gains a carefully-planned power. Once his plan has succeeded, though, the hero cannot restrain himself from sharing his real name, even when his men try desperately to dissuade him:

But my temper was up; their words did not dissuade me, and in my rage I shouted back at him once more: “Cyclops, if anyone asks you how you came by your blindness, tell him your eye was put out by Odysseus, sacker of cities, the son of Laertes, who lives in Ithaca.”³⁷

Odysseus’s carefully planned ruse and his reckless, post-success need to inform the Cyclops of his name, the name of his father and where he lives, reveals a relatively traditional return to the power of the name. Odysseus, as hero, is always in control. The invisibility cloak of no name is a useful device, but once it has achieved its purpose the true hero must emerge from under its anonymous shroud and proclaim his name aloud for posterity. There is little lasting power in anonymity. This powerlessness is felt by Miss Julia Wray in *Party Going*:

As she stepped out into this darkness of fog above and left warm rooms with bells and servants and her uncle who was one of Mr Roberts’ directors – a rich important man – she lost her name and was all at once anonymous; if it had not been for her rich coat she might have been any typist making her way home. (*PG*, 15-6)

The social status which Julia drops when losing her name is fortuitously saved, at least in her own mind, by the outward opulence of her attire. Both Odysseus, with the taunting proclamation of his name over the waves, and Julia, with the significant wealth of her red coat, retain an important sense of their self and their status.

³⁶ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. E. V. Rieu (London: Penguin, 2006), Book X, 119.

³⁷ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book X, 123.

But Green's exploration of the potentialities of naming, both with his own name and in his fiction, uncovers something outside of self-proclamation and social positioning. It points to or suggests something separate from the name. In *Blindness*, Emily Haye sees John's blindness as the end of the family name, as the end of many of her preconceived aspirations:

It was so terrible, he would never marry now, she would have no grandchildren. The place would be sold, the name would die, there was no one. Ralph had been the last. "Granny." ... All her dreams were gone. (*Bl*, 71)

The loss of the family name renders a future beyond herself, beyond John, impossible: the name is emptied, rendered meaningless by John's incapacity to procreate and by the sale of the ancestral home. But within the emptiness of this name, there is also a potential escape from the name. In autobiographical terms, the emptying of the name Henry Vincent Yorke creates the possibility of a non-specific non-existence – Henry Green; where the name "Henry Green" annihilates Henry Vincent Yorke. It destroys it and simultaneously transforms it. There is a resemblance here to Derrida's "*Khōra*": "(body without body but unique body and place [lieu] of everything, in the place of everything, interval, place [place], spacing)."³⁸ Derrida argues, in his essay "*Khōra*", that Socrates "effaces himself" and that "his speech occurs in a third genus":

If Socrates pretends to include himself among those whose genus is to have no place, he does not assimilate himself to them, he says he resembles them. Hence he holds himself in a third genus, in a way, neither that of the sophists, poets, and other imitators (of whom he speaks), nor that of the philosopher-politicians (to whom he speaks, proposing only to listen to them). His speech occurs in a third genus and in the neutral space on a place without place where everything is marked but which would be "in itself" unmarked. Doesn't he already resemble what others, later, those very ones to whom he gives the word, will call the *Khōra*?³⁹

This "third genus" appears to offer up one way of conceptualising Green's self-effacement – his replacement of binaries with "ones and threes" – whereby individuals are seen as singular multiplicities, always apt to shift or change in relation

³⁸ Derrida, "'Sauf Le Nom' (Post-Scriptum)" (1992) in *On the Name*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., 56.

³⁹ Derrida, "*Khōra*", 109.

to the undetermined “other”. Green creates a “neutral space” by means of his inclusivity, but also through denial. Each shifting facet of a character, their anonymity and their individuality, each inconclusive name, creates multiple possibilities. But in multiplying possibilities Green denies the binary possibility of “either... or”. It is the fictional equivalent of his choice of Henry Green as a *nom de plume*, whereby the non-specificity of Henry Green suggests multiple possible interpretations, but denies the possibility of one Henry Green. This denial or apophasis is dense with the difficulties of linguistic communication, but the acceptance of the process of naming, of the process of writing, is also present within it.⁴⁰ The scattering pigeon at the end of *Living*, which reappears, dead, at the beginning of *Party Going*, symbolically contains this apophasis. The pigeon’s return, as singular (non-)existence, pulls us, with a start, into the new text, whilst simultaneously pointing to the work and the world outside that work.

⁴⁰ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 554: “**1657** J. SMITH *Myst. Rhet.* 164 Apophasis... a kind of an Irony, whereby we deny that we say or doe that which we especially say or doe. **1753** CHAMBERS *Cycl. Supp.*, *Apophasis*... whereby we really say or advise a thing under a feigned show of passing over, or dissuading it.”

Chapter 3

Enigma and Symbol in *Living* and *Party Going*

At the end of *Living* one bird – a pigeon – is singled out from the multitudinous flocks which populate Green’s second novel; a single pigeon also dramatically opens his third, *Party Going*. It is an image which binds the two novels together despite the long decade of the 1930s which lies between their publication dates. This chapter begins in microcosm with a detailed look at the treatment of pigeons in *Living* and the subsequent treatment of one pigeon in *Party Going*. In *Living* it is possible to discern the early Green’s self-conscious romantic inclinations in the symbolic portrayal of the birds, but as the novel progresses the symbolism accumulates a denser sense of uncertainty which reaches its apogee in *Party Going*. The narrowing of focus from the flock of pigeons in *Living*, “This was filled with pigeon flocks. Thousands of pigeon wavered there in the sky” (*Li*, 377), to the single bird in *Party Going*, “bird that had been disturbed” (*PG*, 7) promises to attach an intensified significance to the pigeon; whilst the very same diminution from many pigeons to one dead pigeon, from a different perspective, suggests a possible extinguishing of all significance.

Initially, this chapter will sketch out these two shifts – from the multiple to the singular; from the neatness of categorisation to growing uncertainty – through a cumulative analysis of Green’s intricate depiction of birds. After exploring the polysemy of this avian symbol on a microscopic level, the next chapter will then broaden its focus to look at how Green manipulates and works in and around the

structural singleness of the one-day novel. The familiar structure of the single day, as with the symbol of the single pigeon, creates a shell, not unlike the specific non-specificity of the pseudonym Green, which allows Green's writing the freedom to create an atmosphere of growing uncertainty and "non-representation". Within the familiar surrounds of one day in one train station in one city, Green's writing is at his most experimental. The singularity of the structure and setting is duplicitous, perhaps even "multiplicitous"; the solid central structure creates an initially reassuring framework, which Green then proceeds to dismantle through his exploration of the multiple potentialities and communicative failings inherent within language. Green takes the proliferation of birds in *Living* and drops one, dead, into the centre of *Party Going*. In this way the familiar vitality of *Living*'s recurrent symbolism is given "Life-in-Death" in *Party Going* (the allusion to Coleridge will gain significance as this chapter progresses) whereby the familiar is instantly defamiliarised.

Birds in *Living* and *Party Going*

Birds – pigeons, doves, seagulls and sparrows – proliferate in *Living*. Their communal flight is often symbolically associated with the fluttering indirection of multiple thoughts in the mind;¹ their confusing configurations dissipated at times and united at others:

When we think – it might be flock of pigeons flying in the sky so many things
go to make our thought, the number of pigeons, and they don't fly straight.
Now one pigeon will fly away from the greater number, now another:
sometimes half the flock will follow one, half the other till they join again.
(*Li*, 340)²

¹ See also *Pack my Bag*: "one's thoughts like pigeons circling down out of the sky" (*PMB*, 53).

² The symbolically anthropomorphic nature of birds, whereby humans are seen to act in similar ways or sound like the birds, is also pointed at throughout *Party Going*: "She thought those gulls were for the sea they were to cross that evening" (*PG*, 19) and "Claire and Evelyn had met and were greeting each other... with cries not unlike more seagulls" (*PG*, 25).

The assumed expectations raised by the above quotation, as exemplified by the single word “till”, are that the flock of pigeons will join together again, that thoughts will eventually find cohesion and direction, and that both, the pigeons and the thoughts, will ultimately find their way back home. This unifying eventuality, with its intimations of a romantic sentiment, might at first seem surprisingly straightforward to readers expecting the trademark ambiguity of Green’s crabwise approach:

For as racing pigeon fly in the sky, always they go round above house which provides for them or, if loosed at a distance from that house then they fly straight there, so her thoughts would not point away long from house which had provided for her. (*Li*, 348)

The neatness of the image, of the racing pigeon (and the child) always finding its way home, chafes somewhat with the shifting, cumulative, relative multiplicities of approach which were outlined and argued for in chapters 1 and 2. But, as with the fictional and meta-fictional repetition and variation of names expounded in these earlier chapters, the images of the birds in *Living*, and then again at the opening of *Party Going*, gradually accumulate a greater sense of complexity and ambivalence as they appear in a growing variety of contexts.

Initially the pigeons in *Living* seem to have some basic, rather neat symbolic relation with Lily Gates. Most often they are associated with her thoughts about and responses to the notion of home and to Mrs Eames’s young baby. The behaviour of the pigeons appears to offer up metaphorical guidance for Lily when she is weighing up the benefits of staying in Birmingham with Mr Craigan and marrying Jim Dale, or running away with Bert Jones to Canada:

As, in Yorkshire, the housewives on a Sunday will go out, in their aprons, carrying a pigeon and throw this one up and it will climb in spirals in the air, then, when it had reached a sufficient height it will drop down plumb into the apron she holds for it, so Miss Gates, in her thoughts and when these ever threatened to climb up in air, was always coming bump back to Mr Craigan. (*Li*, 348)

The guidance offered by the birds spiralling back down into the held-out apron resembles Lily's present hankering for domestic security, where her dreams of an escape (now failed) are rendered nonsensical. But the power is not so much in the symbol as in the hands and context of the onlooker, in the interpreter of the birds' actions – Lily. This image is drawn up from Lily's own memory in order to support and protect her, like the housewife's apron catching the falling bird, from the spiralling loss of control experienced in her elopement. Lily does not directly witness this ritual, but she is able to attach the memory of it to her present moment, a moment when she seeks the reassuring support of the home which she temporarily abandoned.

This initial neat symbolic relation of the pigeons to Lily soon loses its certainty however. Not long after this memory, as she begins to regain her confidence, Lily is already finding more room for manoeuvre in her interpretations of the pigeons. The tight embrace of the housewife's apron may be a safe haven for the spiralling pigeon, but from another angle it is suffocating: the pigeon is potentially destined to end up as a family meal. The apron strings, then, are replaced by a looser, life-retaining string; one that offers, simultaneously, flexibility and protection:

This was filled with pigeon flocks. Thousands of pigeon wavered there in the sky, and that baby's raucous cry would come to her now and again. So day after day and slowly her feelings began to waver too and make expeditions away from herself, though like on a string. (*Li*, 377)

Lily's individuality becomes divided here in order to represent her opposing needs for both roots and wings, with part of her as the housewife and mother and another part of her the pigeon. This ambiguity, whereby the pigeon is free to fly whilst simultaneously being manacled by a string, reveals the multi-purpose nature of Green's symbols. For this is not the only time the image of "a string" has been used to

describe the tendency of both thoughts and pigeons to stay close to home. It is first used in relation to Mr Craigan's reliance upon Lily:

As pigeon never fly far from house which provides for them (except when they are taken off then they fly back there), as they might be tied by piece of string to that house, so Mr Craigan's eyes did not leave off Lily where she went. We are imprisoned by that person whom we love. In the same way as pigeons have an irritating knack of homing so our thoughts are coming back. (*Li*, 369)³

The fact that Lily picks up this image a little later in the novel and alters it to suit her own needs points to the fluidity of Green's symbols, where words and images are able to pass freely between characters, without any one character gaining ownership or ascendancy. This fluidity foreshadows the reader's own interpretative freedom, enabling each individual to read the world around them in their own personal way: what imprisons one, in this example, releases another.

Lily's growing confidence continues to build until, on the last page of the novel, she is able to release the pigeons, strings and all, in favour of what she has truly wanted all along – a baby: “Suddenly with a loud raucous cry she rushed at the baby, and with clatter of wings all the pigeon lifted and flew away, she rushed at baby to kiss it” (*Li*, 382). It is a final image which recalls Lily's romantic attachment to, and Mrs Eames's questioning contemplation of, the symbolic nature of the pigeons' migrating habits earlier on in the novel:

Is nothing wonderful in migrating birds but when we see them we become muddled in our feeling, we think it so romantic they should go so far, far. Is nothing wonderful in a woman carrying but Mrs Eames was muddled in her feeling by it. As these birds would go where so where would this child go? (*Li*, 367)⁴

³ The theme of imprisonment reappears later: “it was like these pigeons, that flying in a circle always keep that house in sight, so we are imprisoned, with that kind of liberty tied down” (*Li*, 370).

⁴ It is also worth noting that Green uses the line “As these birds would go where so where would this child go?” as his dedication “for Dig” at the opening of the book.

Although Mrs Eames is not able to un-muddle the feelings raised in her by the idea of migrating birds, she is able to see the link between the birds and her baby immediately. Within this process of association, Mrs Eames picks out how the inclination to romanticise the image of birds returning home is similar to the inclination to romanticise the pregnant mother. As an experienced mother herself, Mrs Eames, although unable to voice clearly why, recognises that it is more complicated than this. Lily takes longer to make the link between the birds' homing instincts and her thoughts circling back to the baby. The initial sense of a neat association between Lily's thoughts and the homing pigeons grows much more faceted as the associations multiply.⁵ The various depictions of pigeons throughout the novel, for example, are often juxtaposed or interwoven with thoughts of a baby. The "baby's raucous cry" is linked to the "thousands of pigeon" before Lily herself disturbs this pigeon with her own "raucous cry" (*Li*, 377) in order to kiss the baby. Green recycles the same phrase – "raucous cry" (*Li*, 382) – in a delayed, prosaic form of anaphora to suggest these unstated, even unconscious links. When Lily purloins Mr Craigan's string image, she highlights the potential facets hidden within that one image. The "raucous cry", however, reveals how language can hold within it clues to an emotional level which the character using that very language is not even conscious of.

The final image of Lily charging in to kiss the baby is filled with ambiguities. Unlike Mrs Eames, Lily is not in a position to have children; she is unmarried and her prospects of marriage have taken a turn for the worse since Bert Jones, her first choice of husband, has just deserted her, and she has walked out on Jim, her other marriage

⁵ The short story "Saturday" in *Surviving*, 51-8, is also filled with sparrows and pigeons and, more relevantly for *Living*, ends with a pigeon being waved away from a sick boy's room: "But doctor looked up and seeing it, waved, and pigeon was gone. He said racing pigeon were everywhere now. He said: 'Get me hot water.' Mother made haste. Later he said: 'We'll pull him through'" (58).

option. In light of this, Lily's action is sudden and loud; it causes both amusement and consternation for Mrs Eames. Mrs Eames's response is uncertain: she moves quickly to protect her baby from the rather sudden and unexpected assault, but she is also laughing.⁶ It is her cryptic words on the situation (are they aimed at her son or Lily?) that actually finish the novel – ““You're too young, that's too old for you' she said” (*Li*, 382). For the reader, though, the image that lingers most is that of the clattering wings of the rising pigeon(s).

The question mark hanging over the plurality of the pigeons is an example of where Green's prose is minutely crafted to remain open-ended.⁷ At times in *Living*, the plural is used, “flock of pigeons” (*Li*, 340), whilst at other times the *s* is left off even when the plural is clearly meant – “thousands of pigeon” (*Li*, 377). At this crucial moment of the novel Green's text seems purposefully oblique. Out of all the pigeons in the fancier's yard, one has been tempted by grain “onto apron of the pram in front of the baby” (*Li*, 382). This singled-out pigeon becomes the momentary centre of attention, as it entertains the baby and the crowd of onlookers, waddling in and out of reach of the baby's dangerous, grabbing hands:

Soon all were laughing at way this one pigeon, which alone dared to come onto apron, dodged the baby which laughed and crowed and grabbed at it. Soon also they were bored and went all of them into his house. (*Li*, 382)

The mention of the apron draws our attention back to the housewife's apron with its morbid implications; a mood which is intensified by the singling out, the selection of

⁶ “Mrs Eames hid her son's face in her hand, laughing” (*Li*, 362).

⁷ Another example of how Green's minute attention to detail creates a more uncertain multiplicity is in the use of the name Evelyn Henderson in *Party Going*. Evelyn is often referred to as Evelyn. The occasional use of the additional letter *a* – by individual characters (*PG*, 105), but also within the narrative (see *PG*, 56 for an example of both uses on the same page) – raises the possibility that Evelyn Henderson has links with Evelyn Waugh and his first wife, Evelyn Gardner or “she-Evelyn”. She becomes a potential composite of multiple characters. There is an additional layer to the composite Evelyn Henderson in the links with Ellie Henderson, too, from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, which will be explored further in chapter 5.

this one pigeon. But, almost as quickly as it has become centre of attention, this pigeon is cast aside by Green's very next sentence. The anaphora draws our attention to this stark turnaround – "Soon also they were bored" – and the novel ends with its focus clearly on Mrs Eames's baby. The birds, meanwhile, have flown.

It is a disturbed and discarded bird, though, which dramatically takes up the action again in the first lines of *Party Going*: "Fog was so dense, bird that had been disturbed went flat into a balustrade and slowly fell, dead, at her feet" (*PG*, 7). By the end of the next short paragraph we know that "her" refers to Miss Fellowes and that the bird, since she has picked it up, is now "her dead pigeon". There is a clear thematic continuity here which belies the ten-year gap between the publication of *Living* in 1929 and *Party Going* in 1939. And yet, of Green's critics, Edward Stokes is the only one to have made a passing reference to this link.⁸ Read as successive novels, the "bird that had been disturbed" in *Party Going* seems to refer back to "the pigeon" which Lily's "loud raucous cry" shocks into flying away at the end of *Living*. This interpretation is heightened by Green's consciously ambiguous use of "pigeon" rather than "pigeons": "and with clatter of wings all the pigeon lifted and flew away". Within the context of *Living*, the number referred to by the term "pigeon" is plural, "all the pigeon", but when looked at in relation to the context of *Party Going*, the possibility of reading "pigeon" in the singular reveals a structural prolepsis. This particular dead pigeon, lying at the feet of Miss Fellowes, resembles Lily's memory of spiralling pigeons on Sundays which descend, plumb, into the housewives' aprons:

⁸ See Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 143: "There is only one definitely identified pigeon in *Party Going*, but this perplexing bird winds its way ludicrously yet alarmingly through the whole novel. *Living* ends with a shot of a healthy, happy working-class baby gurgling in rapturous delight at a very live pigeon fluttering in winter sunshine round her pram; *Party Going* begins with a shot of an elderly, mysteriously ill upper-class woman compelled by some obscure impulse to pick up the body of a pigeon that falls dead at her feet in dense fog. The two scenes suggest some of the differences in tone and theme between the two novels."

As, in Yorkshire, the housewives on a Sunday will go out, in their aprons, carrying a pigeon and throw this one up and it will climb in spirals in the air, then, when it had reached a sufficient height it will drop down plumb into the apron she holds for it. (*Li*, 348)

There it lay and Miss Fellowes looked up to where that pall of fog was twenty foot above and out of which it had fallen, turning over once. (*PG*, 7)

The reader is tempted into believing that the dead pigeon in *Party Going* has flown directly from Green's last published page in one continuous act. The continuity of the metaphor is relatively indubitable. In fact, not only is the pigeon deemed to have flown in from the pages of *Living*, but out of the multitude of pigeons which inhabit *Living* one was singled out: the pigeon which the fancier tempted onto the apron of the pram. Is it this very pigeon which returns in *Party Going*?

This chapter suggests that such an attempt to read for clarity of authorial purpose – is this intended to be the very same pigeon? – is too narrow an approach to take when looking at the insistently fugal writing of Henry Green. The depiction of each pigeon is generic; they are examples of the typical pigeon. This fact shows Green setting out to multiply, thereby diluting and complicating, allowing for and renouncing, the singleness of focus on one such interpretative thread. This chapter, and the thesis as a whole, seeks to explore further how Green manages to keep this number of possible interpretations open within his writing. The abrupt but eerily controlled “re-emergence” of the singled-out pigeon at the opening of *Party Going* might tempt the reader to search for one interpretation, to believe that it is possible to solve the “mystery” of the dead pigeon. Certainly there are numerous imaginative and compelling interpretations of the pigeon within existing critical writing on Green and *Party Going*. But after looking at a variety of these critical interpretations, I hope to show that, although each solution has its value, that very search for a static solution can impede our reading of Green. The obfuscatory nature of Green's writing, with its

potentiality for multiple readings requires a much more fluid, all-encompassing approach. It is an approach which we can test out within the more manageable terrain of symbols, before widening the focus to see how this might affect the interpretation of *Party Going* as a whole and ultimately of Green as a novelist. First, though, let us look at how the approaches of some critics to “the mystery of Auntie May’s dead pigeon” have varied historically.⁹

The Enigmatic Symbol

It is possible to split the authors of Green monographs, albeit rather crudely, into two camps: those who attempt to pin down a single meaning to symbols like birds in Green’s writing, and more specifically to Miss Fellowes’s dead pigeon in *Party Going*, and those who have a rather more fluid interpretation of symbols and Green’s use of them. In 1961, A. Kingsley Weatherhead described how the reader must feel as “harassed” by “the mystery of Auntie May’s dead pigeon” as Claire and Evelyn. Although admitting that: “the ‘meaning’ of this episode is not absolutely clear”, Weatherhead went on to explain what the “main business of the novel is”:

In a word it concerns the death of youth, the abstract, which formerly had been presided over by the nannies and Miss Fellowes. Miss Fellowes now sees fit to watch over the death of youth and to grant it a decent burial. Her care of the pigeon figures her last proper function as a guardian of youth. But if she had finally disposed of it her usefulness would be at an end. She would be cast off, like nannies elsewhere in Green when their maturing protégés pass beyond their control. Naturally she seeks to protect her usefulness; hence she clings to the bird, clinging thereby to life itself.¹⁰

There is no doubt that this interpretation of the pigeon as a symbol of youth is convincing in this context and it is further strengthened by the fact that other critics searching for static meaning have also resolved upon similar answers: John Russell’s

⁹ Weatherhead, *A Reading of Henry Green*, 46.

¹⁰ Weatherhead, *A Reading of Henry Green*, 46.

impressive comparison of Amabel's bath scene and Miss Fellowes's washing of the dead pigeon finds an equation between sex and death which resonates with Weatherhead's view;¹¹ whilst Keith C. Odom, writing almost twenty years later, compares Miss Fellowes's carrying of the dead pigeon with Coleridge's Ancient Mariner shouldering the burden of the albatross:

Miss Fellowes's pigeon not only symbolizes spiritual isolation, like the Mariner's albatross, but also images the theme of social dissolution. The Coleridgean term "Life-in-Death" precisely describes these characters' existences.¹²

Perhaps it is Oddvar Holmesland, writing in 1986, who exemplifies most acutely the need for this camp of critics to find a one-size-fits-all solution to the "mystery" of Green's symbolism. Holmesland makes confident assertions stating that: "In a Green novel, the urge to depart for exotic settings admittedly suggests deep underlying needs for sexual and spiritual fulfilment" and that "birds usually represent vivacity in Green's fiction".¹³ My argument is that such a neat, categorising impulse can ultimately impede one's reading of Green's novels and work against the open-ended nature of the symbolism at work in his prose.

¹¹ See John Russell, *Nine Novels and an Unpacked Bag* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960), 106-7. Russell's close reading draws attention to the subtle mirroring of the scenes: "And we hear a remarkable echo when Amabel lovingly dries herself. 'She was gradually changing colour, where she was dry was going back to white; for instance, her face was dead white but her neck was red. She was polishing her shoulders now and her neck was paling from red into pink and then suddenly it would go white' (172).

Sudden changes to 'dead white' are suggestive enough, but we perceive a sort of occult transposition of Miss Fellowes and Amabel, when we recall that Miss Fellowes's hands changed colour in reverse order when she bathed the pigeon; 'for she was doing what she felt must be done with hot water, turning her fingers to the colour of its legs and blood' (9)."

¹² Keith C. Odom, *Henry Green* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 63. The pigeon's flight from *Living* to death in *Party Going* encapsulates Coleridge's notion of "Life-in-Death" in an even more startling form than Odom relates. See Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 32, for an account of how the opening of *Party Going* reverses the "determined scheme" of Coleridge's poem: "In the poem the Mariner shoots the albatross, and so precipitates a narrative of guilt depending on a final redemption. This determined scheme, which culminates in the revelation of 'truth', is reversed by *Party Going*; with the pigeon only dead, 'it did seem only a pious thing to pick it up' (25)."

¹³ Oddvar Holmesland, *A Critical Introduction to the Novels of Henry Green: The Living Vision* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 196, 195.

It is important, then, to look more carefully at how Green used symbolism and how critics have gone on to interpret those symbols. In an interview published in *Shenandoah* in 1975, David Lambourne asks Green directly about symbolism:

INTERVIEWER:

Can you tell me something about your use of symbolism?

GREEN:

No, that's far too big a subject to deal with in an interview. There's a book by W. B. Yeats on Blake that will tell you something about it. It's impossible to get hold of now. I tried to use symbolism; I used it, and I did my best. That's all you can do.¹⁴

The deliberate evasion in Green's refusal to answer the question and his pointing the interviewer to a rare, unattainable text for that answer is both deliberate and appropriate.¹⁵ It reveals a self-conscious awareness of how symbolism must stand on its own; it cannot be broken down and explained rationally. In Yeats's book, though, there is an important distinction traced between a symbol and an allegory, one which Yeats attributes to William Blake: "the one is a revelation, the other an amusement."¹⁶ Yeats extends this argument further in "Symbolism in Painting" where he tells the story of a German symbolist painter who

insisted with many determined gestures that symbolism said things which could not be said so perfectly in any other way, and needed but a right instinct for its understanding; while allegory said things which could be said as well, or better, in another way, and needed a right knowledge for its understanding. The one thing gave dumb things voices, and bodiless things bodies; while the other read a meaning – which had never lacked its voice or its body – into something heard or seen, and loved less for the meaning than for its own sake.¹⁷

¹⁴ David Lambourne, "'No Thundering Horses': The Novels of Henry Green", *Shenandoah* 26: 2 (Summer 1975): 66-7. Green's nervousness about or reticence over saying any one specific thing about his use of symbolism also reflects a more general refusal to be tied down to specifics, which is discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁵ A copy of the book remains in the Forthampton Court library, but its rarity is over-stated by Green.

¹⁶ W. B. Yeats, "William Blake and His Illustrations to the *Divine Comedy*", *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 116. Michael North also discusses the relevance of this to Green: "The distinction is basic to *Party Going* as well, offering a way to differentiate between the truly untranslatable symbol, such as the pigeon, and the mere emblems that Green's characters use as a kind of game or as charms to conjure away the threat of that central symbol." See Michael North, *Henry Green and the Writing of His Generation*, 88-9.

¹⁷ W. B. Yeats, "Symbolism in Painting", *Essays and Introductions*, 146-7. See also 148: "A hundred generations might write out what seemed the meaning of the one, and they would write different meanings, for no symbol tells all its meaning to any generation".

The static search for an individual meaning, as witnessed in the first camp of critics, is standard fare for an allegorical reading, but limits the scope of the symbolic. It is the second camp of critics, for me, who have a broader sense of the symbol, seeing it as “suggestive, indefinable, and visionary” in the way that Yeats expounded in his writing on Blake.¹⁸ Edward Stokes is absolutely aware of the dilemma:

It is impossible to ascribe to the setting of the novel any single, definite meaning. *Party Going* is not an allegory, but a symbolic novel which can be interpreted on various different levels.¹⁹

Stokes proceeds to show a great sensitivity to the novel’s “complexity and ambiguity”, whilst also exploring the possible meaning of “three seagulls which fly through the span of the bridge”: “Though the meaning of these birds cannot be translated into precise, rational terms it is clear, at least, that they are symbols of life, of sex and flight.”²⁰ Rather than search for an individual meaning, though, Stokes’s interpretation of these three birds acts to counter the weight of imagery which “conjures up an impression of death, desolation and aridity”. Green’s prose and symbolism, Stokes argues, is never solved:

Perhaps it could be maintained that Miss Fellowes’ physical illness is a representation of the spiritual condition of her class, or that this whole class is a “dead pigeon”. But this would certainly be arbitrary indeed. Any attempt to define the novel in a single phrase is doomed to failure.²¹

In the same way that Yeats describes symbols as unable to be defined “so perfectly in any other way”, Stokes makes it clear that Green’s novel and his use of symbols can never be paraphrased or defined. There is no simple answer. Green’s generically

¹⁸ North, *Henry Green and the Writing of his Generation*, 88.

¹⁹ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 149.

²⁰ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 148, 147. See also Bassoff, *Toward Loving*, 136-7 where Bassoff also feels inclined in his analysis of the same birds to find a certain level of fixity in Julia’s confused memory. Taking the reader through a complex etymological analysis in order to provide a less than conclusive link between pigeons, swallows, doves and seagulls, he states boldly: “The missing bird (as three sea gulls [doves] become two) can only be the bird that tumbles to death at the beginning of the book.” As my own linking of the pigeon disrupted at the end of *Living* and the one falling, dead, at the beginning of *Party Going* is intended to show, Green’s writing does not allow for the single – this can only be – interpretation.

²¹ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 150-1.

dismissive words in response to Lambourne's question ring out again: "I tried to use symbolism; I used it, and I did my best. That's all you can do."

However much my argument may revolve around the need for fluidity and flexibility in the critic's response to Green's writing, though, it is ultimately driven by a desire to cast a little more light on the novels than the author himself was willing to. In this way, Bruce Bassoff's extension of the work of Edward Stokes in *Toward Loving: The Poetics of the Novel and the Practice of Henry Green* is extremely helpful, at a word level, in exploring how Green moved towards the generic rather than the specific in *Party Going*. Bassoff argues, as I have done in similar fashion with the singular and plural uses of "pigeon" and "pigeons" earlier in this chapter, that the omission of definite and indefinite articles in *Party Going*, more so even than in *Living*, "can give the effect of making the noun more generic", unmodified "bird" becomes "birds, member becomes species."²² He goes on to explain this further in relation to *Party Going*:

Unlike its particularizing effect in *Living*, the elision of articles before "fog" and "bird" gives these words a vague, generic quality. Encountering more than a particular fog or a particular bird, one is encountering "fogs" and "birds," which, occurring in various contexts throughout the book, become signals for certain kinds of awareness.²³

Bassoff's close analysis of generic non-specificity, where multiple possibilities are held within the single container of one word, revisits a refusal in Green's writing to be tied down to a reductive specificity. This open-ended nature of Green's writing is given voice by Green himself later in his interview with Lambourne. When questioned as to whether *Living* and *Party Going* were "concerned with personal issues", Green answers "Yes" but then qualifies this: "Personal to all of us. Not me

²² Bassoff, *Toward Loving*, 54.

²³ Bassoff, *Toward Loving*, 60.

and the book, but you and me and all of us. I was trying to write so that everyone could understand”. Later on he is asked if *Party Going* is “based on your experiences” as much as *Living*:

“No, you see, it’s true I worked in a factory, but the factory wasn’t like that. And it’s true I’ve been to a railway station with a party of friends, but the railway wasn’t like that. I tried to make it all factories and all railway stations.”²⁴

Green’s insistence here upon the non-specificity of his settings is supported in *Party Going* by the generic, shifting nature of his symbols: the inexplicable omnipresence of the dead pigeon and the obfuscatory nature of the fog serving to multiply the novel’s symbolic layers.

Bassoff’s distinction between “bound” and “compositional” motifs provides us with the vocabulary to explore the enigmas of Green’s symbols. He compares these motifs with the “kinds of evidence given in a jury trial”: “The bound motif is admissible evidence, whereas the compositional motif is inadmissible evidence which we hear anyway”²⁵ and then describes the pigeon as “the single most powerful compositional motif in the book [*Party Going*].”²⁶ The distinction made here between what is “bound” and what is “free” is similar to the distinction that Stokes makes between the “fixed” and the “expanding” symbol, both of which tie in with Yeats’s discussion of allegory and symbolism. Stokes describes C. Day Lewis’s assertion that “a symbol is denotative; it stands for one thing only, as the figure 1 represents one unit” as an “arbitrary limitation”; but prefers E. K. Brown’s notion of the “expanding symbol”

²⁴ Lambourne, “No Thundering Horses”, *Shenandoah*: 62, 66.

²⁵ Bassoff, *Toward Loving*, 71. It is worth noting that Bassoff takes these notions from Boris Tomashevsky’s “Thematics” “although,” Bassoff admits, “I have reduced his more elaborate scheme to two notions and have changed his terminology.” Tomashevsky refers to “bound” and “free” motifs. See Boris Tomashevsky, “Thematics”, *Russian Formalist Criticism*, eds. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 61-95.

²⁶ Bassoff, *Toward Loving*, 137-8.

which, like the echo in *Passage to India*, slowly and irregularly accreting meaning from its recurrence in a variety of contexts, is a suitable device for (in Brown's words) "rendering an emotion, an idea, that by its largeness or its subtlety cannot wholly become explicit". It is, it seems to me, more satisfactory to regard the birds of several of Green's novels (especially *Loving* and *Concluding*) as "expanding symbols" which provide a complementary expression of meaning, which indeed come to represent a complex structure of feeling and values that are of great importance in the total structure of the novels, than as randomly recurring and "meaningless" visual images.²⁷

All three sets of terms – whether allegory and symbol, the fixed and the expanding symbol, or the bound and free or compositional motif – begin to incorporate within them some of the interpretative fluidity necessary to unlock the multiple potentialities held within Green's writing. Bassoff, for example, using the more inclusive notion of the compositional motif, is able to retain and balance many of the singular interpretations which have come before:

Miss Fellowes, as her name indicates, is a touchstone for fellow feeling in the book, and the death of the pigeon signifies the death that the lack of, or warping of, that quality entails. The sexual associations of the pigeon motif are also part of a complex that includes fellow feeling, sex, and death.²⁸

It is possible to see from this example how Bassoff's compositional motif has the capacity to hold within it multiple strands of interpretation: the "guardian" of A. Kingsley Weatherhead's "reading"; the combination of sex and death extrapolated by Russell's close analysis; and the spiritual isolation and social dissolution picked up on by Keith C. Odom.²⁹ The "expanding symbol" and the "compositional motif" explored in relation to the work of Henry Green by Stokes and then Bassoff are invaluable to our understanding and our "readings" of Green, but it is important, now, to move beyond their more static foundation in statistics and poetics. As Stokes stated with relation to his own quantitative, statistics-based analysis:

²⁷ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 140: Stokes takes the C. Day Lewis quotation from *The Poetic Image* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), 40 and the E. K. Brown quotation from *Rhythm in the Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 56.

²⁸ Bassoff, *Toward Loving*, 138.

²⁹ Odom, *Henry Green*, 60, 63.

One becomes more and more painfully aware of the limitations and inadequacies of this kind of analysis when applied to a novelist like Henry Green... Such analysis does at least suggest that Green's individuality of technique consists partly in his encouraging every novel to set him a different problem of method... so that he has no fixed, stable method. But this kind of analysis, in Green's case, cannot be more than a preliminary investigation, for it allows too much to slip through unnoted.³⁰

It is in the later work of Rod Mengham and Michael North – both of whom I place in the second camp of more fluid critics alongside Stokes and Bassoff – that it is possible to trace the next level of uncertainty residing within the text and imagery of *Party Going*. Both critics emphasise the difficulty of seeking a “purposed meaning”³¹ from the text, but respond to this dilemma differently. In looking at these two differences of response we can see the extent of the potential for interpretation and misinterpretation, or perhaps more accurately, the scope for justifiably incongruous interpretations. Mengham sets out his dilemma with characteristic force:

The deliberate attentiveness of the writing ought to reward a deliberate attentiveness of reading with a corresponding degree of purposed meaning. But the accepted means to achieve semantic cohesion – to condense these vaporous meanings – are used with complete inadvertence... there is an intense preoccupation with motif, which is perverse, since it does not inform any method of integrating effects but generates a rising incomprehension.³²

There is a building frustration in Mengham's analysis towards the wilful or “perverse” nature of Green's text. Mengham argues that “the deliberate attentiveness of the writing” implies a purposeful intent in the construction, which is perversely absent in terms of meaning. The result is a lack of condensation or integration in the writing which creates “rising incomprehension” and frustration in the reader. Mengham responds to this “rising incomprehension” initially by building imaginatively on the links between *Party Going* and Coleridge's “The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner” and drawing out the similarities between William Empson's essay “Marvell's Garden”

³⁰ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 97.

³¹ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 31.

³² Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 30-1.

and the “connection of greenness with oceans”. But this comparison is immediately followed by an admission that such “a dependence on the poem might seem over-determined”.³³ By the end of his chapter on *Party Going*, however, Mengham is making a much more persuasive and fruitful comparison with W.H. Auden’s *The Orators*:

If the writing [Auden’s] is in flight from a central dominion of meaning, it does nevertheless present itself as under such a threat – that of the universal submission to a single agency [Fascism]. This universality, “turning towards one meaning”, whether it be accepted or rejected, is precisely what is absent from *Party Going*, whose writing stays alive when it puts off the scent of meaning.³⁴

In writing the chapter on *Party Going*, Mengham moves away from an initial need to find a singular, “purposed meaning” and begins to contemplate the possibility of a writing which gains its very energy from an avoidance of such singularity of meaning. A position which begins to allow for the possibility that Green does not take “flight from a central dominion of meaning” – he does not choose the either/or of acceptance or rejection, submission to or retaliation against a single agency – but rather offers up the potentiality of singular, multiple and potentially meaningless stances. Mengham’s position at the end of his chapter on *Party Going* is one which Michael North feels more comfortable with from the start.

Rather than battle against the uncertainty of purpose in the writing or grow frustrated over Green’s intention, North examines how this uncertainty affects the

³³ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 41. See William Empson, “Marvell’s Garden”, *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935), 120. It is clear from chapter 1 of this thesis that the connection between greenness and oceans was already present in the mind of Green. See Yorke to Coghill, 8 August 1925, No. 28, Eton College Archives: “where the sea is deep there are palaces in forests and there the old men sit, their thoughts a fugue in Green.” Green’s gradual move away from more romantic nuances as his writing matures is revealed in a starker manner with *Party Going*’s “unwillingness to condense these vaporous meanings” and its almost deliberately obfuscatory style.

³⁴ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 51-2.

dynamic of the novel itself. His analysis of Miss Fellowes, her illness and the dead pigeon are prime examples:

This illness becomes a central preoccupation of the partygoers, an obstacle to their plans, and a theme of obvious importance to Green, yet he refuses to diagnose it or to make clear the relationship between it and the pigeon... Green's reluctance... might stem from the same reluctance to be specific about an episode that is fearsome and disturbing precisely because its exact character remains unknown. To explain the pigeon is to remove its threat, and to be more explicit about Miss Fellowes's illness would be to remove exactly the aspect that makes it so disturbing to the partygoers.³⁵

North considers how the lack of clarity and the uncertainty of the pigeon add to the complexity of the characters' positions within the text as much as the readers outside of it. The symbols, therefore, have an internal power or impact in addition to the intra-textual resonances which build in fugal complexity and strength as the number of novels Green publishes increases.

Chapters 1 and 2 examine how Green plays with the notion of the name as a container by multiplying its fictional and meta-fictional guises; in this chapter it is possible to witness how the symbol takes on a similar multi-layered complexity of usage. There is an internal switching or sharing of symbols between characters, as exemplified by Lily's appropriation of Craigan's string analogy, such that they function in multiple and sometimes incongruous ways within the novel. This is unsettling for the reader, as a symbol that might suggest the comfort of home for one character suggests entrapment for another: there is no reassuring consistency. In fact,

³⁵ North, *Henry Green and the Writing of his Generation*, 85. It is also worth adding Anthony Burgess's short summary of *Party Going* in *The Novel Now: A Student's Guide to Contemporary Fiction* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), 113-4. His summation includes an awareness of the dangers inherent in placing singular meaning on Green's text, whilst also retaining the confidence to make suggestions which still appear pertinent today: "The one memorable thing that happens seems significant: an old lady finds a dead pigeon in the station and she wraps it up in a parcel. It would be dangerous to attach a simple meaning to this or to the effect it has on the delayed passengers: we may perhaps take it as symbolizing the incursion of an eccentric, individualistic act on societies which carry on with their inherited patterns of behaviour. But Green is writing a poem here, and once meaning is extracted from a poem, the poem itself collapses. We ought to remember, though, when the novel appeared – 1939, when the peace-dove fell dead at our feet, and the fog of war stopped everyone's party-going."

as North points out, the characters themselves might not even be sure what they are excluding:

Green's characters choose symbols for themselves, and use one another as symbols, in order to protect themselves against unpleasant realities they would like to exclude.³⁶

North here is referring mainly to Julia's "mascots" or "charms" in *Party Going* – the top, the toy pistol, and the wooden egg – but there is a much less tangible and permeating sense that the symbolism of language is also shared and reinvented by characters. It is the depth of Green's awareness of how language is constantly personalised and thus relativised, both consciously and unconsciously, which provides the ever-intensifying fugal nature of Green's writing. Not only is there no authorial intent – the characters choose symbols for themselves – but the characters are "protecting themselves against unpleasant realities" and consequently might not be clear of their own intent. *Party Going* stands out as an extremely important bridge between Green's early and late fiction, for we see nascent evidence of his later theories about art – its "non-representational" nature, for example – beginning to emerge. Mengham's internal battle with *Party Going* is perhaps symptomatic of the shift occurring within Green's writing at this stage and the potentially disconcerting effect its relentless ambiguity can cause. But such a battle is essential to every reader of Green, for it is the battle to place themselves and their own voice within the growing fugue. It is a battle which Green's prose fights on a microscopic level with names and symbols and on a macrocosmic scale with the one-day novel and the shifting nature of his oeuvre.

³⁶ North, *Henry Green and the Writing of his Generation*, 89.

Let us take a final interpretative glance at the microscopic level with the singled-out pigeon which Miss Fellowes has picked up off the floor and is carrying into the train station:

No one paid attention, all were intent and everyone hurried, nobody looked back. Her dead pigeon then lay sideways, wings outspread as she held it, its dead head down towards the ground. She turned and she went back to where it had fallen and again looked up to where it must have died for it was still warm, and, everything unexplained, she turned once more into the tunnel back to the station. (*PG*, 7)

The attention Miss Fellowes gives, like the perceptive reader's interpretation, is both unique and narrow. Everyone else is walking hurriedly past; she is the only one looking back (or up) to work out where the pigeon has come from. But, with "everything unexplained" she returns to the "tunnel", back in the direction that she was always heading. There is no sense that her actions are seen as laudable or that they get her anywhere new; nor is she rewarded for her inquisitiveness. Quite the opposite, in fact: over the course of the novel Miss Fellowes gets progressively and inexplicably sicker (or perhaps just drunker, it is never quite clear which) and becomes more and more of a liability for her niece and the young group of travellers. There is a resounding paradox in this. The thoughtful Miss Fellowes, with her nominally-suggested fellow feeling, ends up being an inexplicable, albatross-like weight on the party-goers, potentially preventing some of their departures. The first camp of critics, with their attempts at pinning down single meanings to symbols, creates a similar paradox. The narrow and constricting nature of their criticism limits the potential plurality of effect Green's writing is capable of and, in doing so, can limit the novels' attractiveness.³⁷ Miss Fellowes returns to the same tunnel and goes back to the station, but as the novel progresses it is made clear that there are many

³⁷ See North, *Henry Green and the Writing of his Generation*, 87-8: "any attempt to fill out the pigeon or the mystery man with a specific allegorical meaning, as A. Kingsley Weatherhead has done, is not only doomed but is inimical to Green's purpose." It is important, too, not to overemphasise Green's "purpose". This thesis argues that Green's intention and purpose must be subject to the same uncertainties of chance and unpredictability as his texts and characters are.

other tunnels feeding into the station. The purpose of the next chapter is to reveal how Green does not simply allow us to experience these individual tunnels with great detail and depth, but how he also widens the focus to allow a taste of the constantly fluid whole which is both intrinsic to those individual parts, to each tunnel, whilst also existing as a totally self-sufficient and separate backdrop.

Chapter 4

Party Going: Foregrounding the Backdrop of the Everyday

in the neutral space on a place without place where everything is marked but which would be “in itself” unmarked.¹

There is much that is both static and singular about *Party Going*. It takes place in and around one train station, in one city, and follows the course of one evening. It starts, as discussed, with one dead pigeon. All of this stillness and singleness as an opening stands out in stark contrast to my argument for multiplicity and fluidity. Where *Living* began with “thousands” coming back from dinner, *Party Going* begins with Miss Fellowes and a dead bird. But just as each name, with its contextual variations and permutations, is open to misinterpretation or possible reinterpretation in chapters 1 and 2, so there is something more generic residing in the symbol of the dead pigeon. On the one hand it is clear that critics have found rich reward in unpicking the possible meanings of the pigeon. It might only be one pigeon, rigid in rigor mortis, but its polysemy renders it in constant flux: an amorphous shifting shape taking on different forms in different minds. In addition to this, it is dead. And, in its deadness, it is both present and absent. This deadness might be seen to constitute a reference to the past, where a past flock of symbolic birds re-emerge and combine to offer complex meanings. In this sense, the dead pigeon is alive with the past.²

¹ Derrida, “*Khōra*” in *On the Name*, 109.

² The echoes of T. S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” are strong here and take us back to the beginning of the last chapter which outlined the path the pigeons might have taken from *Living* into *Party Going*. See Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 38: “we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously” and 44: “he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.”

But it is impossible to deny the fact that this pigeon is strikingly dead and that the other pigeons in *Party Going* might not even be pigeons at all, however convincing Bassoff's etymological chicanery.³ The shift from the climax of *Living* with its vitality, energy and evanescent pigeons to the foggy aporia and inexplicable death and illness which opens *Party Going*, also heralds a possible apophatic discourse. Just as the dead pigeon seems to have no traceable, agreed or purposed meaning, much of the power and mood of *Party Going* refuses, as Mengham notes, "to condense [its] vaporous meanings".⁴ This open-ended uncertainty follows on as another fugal strand of my thesis that Henry Vincent Yorke was able to find a non-specific, non-existence in the generic pseudonym Henry Green.

Iterability and the Non-Event: Functioning from the Margins

The name and now the dead pigeon act in paradoxical ways which are prescient of and precursors to Derrida's "signature". For Derrida, "a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer", whilst at the same time "the signature also marks and retains his [the signer's] having-been present in a past now or present."⁵ Within the signature:

the condition of possibility... is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity. In order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, by corrupting its identity and its singularity, divides its seal [*sceau*].⁶

The same "repeatable, iterable, imitable form" with its scope for detachability and for sameness is also present, in differing degrees, in a name, in a symbol and in a word.

³ Bassoff, *Toward Loving*, 136-7. See also 10, n.30.

⁴ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 30.

⁵ Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 20.

⁶ Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 20.

Intention is therefore intrinsically weakened by its “nonpresence” in future contexts; where the reception and interpretation of names or symbols or words are separated from their origin. This releases deep waves of uncertainty into the writing. It is this same condition of uncertainty which can also create the “neutral space”, reminiscent of the *Khōra*, through a denial of the conclusive or, put another way, through an acceptance of the inconclusive.⁷ The reader is not reassured by the temporal and spatial certitude of *Party Going* – with its specified hours of dusk and its static setting in Victoria Station – as the symbols and the style, the fog and the confusion, alert them to the novel’s essential openness to uncertainty and flux.

The process of reading *Party Going* is like being seated in a waiting room. A journey to a destination is promised, in this case a Mediterranean jaunt, but that end point never gets any nearer or clearer. Small gestures are made towards some form of resolution, but they rarely occasion much hope. The journey is never embarked upon. The novel and the characters within it go nowhere. The image of the “enormously fat” man in the “long hall... [which] was like an enormous doctor’s waiting room” resonates with the frustrations of such inaction, whereby the characters are incapacitated by the mechanical/inhuman aspects surrounding them:

One man there had a cigar in his mouth, and then she [Julia] saw he had one glass eye, and in his hand he had a box of matches which now and again he would bring up to his cigar. Just as he was about to strike his match he looked round each time and let his hands drop back to his lap. His match not lighted.
(*PG*, 59)

The glass eye and the mechanical repetition of the gesture, with the recurrent image of “his match not lighted” endlessly drawing attention to its non-performance, only serves to highlight the redundancy of the situation. Not only does Julia think that it resembles a doctor’s waiting room, but she also hyperbolically imagines “that it

⁷ Derrida, “*Khōra*” in *On the Name*, 109.

would be like that when they were all dead and waiting at the gates” (*PG*, 59). Julia’s reaction reflects the historical context of the novel where the possibility of another war is looming heavy. Consider, again, Burgess’s words: “We ought to remember, though, when the novel appeared – 1939, when the peace-dove fell dead at our feet, and the fog of war stopped everyone’s party-going.”⁸ Burgess describes “the fog of war”, whereas Green’s fog is more appropriately attached to the fog involved in waiting for war. War itself provides a grim certainty which the all-pervasive fog of waiting does not offer. If *Caught* depicts the uncertainty of waiting for the bombs to drop within the fog of the Phoney War, *Party Going* doesn’t yet know what it is waiting for. There is, in *Party Going*, one inference or prediction of war – “‘What targets,’ one by him remarked, ‘what targets for a bomb’” (*PG*, 178) – but it is nothing like the verging-on-hysterical certitude of death which opens Green’s “self-portrait”, *Pack my Bag*, published only a year later.⁹ In fact, *Party Going* provides a bathetic undercutting of this anticipatory tension a few pages later:

it was this moment the individual who could not or would not light his cigar chose to light the match in such a way that every match in his box was lit and it exploded. He was so upset his cigar tumbled out of his mouth; it was his moment, everyone now looked at him. (*PG*, 62)

When the moment does eventually arrive, when the focus of everyone does eventually shift to this marginal character attempting to light his cigar, the character is in a state of collapse.¹⁰

The absence of central action in *Party Going* is intrinsic to its indirect functioning from the margins. The initial singleness of structure offered is

⁸ Burgess, *The Novel Now*, 114.

⁹ “[W]ar... seems to be coming upon us now and that is a reason to put down what comes to mind before one is killed, and surely it would be asking too much to pretend one had a chance to live. That is my excuse, that we who may not have time to write anything else must do what we can” (*PMB*, 5).

¹⁰ This is also an example of Green’s “non-epiphanic” moment, which is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

purposefully emptied of meaning, in order to allow for the shifting marginal “tactics” and “ruses” found within a much more oblique set of irreducible symbols, events and characters. Michel de Certeau’s terms are worth briefly expounding here, for they offer up “an increased deviousness, fantasy or laughter” which is particularly pertinent to the oblique approach which this thesis attributes to Green’s fiction.¹¹ For de Certeau the tactic, “by contrast with a strategy, ... is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus... The space of a tactic is the space of the other”:

It [the tactic] operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of “opportunities” and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.¹²

Party Going’s structure as a one-day novel is similar to “this nowhere”; it exists as a temporal and spatial lacuna. The structure of the day provides a specific external “framework of a system” more akin to de Certeau’s “strategy” – “a tactic is determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power.”¹³ This “postulation of power” creates an anticipatory emptiness, a stillness of temporal space, where potential tactics – “consumers’ ways of operating are the practical equivalents of wit”¹⁴ – can be freely explored without condensation. The structure of one specific day opens up the space for expressions of the everyday, within which the individual day permeates into a non-specific non-existence –

¹¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), trans. Stephen Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xvii.

¹² Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), 37.

¹³ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), 38.

¹⁴ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), 38.

Socrates's "third genus"¹⁵ – whilst simultaneously holding the potential to dehisce into specific and various tactical ruses.¹⁶

Chapter 2 explored how the name Henry Green holds both these possibilities: the fullness of interpretative potential held in "Green" and the emptiness created by its "iterability". In *Party Going* this wide spread of "potentiality" can be traced at a word level – as we have seen in the singular and plural uses of "pigeon(s)"; in the shiftless uses of both Evelyn and Evelyns; and in the absence of definite and indefinite articles which can lead to a reading of a generic "many" rather than a specific "one" – but also in the structure, style and form of the novel itself. *Party Going* is one of the most telling of Green's novels in that it displays Green at his most experimental, attempting to forge his own writing style at a time when the future of the world he is living in is uncertain and when the literary world is left picking up the fragments of what the modernists have left behind.

When asked, in the 1958 interview with Terry Southern, what impact Joyce and Kafka's fiction had had on "the future of the novel", Green answers:

I think Joyce and Kafka have said the last word on each of the two forms they developed. There's no one to follow them. They're like the cats which have licked the plates clean. You've got to dream up another dish if you're to be a writer.¹⁷

Although this might, at first glance, seem an unusually direct response from Green, there is a deeper hook hidden below the surface. It is woven within the line: "They're

¹⁵ See Derrida, "Khōra" in *On the Name*, 109.

¹⁶ Later in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, whilst discussing the arts of theory, de Certeau provides a summary which, when amalgamated, characterises Henry Green's approach: "the combination of two distinct terms persists unchanged, the first being a referential and unrefined knowledge, and the second an explanatory discourse that brings forth into the light an inverted representation of its opaque source" (72). Green's own discourse adopts an opacity which creates spaces of uncertainty within which "a referential and unrefined knowledge" awaits; the "kinds of knowledge that do not know themselves" (71).

¹⁷ Green, "The Art of Fiction", 247.

like cats which have licked the plates clean.” This is not quite how the saying usually goes. What we would normally expect is: “They’re like the cats which have got the cream.” With the structure almost identical and the clean/cream alliterative half-rhyme at the end, the absent presence of this other line is clear within it. The chosen simile, Joyce and Kafka’s failure to leave any leftovers, is more ambiguous. There is little solid left to play with; the cupboard, it implies, is bare. Green suggests here that the novelist who follows the likes of Joyce and Kafka cannot improve on their styles; their styles leave nothing behind, they are exhaustive. The writers who come next will have to “produce” something new, they must develop into more self-sufficient creatures entirely, for there is nothing left to consume; Joyce and Kafka’s rough probing tongues have removed every last tittle on the *i* and every last cross on the *t*.

The experimental nature of Green’s style – as found in the absence of definite and indefinite articles in *Living* and *Party Going*, in the unexpected cinematic cuts of *Caught* and *Back*, or the bland surfaces and rigid plot structures of *Nothing* and *Doting* – does not reside in placing new and exotic meals on this slick, unappetising surface. Instead, Green creates a different surface entirely; a surface which refuses to dress itself up in a quick bid to entice the reader. The surface of Green’s prose does not provide the reader with Joyce’s multi-lingual pyrotechnics or Kafka’s extraordinary situations; it is not fattened up with multiple allusions or stark defamiliarisation. Green’s prose seeks a longer, more intimate relationship with the reader. It is not there to be consumed; it is there to become acquainted with. In *Pack my Bag*, Green discusses with characteristically poetic simplicity his understanding of the reading process:

Prose is not to be read aloud but to oneself alone at night, and it is not quick as poetry but rather a gathering web of insinuations which go further than

names however shared can ever go. Prose should be a long intimacy between strangers with no direct appeal to what both may have known. It should slowly appeal to feelings unexpressed, it should in the end draw tears out of the stone. (*PMB*, 55)

Reading is a gradual, cumulative, extended process. It is a “gathering web”, “a long intimacy”. It is indirect and “should slowly appeal”. “It is not quick as poetry”. One assumes, with the weight of the Second World War looming, that Green has in mind W. H. Auden’s sonnet “The Novelist”:

Encased in talent like a uniform,
The rank of every poet is well known;
They can amaze us like a thunderstorm,
Or die so young, or live for years alone. They
can dash forward like hussars: but he Must
struggle out of his boyish gift and learn
How to be plain and awkward, how to be
One after whom none think it worth to turn.

For, to achieve his lightest wish, he must
Become the whole of boredom, subject to
Vulgar complaints like love, among the Just

Be just, among the Filthy filthy too, And
in his own weak person, if he can, Dully
put up with all the wrongs of Man.¹⁸

Prose cannot, Green suggests, rely on amazing “us like a thunderstorm” nor can it “dash forward like hussars”. The intimacy between prose and its reader is a subtle, perhaps unconscious, process of accumulating insinuations which taps into a deeper reservoir, at once more ordinary and more extraordinary, than that of specific names or the clarity of feelings wholly expressed. The prose is involved in a continual process of introducing. The text remains the same, but the context in which the introductions take place is forever changing; the author must ultimately relinquish any control of meaning: “To create life in the reader,” Green states in a later essay, “it will be necessary for the dialogue to mean different things to different readers at one and

¹⁸ W. H. Auden, “The Novelist” (1939), *Collected Shorter Poems, 1927-1957* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 124-5.

the same time.”¹⁹ Green’s indirect approach reveals and revels in what Derrida would, many years later, explore in his analyses of “iterability” and “différance”.²⁰

This surface of “iterability”, this form which can be repeated albeit with variations and shifts in meaning, requires a certain static level or at least an illusion of stillness. Language, at the level of the “sign”, provides this illusion of stability or consistency. But, in Saussure’s terms, “the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary”,²¹ just as the relationship between the signature, the name and the individual is also arbitrary.²² In *Party Going* this surface of stillness is created by the temporal confines of one evening and the static nature of the setting. I will argue, though, that this stability is not only misleading, but that it is also a ruse.

This temporal and spatial solidity, its “oneness”, is not what it seems. It is an “arbitrary” housing. It is “a place without place” within which a breadth and fluidity of multifarious levels of human interaction are released within and outside of the fog. The “one”, in *Party Going*, branches out and multiplies with untrammelled celerity into the “many”.²³ Where *Living* begins with “thousands” and funnels its focus down to a few, *Party Going* begins with one (one day, one pigeon, one individual [Miss Fellowes], one station), moves quickly into “ones and threes” (“a flood” of people which comes out and “spread[s] into streets round” [*PG*, 14]), until finally it is “all

¹⁹ Green, “A Novelist to his Readers: I”, 140.

²⁰ Derrida, “Signature Event Context”, 18.

²¹ See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1907), eds. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye in collaboration with A. Reidlinger, trans. W. Baskin (Glasgow: William Collins Sons and Co Ltd, 1974), 67.

²² Derrida would describe this inner complexity and unpredictability as the “structural unconsciousness” of the word or mark. See Derrida, “Signature Event Context”, 18: “this essential absence of intending the actuality of utterance, this structural unconsciousness, if you like, prohibits any saturation of the context.”

²³ Take, as an example, the unpredictable interpretative potential of the dead pigeon or the growing numbers of people squashing into the station without any route out.

those millions down below” (PG, 176). Within this multiplicity the concept of an individual’s private space is literally sucked out of them. Each individual’s life, their very breath, is shared with multiple others:

So crowded together they were beginning to be pressed against each other, so close that every breath had been inside another past that lipstick or those cracked lips, those even teeth, loose dentures, down into other lungs, so weary, so desolate and cold it silenced them. (PG, 200)

In the early stages of *Party Going* these masses are unseen, hidden both by the fog – “where hundreds and thousands she could not see were now going home, their day done” (PG, 16) – and by each individual’s inability to see more than what is in close proximity to them: “how was it possible for them to view themselves as part of that vast assembly for even when they had tried singing they had only heard those next to them” (PG, 200). The individual is wearied into a cold and desolate silence by the recycled breath of the many pressed against them, in the same way that Julia’s individuality and personality are threatened on entering the fog: “As she stepped out into this darkness of fog above and left warm rooms with bells and servants... she lost her name and was all at once anonymous” (PG, 15-6). The solidity of the “one”, whether the individual, the place or the time, is under constant threat by the overabundance of the other “many” (PG, 26); the multiple facets of relativity which are born from the very existence of one and the potential for arbitrary repetition held within that one.

Green manipulates his syntax, his one-day novel format and the static, unchanging nature of the setting of *Party Going* to draw attention to the tensions within this “oneness”. Take the tight, jagged prose of the opening line of the novel as an example: “Fog was so dense, bird that had been disturbed went flat into a balustrade and slowly fell, dead, at her feet” (PG, 7). The abrupt staccato of the

syntax, with its selective absence of definite and indefinite articles, confuses the reader's cognitive expectations by condensing the sentence's length and cutting out the expected linguistic markers.²⁴ The unusual density of the prose confounds the simplicity of the setting and format of the novel. This continues with Green's increased restriction of the already strict confines of the one-day-novel genre, which he further concertinas into a few darkening hours. This asphyxiation of temporal space grows progressively more stifling as the actual physical space of the station becomes more and more crowded, letting in more people than it lets out.²⁵ The novel quickly generates an internal tension by means of the dense poetic syntax, the foggy landscape and the constant multiplying of the characters within that foggy confined landscape, where the increasing numbers constantly threaten to explode the ever-tightening confines of the novel. This, Green makes clear, is where the setting of his novel begins:

So now at last all of this party is in one place, and, even if they have not yet all of them come across each other, their baggage is collected in the Registration Hall. Where, earlier, hundreds had made their way to this station thousands were coming in now, it was the end of a day for them, the beginning of a time for our party. (*PG*, 39)

What is the beginning for some, though, is the end for others. Within this "one place" there are signs for "DEPARTURES" (*PG*, 7, 26) but also for an "ENTRANCE" (*PG*, 36) and a "RECEPTION" (*PG*, 56). There are both beginnings and endings existing within the solid outer shell of the train station. Even time, like the language painted on the signs, seems to stand still during the fog: "They were beginning to adjust the board indicating times of trains which had stood all of two hours behind where it had

²⁴ In *Party Going* Green's omission of articles is much more selective than in the earlier *Living*, which Green later suggested might seem affected. See Green, "The Art of Fiction", 246: "I wanted to make that book [*Living*] as taut and spare as possible, to fit the proletarian life I was then leading. So I hit on leaving out the articles. I still think it effective, but would not do it again. It may now seem, I'm afraid, affected."

²⁵ "[T]here are now, we estimate, thirty thousand people in the station. The last time we had a count, on the August Bank Holiday of last year, we found that when they really began coming in, nine hundred and sixty-five persons could enter this station by the various subways each minute" (*PG*, 76).

reached when first the fog came down” (*PG*, 205). These external suggestions of stillness provide a structural stability through which Green is able to explore the enormous linguistic potential for layering plurality and emptiness of meaning in relational interdependence. This occurs on the linguistic level but also on the social level, where the vantage point of a character or a reader has direct and manifold implications for their understanding of the scene or their reading of that scene.

Within the stillness of the thickening, aporetic fog the movement, vision and interpretative confidence of the characters and the reader is restricted. Whilst “our party” cannot commence their journey, others are not able to finish their days and the reader, along with many of the characters, is left in hovering uncertainty over potential motives and intentions. Within such a difficult environment, the vantage point of characters in *Party Going* – where they are depicted in relation to their surroundings – is often associated with their ability to interpret or see through the fog, both literally and figuratively. Characters are seen to inhabit various Dante-esque layers within the station. Although the fog and the stasis do not allow one to leave on a train there is vertical movement as characters and readers are given the chance to move up or down levels within the terminal.

Multiplicity: Fleeting Moments in a Crowd

Within the stillness, then, a variety of perspectival layers is offered. In the first few pages of the novel, Miss Fellowes retreats to the depths of the “underground, down fifty steps”, where she attempts to clean the recently-found dead pigeon. This lowly vantage point reeks of dark witchcraft, more specifically the three witches of *Macbeth*, and of sacrifices being offered in purgatory:

Descending underground, down fifty steps, these two nannies saw beneath them a quarter-opened door and beyond, in electric light, another old woman who must be the guardian of this place; it might have been one of their sisters... For Miss Fellowes... had drawn up her sleeves and on the now dirty water with a thin wreath or two of blood, feathers puffed up and its head sideways, drowned along one wing, lay her dead pigeon. (*PG*, 9)

The next level up from this is the ground, where the masses or the crowds gather and where the classes mix indiscriminately and social status faces the threat of eclipse. On this relatively lowly level, the wealthy upper classes are often threatened with a loss of power or position, as Alexander finds out sitting in a taxi on his way to the station:

He did not know where he was, it was impossible to recognize streets, fog at moments collapsed on traffic from its ceiling. One moment you were in dirty cotton wool saturated with ice water and then out of it into ravines of cold sweating granite with cave-dwellers' windows and entrances. (*PG*, 37)²⁶

These social layers come back into play again within the enclosure of the hotel, which sits within the station.²⁷ Those who are financially equipped might enter on the ground level and buy a drink in the bar and those with a higher income, like Max, can hire suites of rooms on a variety of floors in total isolation from the crowds below. On another level entirely to the purgatorial Miss Fellowes, but associated through the image of washing, and higher even than Max's hotel rooms, is Amabel. Amabel, in Alex's eyes, assumes a higher, paradisiacal ground which transports her outside of and above the physical:

she was not unlike ground so high, so remote it had never been broken and that her outward beauty lay in that if any man marked her with intimacy as one treads on snow, then that trace which would be left could not fail to invest him, whoever he might be, with some part of those unvulgar heights so covered, not so much of that last field of snow before any summit as of a high memory unvisited, and kept. (*PG*, 144)

The depiction of Amabel as residing on this higher, quasi-spiritual plane is created almost entirely out of negatives and double negatives: "not unlike"; "never been";

²⁶ Alex's "position" is thrown into more doubt on a comical level when he finds himself mistakenly taken to Max's house rather than the station.

²⁷ The policeman suggests that Julia and her party are escorted to the hotel to get away from the crowd: "Now, I don't like to see you waiting about here in all this crowd, can I not persuade you to wait in the Hotel? It belongs to the Company and I am sure you will be very comfortable there" (*PG*, 53-4).

“could not fail”; “some part of those unvulgar heights”; “not so much”; “unvisited”. Such an oblique representation or “non-representation” is able to depict a non-specific Amabel by means of what she is not. The impossibility of “keeping” a “high memory” which has not been visited, for example, does not invalidate the impact of the image entirely. Albeit conceptually challenging, it provides a sense of Alex’s romantic and impossible ideal, where Amabel is able to retain her purity even after being marked by a man’s intimacy. It is a plane of existence, a layering of status which cannot be physically lived out, but only exists in the mind of Alexander. The layers beyond Green’s still surface are not controlled by a stable sense of what reality is, but rather by the angle from which they are witnessed or observed. Whichever level the characters are on at any one time, their views are restricted to that time, that place and their own preconceptions. As the time, the vantage points and the characters shift, so does the relative stability of the moment and the reader’s interpretation of that moment.

Take the crowd as an example of this shifting fluidity. At times the crowd is depicted as a singular entity, whilst at other times it is inhabited by ostensibly separate individuals. From the point of view of Julia, in the company of Max, in the hotel room on the floor above everyone else, “the whole of that station [is]... covered from end to end by one mass of people.” Julia sees the mass of people down below in a suitably subjective, patronising light:

As those people smoked below, or it might have been the damp off their clothes evaporating rather than their cigarettes, it did seem like November sun striking through mist rising off water. Or, so she thought, like those illustrations you saw in weekly papers, of corpuscles in blood, for here and there a narrow stream of people shoved and moved in lines three deep and where they did this they were like veins. She wondered if this were what you saw when you stood on your wedding day, a Queen, on your balcony looking at the subjects massed below. (*PG*, 86-7)

The passage creates a careful distinction between Julia's views of the scene; her selection of images to depict the scene; the thoughts that such a scene triggers for her; and other possible views which might be hidden in the same scene. It is unclear whether it is the smoke from cigarettes or the damp from clothes which creates the scene below. But the subtle unspecified narratorial presence within this uncertainty releases a set of shifting perspectives which would not be there without it. In the first sentence quoted here, the question of whether it is cigarette smoke or evaporating damp does not seek obvious resolution. It simply offers up a double perspective; a double perspective which is rendered more deeply beautiful and resonant by its comparison with "November sun striking through mist rising off water". The still-resonating image, with its long drawn-out use of assonance and the repeated present participles prolonging its echo, is ostensibly pulled up short by the terse arrival of "or" and the monosyllabic simplicity of the sub-clause "so she thought" which start the next sentence. The November mist dissipates in consideration of an image which is specifically and separately Julia's.

The prose holds within it a subtle undermining of Julia's perspective through its use of these comparative images. The uncertainty initially suggested in the double perspective of the cigarette smoke and the evaporating damp is picked up again in the contrast between Julia's "illustrations... in weekly papers" and the image of the "November mist" where the artificial, modern images of cigarette smoke and the weekly papers are far outweighed by the natural imagery of the damp and the mist. The associated images clash with Julia's regal posturing, obliquely ridiculing her vain imaginings. As "Queen [of the]... subjects massed below", Julia's attitude becomes increasingly dehumanising, so that she feels progressively more threatened by them as

an entity. She notes “how strange it was when hundreds of people turned their heads all in one direction, their faces so much lighter than their dark hats, lozenges, lozenges, lozenges” (*PG*, 99). The shift in imagery from the functional necessity of the crowd in forming the veins of a larger body in the earlier depiction is belittled by this reduction of each individual to a repeatable shape, whether that of a diamond or a sweet. This diminutive dehumanising of the crowd is later replaced by a panicked fear of them: “but then they’ll come up here and be dirty and violent” (*PG*, 235).²⁸ But although Julia seems genuinely scared by the prospect of the crowd breaking in below, this fear could also be occasioned by her own uncertainty about Max and his intentions with her. The threat of the crowd being “dirty and violent” is rather undercut by her specific fear that “they’ll... try and kiss us or something.” Julia’s perspective on the crowd is relative to how she feels about Max. Whether she is confident of his attentions or threatened by his actions, she uses the unpredictable collective of the crowd as a vehicle for expressing her uncertain feelings.

The way the crowd is perceived, then, relies heavily on subtle shifts in the perspectives of other characters. Julia’s uncertainty, for example, when compared with Angela or Amabel’s confidence, creates a more volatile and threatening crowd. Julia feels threatened by the anonymity of stepping out of her “warm rooms with bells and servants” (*PG*, 15), but there is no sense of this fear in Angela Crevy. Angela feels “excited” by the crowd and retains her identity even when placed within it:

If that swarm of people could be likened to a pond for her lily then you could not see her like, and certainly not her kind, anywhere about her, nor was her likeness mirrored in their faces. (*PG*, 28)

Angela does not become one of the nameless “lozenges”; her superiority to the rest of the crowd is in no doubt. Even though Angela’s position on the ground is potentially

²⁸ Julia also describes them as “those frantic drinking hordes of awful people” (*PG*, 240).

much more dangerous than Julia's within the relative security of the hotel, there is no fear of the crowd present in this depiction. Similarly, Julia's modest primness over kissing Max – "it's too early in the day for that sort of thing" and "you are not going to muss me up now" (*PG*, 113) – is explicitly contrasted with Amabel's prowling sexual confidence:

When they [Max and Amabel] were in that room upstairs where Julia had asked him not to muss her about, Amabel's first words were "kiss me" and this more than anything showed the difference between these two girls, not so much in temperament as in their relations with him. (*PG*, 215)

Julia's tentative nature, reinforced by Amabel's assertiveness, leads to her faintly ridiculous fear of the crowd's "kiss".

The bathos created by Julia's fear of the crowd's kiss is also intensified by its calling to mind an earlier kiss which takes place within that very crowd, between Julia's own servant, Thomson, and a stranger. The kiss is spontaneous, light-hearted and freely given by a young woman called Emily. It picks out two individuals within the mass of the crowd and highlights a powerful moment of unexpected tenderness. It is greeted like a blessing by Thomson ("God bless me") and by the porter who witnesses it – "God bless 'er little 'eart... Come up out of the bloody ground, and gave him a great bloody kiss when he asked her" (*PG*, 160-1). Emily's rising from below for God's blessing is contrasted with Julia, who is isolated on high with no understanding of the situation on the ground.²⁹ After the porter's comment, the text cuts directly back to Julia's misguided thoughts: "Poor Thomson," Julia said just then to Max, putting on her hat again, 'd'you think he's all right, and what about his tea?"

²⁹ "[A]nd not far above her was that vault of blue now instead of green, now that she was closer to it" (*PG*, 99). The alteration in the colour of the vaulted roof, first referred to as green by the station master – "that huge vault of green he called his roof" (*PG*, 22) – and now seen as blue from close-up, reiterates the point I am making about how a change in perspective can change the assumed reality of a situation. In the case of Julia her perspective is different from those on the ground – the station master and Thomson.

Prior to the kiss, Thomson was indeed worrying about his tea and Julia's concerns would have been appropriate. But Thomson's moment of osculatory bliss renders Julia's concerns irrelevant and the juxtaposition distances the two characters. Julia, with her prim attitude towards kissing, would be shocked at the momentary union between Thomson and Emily.

This projected sense of shock, which draws attention to the various and shifting perspectives within the novel, is given further encouragement when we return to Thomson, Edwards and the porter who are discussing the incident. Edwards describes Emily's actions as "disgusting", but Thomson disagrees:

"No," said Thomson. "No, it's fellow feeling, that's what I like about it. Without so much as a by your leave when she sees something hankering after a bit of comfort, God bless 'er, she gives it him, not like some little bitches I could name," he darkly said, looking up and over to where their hotel room would be. (*PG*, 162)

Although they might be on the lowest layer, the sentiments which Thomson and Emily experience are deeper emotionally than Julia's fear of being kissed "or something" by the crowd. The intensity of this response is impressed upon us by Thomson's sudden use of the expletive, "bitches", to show the distance between Emily's "fellow feeling" and Julia's concern from afar. The reference to Emily's "fellow feeling" raises a simultaneous comparison with Miss Fellowes, one which has been foregrounded earlier in the chapter in a light-hearted repartee between Thomson and Edwards:

"Go on if you like and pick up some bird, alive or dead, Thomson, and get yourself your cup o' tea if you feel like it."
"What d'you mean, alive or dead?"
"... Alive or dead? I meant nothing."
"Not wrapped in brown paper you didn't?" (*PG*, 159)

The effect of Emily's spontaneous "fellow feeling", with its place in the world of the living and the human, compared with Miss Fellowes's preoccupation with the dead pigeon, has an altogether cleaner and more positive impact on those around her.

Thomson is also able to evaluate the kiss with a depth of honesty and regret which Julia's blustering platitudes skim right past:

"Waiting about in basements, with no light and in the damp and dark," Mr Thomson muttered to himself, and if he and that girl had been alone together, in between kisses he would have pitied both of them clinging together on dim whirling waters.

"Well, there you are," said Julia as she came in and before she could see who was there. (*PG*, 162-3)

The past unfulfilled conditional of Thomson's "if" (but not) – "if he and that girl had been alone together" – describes what was not, thereby giving it a past possibility. This is not a romantic dream of fulfilment, though. Thomson encounters a fear through his unfulfilled conditional, whereby "he would have pitied both of them". One might expect this to render the present moment more perfect, in that it did not occur, but in fact it destabilises the actual event. Emily does "come up out of the bloody ground" to provide us with one of the most touching moments of the novel, rendering Julia's fears of the crowd increasingly pathetic. But her effect is not simply one-dimensional: Thomson's darker contemplation of what-if and Edwards's disgust complicate this most fleeting of events. Emily is a marginal character, appearing for a few seconds only, but the resonance of her action far outlasts this.

Such a weighting towards the marginal occurs throughout *Party Going*, in the form of Miss Fellowes, Embassy Richard, the "hotel detective" and the tunnels and corridors which feed into the station and the hotel rooms. We have seen how many lines critics have written about Miss Fellowes, her dead pigeon and her sickness. And

yet, as we are told on the first page of the novel, “Miss Fellowes had no more to do than kiss her niece and wave good-bye” (*PG*, 8). The marginal status of Miss Fellowes, purposefully declared from the outset of the novel, is contradicted by the attention which she draws. She is not a part of the party going to the South of France, but she becomes inextricably linked to whether that party does indeed go. A similar number of critical lines have been dedicated to analysing the role of the “hotel detective” and Embassy Richard, neither of whom are quite part of the group, although both take up a great deal of that group’s thoughts and conversations. The unspecified position of these characters hovering on the edge of the main party – the “hotel detective” always lingering in the background with his shifting variety of accents; Embassy Richard’s total physical absence until the last pages of the novel – often allows them to become central topics of conversation. Their absence allows for a greater honesty of discussion, which the party members themselves avoid due to the politics of audience: how the presence of others alters what and how things are said. Those floating around the margins, with their physical refusal to be placed within the demarcated layers of social hierarchies, confuse and complicate the simple structuring of the novel.

The uncertainty of their position, their non-essential nature, and the marginalised roles they play might suggest a lack of importance. And yet these sideshows provide the main action of *Party Going*, where the party, in fact, goes nowhere. The novel creates its tone and setting by depicting all the characters of the party gradually entering the station from different directions – “in under into one of those tunnels” (*PG*, 9).³⁰ The various tunnels create a positional uncertainty, where the

³⁰ This exact phrase with its prepositional uncertainty is repeated twice. See also *PG*, 39.

characters are uncertain which layer they belong to. Within this uncertainty it is possible for the marginalised characters to take an apparent centre stage. It must be a dubious centre stage though. For the caveats considered earlier, with regard to placing Miss Fellowes and the symbolic nature of the dead pigeon at the centre of the novel, must also be kept in mind when looking at Embassy Richard – who is fast becoming a centre of futile speculation over whether he was invited or not to the party that he was unable to attend (*PG*, 21) – or the “hotel detective”. Frank Kermode, in his analysis of the “hotel detective”, whom he calls the “Hermes figure” or the “wandering stranger”, proposes a mythological interpretation of this “wandering stranger” but also warns of the dangers of doing so when dealing with such an irreducible text:

Party Going often uses demonstratives (“those two nannies,” “that bird”). This can be very unsettling, like the wholesale omission of articles in *Living*; it is a kind of grammatical assertion of the uniqueness of the text, a hint, perhaps, that it is not easily reducible to something else... these hints of irreducibility can have a severely qualifying effect on interpretative strategies like the one I used when I placed the Hermes figure in the very centre of *Party Going*.³¹

The move to place “the Hermes figure in the very centre of *Party Going*” is an arbitrary strategy or an “interpretative divination”, to use Kermode’s own terms; but “in the end,” Kermode decides, “some such move must be made”.³² This chapter has sought to maintain more of a balancing of what lies in the margins, rather than centralising any particular character or symbol. In doing so, it is inevitable that the thesis begins to create its own individual centralising narrative arc. But within this chapter the focus is on how Green’s characters act in relation to each other. Rather than seeing an individual as acting in accordance with his or her own solid set of beliefs and morals, it has considered how the context, the audience and the social group influence that character’s decisions: the influence of the multiple on the single.

³¹ Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 8, 12.

³² Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, 8, 12.

The more one is faced with these specific characters, the less familiar and less specific they become. In *Party Going*, this fluidity of identity is captured in the relational variance created by constantly shifting perspectives. The way characters are presented or the way they present themselves varies according to the company they are keeping at that present moment: “People, in their relations with one another, are continually doing similar things but never for similar reasons” (*PG*, 114). Over the course of the novel characters shift their stance or change their opinions so frequently and so whimsically that any single notion of their identity is blurred by this constant toing and froing. Each character in the party is in such a blur of self-seeking motion – back and forth through the same rooms – and motivation, shifting their opinions and allegiances without thought, that their individualities, the idiosyncratic “charms” which make them unique, are lost.

Take Julia. She is obsessed with her charms – “her egg with the elephants in it, her wooden pistol, and her little painted top” (*PG*, 18) – throughout the novel. On a physical level, she is always worried as to their whereabouts and their being mislaid; she even goes back to the house to look for them.³³ On an emotional level, her unwillingness to share the history of her charms with others, especially with Max, and the vulnerability she purports to suffer in baring her soul or revealing her emotional individuality comes across as indicative of her youthfulness and naivety within this complex social milieu.³⁴ This is supported by Max’s unvoiced lack of interest (“he thought bother her top” [*PG*, 113]) and the total lie he makes up about his own childhood – “he lied and said: ‘I had a doll as well... it was dressed up, a girl, in an

³³ See Green, *Party Going*, 29-30.

³⁴ See Green, *Party Going*, 47 and 108-10.

Eton blue frock”” (PG, 112). But Max’s lack of interest and breezy ability to create, on demand, his own false childhood idiosyncrasies is countered by Julia’s own dishonesty: “‘You’ll never believe about my egg,’ she said, ‘and I’ve never told another soul,’ which was a lie” (PG, 109). Each character is as dishonest as the other; willing to change their story for momentary gain. Any certainty about characters’ motivations within the party, the collective “centre” of *Party Going*, unravels as the novel progresses; the stability of the novel losing its solidity in the blur of powerfully-juxtaposed cinematic cuts and the duplicitous multiplicity of social game-playing: Max lied again, he said he had had to see his lawyer.

Julia knew he was a liar, it was one of those things one had to put up with when one was with him... As she looked about her, at the other travellers, she could get no comfort out of what she saw. Perhaps he was not lying, which was frightening enough, but if he was then why was he lying? (PG, 58)

It is here, within the relentless uncertainty of social dynamics, where the potential for the ruse in Green’s writing begins to take shape; where the stability of the novel’s structure acts as a powerless, centralised framework around which the characters and text are able to fragment and multiply into ambiguity.

The fragility of this framework is further destabilised by the presence of an all-pervasive fog. Within this confining fog the text creates numerous layers of veils; indeterminate surfaces which suggest but never reveal the deeper shifts occurring below. The text as surface, like the dialogue and thoughts which act as the interface for the characters, holds within it the potential to mislead as much as to inform. The singleness of its surface is only an oblique angle into the multiple possibilities which lie below:

There is a secrecy in wet fly fishing on the Severn with the fly out of sight and the skill lies in knowing more from the behaviour of the line than from anything on the surface of the water that a fish is taking it down. It is an

exciting connection with a remote element when there is only a hint of what is going on. (*PMB*, 55)

This secrecy, this intense attention to the behaviour of the line in, reconfigures Green's comments about the reader's relationship with the text. The individual must be patient enough, when fishing and when reading prose, to relish the gradual accumulation of hints or insinuations.³⁵ In both activities there is an indirect "connection with a remote element". The secrecy, the lack of irrefutable fact renders so much more possible; in relinquishing the certainty of the external senses, in accepting the limitations of communicating intent, it opens up the possibility of the unconscious, of what is felt:

It is not knowing what may be on the end of the line which is half the fun of sea fishing. Not being able to see but only to feel is what any fishing still means to me. (*PMB*, 56)

The Foggy Backdrop of the Everyday

In *Party Going*, there is an additional fog hovering over the surface of the water. This fog further hinders the sight and clarity of the reader and the characters, forcing them to find their bearings through hints and suggestions whilst remaining in a state of constant uncertainty. The fog becomes a centrepiece, a foregrounded backdrop, an all-pervasive vaporous veil of ill-defined air (is it tobacco or mist?),³⁶ which affects everyone – "everyone did seem smudged by fog" (*PG*, 22).

Foregrounding this foggy backdrop requires the same oblique approach involved in foregrounding the paradox of the everyday. It is this blurred but foregrounded backdrop, with its irreducible yet expanding, compositional symbolic density, which

³⁵ "Prose... is not quick as poetry but rather a gathering web of insinuations... Prose should be a long intimacy between strangers with no direct appeal to what both may have known" (*PMB*, 55).

³⁶ See, in addition to the passage mentioned earlier, *PG*, 150: "coughing as fog caught their two throats or perhaps it was smoke from those below who had put on cigarettes or pipes, because tobacco smoke was coming up in drifts".

pushes the “main” characters and action of *Party Going* towards the margins and edges, to the corridors and tunnels. The fog destabilises the characters of *Party Going*, allowing them the freedom to wander without clear focus within the station and the text. This wandering uncertainty is characteristic of what the Situationists would later term *dérive*. The individuals within the crowd, unaware of their collective impact, and the members of the “party”, with their U-turns and perspectival shifts, have an affinity with Baudelaire’s “*flâneurs*” and de Certeau’s “*Wandersmänner*”: “whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it”.³⁷ Green’s characters actively appropriate the space around them by the spontaneity of their responses, in the same way that de Certeau would describe “practitioners [making] use of spaces that cannot be seen”. (We might think here of Emily’s kiss or Miss Fellowes picking up or washing the pigeon.) The unexplained and inexplicable nature of these *opérations d’emploi* (modes of use), these individual appropriations of temporal and physical space, present us with what de Certeau describes as “a strangeness in the commonplace that creates no surface, or whose surface is only an advanced limit, an edge cut out of the visible”.³⁸

The fog’s symbolic presence in *Party Going* is much less “purposed” than the delaying obfuscatory nature of the fog in, say, *Bleak House*. There is no doubt that its pervading sense of uncertainty does delay the departure of the party; in fact it prevents the anticipated central action of the plot: the party going. In this way, the fog emphasises the antagonistic and contrasting relationship between the event and the

³⁷ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

³⁸ Certeau, “Walking in the City”, *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 102. The next chapter discusses how an act like Emily’s kiss might be seen as a “tactical” ruse – “Tactics work within the constraints of a given order, bringing about ‘manipulations within a system’ on the basis of an ‘absence of power’, a ‘non-lieu’ (non-place)” [See Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, 214] – and how Green’s one-day novel offers a rich dialogue with more recent thoughts on the everyday.

everyday. So, on one level, the fog has a clear purpose. It prevents an event. The floating stasis which its presence creates, temporally and physically, also encapsulates the irreducible nature of the text. The unpredictable, constantly shifting nature of the fog, with its veiled impregnability, renders clarity of meaning and status unattainable. It blurs and confuses, rather than functioning to break down or disempower, many of the traditional hierarchies of social class. For a few hours, for example, cars can go no faster than pedestrians: “fog at moments collapsed on traffic from its ceiling” (*PG*, 37). As the novel progresses the fog drops through the layers. It starts at twenty foot – “Miss Fellowes looked up to where that pall of fog was twenty feet above” (*PG*, 7) – and gradually descends to ground level, where it touches and infiltrates personal space, in a way that is more reminiscent of T. S. Eliot than Dickens:

Fog burdened with night began to roll into this station striking cold through thin leather up into their feet where in thousands they stood and waited. Coils of it reached down like women’s long hair reached down and caught their throats and veiled here and there what they could see. (*PG*, 199)³⁹

The fog in *Party Going* is, like the everyday, personal and communal, individual and multi-layered; it is, itself, “an edge cut out of the visible”; an oblique, unquantifiable, insubstantial presence which creates stillness without itself ever being still. As such it embodies, in its noumenal rather than phenomenal essence, “the neutral space of a place without place”. Neither wholly singular nor resolutely multiple the fog caters for an apophatic discourse, where its negation offers us the possibility of the “other”, of the “tactic”: “The space of a tactic is the space of the other.”⁴⁰ The fog encapsulates the non-specific, non-presence of a centre in *Party Going*.

³⁹ *Party Going*’s fog combines the individual, feline personification of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” – “The yellow fog that rubs its back against the window-panes,/ The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,/ Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,/ Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains... / And indeed there will be time/ For the yellow smoke that slides along the street” (T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems*, 13) – with the fog’s veiling of the crowd in *The Waste Land* – “Unreal City,/ Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,/ A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many” (T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems*, 62).

⁴⁰ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 37.

To highlight the potential for power within these marginal characters and images, without selecting any one in particular as a solid central figure; to draw the reader's awareness to the multiple layers present within the spatio-temporal stability of the novel's framework and the relative instability of those layers; to focus on the fluidity and sharp deconstructive facets of the cinematic cuts within the prose, and on the uncertainty presented by subtle authorial selections within that prose, is to argue that the irreducible nature of Green's text allows a multi-faceted backdrop to take the foreground of our attention. In this way it moves to foreground the backdrop of the everyday within the structure of one day. Although all the tunnels might be seen to direct us towards the station, it is the sifting and shifting fog – hovering throughout the entirety of the station, its tunnels, arteries and multiple layers – which manages to incorporate, non-corporeally, the uncertainties harboured within Green's oblique and “non-representational” text.

Chapter 5

The One-day Novel, the City and the Everyday: *Ulysses*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Party Going*

There is no doubt that, as a one-day novel, *Party Going* (1939) has many similarities with its more famous circadian predecessors, *Ulysses* (1922) and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). All three novels follow the footsteps of specific characters walking in the city; all three authors use this one-day-novel form as an external, fixed structure through which to explore the more fluid relativities of the city, post-war modernity and the everyday; whilst the characters of each novel are seen negotiating the constant flux – “*ce mouvement lié*”¹ – of the everyday and the multiple “shocks” of the city.² But this chapter argues that the non-representational non-specificity of *Party Going* – where the day does not verifiably exist (it has no specified date and it is curtailed into a few hours) and where no individual characters stand out as central – shows Green’s novel taking on a narrative form which encapsulates and releases the paradoxes of the everyday in ways distinct from, and more apt than, those of its forebears.

Such an assertion might seem surprising in light of recent criticism which focuses on how the “epiphany”, the “moment” and the “event” are drowned by the flood of the everyday in the work of Joyce and Woolf, and in *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway* more specifically.³ My assertion, though, is that *Party Going* offers an

¹ Blanchot, *L’Entretien infini*, 364.

² Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1939) in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 161. See also *n.*19, 250: “Man’s need to expose himself to shock effects is his adjustment to the dangers threatening him... experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street in big-city traffic”.

³ See Randall, *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life*, Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us* and Sayeau, “Against the Event: The Everyday and the Evolution of Modernist

understated, oblique approach, which, as something easily overlooked, is stylistically more appropriate to literary representations of the everyday. The deceptive platitudes and shifting nature of many of the characters and the lack of decisive action create a veil of indirection and aporia around the train station, which, when considered in conjunction with the open-ended, non-affirmatory nature of the prose, work against any “sudden spiritual manifestation”.⁴ *Party Going* provides a thoroughly flattened, non-epiphanic experience of the city, in style and content, which stands out from the more dramatic, frenzied stylistics of *Ulysses* and the oscillatory experiences of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom or Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith. In this sense, I argue that *Party Going* is more of an everyday novel than a one-day novel.

The ordinary, everyday experience of living – whether it be Buck Mulligan shaving, his “yellow dressinggown, ungirdled,” (*U*, 3)⁵ or Clarissa Dalloway “mending her dress as usual” (*MD*, 44)⁶ – is indubitably a central aspect of both *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*; as it is central to much of literary modernism. But early critics of this modernist tradition sought to find some form of “pattern”⁷ or “key to the labyrinth”,⁸ where the endless, proliferating routines of ordinariness or everydayness

Narrative”. Chapter 1 of Olson’s book “examines how *Ulysses* drowns what could be most important in the flood of insignificant stuff” (7) and goes on to look at Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein and Wallace Stevens, whilst Sayeau traces a history of “Anti-Evental Modernism” through the works of Gustave Flaubert, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad and James Joyce.

⁴ Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, 211.

⁵ Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922), ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). All further references will be to this edition and will stay in the main text.

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), ed. Stella McNichol (London: Penguin, 1992). All further references will be to this edition and will stay in the main text.

⁷ Virginia Woolf, “Modern Fiction” (1919) in *The Common Reader* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1925), 190.

⁸ See Robert Scholes, “Joyce and the Epiphany: The Key to the Labyrinth?” in *Critical Essays on James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, eds. Philip Brady and James F. Carens (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998), 27. In this 1964 essay, Scholes argues that the Joyce establishment of Harry Levin, Theodore Spencer, Irene Hendry, Hugh Kenner and William York Tindall had “essentially treated the term [epiphany] in the same way – as a key to the labyrinth of Joyce’s work.

are transcended by individual moments of enlightenment, whereby the ordinary is transformed into the extraordinary. Liesl Olson puts it succinctly in her introduction to *Modernism and the Ordinary*:

the most famous moments of literary modernism are moments of transcendent understanding; most modernists describe something of this kind: Woolf's "moment of being," James Joyce's "epiphany," Ezra Pound's "magic moment," Walter Benjamin's "shock," T. S. Eliot's "still point of the turning world," or Marcel Proust's explosion of memory, triggered by such events as the taste of the Madeleine.⁹

Olson uses the general nature of this assertion as a launch pad for her "revisionary" thesis, which

revises postmodern accounts of modernism as a period when writers turned away from the everyday or represented it in entirely negative terms. The modernist works that I address do not attempt to "bring order out of chaos" in the mode of "The Waste Land." The structure behind *Ulysses* or the "pattern" that Woolf sees beneath what she calls "the cotton wool of daily life" is always counter-balanced by a valued interest in the diffuse and messy particularities of that life.¹⁰

Olson's argument, as she points out a little later, is part of a more recent critical trend:

While early Joyce critics (and first-time readers of Joyce) frequently look to Joyce's "mythical method" or moments of "epiphany" as readerly guides signify what is most important in the text, more recent critics have explored how Joyce constantly works to ironize the epiphanic. Joyce attempts to equalize events and objects in an environment chock-full of everyday stuff.¹¹

There is a general truth in this broad critical sweep, where a brief glance at the history of criticism of Joyce and Woolf shows that critical responses have, for many years, been exploring how Joyce complicates the "epiphanic"¹² and how the structure of counterbalance is paradigmatic of Woolf's response to modern life.¹³

Where Mr Levin says that *Dubliners* is a collection of epiphanies, Mr. Tindall says that each story 'may be thought of as a great epiphany, and the container of little epiphanies, an epiphany of epiphanies.'" Scholes focuses particularly on "Hugh Kenner and S. L. Goldberg, who make the epiphany crucial to our whole view of *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, and especially to our view of Stephen Dedalus in that work and in *Ulysses*." See also 34, where Scholes argues for "a very limited use... of this term epiphany" and "as a term to be used in the criticism of Joyce's art itself, I would like to see it abandoned entirely."

⁹ Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 3.

¹⁰ Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 5.

¹¹ Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 6.

¹² I am conscious that too much has been published on *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway* to cite here. As an example, however, the shift in focus from Morris Beja's early work, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel*

This chapter examines further how *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*, as formal, one-day-novel predecessors of *Party Going*, treat the events and characters of a single day. *Mrs Dalloway* depicts the most eventful day of the three novels, but these events soon submerge back into the flux of daily life. *Ulysses* complicates what might be deemed ordinary or extraordinary by its continual shifts of context and perspective, such that individual moments no longer offer up a clear transcendence or extraordinary separation from a surrounding ordinariness. The chapter then looks at how, despite this, both one-day novels still cannot avoid creating extraordinary characters and memorable days; days which continue to stand out from the ordinary. *Party Going*, though, subverts and complicates the celebration of epiphany in longer-lasting fashion: it denies the creation of moments whose eventfulness sets them apart from the day and it dissolves the memorable singularity that the depiction of one day in particular might accumulate. *Party Going*, and to a lesser extent Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941), manipulate the one-day-novel form in such a way that it becomes emblematic of a more general sense of fluidity – the backdrop of the everyday – rather than as a specific foregrounding of the individual or the specific day concerned. In this way,

(London: Peter Owen Limited, 1971), to his later essay, "The Incertitude of the Void: Epiphany and Indeterminacy" in *Joyce, The Artist Manqué, and Indeterminacy* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Limited, 1989) seems emblematic of a more general critical trend. Beja finishes his chapter on Joyce and *Ulysses*, in *Epiphany in the Modern Novel*, with the overly-neat assertion: "this climactic epiphany completes the central theme of the entire novel by revealing to Bloom his son in a sudden spiritual manifestation" (111). How, one might ask, is it possible to talk of "the central theme" of *Ulysses*? In the later essay, though, Beja is much more conscious of the presence of uncertainty: "The new conviction is not that it is difficult to arrive at Joyce's 'meaning', but that it is impossible: not that the meaning is hard to determine, but that it is indeterminate" (30), which leads to his conclusion: "if an artist conveys a sense of perplexity and mystery, he or she may not have failed to communicate. And after all, if the meaning and significance behind an epiphany were readily or logically graspable, the experience of epiphany itself would be redundant" (32).

¹³ See Rachel Bowlby, "The Crowded Dance of Modern Life" in *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 243, where Bowlby describes Woolf's "maddeningly and delightedly ambivalent response to modern life, 'the modern mind', and modern writing. On the one hand she will seem to take in joyfully and passively the pleasures of a book, a walk, a 'sensation' of some kind; on the other, and in a second move which is meant to supersede the first, she will pull back and insist without more ado that there must be judgement, or order, or permanence, or depth."

Party Going picks up more directly on and elaborates (albeit in a necessarily indirect and non-elaborate manner) on what was already beginning to take place in *Mrs Dalloway* and *Ulysses*; where “moments of being” are pulled back into the non-epiphanic backdrop from which they emerge.

Moments of Being and Non-Being in *Mrs Dalloway*

Virginia Woolf reveals her interest in the “nondescript cotton wool” of “non-being” as much as her “moments of being” in *A Sketch of the Past*:

Every day includes much more non-being than being. Yesterday for example, Tuesday 18th of April [1940], was [as] it happened a good day; above the average in ‘being’. It was fine; I enjoyed writing these first pages; my head was relieved of the pressure of writing about Roger; I walked over Mount Misery... I also read Chaucer with pleasure; and began a book – the memoirs of Madame de la Fayette – which interested me. These separate moments of being were however embedded in many more moments of non-being. I have already forgotten what Leonard and I talked about at lunch; and at tea; although it was a good day the goodness was embedded in a kind of nondescript cotton wool. This is always so. A great part of every day is not lived consciously.¹⁴

It is clear from this passage, though, that the forgotten “moments of non-being” are not what makes her day good; what makes the day “above the average” is the awareness of “being” she derives from a renewed enjoyment in writing something other than her biography of Roger Fry or the pleasure and interest aroused in reading Chaucer or Madame de La Fayette. Yet, although Woolf portrays the notion of “non-being” in a rather negative light, it is something which she feels “a real novelist” should be able to convey: “The real novelist can somehow portray both sorts of being... I have never been able to do both.”¹⁵ It is in *Between the Acts*, I will argue, that she manages to get closest to conveying the non-being, “the cotton wool of daily

¹⁴ Woolf, *A Sketch of the Past* (1940) in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (1976; London: Grafton Books, 1989), 79.

¹⁵ Woolf, *A Sketch of the Past*, 79.

life”;¹⁶ however, in *Mrs Dalloway*, although “moments of being” are often depicted with poetic intensity, the overlooked presence of “non-being” can also be found. In this way it exemplifies the famous statement Woolf had made in her 1919 essay, “Modern Fiction”:

Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.¹⁷

The day begins with Clarissa successfully negotiating the city in order to buy flowers for her party that evening. This interaction between Clarissa and the busy streets of Westminster requires an unconscious protective layering – “She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnall’s van to pass” – whilst simultaneously offering her a chance to relish in the joy of living:

For Heaven knows why one loves it [living] so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh. . . In people’s eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment in June. (*MD*, 4)

Once prepared for the minor shocks of metropolitan living, Clarissa finds within this moment a great sense of well-being. The “moment of being”, where the intensity of the stimuli is consciously registered and then listed, sees Clarissa revel in the cacophony of the city’s noises: its “bellow and uproar”. It is a discordant medley of notes created by the seemingly never-ending list of cars, buses, vans, and, high above, an aeroplane;¹⁸ images of modernity which are juxtaposed with the continued presence of the past in the shape of carriages, brass bands and barrel organs. Clarissa, at “this

¹⁶ Woolf, *A Sketch of the Past*, 81.

¹⁷ Woolf, “Modern Fiction” (1919) in *The Common Reader*, 190.

¹⁸ For a more detailed look at the playful multiplicity and freedom of meanings held within the image of the aeroplane in contrast to the car in *Mrs Dalloway*, see Gillian Beer, “The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf” in *Virginia Woolf*, ed. Rachel Bowlby (London: Longman, 1992), 132-61.

moment in June”, is able to celebrate the clashing vibrancy of the city in a unitary moment of epiphany, which acts as part of, yet stands out from, the daily round of activities taking place. In this moment she is exhilarated.

Another moment of clear happiness occurs as the day draws to a close and Clarissa thrills in the presence of the Prime Minister: “her Prime Minister”. Contextually, it occurs when her fears of the party being a failure – “Oh dear, it was going to be a failure; a complete failure” (*MD*, 183-4) – finally subside and disappear, to be replaced by the joy of witnessing herself as “the perfect hostess” (*MD*, 67):

And now Clarissa escorted her Prime Minister down the room, prancing, sparkling, with the stateliness of her grey hair. She wore ear-rings, and a silver-green mermaid’s dress. Lolloping on the waves and braiding her tresses she seemed, having that gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed; turned, caught her scarf in some other woman’s dress, unhitched it, laughed, all with the most perfect ease and air of a creature floating in its element. (*MD*, 190-1)

In this moment of elation, Clarissa sees herself playing out the role of the hostess with the grace of a mermaid floating on the waves. She prances, lollops and sparkles whilst still maintaining “the stateliness of her grey hair”; she is young and wise, exotic and human; she is, in her own mind’s eye, everything to all people. It is, without doubt, a “moment of being”; it stands out from the ordinary. But it is also loaded. Peter’s description of Clarissa long ago as the “perfect hostess”, which was intended disparagingly and set out to hurt Clarissa (“she winced all over” [*MD*, 67]) brings into doubt the already rather temporary viability of this as a “moment”. But even without this layer, the moment, by its very nature, cannot last. The presence of the Prime Minister on her arm only seconds later reinforces this:

And, walking down the room with him, with Sally there and Peter there and Richard very pleased, with all those people rather inclined, perhaps, to envy, she had felt the intoxication of the moment, that dilation of the nerves of the heart itself till it seemed to quiver, steeped, upright; - yes, but after all it was what other people felt, that; for, though she loved it and felt it tingle and sting,

still these semblances, these triumphs (dear old Peter, for example, thinking her so brilliant), had a hollowness; (*MD*, 191)

Woolf's language reflects Clarissa's shift in mindset. In the mermaid passage the verbs flood over one another, the parataxis creating an energy which thrusts past any fears – “prancing sparkling... to be; to exist; to sum it all up;... passed, turned, caught... unhitched it, laughed”. The buzz of confidence is fast and furious as Clarissa reacts masterfully to the crowd around her. As with her earlier celebration of the city's clamour, we see Clarissa relishing her interaction with the various unpredictable elements surrounding her. But as the excitement passes, the initial triumph results in a prolonged sense of hollowness. The frenetic loading of stimuli is replaced by a drawn-out, assonantal hypotaxis – “And... with Sally there and Peter there and Richard very pleased, with all those people rather inclined”. This syntactic subordination conveys how dependent Clarissa's individual moment is upon the reaction of others – “after all it was what other people felt”. This “moment of being” is both transitory and reliant upon others; it is quickly rendered empty.

The Eternal and the Transitory

Clarissa Dalloway's emotional search for meaning, her need for warmth to permeate through her daily existence, reveals a wish to break through the impenetrability of her carefully constructed social demeanour. Peter Walsh sums up this ambivalence:

That was the devilish part of her – this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her, which he had felt again this morning talking to her; an impenetrability. Yet Heaven knows he loved her. (*MD*, 66)

The profundity and frigidity of Clarissa resemble the indolence and indifference of beauty in Baudelaire's "*L'Amour du mensonge*" or the blasé froideur of the dandy.¹⁹

Within this devilish coldness, though, remains that same potential for depth and love.²⁰ This is reinforced by the way in which Woolf chooses to end the novel with Peter observing Clarissa:

"I will come," said Peter, but he sat on for a moment.
What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?
It is Clarissa, he said.
For there she was. (*MD*, 213)

There is a terror inspired by Clarissa, but also an "extraordinary excitement"; she can be cold and distant, but she also incites great passion.

Clarissa's almost imperceptible stiffening, revealed whilst waiting for the Durnall's van to pass, suggests a self-protective mechanism which shields her from the shocks of the city. As a hostess, Clarissa reveals a similar, more isolating tendency towards emotional containment:

Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways. Partly the background; it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. But not for her; not yet anyhow. (*MD*, 187)

Clarissa is not taken in by the party; although her presence and organisational skills enable others at the party to reveal extraordinary ("out of their ordinary ways") fragments of themselves, she is unable or unwilling to make the effort herself "to go

¹⁹ Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863) in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays by Charles Baudelaire*, ed. and trans. John Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 29.

²⁰ See Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 200-1, where McGowan translates "*adore*", in the last line of "*L'Amour du mensonge*", as "worship". Similarly, with the earlier line – "*Et promenant l'ennui de ton regard profond*" – McGowan chooses the more intensely spiritual and eternal translation of "*profond*": "In showing in your glance the ennui of your *soul*" (my italics). For Peter Walsh, the last line of this quotation, as with Baudelaire's "*adore*", could be read quite convincingly as: "Yet Heaven knows he *worshipped* her", as is suggested by "Heaven knows".

much deeper.” She distances herself from others in her role as hostess; she wallows in the buzz and excitement of the crowd, but although she observes in it a depth of soul, she is never able to be a part of it: “And yet for her own part, it was too much of an effort. She was not enjoying it. It was too much like being – just anybody, standing there” (*MD*, 187). This isolation results in a cold exterior which belies her inner propensity for warmth and passion, whilst her stiff demeanour – “Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame” (*MD*, 54) – has, over the course of time, ossified into a skeletal reduction of her outward appearance which celebrates the potential of Clarissa’s past more than the possibilities held within her future.

The party is a success; Peter Walsh remains adoring; but Clarissa’s most vital presence is in her past. The novel ends: “For there she was.” With the event over, the place left for Clarissa in her fast-emptying home seems ill-fitting. Peter’s “extraordinary excitement” at seeing Clarissa jars with the previous image of Richard Dalloway celebrating the beauty of their daughter, Elizabeth:

Richard and Elizabeth were rather glad it was over, but Richard was proud of his daughter. And he had not meant to tell her, but he could not help telling her. He had looked at her, he said, and he had wondered, who is that lovely girl? and it was his daughter! That did make her happy. (*MD*, 213)²¹

Richard’s overflowing pride in his daughter, rather than in his wife’s accomplishments as hostess, empties the moment yet further. Clarissa’s presence, as she fears earlier on in the day, goes by unnoticed:

She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (*MD*, 11)

²¹ The fragility of the family unit is further heightened here by the memory of Richard’s fleeting infidelity in *The Voyage Out* (1915), where he kisses Vinrace’s daughter, Rachel. See Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, ed. Jane Wheare (London: Penguin, 1992), 67.

Except, of course, by Peter. But the wavering uncertainty of Peter – “always playing with... his old horn-handled knife” (*MD*, 47) – has never been able to trigger the passion within Clarissa.

It is women, historically, who have created the most intense “moments of being” in Clarissa’s life. As when she sometimes yielded “to the charms of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing”:

Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over – the moment. (*MD*, 34-5)

The explosive suddenness of the rush, which bursts at the seams with orgasmic physicality – “she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt” (*MD*, 34) – is “swollen with some astonishing significance”; it creates an “extraordinary alleviation” and offers up “an inner meaning almost expressed.” The rapture and the illumination of this moment and the “match burning in a crocus” must both soon come to an end, but within that moment, already past, is held, perhaps, a quasi-spiritual insight, an epiphany, a physical rendering of the soul. This is made more explicit when Clarissa experiences “the most exquisite moment of her whole life”:

Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it – a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (*MD*, 39)

This present, purposefully hidden from the world (it is “wrapped up” twice) is “something infinitely precious”, and yet, like the flower which Sally picks, it is also

ephemeral. Wrapped up it remains within, like the “match burning in a crocus”; but it is also solid and lasting, with the ability to be recalled infinitely by the memory. The “moment”, made up of its “myriad impressions”, is fixed with the built-in contrasts of the momentary and the eternal, the vanishing and what remains; the flower remains juxtaposed with the diamond.²²

This diamond, in the mind of Clarissa, acts as a metaphor for the multi-faceted singularity of self:

she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point. (*MD*, 40)

This multifaceted singularity resembles the kaleidoscopic abilities of the artist as *flâneur*, which Baudelaire likens to:

a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.²³

But rather than grasping the multiplicity of her individuality, as revealed to her by Sally’s kiss and the image of the diamond which grows out of that moment, Clarissa, in choosing to be a hostess, learns to quash the multiplicities of her individuality. She “tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her – faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions” (*MD*, 40) and gradually subordinates herself, and her soul, to those around her: “though she is perfectly right, her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality” (*MD*, 54). It is this subordination to others, as characterised by the lingering uncertainty of the hypotaxis, the syntactic subordination in the episode with the Prime Minister, which upsets Peter so much:

²² Woolf, “Modern Fiction” (1919) in *The Common Reader*, 189.

²³ Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863), 10.

it was her manner that annoyed him; timid; hard; arrogant; prudish. “The death of the soul.” He had said that instinctively, ticketing the moment as he used to do – the death of her soul. (*MD*, 65)

From a social perspective, viewed by the multitudes, Clarissa might be seen as a great success with her well-attended parties, her prominent husband and her beautiful daughter, but from Peter’s perspective Clarissa has whittled away the multiple facets of her individuality to create a hollow elegance: “showing in your glance the ennui of your soul”.²⁴

Peter Walsh declares the death of Clarissa’s soul, through her self-protection, but continues to love, adore and worship her. Clarissa herself, though, is shocked and affected by the suicide of Septimus Smith, such that she interprets it as an act of defiance, a sign of strength:

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about in chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (*MD*, 202)

And then, a page later:

Odd, incredible; she had never been so happy. Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long. No pleasure could equal, she thought, straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf, this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank. (*MD*, 203)

It is as if Septimus Smith plays out to its conclusion a facet of herself, allowing her to move on, exhilarated, within the “leaden circles” of soulless Big Ben’s chimes:

She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back. She must assemble. (*MD*, 204)

²⁴ Baudelaire, “*L’Amour du mensonge*” in *The Flowers of Evil*, 201.

Clarissa is constantly spurred into action by the insistence of the bells, the hourly and half-hourly reminders of the day's progress.²⁵ Her hostess's obsession with checking on everything and everyone gives her a sense of purpose – “she must go back. She must assemble” – but it is “in the process of living”, in the mundane, everyday actions of “straightening the chairs, [or] pushing in one book on the shelf,” that she is able both to lose herself and to find pleasure. As she shows signs of surrendering her individuality (the image of one book being subsumed by the shelf of others is entirely appropriate), as she allows herself to let “the triumphs of youth” go, she is suddenly empowered by an awareness of what lies outside herself: she is able “to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank.” Clarissa's realisation, here, both is and is not a finite “moment of being”: it still happens with a “shock of delight”, but its essence lies in a slower, longer-lasting affinity with, and sacrifice to, the daily cycle, the everyday and the process of living within it.

The single day, with its focus on the giving of a party, leaves a hollow centre with its passing. It is behind the scenes – in the quiet surrender of that singularity; in the blurring of focus away from “moments of being”; in Clarissa's relentless self-erosion – that Woolf's novel begins to unveil an awareness of the depth and breadth of “non-being”, of how the day necessarily submerges back into the everyday. In this way, the celebration of “moments of being” in *Mrs Dalloway* can divert attention away from less significant events. But the “myriad impressions” and the lack of neatness, which Woolf discusses in “Modern Fiction”, the built-in contrast of the ephemeral and the eternal, leave a weight of more ordinary detail unexplored and

²⁵ The shock of Septimus's suicide creates an ultimately positive reaction from Clarissa, similar to the “sudden shocks” Woolf discusses in *A Sketch of the Past*, 81: “Though I still have the peculiarity that I receive these sudden shocks, they are now always welcome; after the first surprise, I always feel instantly that they are particularly valuable.”

overlooked. In this way, *Mrs Dalloway* as a one-day novel, in contrast to the notion of it creating its own “Bloomsday” for Clarissa,²⁶ begins to evoke a more general, underlying sense of the everyday and the ordinary. It is easy to overlook the detail of Clarissa straightening a chair or pushing one book back in the shelf; in themselves they do not seem significant acts. But it is this insignificance, this understated or oblique presence of the “cotton wool of non-being”, which I have sought to trace; where the singularity of the event or the one specific day is submerged into the flux and multiplicity of the everyday.

This shift away from epiphany, with its emphasis on the individual and the “moment”, can also be found in *Ulysses*. In *Mrs Dalloway*, it has been possible to see how the frigidity and hardness of Clarissa’s personality is an external façade created in response to society and the city. There are then “moments of being” when Clarissa’s inner self, her soul – “the religious feeling” (*MD*, 39) – are fleetingly revealed. My argument is that these “moments of being”, stuck as they are in a past which can never be recovered, are not necessarily to be celebrated: they are not cathartic. In fact, it is the less shocking, less explicit, everyday states of living, when Clarissa is no longer the stand-alone heroine of the story, which require and offer illumination. For in the subordination of the protagonist in the complex reality of post-war modernity, it is possible to locate a fuller sense of interaction with that modernity. This interaction is compatible with the impermanence of modern, city living – “*le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent*”²⁷ – and seeks out a longer-lasting process of living within it. Rather than harping back to a forever lost past, Clarissa reveals an awareness of the sacrifices made by Septimus Smith and his generation:

²⁶ See Harvena Richter, “The *Ulysses* Connection: Clarissa Dalloway’s Bloomsday”, *Studies in the Novel* 21 (Fall 1989): 305-19.

²⁷ Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” (1863) in *Critique d’art* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 355.

she understands his need to commit suicide. Through this understanding she is able to reassert a desire to go on living her own life – not as the heroine, this time, but as part of a wider context, as part of a bigger room:

But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter.
And she came in from the little room. (*MD*, 204)

Epiphany, the Event and the Everyday in *Ulysses*

Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus: Heroes of the Everyday?

Ulysses plays out this subversion of the hero on many levels. The move from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) to *Ulysses* (1922), for example, sees Stephen lose his position in the starring role. In Section I, the Telemacha (Gilbert) or Dawn (Linati) Section, Stephen is regularly cast as, and his free indirect style often reveals him as, the hero. An example of this occurs near the end of the first chapter, when Haines connects Marcello tower with *Hamlet*: “this tower and this cliff here remind me somehow of Elsinore.” Although Stephen does not respond to this suggestion, it sparks a moment for all three characters:

Buck Mulligan turned suddenly for an instant towards Stephen but did not speak. In the bright silent instant Stephen saw his own image in cheap dusty mourning between their gay attires...

- I read a theological interpretation of it [*Hamlet*] somewhere, he [Haines] said bemused. The Father and the Son idea. The Son striving to be atoned with the Father. (*U*, 18)

Each of the characters, in their own individual way, finds a version of *Hamlet* in Stephen. Earlier Buck Mulligan tells Haines to “wait till you hear him on *Hamlet*” (*U*, 16) and Haines has just been guessing what Stephen’s “idea” (*U*, 17) of *Hamlet* might be, whether it might be “some paradox?” (*U*, 18). In this “bright silent instant”,

Stephen sees his own image as similar to that of Hamlet in mourning.²⁸ The long, complex sentences of Stephen's free indirect style, as epitomised in the density and difficulty of the Proteus chapter, and his contemplative, academic nature strengthen a comparison with Hamlet, but the effectiveness of this type of hero is questioned sharply by the shrewdly practical, action-based notions of Greek (and Latin) heroism insisted upon by Joyce's chosen title, *Ulysses*.

It is not until the opening of Section II, the Calypso chapter, that the modern Greek hero is introduced. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Calypso sees Zeus order the release of Odysseus and the return home of Telemachus; in the *Ulysses* version, not only does the attention shift from Stephen onto Leopold Bloom, but the comparison leaves Stephen lacking. Proteus ends with Stephen's thudding, repeated emphasis on a metaphorical life-in-death – "Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead" (*U*, 49) – and the past – "rere regardant" (*U*, 50). The contrast with the gory, primal vitality of Leopold Bloom's appetite is striking on many levels:

Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls. He liked thick giblet soup, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liver slices fried with crustcrumbs, fried hencods' roes. Most of all he liked grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine. (*U*, 53)

Bloom's taste for blood and guts is entirely appropriate for the Greek epic hero and it also serves to highlight his specific individuality. Bloom's short sentences bristle with an energy which celebrates the physical over the mental and creates an insatiable appetite for more, for the future:

He listened to her licking lap. Ham and eggs, no. No good eggs with this drouth. Want pure fresh water. Thursday: not a good day either for a mutton

²⁸ There are also numerous other areas where Hamlet ("A side-eye at my Hamlet hat" [*U*, 47]) and *Hamlet* ("Ay, very like a whale" [*U*, 41]) are referred to in relation to Stephen.

kidney at Buckley's. Fried with butter, a shake of pepper. Better a pork kidney at Dlugacz's. While the kettle is boiling. (*U*, 54)

Bloom looks forward to what he can eat next while the kettle comes to a boil: he is the multi-tasking action-hero of the everyday, simultaneously making breakfast for his sleeping wife and planning his own feast.²⁹ Where Stephen is asphyxiated by the dusty recycled breaths of death, “dead breaths living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead”, Bloom takes that same “offal from all dead” and, lingering in the sensual experience of it, rustles up something tantalising and unexpected “which gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine.” The casual, but intricately-structured similarity between these two moments, the trace of urine, picks up a larger-scale debate on heroes, occurring over breakfast, where Bloom's culinary masterclass renders Stephen impotent: not only does Buck Mulligan cook Stephen's meal for him, he also burns it.

As contrasting characters – the teacher and the salesman, Hamlet and Odysseus – the fundamental differences of these potential heroes offer up powerful symbols of binary opposition: thoughtful versus practical, abstract versus bodily, mourner versus warrior, cerebral versus sensual. This neat opposition is most dominant as Section I ends (Proteus) and Section II begins (Calypso). In Proteus, Stephen is reluctant to be tied down physically as the object regarded, the spectacle; like the slippery, constantly shifting forms of Proteus eventually tamed by Menelaus:

I throw this ended shadow from me, manshape ineluctable, call it back.
Endless, would it be mine, form of my form? Who watches me here? Who
ever anywhere will read these written words? Signs on a white field. (*U*, 48)³⁰

²⁹ This focus on activity rather than thought reminds us of Clarissa after her thoughts about Septimus: “But she must go back. She must assemble” (*MD*, 204).

³⁰ The underlying interconnectedness between Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom is intensified by the fact that Bloom will find “these written words” of Stephen's later that evening, but he won't be able to read them enough to decipher what they are and finds more use in a stick, with which he leaves his own message: “Mr Bloom stooped and turned over a piece of paper on the strand. He brought it near his eyes and peered. Letter? No. Can't read. Better go. Better. I'm tired to move. Page of an old

In Calypso, Bloom's confident corporeal nature is captured by the cycle of eating, which starts it, and excreting, which is depicted with languid enjoyment at the end of the chapter:

Midway, his last resistance yielding, he allowed his bowels to ease themselves quietly as he read, reading still patiently that slight constipation of yesterday quite gone. Hope it's not too big to bring on piles again. No, just right. (*U*, 66)

Bloom "reads" the physical signs given by his body's excretions, as much as the daily paper which he is simultaneously reading, in the same way that Stephen might read Aristotle's "form of forms" (*U*, 44). But as Joyce's novel multiply unfolds, these binaries become less oppositional, less about an either/or, and more progressively obfuscatory. Through the increased blurring of boundaries the reader is pulled away from asking if the hero is either Stephen or Bloom towards a questioning of whether there is a singular hero of the everyday.

In the transition from Circe, at the end of Section II, and Eumaeus and Ithaca, at the beginning of Section III, the characters, actions and thoughts of Stephen and Bloom morph together, separate, distort and shift. Section II ends with a whirling, phantasmagoric replay of the day's events in dramatic form: Leopold Bloom is seen dressed in an extraordinary variety of over twenty different outfits, ranging from the simple (the "workman's corduroy overalls" [*U*, 452] or the housejacket and "heelless slippers" [*U*, 436]), to the smart ("in dinner jacket with watered silkfacings" [*U*, 423] or "a smart blue Oxford suit" [*U*, 417]); from the extravagant ("a flunkey's plum plush coat and kneebreeches" [*U*, 526] or "a mantle of cloth of gold and... a ruby ring" [*U*, 456]), to the ridiculous ("with asses' ears" [*U*, 468] or "in babylinen and

copybook. All those holes and pebbles. Who could count them? Never know what you find. Bottle with story of a treasure in it thrown from a wreck. Parcels post. Children always want to throw things in the sea. Trust? Bread cast on the waters. What's this? Bit of stick" (*U*, 363).

pelisse, bigheaded, with a caul of dark hair” [*U*, 472]). These dramatic shifts, where Bloom is at one moment being stoned as the false Messiah (*U*, 469) and at another is depicted as a “new womanly man” bearing “eight male yellow and white children” (*U*, 465-6), dismantle yet further any sense of a stable heroic figure which might remain after the various shifting episodes of Section II. Leopold Bloom is, on multiple levels, all of these characters and none of them.

The refusal to identify a central heroic figure is captured by the dramatic narrative form of the Circe episode, which opens up a multi-layered dialogue between the characters, their secret inner worlds and the textual world which they inhabit. On one level the phantasmagoria and the relentless transmogrification reflect Homer’s episode in *The Odyssey*, where the men of Eurylochus are turned into swine by the nymph Circe.³¹ On another level, everyday inanimate objects are given voice, they speak. There is a gasjet – “Pooah! Pfuuuuu!” (*U*, 480), “Pwfunng!” (*U*, 542); a button – “Bip!” (*U*, 516); and a doorhandle – “Theeee” (*U*, 493) – to name but three. This raises their significance and gives them an interpretative dimension akin to that of dreams; each object holding the potential to unveil the secret interior worlds of Stephen and Bloom. It is a potential which Stanislaus Joyce links with his brother’s “noting” of “epiphanies”:

Jim always had a contempt for secrecy, and these notes were in the beginning ironical observations of slips, and little errors and gestures – mere straws in the wind – by which people betrayed the very things they were most careful to conceal.³²

On yet another level, this emergence of the unintended or return of the repressed takes place within the text of the novel, where earlier events re-surface and are replayed and

³¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book X.

³² Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother’s Keeper: James Joyce’s Early Years* (1958; Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 124.

re-contextualised within the dramatic surrealism of Circe. Such intratextuality – where the self-referential nature of the prose recreates events of one day, with variations, over and over again – creates numerous levels of relativity, whereby moments of being, of singularity and of epiphany have their initial instant of signification recast and thereby problematised.

This loss of a singular momentary form of meaning occurs in *Ulysses*, at a word level, too. In Sirens, for example, the narrative form and the language used suggest a hieroglyphic and an aural logic, where the words uttered are chosen for their shapes and sounds more than any linguistic meaning. At other times, the text begs broader questions about the creation of narrative altogether; the Wandering Rocks chapter, for example, where the pomp and ceremony of the Viceregal Cavalcade of the “Coda” re-organises and imposes an arbitrary narrative arc to the eighteen individual episodes which have come before. This gains fuller force when looked at in conjunction with the dismantling of the Odyssean hero seen above: where Stephen’s heroic attributes dissolve with the emergence of Bloom in Section II and, by the end of Section II, the notion of a single heroic identity is thwarted by the growing awareness that Stephen and Bloom cannot be tied down by their apparent similarities to Odysseus and Telemachus.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, to find that the mindsets of Stephen and Bloom, after their physical paths have crossed and separated on multiple occasions, seem to morph together and then separate as Section II moves into Section III.³³ In Eumaeus, the free indirect style which depicts Stephen’s (Telemachus) and Bloom’s (Odysseus)

³³ The Linati Schema describes Section III as “MIDNIGHT (Fusion of Bloom and Stephen) (Ulysses and Telemachus)” (*U*, 739).

thoughts and experiences renders them practically indistinguishable, and in Ithaca, the last chapter before Molly (Penelope) takes over from the men, the question-and-answer structure appears to complicate matters rather than clarify. Intimations of this morphing together of Stephen and Bloom appear back in the Circe chapter. The chapter opens with Bloom following Stephen's path through "nighttown" having missed the train. Bloom is lost and obliquely appears out of "snakes of river fog" (*U*, 412).³⁴ As the drama unfolds Stephen and Bloom grow closer – both geographically and linguistically: they both move from "nighttown" into Bella Cohen's brothel and Stephen's sentences become curtailed and less philosophical, their content and style more reminiscent of the visceral and energetic Bloom:

STEPHEN

(To himself.) Play with your eyes shut. Imitate pa. Filling my belly with husks of swine. Too much of this. I will arise and go to my. Expect this is the. Steve, thou art in a parlous way. (*U*, 486)

The instruction to "imitate pa" looks back to Stephen playing the piano with his eyes shut, imitating Simon Dedalus, his father, but also looks forward to Bloom as epic father figure, as it is Bloom, rather than Stephen's "pa", who is associated with "filling (his) belly with husks of swine". A similar shift towards a more "Bloomian" demeanour is apparent in the shorter sentences which look forward to future action. The significant difference here, though, is that Stephen's task is still unvoiced: the reader never finds out what he will arise and go to, or what he expects this is. Such is still the case at the end of the Circe chapter, where Bloom is tending and protecting the recently knocked-out Stephen: "(Silent, thoughtful, alert, he stands on guard, his fingers at his lips in the attitude of a secret master)" (*U*, 565). For the first time in the

³⁴ The fog acts to disguise Bloom, as do all the various outfits, and to render what was familiar terrain unfamiliar, in a way reminiscent of Odysseus on his return to Ithaca, who Athene makes old so that he is not recognised immediately. See Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book XIII, 164: "... Athene, then touched Odysseus with her wand. She wrinkled the smooth skin over his lissom body, took the yellow hair from his head, gave all his limbs the flesh of an aged man and dimmed the brightness of his eyes. She gave him dismal rags to wear and a dismal tunic, tattered and foul and besmirched with filthy smoke; over this she laid the big bald skin of a bounding deer."

novel it is just the two of them together, although their thoughts remain separate: Stephen is revisiting the scene of his mother's deathbed and Bloom imagines his dead son, Rudy. As the Eumaeus chapter proceeds, though, the thoughts of one become progressively less distinguishable from the thoughts of the other: "Though they didn't see eye to eye in everything, a certain analogy there somehow was, as if both their minds were travelling, so to speak, in the one train of thought" (*U*, 610). The physical paths crossed and re-crossed throughout *Ulysses* join together in Circe to be rejoined by the intermingling of mental paths in Eumaeus.³⁵

This growing sense of physical and mental union between Stephen and Bloom culminates in Ithaca which, with its obsessive attention to detail and measurement, ostensibly sets out to delimit the day just passed through the means of direct questions and direct answers. Stylistically, the terse compartmentalised approach contrasts starkly with the rambling uncertainties of Eumaeus, where nothing is for sure:

The guarded glance of half solicitude, half curiosity, augmented by friendliness which he gave at Stephen's at present morose expression of features did not throw a flood of light, none at all in fact, on the problem as to whether he had let himself be badly bamboozled, to judge by two or three lowspirited remarks he let drop, or, the other way about, saw through the affair, and, for some other reason or other best known to himself, allowed matters to more or less...(*U*, 577)

Ithaca moves away from the clichés in Eumaeus, with their refusal to clarify, and opens with the very question explored above: "What parallel courses did Bloom and Stephen follow returning?" At times, the question-and-answer approach may be seen to hold up the standard oppositions: "What two temperaments did they individually

³⁵ In a letter to Budgen, dated Michaelmas 1920, Joyce explicitly refers to *Circe* as an episode built around crossroads: "Hermes is the god of signposts: i.e. he is, specially for a traveller like Ulysses, the point at which roads parallel merge and roads contrary also." *Joyce's Selected Letters*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), 272.

represent? The scientific. The artistic.” (*U*, 635). But at other times, the clarity of the questions and the literal nature of the answers are not flexible enough to hold strong for the emotional relativity and layering of the search in question:

What, reduced to their simplest reciprocal form, were Bloom’s thoughts about Stephen’s thoughts about Bloom about Stephen’s thoughts about Bloom’s thought about Stephen?

He thought that he thought that he was a jew whereas he knew that he thought that he knew that he knew that he was not. (*U*, 634)

Both the question and the answer obfuscate rather than clarify the individual roles of Stephen or Bloom. In fact, at one stage in Ithaca, the individuality of each of the two characters is thrown into such uncertainty that the two become nominally morphed together: “Substituting Stephen for Bloom Stoom... Substituting Bloom for Stephen Blephen” (*U*, 635). It is only when Stephen leaves that Bloom remains as the sole narrator, who retells, with “modifications” (*U*, 687), the story of the day to his somnolent wife.

Releasing Singularity within the Everyday

As a one-day novel, then, *Ulysses* problematises and undercuts the singularity of that one day. Each separate episode, with its idiosyncratic narrative style, emphasises the multiple relativities at work in a text which presents and re-presents the course of one day in multiple forms: it is a single day constantly shifting through the narrative form which represents it. The two protagonists split the text yet further, creating a parallax discourse through which the events of this one day become destabilised by various shifting viewpoints: “history repeating itself with a difference” (*U*, 609). This complication is further extended by the similarities of Stephen Dedalus

and Leopold Bloom as much as by their differences.³⁶ Such a blurring of boundaries, which separates characters and morphs them together, and the relative uncertainty over the singularity of one day, means that *Ulysses* manipulates and subverts its own shell as a circadian novel. The continual recasting of this one day within *Ulysses*, continues outside of the text with global celebrations of June 16th – Bloomsday – year after year. This annual celebration taking place in multiple loci reasserts the singleness of the day, whilst also attesting to its repeatability.

But neither *Ulysses* nor *Mrs Dalloway* goes as far as *Party Going* in relinquishing their day and their protagonists to the flux and homogeneity of the everyday. Clarissa is still presented as a unique individual in her attempts to bridge the divide between the trivial and the eternal life, even though she must erase much of her own individuality in order to contribute to the social functioning of her world.³⁷ Septimus finds too many meanings in the greater patterns of the world and this leads him to erase himself from the world. Clarissa, in a similar attempt to read the “letters in the sky” (*MD*, 22) for meaning, finds her own defining pattern through others: she sacrifices her own individual needs to devote herself to the routines of each day. There is no such utilitarian sacrifice in *Ulysses*, where the singularity of the individual is surrendered for the good of the many; rather, as Philip Fisher suggests in “Torn Space: James Joyce’s *Ulysses*”, Bloom “invites the world to distract him” from what he knows is happening at home:

³⁶ The fact that critics, in line with Joyce in his letters, have grown accustomed to referring to Stephen Dedalus as Stephen and Leopold Bloom as Bloom, demonstrates a meta-textual sensitivity to the fact that although the two characters are separate they also have the potential to be united as Stephen Bloom.

³⁷ See Woolf, *Between the Acts* (1941), ed. Stella McNichol (London: Penguin, 1992), 125, where Miss La Trobe reveals a similar subordination when she concludes “in the margin of her manuscript: ‘I am the slave of my audience.’” As director of the pageant, Miss La Trobe oscillates between the desire to remain anonymous – she is often hidden and regularly referred to as “Miss Whatshername” – and wanting to unify and control her audience. See 90, 110, 117, and also 115 where she “wishes it seems to remain anonymous”. All further references will be to this edition and will stay in the main text.

One way of describing Joyce's *Ulysses* would be to say that it is not the description of Molly Bloom's day, a day spent in a closed domestic space, engaged with a single drama. A morning of predictions (fortune-telling cards and the letter that announces that her lover will come in the afternoon); followed by a day of preparation for and anticipation of the single event, lasting through the arrival of the presents that precede her lover, Blazes; then the climactic hour; followed by sleep, memory, and conclusion.³⁸

In line with Fisher's point, *Ulysses* avoids, or touches upon through multiple obliquities, any notion of a single "event" within the day. It refuses to separate the multiple strands of everyday living, as seen in its cacophony of styles, its anti-eventfulness³⁹ and its blurring of heroic significance.

There is a carefully darkened and blurred separation between Stephen and Bloom which differs from the clarity of separation between Septimus and Clarissa. Where Clarissa chooses life and the party, neither Stephen nor Bloom is given such control. There remains a sense behind the fierce questioning of *Mrs Dalloway* that Woolf still clings to a belief in representing the whole, that the "shock" of experience:

is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole.⁴⁰

For Joyce, though, the identities of Stephen and Bloom become more oblique and more complex as the novel progresses. This growing uncertainty points to a less complete sense of the text as whole in Joyce's writing, where the inexplicable might hold more "truth" than clarity. Stephen refers to "a darkness shining in brightness" in Nestor:

³⁸ Philip Fisher, "Torn Space: James Joyce's *Ulysses*" in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), Vol. 2, 669.

³⁹ The notion of "anti-epiphanies" is traced from the Manuscript Epiphanies of 1900-1903 through to *Ulysses* in chapter 5 of Sayeau, "Against the Event", where it is argued that: "The early development and later trajectory of this concept [epiphanies] is grounded in a fundamental resistance to the narrative event, and is perhaps the most vivid and significant instance of anti-evental technique to be found in modern literature."

⁴⁰ Woolf, *A Sketch of the Past*, 81.

Averroes and Moses Maimonides, dark men in mien and movement, flashing in their mocking mirrors the obscure soul of the world, a darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend. (*U*, 28)

The language Joyce uses to evoke these two twelfth-century theologian-philosophers is reminiscent of Milton's "darkness visible".⁴¹ And, as Jeri Johnson points out in her notes to *Ulysses*, the "darkness shining in brightness" is a

parodic inversion of John 1: 5: 'And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not'. Stephen is preoccupied (as is Joyce) with the persistence of an incommensurable darkness (or error, or heresy) in the midst of 'light' (of law or Church), a darkness which is more 'true' than the 'truth' of 'light'. (*U*, 778, n. 28. 26-7)

The Muslim and the Jew juxtaposed in this way are irreconcilable – their religious orthodoxy keeps them apart – and yet they are also conciliatory in their attempts to combine Aristotelian philosophy with their own orthodoxies. In light of this parodic inversion of a New Testament text they are rendered even more irreconcilable, while the allusion to *Paradise Lost* brings to the surface a history of critical debate over Milton's own grappling with religious belief. It is by means of this rigorous questioning of uncertainty and darkness that *Paradise Lost* accrues its depths. In *Ulysses*, Stephen and Bloom act as the irreconcilable and yet conciliatory pairing, who continually obfuscate and complicate notions of the hero and the heroic quest, whilst pulling us through the intricacies of a day in each of their lives. The impenetrability and difficulty of *Ulysses* as a text resonate with Johnson's assertion in its "persistence of an incommensurable darkness... which is more 'true' than the 'truth' of 'light'".⁴² In Virginia Woolf, this is picked up in the often overlooked intimations held within "moments of non-being" rather than "moments of being". Both *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway* carry an undercurrent which can draw the reader

⁴¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 1989), Book I, l. 63.

⁴² The obscurity and increasing levels of obfuscation in *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) see this darkness explored yet further.

towards an immeasurable darkness, but in *Party Going* this indefinability, this unspoken current of uncertainty, is the lifeblood of the novel's single day.

The Everyday Collective: *Party Going* and *Between the Acts*

Party Going employs the crowd, as *Between the Acts* will later employ the audience, as a single, albeit essentially fragmented unit: both the crowd and the audience are treated as entities in themselves. As collectives, they are foregrounded and seen to influence and to be influenced by the actions of individuals within and outside of their unit. What is most noticeable and unusual in *Party Going* is that the crowd is seen to be as significant as the individuals themselves; the foggy backdrop is foregrounded over the particular detail. In *Ulysses*, the characters accumulate a density and depth of personality over the course of the novel; in *Mrs Dalloway*, individuals act with consistency and distinctive personalities emerge from the day; but in *Party Going* there is a cumulative deconstruction of the reader's trust in the characters: individual characters will say one thing to one person and, only moments later, something quite different to another. Rather than centralise a particular character or symbol, the focus of *Party Going* is continually split and blurred in order to give a sense of the various marginal goings-on. Where *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway* can be seen to show an awareness of the non-epiphanic moments within a day, the day which each presents is a memorable one dotted with extraordinary events – births, deaths, parties – and unusual characters. *Party Going* goes further than either *Ulysses* or *Mrs Dalloway*. Not only are “moments of being” practically erased from within the day, but the day itself, albeit set up as an out-of-the-ordinary day of departure, is presented with such ambivalence and equanimity that it resembles the more oblique, less identifiable ubiquity of the everyday.

In *Party Going* there is no journey nor is there a narrative generated by one individual. From the outset no character is permitted even the showings of any such central role: the one immediately dissolves into the many. Even the symbol of the pigeon and the mystery of the hotel detective, with his various accents and hats, are denied any specifiable purpose or meaning. The thrust of an individual's daily journey, as found in *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*, is replaced by the waiting-room atmosphere of the fog-filled railway terminus in *Party Going*: the individual thrust replaced by a foregrounding of haziness and uncertainty. Individuals never appear alone and never seem to say what they mean or what they can't immediately contradict. There is, particularly in the party of upper-class travellers, what Engels described, almost a century earlier, as "the brutal indifference with which they ignore their neighbours and selfishly concentrate upon their private affairs."⁴³

Party Going grows out of a premise which assumes this "brutal indifference", or the "blasé attitude" which Simmel described in 1903 as "unconditionally reserved to the metropolis";⁴⁴ whether it is a person or a symbol or a particular day, each is denied meaning as a singular identity. Their individual forms are indefinable from the outset as each character is subsumed by the flux of the crowd and their own fickleness; clear symbolic meaning fragments into limitless possible meanings; and the singularity of the day drifts emptily into the constant repetition with variation of the everyday. Within the strict confines of its structure, though, *Party Going* explores

⁴³ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), ed. and trans. W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 31. Engels goes on: "The disintegration of society into individuals, each guided by his private principles and each pursuing his own aims has been pushed to its furthest limits in London."

⁴⁴ Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and the Mental Life" (1903) in *Simmel in Culture*, eds. David Frisby and Mile Featherstone (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 178.

uncertainty and obliquity with a similar intensity to *Ulysses*. The apophatic discourse of Stephen in *Ulysses* – the “darkness shining within brightness which brightness could not comprehend” (*U*, 28) – is revisited in *Party Going* in a way which subverts the search for individuality within the metropolis. *Ulysses* is able to create formlessness through the sheer flexibility and versatility of ways in which its one day and its individual characters are presented and re-presented throughout its various episodes. *Party Going* achieves a similar formlessness and uncertainty through its “non-representational” obliquities: the inaction and the inconclusive nature of all that is said and done create a surface devoid of aura and resolutely inauthentic. In contrast to the overflowing surfaces of Joyce’s text which track and re-track multiple perspectives on one day, Green’s prose is pared down and the day shortened to a few hours spent hermetically sealed within the station setting. *Party Going*, like its setting, is the reader’s departure-point: it embodies the ever-present everyday from which moments and events wait to emerge. Both novels attempt to overcome, or at least structurally recognise, the inherent partiality of their textual form. The process of *Ulysses* involves a manipulation and loading of the prose with multiple allusive layers of structural density and depth, whilst *Party Going* sacrifices the individual to open-ended multiplicity.

Between the Acts, like its predecessor *Party Going*, loosens the singularity of the one-day novel’s focus by foregoing any central narrative drive. *Party Going* achieves this on a symbolic level, where symbols lose any capacity for definite meaning and accrue multiple potentialities in the hands of different characters: the symbolic meaning is rendered fluid and formless by the shifting interpretations brought in from various marginal influences. Like the everyday, it escapes. Such

formlessness, created by the flux of constantly shifting margins, is found in *Between the Acts*. The central action of the novel is ostensibly a village pageant, just as the party going on a trip is the central action of *Party Going*. But, although the pageant, unlike the trip, does take place, its centrality within the novel is repeatedly subverted by the multiple interruptions and intervals which disrupt the continuity of its progress. Miss La Trobe subordinates herself to the role of director, as Clarissa does to her party, working behind the scenes to give life and soul to the participants of her pageant – both actors and audience. But La Trobe’s position of centrality is much more uncertain than that of Clarissa Dalloway. Nominally, “La Trobe” might not even exist, as her name means “invention”; a fact which is heightened by her role as the unseen, anonymous director. In fact, rather than a version of Clarissa Dalloway, Miss La Trobe resembles the more marginalised “Miss Kilman in her mackintosh” (*MD*, 135), the one-time lover of Clarissa’s daughter, Elizabeth. Miss La Trobe, like Miss Kilman, is an outsider: she is a jilted lesbian (“since the row with the actress who had shared her bed” (*BA*, 125), intelligent, but poor and inclined to drink. Such a combination renders her unable to fit neatly into any social stratum. Consequently she is not invited to dine at Pointz Hall and she is never given a first name. Miss La Trobe might be directing the pageant, but she is still resolutely marginalised: she is refused social status and stability and slips between the normative categories. The same occurs with the play’s acts which are continually dispersed and fragmented by the interruptions and commentaries of the audience; the novel’s central action – the play – is shifted by the multiple happenings which are occurring “between the acts”.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ In *Concluding* the “central” event is also marginalised. The disappearance of the two girls, Mary and Merode, is never solved, whilst the annual, and therefore repeated, party goes ahead as if nothing has happened.

These multiple happenings stream in from the edges of the action – from the audience, from the skies, from the cows – where they complicate and question any sense of an overall pattern. The skies, which in *Mrs Dalloway* offer up the potential for understanding or an overall pattern, at least to Septimus and Clarissa, are feckless and shifting in *Between the Acts*:

Certainly the weather was variable. It was green in the garden one moment; grey the next. Here came the sun – an illimitable rapture of joy, embracing every flower, every leaf. Then in compassion it withdrew, covering its face, as if it forebore to look on human suffering. There was a fecklessness, a lack of symmetry and order in the clouds, as they thinned and thickened. Was it their own law, or no law, that they obeyed? (*BA*, 16)

This “lack of symmetry and order in the clouds”, the shifting unpredictability of the weather and the tense dialectic which occurs between play and audience revisits the question of epiphany and the potential for meaning, which this chapter has explored in *Mrs Dalloway*, *Ulysses* and *Party Going*. On one level, Miss La Trobe seeks to unify the audience through the words and actions of her pageant:

Ah, but she was not merely a twitcher of individual strings; she was the one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world. Her moment was on her – her glory. (*BA*, 92)

More than a puppeteer Miss La Trobe sees herself as a supernatural, witch-like figure concocting a new world out of the drama of “wandering bodies and floating voices”. But this glorious moment is immediately undercut by the mundane “application of black side whiskers” (*BA*, 92) to a sheepish actor, Hammond. The moment, as with Clarissa’s moments, is quickly past.⁴⁶

The inability of Miss La Trobe’s pageant to communicate any full or clear sense of meaning to the audience does, however, create a space for the unpredictable,

⁴⁶ As with Clarissa’s early fears for the failure of her party, Miss La Trobe has already condemned her own attempts as failing. “It was a failure, another damned failure. As usual. Her vision escaped her” (*BA*, 60).

where what would normally pass by unnoticed gains significance. Take the role of natural world as one example. Throughout *Between the Acts* the wind is seen to disrupt the pageant, as it often renders the words of the actors inaudible. In one particular case this has dire results for Miss La Trobe's performance:

Then the wind rose, and in the rustle of the leaves even the great words became inaudible; and the audience sat staring at the villagers whose mouths opened but no sound came.
And the stage was empty. Miss La Trobe leant against the tree, paralyzed. Her power had left her. Beads of perspiration broke on her forehead. Illusion had failed. 'This is death,' she murmured, 'death.' (*BA*, 84)⁴⁷

The power of words, the power of "great words" is suddenly rendered bathetically empty by the innocuous "rustle of the leaves". The fact that Miss La Trobe is "paralyzed", perspiring and left contemplating death after this underwhelming gust of wind asserts the fragility of her individual, directorial control. And it is only by the timely bellow of one nearby cow, and then many, that this illusion-threatening silence and emptiness is filled:

From cow after cow came the same yearning bellow. The whole world was filled with dumb yearning. It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment. Then the whole herd caught the infection. Lashing their tails, blobbed like pokers, as if Eros had planted his dart in their flanks and goaded them to fury. The cows annihilated the gap; bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and continued the emotion.

Miss La Trobe waved her hand ecstatically at the cows.
'Thank Heaven!' she exclaimed. (*BA*, 85)⁴⁸

The bovine chorus is both comic and epic. Miss La Trobe's reversal of fortune, occasioned by the appearance of some local cows, lifts her into a sublimely ridiculous state of religious ecstasy. This comic juxtaposition is magnified by the exaggerated

⁴⁷ For other examples of how the wind disrupts the performance see *BA*, 76: "the wind blew the words away" and 50: "only a word or two was audible... the wind blew away the connecting words of their chant".

⁴⁸ Another example of Miss La Trobe's excessive panic being assuaged by something totally out of her control occurs on 107: "Panic seized her. Blood seemed to pour from her shoes. This is death, death, she noted in the margin in her mind; when illusion fails. Unable to lift her hand, she stood facing the audience.

And then the shower fell, sudden, profuse... Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping. Tears. Tears. Tears." The exaggerated epic grandeur of two separate tricolons, the gore of the blood and the melodramatic pathetic fallacy severely undercut the impact of Miss La Trobe's moment of crisis.

grandiloquence of the effect of the cows' lows – “the world was filled with dumb yearning” – and the epic-inspired appearance of Eros as the instigator of the cows' fury. This darkly comic scene creates a potential significance out of the “dumb yearning” of bellowing cows, where the sub-linguistic, “primeval voice” resonates deeply with the fuller evocation of the “nondescript cotton wool” of “non-being” which *Between the Acts* embeds itself in.

Woolf's “moments of being” assume a conscious, highlighted awareness of what stands out from the “nondescript cotton wool” of the day; the “moments of non-being”, of which there are many more, must, however, go by unnoticed; it is part of their nature. In *Between the Acts* this changes when potential moments of intensity are more obviously undercut. At the end of the pageant, the Rev. G. W. Streatfield stands up to offer up his interpretation of the production. It is the perfect scenario for a “moment of being”:

He looked at the audience; then up at the sky. The whole lot of them, gentles and simples, felt embarrassed, for him, for themselves. There he stood their representative spokesman; their symbol; themselves; a butt, a clod, laughed at by looking-glasses; ignored by the cows, condemned by the clouds which continued their majestic rearrangement of the celestial landscape; an irrelevant forked stake in the flow and majesty of the summer silent world. His first words (the breeze had risen; the leaves were rustling) were lost. Then he was heard saying: ‘What.’ (*BA*, 113)

The potential “moment” of elucidation and epiphany is dramatically subsumed by the backdrop of events and characters which have made up the afternoon: the clouds, the cows, the disruptive wind and the looking-glasses.⁴⁹ Together these fluid aspects of the day just passed (and still passing) deny the Reverend his individual moment of being: he is embarrassing, a butt, a clod, laughed at, ignored and condemned. More

⁴⁹ The use of synecdoche here intensifies the lack of individuality of each member of the audience, keeping the focus on the whole audience *en masse*.

than this his static form renders him irrelevant within “the flow and majesty of the summer silent world.” He is an image of the past, now passed over as irrelevant:

a piece of traditional church furniture; a corner cupboard; or the top beam of a gate fashioned by generations of village carpenters after some lost-in-the-mists-of-antiquity model. (*BA*, 113)

Religion and individual moments of epiphany, one can infer, do not hold the answers any longer, especially on the eve of the Second World War – as underlined by the fact that Mr Streatfield’s speech⁵⁰ is broken up by the noise and sight of “twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation”(*BA*, 114).⁵¹ What is left after their removal is something much darker; something muddier; something more akin to the “primeval voice” and the “dumb yearning” of the cows’ bellows.

The one-day novels discussed in this chapter move away from the fragile clarity found in moments of transcendence and epiphany towards a deeper exploration of the uncertainty and relativity of post-war modern life. This focus on uncertainty can be traced through a number of recurrent subordinations which take place within the novels: the subordination of permanence to flux; of the single moment to moments repeated with variations; of the extraordinary to the ordinary; of the individual to the crowd; of central action to time passing; of inner aura to inauthentic superficiality; of one to many; of the whole to the fragment. *Party Going* reveals the extreme edge of this movement. In *Ulysses*, for example, Stephen foregoes the position of heroic centrality he filled in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (and even more directly in *Stephen Hero*); whilst one day – June 16th, 1904 – accumulates an ever-expanding number of subjective variations. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa’s inner passion and her

⁵⁰ By the end of his speech, Rev. G. W. Streatfield, M.A., has been stripped back down to Mr Streatfield, his qualifications seemingly worthless in this modern environment.

⁵¹ For an account of how the significance of the aeroplane shifts from playful in *Mrs Dalloway* to an “ominous zoom-drone” in *Between the Acts*, see Gillian Beer, “The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf” in *Virginia Woolf*, ed. Rachel Bowlby.

search for the extraordinary are often in conflict with her satisfaction in the process of day-to-day living:

All the same, that one day should follow another, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park;... it was enough. (*MD*, 134)

In *Between the Acts*, Miss La Trobe gradually loosens her often absurd controlling instinct and allows her words to fragment and disperse with the audience. In *Party Going* there is no such individual journey to be followed. There is no funeral or party or pageant to attend. The novel opens with Miss Fellowes, a distinctly marginal character, who has “only come to wave good-bye” (*PG*, 7). Miss Fellowes, like the novel which follows her, acts only as a point of departure. And from one marginal point of departure there are many possible journeys.

Party Going, as discussed in chapter 4, provides a fog-veiled surface of non-representational non-specificity which the reader must negotiate with care. In a distinct move away from *Blindness* and *Living*, *Party Going* deconstructs its characters and its plot as it proceeds. This process unsettles the surface meaning profoundly, offering up multiple eddies of symbolic contradictions and uncertainties.⁵² The metaphoric link between reading and fishing, where the text is the surface and the meaning is the “remote element” (*PMB*, 34) lurking in the depths below, is not restricted to Green. A similar image appears in *Mrs Dalloway* and then later in *Between the Acts*. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Peter Walsh is musing over the soul:

For this is the truth about our soul, he thought, our self, who fish-like inhabits deep seas and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles of

⁵² It is this manipulation of surface meaning in *Party Going* which places it at the heart of Henry Green’s oeuvre, as it foreshadows the future direction of Green’s writing. *Caught* (1943) and *Back* (1946) create similarly disrupted surfaces, where everyday conversations are peppered with mishearing, delays in comprehension and people speaking at cross purposes. In *Caught* and *Back*, though, these breaks in the stillness of the surface point to the effects of trauma, repression and the unconscious impact of war.

giant weeds. Over sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable. (*MD*, 176)

The image is extremely close to Green's image of the same year: "where the sea is deep there are palaces in forests and there the old men sit, their thoughts a fugue in Green."⁵³ And yet the depth and darkness of the soul depicted by Peter Walsh is suddenly, rather flippantly, lightened. His musings continue: "suddenly she shoots to the surface and sports on the wind-wrinkled waves; that is, has a positive need to brush, scrape, kindle herself gossiping" (*MD*, 176). There is an unwillingness to linger in the "gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable" in *Mrs Dalloway*, which smacks of a similar draw towards "moments of being" rather than "non-being". But by the time of *Between the Acts*, with its stripping down of Rev. Streatfield to Mr Streatfield, this superficial shooting to the surface is scorned in favour of a darker battle:

How imperceptive her religion made her! The fumes of that incense obscured the human heart. Skimming the surface, she ignored the battle in the mud. After La Trobe had been excruciated by the Rector's interpretation, by the maulings and the manglings of the actors... 'She don't want our thanks, Lucy,' he [Mr Oliver] said gruffly. What she wanted, like that carp (something moved in the water) was darkness in the mud; a whisky and soda at the pub; and coarse words descending like maggots through the waters. (*BA*, 120)

And Mr Oliver's perceptions are soon verified by Miss La Trobe's visit to the pub:

She raised her glass to her lips. And drank. And listened. Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. She drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning – wonderful words. (*BA*, 125)

The cotton wool of non-being, with its nondescript, empty whiteness, has been replaced by the fertile darkness of mud. A mud which draws our thoughts back to the "primeval voice" of the bellowing cows, the "dumb oxen" here intensifying this reminder of the "dumb yearning" which "filled the world" at Miss La Trobe's moment of great need. Within the darkness and uncertainty, borne from the simplest,

⁵³ Yorke to Coghill, 8 August 1925, No. 28, Eton College Archives. The letter is written four months after the publication of *Mrs Dalloway* and the similarity is made even closer when one reads on in *Mrs Dalloway*: "they looked as if dipped in sea water – the foliage of a submerged city."

monosyllabic words, come “words without meaning – wonderful words.” In this sleepy, befuddled state of mental fertility – the mood might be suggestive of the psychoanalyst’s couch and the emergence of the unconscious – an unformed, incomprehensible wonder emerges. Miss La Trobe is still experiencing a “moment of being” here, but it is not a transitory one; out of these words, words which earlier have escaped her, her new play will begin: “she heard the first words” (*BA*, 126).⁵⁴

Whilst Woolf is able to muddy the cotton wool of non-being in *Between the Acts* in a way that she does not in *Mrs Dalloway*, Miss La Trobe’s moment of being is still unsullied and filled with optimism; for Green, though, in *Party Going* (and more acutely in *Nothing and Doting*), even the most spontaneous spark of humanity and fellow feeling is modified, such that its meaning is rendered uncertain. The out-of-the-ordinary act of picking up a dead pigeon by Miss Fellowes, for example, quickly grows out of all proportion into a complex and elaborate compositional motif. The only other “moment” with the potential to be deeply touching in the novel – when Emily comes “up out of the bloody ground” and kisses Thomson (*PG*, 161) – is also rendered darkly uncertain. Thomson and Emily’s unexpected and unexplained moment of tenderness within the crowd could, initially, be interpreted as a spontaneous act of tenderness. As such it stands out clearly as a “moment”. But this rather simplified romanticising of the working classes is first complicated by the disgusted reaction of Edwards and further exacerbated by Thomson’s own inner musings after the kiss. Thomson creates a past unfulfilled conditional version of the event – “if he and that girl had been alone together, in between kisses he would have

⁵⁴ See also where Miss La Trobe – amidst her wild oscillations between feelings of success (“glory possessed her – for one moment”) and the overriding sense that the whole thing was “a failure” – begins to conceive of a new play, but is unable to find an opening: “The curtain would rise. What would the first words be? The words escaped her” (*BA*, 124).

pitied both of them clinging together on dim whirling waters” (*PG*, 162-3) – which, rather than making the present moment more perfect, destabilises the spontaneity of the actual event.⁵⁵ The event is not laboured over, though. It is not set up as a “moment of being”. It is simply a transitory event, forever past, which the character himself momentarily extracts in a manner reminiscent of Baudelaire’s “*A une passante*” (To A Passing Woman).⁵⁶ Rather than associating this with an exclamation about the death of the soul or the loss of aura, as we might find in Woolf or Benjamin, this fleeting instant of spontaneity within the crowd becomes charged with a more complex potential: the transitory act is shown as repeatable, but that future appearance requires the non-presence of the moment itself.⁵⁷ In a similar way, the future iterability of one day, in the perpetual future flow of the everyday, requires that single day to lose its singularity. This chapter argues that *Party Going* with its oblique foregrounding of the everyday creates a similar sense of future non-presence, whereby the day itself and the events within it are rendered so insignificant or uncertain that any moment of potential epiphanic significance is carefully subverted and complicated: its singularity is annihilated by its future multiplicity.

Party Going refuses to foreground the epiphanic moment in its representation of one day in the city.⁵⁸ Nor does it allow the pace and vibrancy of modernity and the city to overwhelm the reader. Within its hermetically-sealed, fog-filled station, *Party Going* brazenly shifts its emphasis away from any central character’s journey through

⁵⁵ There is a fuller exploration of this scene in chapter 4, 128-30.

⁵⁶ The same complex and awkward tense is present in this poem.

⁵⁷ Benjamin, in his analysis of “*A une passante*” in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, makes two succinct summations: “The delight of the urban poet is love – not at first sight, but as last sight. It is a farewell forever which coincides in the poem with the moment of enchantment” (169) and “This is the look – even as late as Proust – of the object of a love which only a city dweller experiences, which Baudelaire captured for poetry, and of which one might not infrequently say that it was spared, rather than denied, fulfilment” (170).

⁵⁸ We are reminded here of the “non-epiphanic” moment of the man trying repeatedly to light his cigar in *Party Going*, see chapter 4, 114.

the shocks of the city. The characters arrive fully formed and leave unchanged. With movement restricted and numbers rising, *Party Going* creates a cityscape growing independently of the individuals and the individual moments which take place within it. What it offers up, rather than fully formed moments of illumination or clear destinations, is a host of potential starting points; a flattened landscape of ostensible non-consequences. *Party Going* depicts one day, but the day itself is obliquely rendered from the margins. The day is not particularly significant – this is no Bloomsday – rather it is a relatively insignificant day filled with inaction and waiting. This day becomes more of a container for the everyday; where the potential for multiple future readings, the “structural unconscious” of the day, is latent, waiting to be picked up and explored. It is up to the reader to decide – “not being able to see but only to feel” (*PMB*,34) – where to start from and how to proceed. And once the decision has been made, it can, as the last line of the novel attests, always be changed:

‘But weren’t you going anywhere?’ Amabel said to Richard, only she looked at Max.

‘I can go where I was going afterwards,’ he said to all of them and smiled.

Chapter 6

***Caught* (1943) in *Back* (1946): Trauma and Memory within the Everyday**

Green's Second-World-War trilogy of *Caught* (1943), *Loving* (1945) and *Back* (1946) replaces the central characters which *Party Going* worked so hard to deconstruct. There is a shift of focus away from the individual in *Party Going* – whether it is one day, a single protagonist, a particular symbolic meaning or singular moments of epiphany – towards a less definable multiplicity. The dispersal and fragmentation of a central concern in this shift towards the margins creates an apophatic discourse, whereby a formlessness of form, an everydayness which is at once present and hidden, is traced in the adumbrations of the non-specific and the non-representational. During this process the backdrop, with its non-particularity and multiplicity, is brought obliquely – for the backdrop is too “multiplicitous” to be focused on directly – into the foreground. This chapter explores the replacement of the indefinable, abstract nature of this foregrounded backdrop by the more clearly definable presence of the Second World War in the trilogy. Rather than focusing directly on the action of the war itself, though, Green depicts the war as obliquely present throughout; it is the individual characters themselves, albeit in the shadow of the war's shifting presence, who re-emerge in these novels to regain their centrality.

Back is perhaps the simplest of Green's novels. It focuses more exclusively on its protagonist, Charley Summers and the difficulties he faces on having “been repatriated from a prisoners' camp”, than any other Green novel (*Ba*, 5). Its chronology is linear and its time-span a clear six months: it takes us from a specific summer's day, June 13th, 1944, to Christmas. Contextually, it thrusts us back into the world of

Caught, where the “lull of living” (C, 122) of the Phoney War is over and the backdrop of war has become almost familiar; where day-to-day living gradually reformulates itself to create an altered and altering ordinariness within the extraordinary and prolonged circumstances of war. *Caught* depicts characters such as Albert Pye and Richard Roe anxiously awaiting the bombs and the subsequent fires (pyro) of the Blitz; *Loving* tempts us out to Ireland with the trappings of a fairytale romance while the war rages elsewhere; and *Back*, still tactically avoiding the fighting of the war itself, leads us back to deal with some of the consequences of war. *Back* then is a fitting close, rather than climax, to Green’s Second World War trilogy: it comes full circle.

This chapter looks at how *Back* develops Green’s earlier treatment of memory and trauma in *Caught*. Where *Caught* depicts the stress caused by constant anticipation in the Phoney War and the Blitz, *Back* explores the effects of physical trauma and emotional trauma, a lost leg and a lost lover, on the psyche of a young man returning from the war. The chapter focuses on how memory and trauma reveal themselves within the fabric of day-to-day living, as it looks closely at the language of *Caught* and *Back*. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), Freud argues that the unconscious is constantly, though indirectly, present in the everyday; where what might generally be dismissed as simple mistakes or meaningless slips – forgetting names and words, slips of the tongue, misreading or slips of the pen – become imbued with a more or less certain unconscious significance. The absent, the unspoken or the unquantifiable is revealed as a trace in the present. In *Caught* and *Back*, the everyday nature of the prose is littered with traces of trauma, where the present is laced with the past and the unconscious is fragmented within the conscious. In *Party Going* the fog-

veiled textual surface is disturbed by the multiple eddies of symbolic and dialogic contradiction and uncertainty. In *Caught and Back*, the surface of the text is clearer, the veil of fog has lifted, but there is much, now, that surrounds the surface. This chapter looks at how Charley's "visible and invisible system" (*Ba*, 147), with its reified resemblance to Freud's psychological system of the conscious and the unconscious, is flawed. Up until now this thesis has looked at how Green manipulates names, symbols and the narrative form to offer up hermeneutic multiplicity. This uncertainty and obliquity, where nothing is tied down or definite, is extended to the psychological (and more specifically, what Freud referred to as the "metapsychological") in *Caught and Back* with the increasing presence of the unconscious in the everyday. There is an emotional and psychological depth, as experienced by the individual, present in these two novels as it is nowhere else in Green's oeuvre. But both Green's fiction and Freud's psychoanalysis seek to go beyond the usual surface/depth model. For Green, this extra dimension is tied up with humour, discrepancy and uncertainty as it is revealed through repetition, variation and cliché. For Freud it is tied up with his notions of metapsychology.

Metapsychology and Trauma: Repetitions of *Caught in Back*

In his 1914 publication "Der Kritiken der Schizophrenien" ("Criticism of Schizophrenia"), E. Bleuler makes what he considers is "a presumptuous claim":

up to the present the various schools of psychology have contributed extremely little towards explaining the nature of psychogenic symptoms and diseases, but... depth-psychology offers something towards a psychology which still awaits creation and which physicians are in need of in order to understand their patients.¹

¹ Quoted in Freud, "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement" (1914) in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 14, 41.

“By depth-psychology”, Freud asserts later in the same year, Bleuler “means nothing else but psycho-analysis”.² In his 1915 paper on “The Unconscious”, though, Freud “enriches” our understanding of “psycho-analysis” further. “Up till now,” he states:

it has differed from [the “psychology of consciousness”] mainly by reason of its dynamic view of mental processes; now in addition it seems to take account of psychological topography as well... On account of this attempt, too, it has been given the name of “depth-psychology”.³

Freud’s paper goes on to explore how the dynamic, the topographical and a third aspect of “psychical phenomena”, the economic, which follows “the vicissitudes of amounts of excitation”, combine to create a metapsychological complexity, which goes beyond any previous “psychology of consciousness” or “depth psychology”. The multiplicity involved in these dynamic, topographical and economic analyses of the psyche, which consider the relationship between Freud’s *Cs.* (conscious system), *Pcs.* (preconscious system), *Ucs.* (unconscious system) and the various layers of consciousness which potentially lie in between,⁴ provide an interesting lens through which to look at *Caught* and *Back*.

Both novels move beyond the surface/depth model towards a more reflexive, multi-directional and opaque sense of the fluidity and uncertainty of meaning. In *Caught*, the characters Pye and Roe grapple with different forms of mourning and melancholia, where the loss of past relationships is played out in the present on a variety of conscious, preconscious and unconscious levels. In *Back*, these notions of

² Freud, “On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement” (1914), vol. 14, 41.

³ Freud, “The Unconscious” (1915), vol. 14, 173.

⁴ See Freud, “The Unconscious” (1915) vol. 14, 170: “We must be prepared, if so, to assume the existence in us not only of a second consciousness, but of a third, fourth, perhaps of an unlimited number of states of consciousness, all unknown to us and to one another.”

loss and memory and the reconciliation of such trauma with day-to-day existence are revisited in the character of Charley Summers. These build up a complex inter-textual relationship between the characters and the novels where repetition and variation serve to release multiple levels of significance or insignificance simultaneously. It is difficult, within such repetition and variation, to gain any level of certainty or definitive meaning. On a linguistic level, this is most clearly exemplified by the use of acronyms in *Back* – “everything’s initials these days” (*Ba*, 11) – and the increased use of cliché in both novels, which will be explored later in this chapter. But it is also played out more overtly through the temporal layering of present and past within situation and character.

Take Charley Summers returning home. Charley has fought and lost a leg in the war, he has been a prisoner-of-war and now he has returned home as a civilian, even though the war continues to be fought. He is between two worlds. The one he has been returned to is not the same as the one he left – his lover’s death whilst he was away is sufficient evidence of this. But neither is this the world of war and prisoners-of-war. Charley is not a hero: the war has not been won yet. Nor is he a regular civilian: his peg leg remains a constant visual, physical and emotional reminder of this. *Back* charts Charley’s struggles to navigate and reconcile the once-familiar visible world with his own psychological system of submerged memories and experiences.

Charley’s struggles to reconcile past memories with present reality is picked up inter-textually in the relationship between *Back* and *Caught*; for Charley’s struggles are, on many levels, a reconstitution of the same post-traumatic stresses

found in *Caught*. In *Caught* we witness the traumatic, and ultimately tragic, impact of memory on Pye, in particular the memory of his first sexual experience. Early on in the novel, Pye remembers how “the imminence of war physically excited him” (C, 40). Sex and the memory of it are triggered by both the mind and the body. The anticipatory adrenaline of imminent battle is physically reminiscent of the anticipation of sex: it excites. Mentally this represents an interlinking of war and sex: “War, she thought, was sex” (C, 119). A fighting soldier generates, therefore, connotations of virility and sexual prowess.⁵ This is bolstered by Pye’s memory of the bunkers in the First World War: “Yes, he had been close to the earth and it led him back to the first girl he had known” (C, 40). It is a soldier’s affirmative, confident “Yes” which opens this paragraph of recollection. But, as the memory grows to incorporate childhood – “for that too was of the earth” – the clarity and straightforwardness is thrown into doubt:

that winding lane between high banks, in moonlight, the colour blue, leaning back against the pale wild flowers whose names he had forgotten her face, wildly cool to his touch, turned away from him. (C, 40)

The moonlight lacks clarity, lending a fickle uncertainty to the memory, whilst the blue light suggests lewdness. The wild nature of the pale flowers is interlinked with her face, which is “wildly cool to his touch”. The atmosphere is threatening: the flowers are crushed and she turns her face “away from him”. This is accentuated by the lack of punctuation in the phrase: “whose names he had forgotten her face”. The verb becomes awkwardly split, working for two separate objects. Two clear phrases –

⁵ For how this ties in more specifically with Charley’s predicament in *Back*, see Kristine Miller, “The War of the Roses: Sexual Politics in Henry Green’s *Back*”, *Modern Fiction Studies* 49 (Summer 2003): 232 : “the soldier who returns triumphant from the front line reaps the benefits of a discourse that equates military power with sexual prowess... The many soldiers who had been wounded in battle and captured by the enemy found it especially difficult to think of themselves as either war heroes or matinee idols upon repatriation. After all, the prisoner of war had spent much of the war not fighting vigorously but waiting patiently, and an amputated limb undercut conventional images of the desirable male body. The wounded prisoner of war thus returned home to find himself doubly emasculated because he was missing both a limb and his share of front-line action. Ironically, his symbolic castration and enforced passivity better suited him to the role of waiting girl than returning hero.”

“whose names he had forgotten” and “he had forgotten her face” – have combined into a shorter, more confused and uncomfortable memory. Not only has he forgotten the names of the flowers but he has forgotten the face, too. Even more disturbing, within the context of Pye’s fears of incest, is the confused, unconscious logic of the morphed phrases which suggest that the face might have more than one name. The associative multiplication contained in recollection is much farther-reaching than the singularity of the event itself. Gradually the calm, moonlit landscape of winding lanes and wild flowers recollected by a virile survivor transmogrifies into a more brutal, bestial affair:

this bloody black-out brought you in mind of it with the moon, this blue colour, and with the creeping home. He had been out hunting that first night right enough as he came home, her tears still on the back of his hand, with the cries of an owl at his temples, like it might be the shrieks of that cat on the wall over there, bloody well yelling for her greens. (C, 41)

This is an ill-defined, composite world where memory and experience, the conscious and the unconscious, merge; where sex and war, the physical and the mental, intertwine; where the vague nocturnal cries of an owl might become twisted into the specific shrieks of a particular cat or an indistinct “she” (Pye’s sister, perhaps) agitatedly yelling for her greens. Its recollection holds within it, but does not show, the anger and confusion of uncertainty and implied guilt which will ultimately play its part in Pye’s suicide.

Pye’s inability, in *Caught*, to reconcile his contorted memories with his present casts a proleptic shadow on Charley’s own precarious grasp of reality in *Back*. For as Pye’s recollections of this first sexual experience become more regular, they become increasingly intense and hysterical. At one crucial moment, when questioned by the doctor at his sister’s asylum as to why she never married, Pye recoils:

In a surge of blood, it was made clear, false, that it might have been his own sister he was with that night. So it might have been her voice, thick with excitement and fright and disgust, that said “Will it hurt?” So in the blind moonlight, eyes warped by his need, he must have forced his own sister. (*C*, 140)

It is a crucial moment because, within the space of a few moments, Pye moves from the conditional uncertainty of the fact that “it might have been his own sister” to the certain realisation that “he must have forced his own sister.” As this sense of certain incest sinks in, Pye’s anger and confusion are demonstrated by short, violent lapses of vituperative language aimed at his sister – “the unnatural bitch” (*C*, 140); Prudence – “the silky white bitch”; “the rotten-gutted bastard of a doctor... quack”; or, just simply, to the world at large – “sod it” (*C*, 141). All of this while dealing with “a suffocation of loathing at himself” (*C*, 141). And yet, these various bursts of anger, fired off in an array of directions, never stick to any one target for very long. What is set up as a potential moment of clarity dissipates into a frantic, muddled despair of belief and disbelief: “What with believing, then disbelieving, he could not remember how he got out” (*C*, 141). Where what “was made clear” is also made potentially “false”; where the mental turmoil is so overpowering that the physical process of leaving the hospital is totally forgotten.

For Pye the warnings are there all along. The “might” of uncertainty may momentarily become the “must” of incest, but the context belies this certainty of progression. The moonlight, personified, is “blind”. Pye is the only one able to see or not see, for the girl’s face is “turned away from him”, but his eyes are “warped by his need”. In yet another blending of the mental and the physical, the eyes are depicted as having the capacity to be perverted or twisted by the context of his needs. It is for this reason that Pye’s growing recollections never amass into a coherent whole. As the context of his realisation alters, so does his interpretation of the details. From the

asylum Pye moves to the pub, from the psychologist he moves to gather the opinion of Richard:

His instinct had been to find some comfort against the doubts which were sure to crowd him when, some hours later, after lights out, he would close his eyes alongside the black telephone. (C, 160)

During his conversation with Richard, Pye prevaricates and circles around his fears. Nothing is ever settled on or resolved; nothing sits still. At first the conversation hovers around the topic of his sister, particularly her abduction of Richard's son and her being placed in an asylum. Later, Pye moves onto moonlight and mistaken identity and finally, after many false starts, the conversation lights on girls – “kypher, skirt” (C, 159). The slang imposes a false jauntiness which points to Pye's deliberate understatement, his way of drawing attention away from the import of his topic. The process is painfully drawn out, the awkwardness intensified by the reader's awareness of, and Richard's obliviousness to, Pye's predicament. The intensity belongs with Pye, but also with the reader: “Skirt, eh? Well that's sent many a good man off his nut. I've remarked there's a lot to do with the first one a lad has, and that goes for the woman as well” (C, 158). Pye's sister has already been admitted into a mental asylum and Pye will later commit suicide by placing his head in an oven; it will be Richard who finds him. All of these outcomes are held within this clichéd aside, casually dropped into the circling pub conversation.

Underneath the “lull” of *Caught*, a latent anger simmers; everyday existence is charged with the apprehension and frustration of waiting for an attack that never seems to arrive. Green renders this unease stylistically with the jagged use of sharp cinematic shifts. These shifts jar and destabilise the reader. One context is unexpectedly pulled away, which forces another context into its place, but without

any sense that the emerging context is more important. Every moment depicted, no matter how significant, becomes enshrouded by the anticipation of its disruption by another. It is a stress that we also see in Pye:

As he lay in bed on duty, his head by another telephone, a myriad anguished conversations held, unheard by him, within the black, shining, idle handle, he felt he could not sleep. (C, 84)

The stress is apparent, not only in the physical sense that the phone might ring at any stage, but also psychologically. There is a hysterical, overburdened edge to his awareness of the multiple realities existing around him, impinging on his own ability to sleep. The threat of war merges with the threat of modern life, where the telephone has the potential to disrupt Pye as much as a bomb.

It is a threat which impacts on more than just Pye; for Pye's earlier anger is recast in Roe's emotional explosion at the end of the novel. Although "superficially uninjured", Roe is sent home for "nervous debility" after a bomb came too close and knocked him out. The harsh irony is palpable. When the physical bombing eventually begins, Roe is sent home for his nerves. The growing anger at prolonged, unrequited warfare does not take long to appear:

He let go. "God damn you," he shouted, releasing everything, "you get on my bloody nerves, all you bloody women with all your talk."
It was as though he had gone for her with a hatchet. (C, 193)

Nor, though, does it take long to dissipate again.

He said to Christopher, for the first time:
"Get out," and he added,
"Well, anyway, leave me alone till after tea, can't you?" (C, 193)

We are left in a post-hysterical limbo with two Richards. The first Richard wields a hatchet and goes after his sister-in-law, Dy, and the second feels bad after telling his son to get out. Upset by Dy's inability to forgive Pye and destabilised by his being sent home, "superficially uninjured" (C, 172), while the Blitz continues, Richard's

momentary loss of temper foreshadows the more detailed exploration of trauma found in *Back*.

The loss of Charley Summers, in *Back*, is both physical and mental. Whilst a soldier “on the other side” (*Ba*, 5) he is shot and loses his leg; then, during the time he is held as a prisoner-of-war, his ex-lover, Rose, dies. Such physical and emotional trauma is compounded by the shifting social dynamics which Charley is faced with on his premature return home. *Caught* emphasises the latent anger and consequent hysteria resulting from prolonged anticipation of war, which is directly specific to the Phoney War. *Back*, on the other hand, delineates a condition more akin to what is now called “post-traumatic stress disorder”. *Caught*’s febrile shifts and latent anger are replaced in *Back* by a pervasive sense of disjointedness: temporally, physically, emotionally and psychologically. Charley’s memories of the world, and of the people he knew, are temporally at odds with real time. Things have changed. Time has passed. And yet Charley’s memories, of Rose in particular, have become increasingly subjective and idealised. Charley’s disorientation, therefore, is an emotionally and physically intense grappling with the gap between physical loss and the psychological acceptance of this loss. Arriving on “the roadway... asphalted blue” (*Ba*, 5), Charley must reconcile his loss with his memories and with the present world to which he has returned. In this way Charley Summers forms a composite of both Pye and Richard. Pye’s unwilling attempts to untangle the real and the imagined, his interlaced memories of war and sex, are mirrored in Charley’s struggle to form a sexual relationship with Dot Pitter or Nancy Whitmore (Rose’s illegitimate half-sister). But at the same time, the loss of Richard’s wife, the distance he maintains from others, his difficulties in communicating, most especially with his son and Dy, all resemble

Charley's own reactions to the loss of his Rose. But rather than the explosive anger of Richard or the dramatic suicide of Pye, Charley is a softer, more amusing character who gradually finds ways to reconcile his inner trauma with the changing surfaces of daily life which he faces.

Mourning and Melancholia

In both *Caught* and *Back* Green depicts memories as reified. This technique embodies the initial psychological tendencies of those dealing with loss, where the mind struggles to accept the physical loss. It is healthy and acceptable for Richard's son, Christopher, "to create his first tangled memories", for they provide a way for him "to bind himself to life for the first time" (C, 34). But for Richard his memories represent a past that can never be regained, thus to bind himself to those memories with such physicality is to be in a state of mourning. With his wife no longer alive, Richard regrets the times when he "had taken the companionship of wife and baby for granted" and "he could not, this time, leave his wife's memory alone"; in fact, "he could not keep his hands off her in memory":

he could not leave her alone when in an empty room, but stroked her wrists, pinched, kissed her eyes, nibbled her lips while, for her part, she smiled, joked, and took him up to bed at all hours of the day, and lay all night murmuring to him in empty memory. (C, 33)

The list of tactile, physical gestures, with its sense of relaxed intimacy, is initially a pleasant imagining triggered by Richard's visit home; but as it is extended and the specificity leaks into vagaries of time and indiscernible murmurings, the barren reality makes its appearance. Soon after, the imaginings begin again, seemingly renewed with confidence and physicality. For on the morning of Richard's return, we are told that:

his wife went with him for a stroll... and, as he clutched at her arm, which was not there, above the elbow, he shook at leaving this, the place he got back to her nearest, his ever precious loss. (C, 34)

The assertion of the stroll with his wife is destabilising. We know Richard's wife to be dead and yet there remains the faint possibility that this cuts to a flashback. Green continues the illusion for another paragraph, until it is made clear: the arm "was not there". But this delay and the fact that the conscious clarification is followed immediately by Richard's specifically located, physical clutch of her – "above the elbow" – refuses to keep memory and reality apart. The two are blurred, separated and wilfully blurred again.

Richard might have lost his wife, but this deep reluctance to separate memory from reality emphasises his unwillingness to lose the memory of his wife. This, according to Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia", is a natural part of the mourning process:

Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition – it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them. This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis.⁶

Although Richard could be spending his time with Christopher, his opposition at being asked to withdraw his attachment from his wife is demonstrated by his wish to create hallucinatory scenarios through which he can maintain this "libidinal position" – as emphasised most clearly in the list of physical imaginings mentioned earlier.

Richard fits perfectly into Freud's category of someone mourning and, so, "we rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time" and we expect the ego, "when the

⁶ Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), vol. 14, 244.

work of mourning is completed”, to be “free and uninhibited again”.⁷ The cases of Pye and Charley, though, are more complicated.

For Pye the object of loss is not clearly identifiable, whilst for Charley the loss is doubled – he has lost his leg and his lover. The complexity and murkiness of Pye’s loss are centred on his sister, who has recently been admitted into an asylum for the abduction of Christopher, Richard’s son. Pye’s guilt about her removal there (he had to sign the papers and pay two doctors to sign as well), and the re-emergence and reinterpretation of memories of his first sexual experience cause him sleeplessness: “It’s a thing that only came to me not above a week or two back. Keeps me awake, that does. I bloody well lie there sweatin’ of a night time” (*C*, 160). This anxiety and sleeplessness, the guilt-laden uncertainty about his own actions and the fact that this memory is emerging after so many years, points towards a more dangerous state of mind than mourning, that of melancholia. In mourning “nothing about the loss... is unconscious”; there is no doubt in Richard’s mind that his wife is dead. In melancholia the loss is “of a more ideal kind”. This, according to Freud, can lead to situations in which:

one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this [more ideal] kind has occurred, but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either.⁸

Pye’s inability to perceive in full consciousness the object of his loss has led him into an unhealthy position of ambivalence. This is reflected in the simultaneous anger and guilt he feels; an anger directed towards the “system” (“this marvellous system of ours can put a sane woman within the asylum” [*C*, 156]) and a guilt at his own unwillingness to bring her home – “I’ve only to go up before the ’Igh Courts of

⁷ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), vol. 14, 244, 245.

⁸ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), vol. 14, 245.

Justice, put down fifty quid, and the thing's done" (C, 157). Pye is confused. Angry and saddened at the same time – a state of mind reminiscent of his tendencies towards blurring distinctions between sex and war, love and hate – Pye cannot make up his own mind:

“even if I did want her back which I'm not so sure now, it wouldn't alter that she'd been in. No, if she's in she'd better stay, but the 'eartbreak is that she was ever there at all.” He fell silent. (C, 157)

There is an underlying supposition in the ensuing silence that “there” refers not simply to the asylum, but also to that fateful moonlit night. This potential for ambivalent readings heightens Pye's inability to decipher love and hate. Where Richard is gradually, if angrily, able to withdraw his libido from its attachment to his wife, Pye, with no clear object of loss to identify, transfers his emotions back onto his own ego:

Just as mourning impels the ego to give up the object by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the inducement of continuing to live, so does each single struggle of ambivalence loosen the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even as it were killing it.⁹

The result is a tragic victory of the libido over the ego as Pye places his head in the gas oven.

Charley Summers is a man warring with both mourning and melancholia. This is most apparent in Charley's prolonged inability to deal with the loss of Rose. Rose may indeed have passed away, but it is clear that Charley had at least partially lost Rose well before her death. The presence of James Phillips, Rose's husband, and their son, Ridley, attests to this. On one level this is reminiscent of Freud's state of melancholia, where there are a broader number of “exciting causes” and where “the object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love”. But there

⁹ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), vol. 14, 257.

is also no real sense that the “object-loss” has been “withdrawn from consciousness”, as would be expected in melancholia. Instead, it is the timing of the “object-loss” which has been blurred.¹⁰ This leaves Charley more susceptible to confusion and ambivalence, as exemplified in his initial refusal to see Nancy Whitmore as anyone but Rose herself. But the clarity of the object of his loss does leave clear the ego’s route to freedom without inhibition:

the exciting causes of melancholia have a much wider range than those of mourning, which is for the most part occasioned only by a real loss of object, in which hate and love contend with each other; the one seeks to detach the libido from the object, the other to maintain this position of the libido against the assault. The location of these separate struggles cannot be assigned to any system but the *Ucs.*, the region of the memory-traces of things (as contrasted with word-cathexes). In mourning, too, the efforts to detach the libido are made in this same system; but in it nothing hinders these processes from proceeding along the normal path through the *Pcs.* to consciousness.¹¹

Charley does not reveal his confusion with the same vitriolic anger as Pye. We are much more confident in his ability to differentiate between love and hate and, ultimately, his libido works to detach itself from its object. Nevertheless there is a wider variety and more significant number of lapses than in the case of Richard Roe. In this way Charley’s attempt to reconcile his losses with the world around him becomes more than a character’s schematised psychological journey.¹² It becomes emblematic of a less easily defined (and necessarily unpredictable) process of reconciliation occurring between the conscious and the unconscious, the individual and the system, the day and the everyday.

¹⁰ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917) vol. 14, 245.

¹¹ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), vol. 14, 256-7.

¹² Although it’s difficult to know how much of Freud Green had actually read, the fiction (especially *Nothing and Doting*) is often playful when alluding to psychologists and psycho-analysts – “he’s been to all sorts of psycho-analysts, and the only advice they’ve any of them been able to give the poor man, was that he should, so to speak, try himself out, every now and again, on a girl who is considerably, even absurdly younger than he is” (*D*, 153) – or when directly referencing Freud: “‘You know what one comes across with those awful books of Freud’s I haven’t read thank God.’ ‘They’re completely out of date nowadays.’ ‘They are? You’re sure? Yet there must be something in them when he’s been so famous’” (*N*, 25-6).

Discrepancies: Context, the Acronym and Cliché

Charley is constantly a step or two behind. This is quite literally the case with his amputated leg. As early as the second sentence of the novel Charley gets out of the bus “carefully because he had a peg leg” (*Ba*, 5). Within a few pages Charley is miserable and wet because of his lack of mobility:

He started to drag as quick as he could for the path, to shelter in the church porch. But he had to go sideways, brushing against cypresses, getting his neck scratched once or twice, having roses spatter in his ears because he could not lift his leg properly, and did not wish to pull it over the green, turfed graves, to scar them with the long souvenir he had brought back from France. (*Ba*, 9)

Moments later he “could not go fast” and “far behind... hobbled along” after “the fat fellow” (*Ba*, 12). This fellow is James, his portly love rival; James – “fat as those geese” (*Ba*, 10). The peg leg is a “long souvenir... from France” for two reasons: it is with him for life and it is “a wooden leg that did not fit” (*Ba*, 7). But it is not simply Charley’s physical disability which impedes his progress. His experiences as a soldier and the memories of that trauma inform his interaction with the world around him. This description is charged with what seems disproportionately intense, physically-threatening imagery as he is scratched, spattered and unwilling to scar “the green, turfed graves”. It is clear from early on that Charley has returned from France with more to deal with than a peg leg. For Charley is in two locations simultaneously: in the churchyard struggling to locate Rose’s grave and back “on the other side” under gunfire:

As he looked up he noted well those slits, built for defence, in the blood coloured brick. Then he ran his eye with caution over cypresses and between gravestones. He might have been watching for a trap, who had lost a leg in France for not noticing the gun beneath a rose. (*Ba*, 5)

His soldier’s eye picks out the “slits, built for defence” and equates the redness of the bricks with blood; whilst the narrator points out Charley’s inability to see the danger

lurking beneath the surface of a rose. It is *Back*'s first mention of the term "rose" and it is one of many.

For it is by means of the multiple uses of the "R/rose" conceit that Green is able to approach representation of Charley's trauma. The image of the multi-petalled rose is a familiar motif of Green's novels, but in *Back* its capacity as a vehicle of literary symbolism is expanded to the point of bursting. Edward Stokes points out that the rose "is present in almost all the love-scenes" of *Loving* and *Caught*; he quotes from *Loving*:

Lying back he squinted into the blushing rose of that huge turf fire as it glowed, his blue eyes azure on which was a crescent rose reflection... From this peat light her great eyes became invested with rose incandescence that was soft and soft and soft.¹³

This rose filter can create moments of calm, natural beauty, but there are also examples where the image is extended to the point of hyperbole. There is this moment, for example, in *Caught*, when Brid returns home with her child but not her husband:

Mrs Howells, with shaking fingers, put down the china teapot covered with pink roses her sister, Aggie, had given as a wedding present; which had reflected Brid's conception by that liquid rose flower light of a dying coal fire twenty-one years back; which now witnessed Brid's return, deflowered. (*C*, 77)

The personification of the teapot as witness to Brid's tragic return is fragile enough, but it is the extended rose image which proves too much. To link the decorative roses of the teapot to the "liquid rose flower light" of the night of Brid's conception and to complete the journey with Brid's own deflowering becomes inexplicably absurd. Here the banal is imbued with a significance which shatters its very existence within the everyday. Green's poeticising of the everyday, the journey from the literal to the metaphorical, is not believable.

¹³ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 166.

It is, therefore, with trepidation that one approaches the surfeit of rose imagery found in *Back*. And yet it is that very all-pervasiveness which renders it so successful. For the term is a container for multiple personalities: it is the flower; it is the person; it is the implications of existence within a variety of linguistic usages; it is moods and symbols and images. It is the perfect carrier of the one and the many, the literal and the metaphorical, the conscious and the unconscious. In *Back* the links are often inexplicable or outside of the fully conscious realm, but in contrast to the journey from teapot to conception in *Caught*, the interrelation between the physical and the mental is strong.

Physically, we have seen how Charley's peg leg locates him as lagging behind the likes of James, but there is also a clear sense mentally that he is neither totally here nor there. This is evident in the way that Charley visualises the churchyard through a soldierly lens, as mentioned above. But most powerful is the synaesthetic impact of incidents on his senses. The "sudden upthrusting cackle of geese in panic", for example, not only reminds him of the war, but it makes him see and then feel the war:

the sound... brought home to him a stack of faggots he had seen blown high by a grenade, each stick separately stabbing the air in a frieze, and which he had watched fall back, as an opened fan closes. So, while the geese quietened, he felt what he had seen until the silence which followed, when he at once forgot. (*Ba*, 6)

This merging of sensual responses, of remembered and present experience, is reminiscent of Richard's "hallucinatory wishful psychosis." In the lapse of time between when his wife dies and when his libido is finally able to release its attachments to her, Richard "could not keep his hands off her in memory"; he "stroked her wrists, pinched, kissed her eyes, nibbled her lips" (*C*, 33). *Back* centres

even more directly on the period of time in which Charley must reconcile his memories of Rose and the world he lived in before he went to war, with that of his experiences of being a soldier, of having lost a leg and of Rose's death. But the time lapse for Charley is greater, because although he wishes to progress, his memories pull him into the past and hold him there, entwined in their briars:

The idea had been to make the clock's hands go round. And now that he'd come, he told himself, all he was after was to turn them back, the fool, only to find roses grown between the minutes and the hours, and so entwined that the hands were stuck. (*Ba*, 8-9)

The image works on two levels simultaneously. The churchyard is full of roses – “climbing around and up these trees of mourning, was rose after rose after rose” (*Ba*, 5) – their thorny branches weaving around the cypress trees. But, on another level, “her (Charley's lover) name, of all names, was Rose” (*Ba*, 6).

Although Charley's idea has been to come to the grave to say goodbye, “to make the clock's hands go round” and to move forward, he becomes more conscious of the fact that his memories, his past attachments, are strong enough to hold him to the past. This is exemplified by the difficulties which Charley experiences in reconciling his own idealised memories of Rose:

whom he could call to mind, though never all over at one time, or at all clearly, crying, dear Rose, laughing, mad Rose, holding her baby, or, oh Rose, best of all in bed, her glorious locks abounding

with the rather more brutal attempts to visualise Rose as she now is: “here nailed into a box, in total darkness, briar roots pushing down to the red hair of which she had been so proud and fond” (*Ba*, 7). The struggle over these contrasting mental images is represented by the crabwise approach Charley weaves towards the more shocking of the images. The “briar roots” are not his own direct imaginings; instead he suggests that Rose herself “could never have imagined herself here nailed”.

Similarly, when he then goes on to describe Rose: “as cold beneath a slab, food for worms, her great red hair, still growing, a sort of moist bower for worms” (*Ba*, 8), it is made clear that it is James who “at no time before this moment, had... ever thought” of Rose in this way. The distance which Charley’s triangulating puts between himself and these images is extended further by his allusions to the words and contexts of others. There are, for example, strong allusions to Marvell’s more overtly grotesque image in “To His Coy Mistress” – “then worms shall try/That long preserved virginity”¹⁴ – and some striking similarities with the story of the poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.¹⁵ Charley’s oblique lines of approach through other people and by means of literary props, when visualising his lost lover in death, intimate the difficulties he is having in merging his sense of the present with the actual present. It is an issue which affected a large number of soldiers returning home from war at this time, as a Mass-Observation report observed: “the past is the only future on which they can build, the only future they can clearly visualise.”¹⁶ Charley’s attempts to register the world around him trigger a combination of visceral and mental reactions which cloud his clarity. The world becomes illegible, difficult to hear and, consequently, to understand.

But the illegibility of the world cannot be pinned solely on Charley’s inability to read it; in the same way that mishearings cannot simply be blamed on the ears of the listener. The difficulties of constructing a future based on the present, then, rather than the past, must also be located in the legibility of the world itself. For the

¹⁴ Andrew Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress” in *The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 1996), 51.

¹⁵ Evelyn Waugh, *Rossetti: His Life and Works* (1923; London: Duckworth, 1975). See 111: Rossetti, on the burial of Elizabeth Siddal, his wife and the model for his paintings “put the volume into the coffin between her cheek and her beautiful hair”. See also 152, when, seven and a half years later, the volume of poems is retrieved – “some of the hair came away with the book” – and Waugh depicts Rossetti as beginning “the hideous task of piecing together his work from among the stains and worm-holes”.

¹⁶ Mass-Observation, *The Journey Home* (London: John Murray, 1944), 111.

individual must always be at a slight variance from the normalising influence of the world and its necessarily reductive categories. Green's fiction revisits this discrepancy time and time again. The paradox of naming is a prime example, where the individuality of a character is often anonymised by their reduction to a name; as with all the butlers in *Loving* who are forced to go by the name Albert or all the girls in *Concluding* with names beginning in *M*. In *Back* it is an even more literal rendering. Charley is unable to "read" the world: "Britain in 1944," says Mengham, "is literally unreadable". Mengham argues that the intensive use of acronyms "of the new Home Front environment" is a "crucial disadvantage for returning servicemen."¹⁷ The jargon becomes obfuscatory and exclusive, rather than a faster means of communicating. This is absolutely true, but it is further complicated by the fact that Charley, when he was a soldier, used to be able to understand acronyms. These acronyms were initially a comfort, as they were symbolically linked with flowers and decorations:

The prisoners' camp had been flowered with initials, each inmate decorated his bunk with them out there. To let it be known what he taught. Such as "I.T." which stood for Inner Temple, at which Marples, this very afternoon perhaps, was still teaching Roman Law. (*Ba*, 8)

For Charley the letters represent individuality and personality, they specify and humanise the inmates of the camp by alluding to their own specific teaching subject. The signifier reveals the signified, as is literally the case with "I.T.", which is translated by Charley into the Inner Temple. But the Home Office acronyms are never translated. In fact they have exactly the opposite effect. Rather than comforting Charley, by allowing individual human traits to emerge in the essentially dehumanised atmosphere of the prisoners' camp, the first initials he witnesses take the place of a signature: "'E.N.Y.S.' it was signed". The idiosyncrasy of an individual's signature is removed and the person is replaced by a system. For Charley, they are

¹⁷ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 158.

just “more letters standing he did not know what for” (*Ba*, 8). Nor will these initials be translated for us.

For a brief moment, the experience of reading Charley’s world is as mystifying for us as it is for him. But Green, although keen to connect our experience of reading with the experiences of his characters on the page, is just as interested in provoking the reader to analyse their own “writerly” experience.¹⁸ For in reading the text, the reader is also writing it. This performative, metatextual awareness is more readily triggered by allowing the reader to observe Charley’s gradual attempts to read his world. When Charley first sees Ridley, for example, but does not recognise him as Rose’s (and possibly his own) son, our attention is drawn to his oversight: “He did not even feel a pang, as well he might if only he had known.” The authorial intrusion is unusual enough for Green, but a few lines later he reiterates Charley’s inadequate awareness of the situation: “And he forgot the boy who was gone, who spelled nothing to him” (*Ba*, 6). It is only at the end of the novel’s first “chapter” – the chapters are not labelled, but rather signified by a break in the text – that we witness Charley able to read anything at all:

there lay before his eyes more sharp letters, cut in marble beyond a bunch of live roses tied in string, and it became plain that this was where they had laid her, for the letters spelled Rose. (*Ba*, 12-3)

It is no surprise that Charley is only able to read the past, to read Rose. What is more evident from this passage is that even this reading is fraught with imprecision. The letters are sharply cut out of marble¹⁹ and yet the process of illumination is only

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (1970) trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 5: “The writerly text is the perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticised by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages”.

¹⁹ See a few pages earlier Charley had felt certain that “James could never have found marble for her” (*Ba*, 8).

gradual: “it became plain”. The “bunch of live roses”, although they might appear to be alive, in that they aren’t part of a design cut into the marble,²⁰ are actually cut and tied with string: they are, in fact, dying. Charley might be able to spell Rose, as he was unable to “spell” Ridley’s meaning, but his perception of the world around that single word is flawed.

There are countless examples of Charley’s propensity for misinterpreting contexts as the novel progresses. The most obvious and most quoted evidence of this is Charley’s stubbornly singular interpretation of the word “rose” irrespective of the context. When Middlewicht thanks a barmaid called Rose “it gave Charley a jolt” (*Ba*, 23); when Mrs Frazier talks of flower prices rising, using the past tense of the verb – “they rose, they’ve rose” – Charley is “pierced right through” (*Ba*, 35) by the words; at the second-hand bookseller’s Charley reads the title “‘Cometh up as a flower’ which twisted his guts” (*Ba*, 56); he is brought back “sharp” when he hears the record “Honeysuckle Rose” “oozing out next door” (*Ba*, 57); and when Dot mentions the effect of the port – “‘I suppose it was the fumes rose’... she saw a spasm pass across his face” (*Ba*, 63). Any mention of “(R)ose” and Charley is physically impacted by the resurgence of his memory.

It is this physicality which is unusual. For rather than restricting Charley’s progress, it provides him with an identifiable marker; a route into his loss and, potentially, his unconscious. Over time, it is something which he learns to deal with better, as we see after Mrs Frazier’s words: “He held his breath for the pain to which he had grown accustomed, particularly in Germany, he waited for it to break over

²⁰ This recalls an earlier description: “a live wreath lay fallen on a wreath of stone, or on a box in marble colder than this day” (*Ba*, 5).

him” (*Ba*, 35). But the pain never arrives: “Nothing. He was amazed... But he felt nothing whatever” (*Ba*, 35). This is not, though, the end of it. Charley does make progress and his ability to disassociate his singular loss of Rose from the multiple everyday appearances of the term “R/rose” grows increasingly apparent. More important is the switching of his libido’s attachment from Rose, the lost object, to Nancy, Rose’s half-sister. On his second visit to the restaurant where the waitress is called Rose, Charley no longer physically recoils at the mention of her name:

“Rose, Rose,” Mr. Middlewitch called to the waitress once they were seated.
“Reminds me,” Summers said quiet. “D’you know Nance Whitmore?” (*Ba*, 113)

The unconscious impact of the loss of Rose has been replaced by the conscious, physical presence of her replacement. For when Charley first sets eyes on Nancy, the physical and the mental implode on each other, and he faints:

He looked. He sagged. Then something went inside. It was as though the frightful starts his heart was giving had burst a vein. He pitched forward, in a dead faint, because there she stood alive, so close that he could touch, and breathing, the dead spit, the living image, herself, Rose in person. (*Ba*, 47)

The memory of Rose, with its wishful hallucinations, has now taken a real physical form, even if the distinction between who is dead and who is alive remains unclear – Charley pitches forward “in a dead faint”, whilst Nancy/Rose is both a “dead spit” and a “living image”.

The loose slang of “dead spit”, with its absent presence of an unconscious joke,²¹ carries within it a potential for significant meaning. This is not simply the offhand use of an over-worn phrase or cliché; instead the phrase becomes personally and specifically charged by the context in which it is placed: Rose is dead and Nancy

²¹ Freud, “Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious” (1905), vol. 8, 168: “in the formation of a joke one drops a train of thought for a moment and... it then suddenly emerges from the unconscious as a joke.”

is her living half-sister. Green's use of the cliché renews the impact of its empty metaphorical container by filling it with the possibility of Charley's self-realisation. Charley's use of the phrase, "dead spit", demonstrates an element of this growing realisation: to be a dead spit, it cannot be "Rose in person." According to Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, "The dead spit of someone" is "the exact counterpart. The equivalent of SPITTING IMAGE";²² it is not the same person, although the two might have the same parent.²³ In Green's use here Nancy is "the dead spit, the living image, herself, Rose in person." Although all of this is not technically possible, it is the most apt depiction of the fluidity of Charley's states of mind during this transitional period. This manipulation of the cliché reveals its literary potential. It becomes a technical form which can, like the unconscious joke or the slip of the tongue, obliquely reveal another area of consciousness. More importantly, though, it can do this "without risking the complacency of making a truth-claim";²⁴ it critiques its own banality, without necessarily seeking to transcend it.

Green's use of cliché, discussed in more detail in the next chapter, here fulfils both aspects of the cliché which Elizabeth Barry picks out as crucial for understanding their function in Samuel Beckett's work:

First, cliché in its general sense, is a judgement felt to apply to borrowed, lazy and banal forms of thinking... Secondly,... verbal cliché. This is a phenomenon of expression: a figure of speech felt to be repeated to the point where the original image has ceased to be striking.²⁵

²² Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, rev. John Ayto (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), 367.

²³ See Nigel Rees, *Phrases and Sayings* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), 439, where this link of parentage is made even more clearly: "spitting image... is a corruption of 'speaking image' or 'splitting image' (two split halves of the same tree which provide an exact likeness)".

²⁴ Elizabeth Barry, *Beckett and Authority: The Uses of Cliché* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2.

²⁵ Barry, *Beckett and Authority*, 3.

The banality and repetition of the cliché suggests thoughtlessness in the user, where the originality and meaning of the initial metaphor has been lost over time. This process resembles the etymology of the word itself, which was initially used in French typography and was synonymous with the term “stereotype” (a printing plate cast from a mold).²⁶ Here the unique nature and effort that goes into creating the first stereotype block is soon anonymised by its mechanical reproduction: inherent in its make-up is its own expiry.²⁷ The self-effacement intrinsic to the conscious use of cliché as an expired form in literature is deeply pertinent to the oblique nature of Green’s approach to the everyday. The cliché, as with the everyday, usually passes by unnoticed or smacks of banality and repetition. Here, though, we can see how “dead spit” plays precisely on the word “dead”, and in so doing carefully revitalises the use of the cliché to give – “without risking the complacency of making a truth-claim” – a fuller suggestion of where Charley is psychologically. The linguistic complexity of the cliché, whereby its existence as cliché is founded upon its past, now-forgotten usage, creates a site from which to revisit and return to that past in a literary form of Freud’s “return of the repressed”. However, it is not possible to reify such a return. The cliché inherently allows for the inevitability of its own failure, even during its moment of reawakening. It humorously and tragically attests to its own incompleteness. It is this self-effacing awareness which is lacking from Charley’s own approach to the world around him.

²⁶ The word *cliché* echoes the sound of the mold dropping into molten metal and describes the process of reproducing multiple versions of the same imprint. See *Trésor de la langue française (1789-1960)*, ed. Paul Imbs (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1977), 912-3: “*Fabriquer un cliché, c’est-à-dire se procurer l’empreinte d’une forme..., y couler un métal fusible permettant d’obtenir une planche solide à partir de laquelle on peut reproduire la forme en un grand nombre d’exemplaires.*”

²⁷ A similar point is explored with relation to the “slogan” in Rachel Bowlby, “Clichés in the Psychology of Advertising”, *Fonctions du cliché: Du banal à la violence* 16 (Tours: GRAAT, 1997). See 45: “their [slogans] very success... depends on their becoming the very stuff of everyday language and thinking, dwindling inevitably from their first fine force of novelty to the banality of the commonplace and ultimately the rubbish-heap of the cliché, when the slogan is no longer regarded as effective at all and has to be replaced by a newer coinage.”

For when Charley tries to comprehend the whole, when he seeks to solve or contain emotional trauma, something breaks down; sometimes it is his body, other times it is his grasp on reality. His physical manifestations of shock and inner trauma have already been discussed in some detail. The triggers of this are clear. There is, as Dot realises, “The mention of her name”:

He started up out of his chair at this cruel shock, this searchlight on a naked man, but she went on. “Oh I’ve known for ages. It’s Rose, Rose she’s called, isn’t it Rose?”

“No,” he lied, and went straight out of the room to the lavatory, in case he should have to vomit. (*Ba*, 112)

Then there is the trauma of war, “of the gun beneath the rose” (*Ba*, 5): “But the nausea, which had recently begun to spread in his stomach whenever prison camps were mentioned, drove all else out of his head” (*Ba*, 18). These traumas, if they remain in the unconscious, permanently invisible and indivisible, threaten to restrict Charley’s re-absorption into society. The physical symptoms act as evidence of a traumatic past; a preconscious retch echoing in the silent unspoken surrounds of the unconscious: “Because he had something, a sort of block in his stomach, which, in the ordinary way, seemed to stand between him and free speech” (*Ba*, 24). Charley’s silence; his slowness to respond or act; his tendency to fall back on clichés; his lack of concentration or inability to hear; his unwillingness to dig too deeply beneath the surface; all exemplify this “sort of block”. It is a mental block which incapacitates Charley further even than his physical disability.

For Charley is not conscious of the unconscious triggers affecting his responses to the world. Consequently, when he attempts to piece everything together, his theories are ridiculous: “he again saw this whole thing as a whole. What he saw was that, somehow or other, Rose had, in fact, become a tart, gone on the streets”

(*Ba*, 67). Later he decides that Rose must be a bigamist (*Ba*, 88) and creates numerous conspiracy theories: “he grew more and more sure this whole thing was a plot” (*Ba*, 112). Finally, and symbolically, he cuts up all of Rose’s precious letters to him, removing any terms of endearment, so that he can have the handwriting tested against that of Nancy without embarrassment (*Ba*, 120-2). This insight into Rose’s letters to Charley provides a clearer sense of their past relationship, of how Charley’s memory of that relationship might be flawed or idealised and of how Charley’s reading skills are still drastically limited. Rose refers to Charley as Stinker and orders him around like a child, whilst continuing happily with her married life, talking about her pregnancy and threatening to forget him. And what is Charley’s reaction upon re-perusal? “His eyes filled with tears. These letters were sacred.” Immediately after this desperately naïve moment of sentimentality: “He found his nail scissors, got the letters again, and began, without thinking, to cut those sentences out which he thought would not give him away” (*Ba*, 121). The “without thinking” is crucial, for it suggests an internal, unconscious action which opposes the seemingly contradictory, conscious “thought” presented eight words later and the earlier teary assertion. His detachment from Rose is almost complete. That evening “he mourned the fact that Rose’s treachery had destroyed the last there was left to him” and “that night he slept very well for once, and did not dream” (*Ba*, 122). By cutting everything up into pieces, Charley has dismantled his naïvely constructed view of Rose and his various levels of consciousness enable him to read the world through clearer eyes. However, this is not something which he is able to do alone.

This lack of fluency in engaging with the world around him is recognised by almost every other character in the novel. Where in *Caught*, Pye finds more reasons

for self-doubt and targets for his anger in the people who surround him; Charley ultimately finds opportunities to learn different lessons from the likes of James, the Grants, Corker Mead and Nance. So, although Charley is very much the central figure, more so than in any other of Green's novels,²⁸ the way other characters seek to guide and offer him advice provides a variety of surfaces; each surface creating facets of and angles into his individuality. James Phillips, for example, sends Charley a story "From the Souvenirs of Madame DE CREQUY (1710-1800)". James believes that the story is extremely "close to Charley's situation" and hopes that it might enlighten him. On it he writes clear instructions: "'Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest,'" and then "signed his initials" (*Ba*, 91). The "inwardly digest" is particularly apt. James wants Charley to look below the surface, to explore more than just what he sees. But Charley misses these instructions altogether, fails to "read" the initials and "ignore(s) the date" (*Ba*, 92) on which it is sent, thus missing its more cryptic relevance. But, although he considers the story "ridiculous" he does, we are told, have "his first good night's rest for weeks" (*Ba*, 104) after putting it down.

And yet the links and the story's relevance are readily apparent to James and the reader. The death of an already lost lover – in this case both are married to someone else – leaves Madame d'Egmont so little able to forget him "that she fainted if his name came up in conversation": "This actually happened when the Prince Abbot de Salm purposely named him, and the young woman was taken with appalling convulsions on the spot" (*Ba*, 94). This very situation and the physicality of the response is clearly mirrored in Charley's rising nausea and his rushing to the bathroom when Dot Pitter, taking the place of the Prince Abbot de Salm, mentions

²⁸ Even John Haye, in Green's earliest novel, *Blindness* (1926), is totally absent from the descriptions of Joan and her father; in *Back*, on the rare occasions when Charley isn't present, he is being talked about.

Rose's name on purpose (*Ba*, 112). Charley's fainting on sight of Nancy (*Ba*, 47) is another moment mirrored exactly in the *Souvenirs*, when Madame d'Egmont faints and is "taken ill" on seeing her lover's half-brother for the first time (*Ba*, 98). It is here that we can see James's possible intentions. James does not see the same striking resemblance between Nancy and Rose that Charley does: "'I don't see that you're at all alike,' he said with truth and absolute conviction" (*Ba*, 88); nor does Madame de Créquy, the author of the *Souvenirs*, see what Madame d'Egmont sees: "I was not, at that instant minute, struck by how alike they were" (*Ba*, 101). What Madame de Créquy "shall never forget" is

this twin attachment, these two extraordinary passions she somehow found a way to lavish on two men who were entirely different and yet at the same time exactly similar, on the living and the dead. (*Ba*, 104)

Somehow, the last line of the story asserts, Madame d'Egmont is able "to fuse the memory of these two men into one, into one true lover" (*Ba*, 104). James's covert message is one of hope, that Charley might be able to love both Nancy and Rose, the living and the dead. This final paragraph is "the one notable departure [of Green's translation] from his source",²⁹ where Green's version is not absolutely literal. In this final image, Green invokes a much more physical, bodily fusion than was contained in the original eighteenth-century autobiography. It takes us back, again, to Charley's first sight of Nancy: "He pitched forward, in a dead faint, because there she stood alive, so close that he could touch, and breathing, the dead spit, the living image, herself, Rose, in person" (*Ba*, 47). The presence of this story-within-a-story creates a *mise-en-abyme*. Green's translated fragment cuts away 57 pages of the original, whilst James's selection of it from a literary review cuts away further contexts. The fragments reductively reflect back into infinity, whilst what is taken forward is chance.

²⁹ See David Copeland, "Reading and Translating Romance in Henry Green's *Back*", *Studies in the Novel* 32: 1 (Spring 2000): 62-3.

Charley's conscious response is that it is a ridiculous story (although the impact of it unconsciously might be a reason for his sleeping well), but with the semi-fictional nature of Madame d'Egmont's "Souvenirs" and the artistic licence of Green as translator James's message becomes fraught with uncertainty; it is only one fragment within many.

Then there are the Grants, Rose's parents, who are also dealing with loss. In an attempt to explain his wife's loss of memory to Charley, Mr Grant suggests "that nature protects us by drawing a curtain, [it] blacks certain things out" (*Ba*, 13). Mrs Grant, however, fully recovers and it is Mr Grant who has a stroke leaving him "paralysed all down his right side", totally conscious but without "the power of speech" (*Ba*, 154). Neither situation is as the surface might suggest. When Charley asks Mrs Grant whether she remembers him coming to visit "he was horrified to find a sudden look of sly cunning begin to spread over her placid face" (*Ba*, 173). The lines between conscious intention and unconscious self-protection, between mental uncertainty and physical disability, continue to be blurred. It is, we find out, Mr Grant who has been hiding the secret of his illegitimate daughter, Nance, "drawing a curtain" over his wife for years. His silence starts to control him, though, and ultimately it consumes him. His earlier warning to Charley – "when you reach my age you'll realise that some secrets aren't your own" – goes unheeded: "I don't know what you mean" (*Ba*, 82). But Mr Grant's silence over Nance is ridiculed by Mrs Grant's later nonchalant assertion that she has "been in touch on and off with her [Nance's] mother all these years" (*Ba*, 155); Mr Grant's humiliation is intensified yet further by his wife's wilful insensitivity to his predicament of being able to hear but not speak:

“Remember, he’ll be able to hear every bit we speak,” she warned, as she led the way into the house, and up the stairs.

Mr. Grant rested like a log in bed. All that was alive was his eyes. Charley stammered a good evening, and added a word about how well he was looking.

“Oh, he’s not,” Mrs. Grant broke in, “he’ll never be better the doctor says.” (*Ba*, 156)

Where Charley was unable to read anything consciously or to demonstrate any sense of insight into the story of Madame d’Egmont, his horror at Mrs Grant’s possible subterfuge and later revenge reveals his growing awareness of the unconscious, unstated triggers lying behind individual actions. Charley begins to learn that what is on the surface, what is said or revealed, is often at odds, whether consciously or not, with what is felt.³⁰ This is most tangibly expressed through the failure of Charley’s “visible system” (*Ba*, 38) – the card-index system which he creates at work to display each and every transaction as it occurs. As the novel progresses, Charley sees his personal system fail and when he is brought before his boss, Corker Mead, he is taught to consider the implications of the invisible system underlying each business transaction.

The Visible and the Invisible System

Charley’s “card indexing” is a singular system, belonging to him specifically: “That’s my visible system”. It is precise and individual. Charley explains it to his new secretary, Dot: “The whole thing’s visible. Tell at a glance, I don’t think. It may seem loopy to you but this is the one way our particular job can be done” (*Ba*, 39). By

³⁰ The phrase “rested like a log” in its reworking of the cliché “sleep like a log”, also points to this contradiction. Rather than being an empty phrase, it recalls the original metaphor of the phrase and thereby alludes to the anger underlying Mr Grant’s still exterior. See *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 1284: “**Sleep like a log** or **like a top, To**. When peg tops are at the ACME of their gyration, they become so steady and quiet that they do not seem to move. In this state they are said to ‘sleep’. William Congreve plays on the two meanings: ‘Hang him, no, he a dragon! If he be, ’tis a very peaceful one./ I can ensure his anger dormant, or should he seem to rouse,/ ’tis but well lashing him and he will sleep like a top’ (*The Old Bachelor*, I, v [1693]).”

producing a concrete, physical system which can be read, Charley is seeking to control his environment. Whilst the slippery emotional undertow of his unconscious, created by the trauma of losing Rose and his wartime experiences, continues to destabilise him, this system gives him a temporarily firmer footing: “the system he had installed... had kept him sane throughout this first re-flowering of Rose” (*Ba*, 38). Yet there is a foreshadowing of failure here. A failure which Charley himself gestures at with his immediate counter-statement – “I don’t think” – and his second-guessing of Dot, predicting that she might find it all a bit “loopy”.

For others, its precision, its total reliance on the literal, is what foreshadows its inevitable failure. “Oh dear” Dot says in response to Charley’s unusually long-winded explanation of his system. Dot’s quiet resignation gestures to this unspoken inevitability. Rather than engage in any further discussions to understand the indexing system better, Dot asks if she “could meet with one of the other girls” (*Ba*, 39); someone, perhaps, who is on a similar wavelength. Despite all of this “she began to get involved with the card index system” and “found it dead accurate... There was not an item wrong” (*Ba*, 45). The first slip, when it comes, is not her fault, nor is it Charley’s; it is, in fact, “Mr Pike, the chief draughtsman, [who] must have kept it [an advice note from Braxtons for joint rings] back on purpose” (*Ba*, 46). Charley’s system, though technically accurate and successfully managed by Dot Pitter and himself, cannot account for the unpredictability of human action. Mr. Pike’s impromptu gesture has brought the system down, albeit momentarily. Later, Charley is brought up in front of his boss, Corker Mead, because of a breakdown in the chain of production. Charley’s letter is to blame: “Because it was wet what you wrote, sloppy”

(*Ba*, 107). Mr. Mead proceeds to give Charley advice on how to interpret and write business letters:

“Don’t be too much in a hurry to take things at face value. You were wrong about Jordan’s letter. He was only covering himself in case he got the blame. There’s just one other point. Keep lively. Don’t think that everything’s a try on because of this single instance.” (*Ba*, 108)

It is not straightforward advice and Charley struggles with its subtleties. Without being able to take all things literally, to take everything at face value, Charley is lost. His visible system cannot cope with the unpredictable variations of human nature. Its framework of rationality cannot contain or absorb the inconsistencies of Mr Mead’s second piece of advice: a single instance does not necessarily evidence a universal truth. Charley, like his system, struggles to be this flexible, and a little later, when he suggests to a silent Mr Pike that someone may have forged the letter, we see him as an uncertain and paranoid conspiracy theorist: “Mr. Pike stayed quite still. Charley blushed” (*Ba*, 110). Charley’s physical reddening marks his growing self-awareness.

Charley’s various learning curves, whether they are in a psychological, emotional, social or business context, are inconsistent. Each has its successes and its setbacks. But each setback provokes a fuller detachment and movement away from another flawed perception. These continual alterations and perceptual shifts, triggered by the people and the events taking place around him, the shifting contexts or margins, begin to allow for a better-adjusted Charley Summers. Charley acts as a fluid centre point for *Back*, around which the other characters gravitate and pull. Their differing advice and shifting interactions provide a multiplicity of sounding-boards and angles from which emerges a more complex, more flexible and competent Charley.

The process of reading *Back* can be aligned with Charley's evolution as a character, where it is the growing awareness of the spaces in between Charley and his world, the reader and the text, which provide the richness and variety of an independent and individual understanding. In *Back* the reader's and Charley's awareness of this discrepancy is heightened by interaction. When James cuts out the Madame d'Egmont story, for example, the potential for a happy outcome, where Charley is able to merge his love for Rose into a love for Nancy, is hypothesised. The Grants' failings and secrets, however, insinuate a darker outcome; a future potential that is best avoided. Charley's boss, Corker Mead, ostensibly helps Charley navigate through the business world. But the lessons Mr Mead teaches Charley about his "visible system" are essential to his wider future as well, for they propose the necessity of flexible everyday living:

"There's no visible or invisible system, or whatever it may be, it doesn't exist, which can take the place of ordinary office routine. Now do you comprehend that?"

"Yes sir."

"Because I'm telling you for the last time, for your own good, you can't just put one system over another, and then be satisfied to use the top one without any sort of check." (*Ba*, 147)

Whatever the individual system might be, whether it is visible or invisible, it cannot, according to Mr Mead, "take the place of ordinary office routine." This might well be true of business, although Mr Pike's withholding of the advice note goes against even this, but when it comes to life, after all, it "is one discrepancy after another."³¹ One cannot control the space between these two systems with checks. In the same way that "the speech act is at the same time a use of language and an operation performed on it", there is an unpredictability assigned to the gaps in these systems, where individuals act out their "tactical ruses."³² Mr Mead's confidence in checks is by no

³¹ Green, "The Art of Fiction", 244-5.

³² Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), 33, 40.

means infallible and in his last appearance in *Back* we are given reason to question his advice, especially when it comes to personal issues. Whilst advising Charley to marry, Mead's own wife, Muriel, calls about their son. Mr Mead's response clashes violently with his earlier advice: "'You tell that kid of mine I'll tear the heart right out of him when I get home,' he shouted, almost at once" (*Ba*, 190). This loss of control ridicules the boss and belittles his role as pastoral advisor; and yet the incident still prompts Charley to phone Nance, where the topic of marriage is obliquely raised. The performativity of language remains powerful, but the question of intent or control of that performativity is forever brought into doubt. The reader uses language, just as the speech act is "a use of language", but he also performs an operation of interpretation on language. It is in this gap, as with the cliché's repetition and its difference, that the unpredictability and the scope for newness exist; it is here that the text, as emphasised by Barthes, is constantly rewritten.

Rod Mengham describes "the writing of *Back*" as "like an elaboration of Pascal's wager; it is the construction of a working knowledge, in the absence of what remains unknown and hidden."³³ This "working knowledge", if we emphasise its continuously adaptive and adapting nature, holds up well in an analysis of Green. But to talk about "the construction of a working knowledge" and to focus so overwhelmingly on the Christian frame of reference is to risk losing much of Green's playfulness. The invocation of Freud's fluid metapsychological system of multiple layers of consciousness aims to acknowledge a similar "absence of what remains unknown and hidden", but *Back*, with its critique of Charley's visible and invisible system, also allows for a much more playful, less schematised variety of

³³ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 179.

interpretations. Whilst *Back* ostensibly follows the return of one post-traumatic individual, Charley, it also opens itself up to acknowledge and question broader systems of understanding. Mengham emphasises the links with Christian systems of thought and their paradoxical containment of the divine within the human in Jesus Christ. My leaning is towards a more open-ended, yet idiosyncratically Greenian approach. Where Pascal's wager sides with God through probability rather than reason, Green's writing overturns that probability and moves towards a "science of singularity".³⁴ Here the individual's play within the various systems in which it exists, its idiosyncrasy or "idioculture",³⁵ is celebrated with relation to its future potential as much as its present state. So as much as Charley's journey to clarify his traumatised mindset, to read his world, is central to the Second-World-War context of *Back*, it is also just central to Charley: "He thought how Rose would have laughed to see him in his usual state of unknowing, lost as he always was" (*Ba*, 7). Charley was, after all, like this before the war, too. This can also be said of Green's elusive reader who creates their own individual narrative as they read *Back*. The relationship between trauma, memory and the everyday, as explored in the ways *Back* revisits and repeats much of *Caught*, emphasises the multiple layers between the conscious and unconscious by drawing attention to the relative and indefinite nature, the subjectivity, of time and place within both the mind and the written word. Green's crafty, sideways approach to representing the everyday, the open-endedness, the ambiguity, the

³⁴ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, ix.

³⁵ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004). See 21: "Although a large part of one's idioculture may remain stable for some length of time, the complex as a whole is necessarily unstable and subject to constant change; and although one is likely to share much of one's idioculture with other groups (one's neighbours, one's family, one's age peers, those of the same gender, race, class, and so on), it is always a unique configuration" (21). Attridge continues this line of thought to emphasise the singular nature of each individual: "it is important to note that individuality is not *exhausted* by idioculture; that is to say, I am more than the sum of the parts of cultural systems I have absorbed. I am not only unique, in the sense that no one else is constituted by exactly the same idioculture; I am... singular" (22).

multiplicity and the uncertain disparity of experience represented in his writing, is in itself a powerful singularity.

Chapter 7

***Doting* (1952) on *Nothing* (1950): “untenanted attention”**

Green’s last two novels, *Nothing* and *Doting* are repetitive, full of clichés and uneventful. This has led to a popular contention that they are inferior to Green’s earlier fiction or, in some way or another, “failures”. Such a verdict is particularly forthright in the full monographs on Green, which, until Jeremy Treglown’s recent study, have been practically unanimous in their damning appraisals of the last two novels. There is no doubt that the mirroring of *Nothing*’s episodic structure and dialogic form in *Doting*, and the almost identical contextual backdrop of the two novels, run the risk of boring and frustrating the reader. This risk is further intensified by the increased use of cliché and the continual repetition of situations in which couples eat lunch in the same locations and have similar mundane conversations over and over again. This chapter looks at why critics choose to single out *Nothing* and *Doting* as texts which are indulgently self-parodying and lacking vitality; it explores why the intertextuality and self-referential nature of Green’s fiction is overwhelmingly dismissed in these last two novels, when it is often celebrated in his earlier fiction. It then goes on to argue that *Nothing* and *Doting* are two of Green’s subtlest and most challenging novels, and that – contrary to Mengham’s assertion that Green “has promised the novel to dialogue as the result of a stylistic aversion rather than as a timely response to social and cultural constraints”¹ – these two novels, in fact, reveal a rigorous grappling with the state of the novel at the midpoint of the twentieth century. It is a grappling which is given a more revealing and liberating frame of reference by looking at how these last two novels explore, build upon and precede much twentieth-century thought about the “everyday”.

¹ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 209.

What have the critics said? Writing the first monograph on Green in 1959, Edward Stokes states that these two dialogic novels are “generally considered to be inferior” and that they are “disappointing for several reasons”; Stokes goes on to describe how Green “begins to repeat himself” and how the two novels are “full of clichés and conventional gush”.² Bruce Bassoff agrees, pointing out in 1975 that *Nothing* and *Doting* are “failures” and that Green is at risk of “self-parody”.³ It is Rod Mengham’s cursory and vehement excoriation that “there is almost nothing to read for in *Doting*” which is most surprising, though, considering the fastidiousness of his analysis of the earlier fiction. In what is a combination and distillation of Stokes and Bassoff, Mengham boldly laments Green’s anti-climactic literary finale, a double act which he sees as empty forms resonating with nothing more than self-indulgence and platitudes: “syntactical resourcefulness and figurative chicanery merely subside in a string of clichés, totally reliant for their effect on a form of textual parasitism.”⁴

With hindsight, it has been tempting for critics to see the repetition of *Nothing*’s episodic, mathematically-precise structure and narrow social demographic in *Doting* as evidence of Green’s creativity waning: Henry Green lived for over twenty years after the publication of *Doting* and yet published nothing new again. It is argued by Bassoff, Mengham and Holmesland that this reliance upon dialogue – driven by Green’s theoretical ideas about writing and the future of the novel, which were being broadcast on the radio and published during the same period – marked a literary cul-de-sac for him. There is no doubt that Green’s rather timely theoretical

² Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 20, 124.

³ Bassoff, *Toward Loving*, 6, 7.

⁴ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 214, 207.

pronouncements – in “The English Novel of the Future” (August, 1950),⁵ in his two broadcasts entitled “A Novelist to His Readers I” (November, 1950) and “A Novelist to His Readers II” (March, 1951), in a third broadcast “A Fire, a Flood and the Price of Meat” (August, 1951), and in his later *Paris Review* interview with Terry Southern, “The Art of Fiction” (1958)⁶ – provide some fascinating and useful insights into his later fiction. But there has been a tendency to overemphasise this connection in order to find or create some neat form of resolution relating to Green’s oeuvre. This is clearly evident in Holmesland’s 1986 analysis in which he turns Green’s own theoretical proclamations about the novel back in judgement on him: “Green fails to make his last two novels ‘as diffuse and variously interpretable as life itself’; they ‘fail to ‘attain a life of their own’”.⁷ Holmesland goes on to state confidently that “Green aims to consummate his theory of the abstract, non-representational work of art” in his last two novels.⁸ To aver that Green has his own clear “theory” shows rather a bold reliance on Green’s limited theoretical comments; to attempt, then, to demonstrate the consummation of any such a theory out of the uncertainty and open-ended nature of Green’s text is precarious. In many ways, though, Holmesland is simply making a logical progression on from the critical works of Stokes, Bassoff and Mengham. My argument is that Holmesland’s approach builds on a trend in the critical reception, whereby Green’s theoretical pronouncements are treated as a fully-formed system. The last two novels have generally been treated as part of this theoretical system, which has led to critics failing to focus sufficiently on the relationship between the dialogue and the set pieces in the last two novels themselves.

⁵ Green, “The English Novel of the Future”, *Contact I* (July–August 1950): 21-4.

⁶ Each of these is published in Green, *Surviving*, 136-42, 143-50, 151-7 and 234-50.

⁷ Holmesland, *A Critical Introduction to Henry Green’s Novels*, 193, 215.

⁸ Holmesland, *A Critical Introduction to Henry Green’s Novels*, 193.

All three of these earlier critics attest to the existence of a stable “fictional theory” outlined by Green – the centrality of the dialogic form – but then go on to assess *Nothing* and *Doting* without any direct or close analysis of particular dialogues. Stokes describes the “two B.B.C. talks and an essay” (“A Novelist to His Readers: I & II” and “The Future of the Novel”) as the first time that Green had “committed himself publicly to any fictional creed or programme”. He then proceeds to settle his attention on how Green’s “fictional theory”, with its reliance upon the dialogic form, limits the success of these novels from the outset:

It seems to me that it is only in the two novels published since his manifesto that Green can, with any justice, be accused of “excessive concentration on method”. For these two novels – *Nothing* (1950) and *Doting* (1952) – were deliberately written in support and illustration of the fictional theory he had just stated. Green’s answer to his own question: “What is the best way to create life in the reader?” is “By dialogue.”

Nothing and *Doting* carried out this programme to the letter, without achieving the stated aim of “creating life in the reader” – or at least without achieving this object as fully as earlier novels which were not written in conformity to such a rigidly restrictive formula. In reading these novels one feels that Green has deliberately strapped himself into a strait-jacket... One feels that in these novels there is a disparity between the seriousness of the issues and the mannered superficiality of the treatment; one feels, too, that Green’s dialogue here is not sufficiently non-representational – it seems to be an exact record of the way such people talk. One can only conclude that Green’s attempt at purification of the novel, in the interests of greater reality, has resulted instead almost in sterilization. It was perhaps worth doing once... but, one feels, not worth doing twice.⁹

Stokes settles his attention on the overall dialogic form of the novels rather than on the specificity of actual dialogues within the novel, and consequently gets tied up in the vagueness and uncertainty of his own critical response. On the one hand, he points to the “mannered superficiality of the treatment” whilst, later in the same sentence, exclaiming that the dialogue “seems to be an exact record of the way such people talk.” Such uncertainty is magnified by the sudden preponderance of modifiers and conditionals in his own critical prose – “it seems to me”; “one feels that”; “one can

⁹ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 66, 68-9.

only conclude”; “has resulted instead almost”; “it was perhaps... but, one feels, not”. For a fascinating study which uses an unusual, statistical form of analysis throughout, this approach to *Nothing* and *Doting* is disappointingly vague.

The lack of detailed analyses of the dialogues continues in the work of Weatherhead, Bassoff, Mengham and Holmesland. Each critic points to Green’s restrictive, theoretical reliance upon dialogue: Bassoff talks of Green’s “prescription for a novel of pure dialogue”;¹⁰ while Mengham, as previously mentioned, feels that Green “has promised the novel to dialogue as the result of a stylistic aversion.”¹¹ But none of these critics goes on to analyse the dialogues themselves. Instead, the dialogic form is denounced as a clumsy tool which Green uses to implement his limiting and ultimately flawed theories of non-representational art. In fact, Mengham argues that these “theoretical pronouncements” are themselves a sign of Green’s anxiety over the limitations of repeating his chosen dialogic form in *Doting*: “The dogmatic timeliness of the theoretical pronouncements during the same period is a means of compensating for the anxiety which must have increased as *Doting* proved incapable of a sufficiently dynamic regulation of the indefinite.”¹² In addition to this dismissal of the insufficiently dynamic nature of *Doting*,¹³ the only passages which Mengham chooses to analyse in any detail, in the brief chapter he devotes to *Nothing* and *Doting*, are the increasingly rare descriptive passages which Green had been working hard to eliminate. Mengham is not alone in this approach, though. The focus on certain set pieces of description, where the prose is dense and purple rather than clichéd and light,

¹⁰ Bassoff, *Toward Loving*, 106.

¹¹ Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 209.

¹² Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time*, 215.

¹³ See Russell, *Henry Green*, 205, for another earlier criticism of the lack of vitality found in Green’s repeated schematisation: “The fact that Green has deployed six characters in each book, in relationships that can be diagrammed, tempts one to detect in his construction a negation of organic principle, which is ostensibly replaced by inorganic (therefore lifeless) schematization.”

is typical of many other critics too, most notably Stokes and Weatherhead. It is my contention that this is partially misdirected criticism. Or, at least, that it is criticism triggered by a retrospective awareness of Green's lack of literary output in the following years and an over-emphasis on the dialogic aspect of his "theoretical pronouncements" as they fit into this decline.

Contemporary responses to *Nothing* and *Doting*, however, reveal a far broader range of reactions; a range which Green clearly anticipated: "it will be necessary for the dialogue to mean different things to different readers at one and the same time."¹⁴ Diana Trilling, in a review of *Nothing* for *The New York Times Book Review* in March 1950, describes "a strikingly bold intelligence – a quite unconscious intelligence" which lies "beneath the pleasant surface of Mr. Green's 'light' fiction"¹⁵ and Marghanita Laski, in a review for *The Spectator* a couple of months later, sees Green reserving "his descriptive writing... for intuitions, for movements and settings, and here he reveals himself, more perfectly than he has before, a master of the subtle and unexpected metaphor."¹⁶ It is this "advance" on his earlier books which reviewers of *Doting* found lacking. H. P. Lazarus, for example, in his review of *Doting* for *The Nation* in May 1952, feels that "there is nothing in *Doting* that Mr. Green has not done better before."¹⁷ J. D. Scott's review of *Doting*, for *The New Statesman* two weeks earlier, begins by praising "how admirable a book *Doting* is. Witty, stylish, poignant, mordantly funny and horribly sad" – but then goes on to describe it as

¹⁴ Green, "A Novelist to his Readers: I", 140.

¹⁵ Diana Trilling, "The Tragic and the Comic View", *New York Times Book Review*, 26 March 1950: 1.

¹⁶ Marghanita Laski, Review of *Nothing*, *Spectator*, 5 May 1950: 626. Treglown quotes Laski describing *Nothing* (favourably) as "the very quintessence of triviality" and contrasts this with John Richardson's assessment of *Nothing*, in the *New Statesman*, as a book "of no weight or importance." Treglown then continues: "To Green's older contemporary, L. P. Hartley, however... the novel meant more... 'Is 'nothing' a trifle, a bagatelle, or is it the void, *le néant*?... I for one found it all too easy to slip through the glittering surface of the comedy into icy and terrifying depths." See *Romancing*, 196-7.

¹⁷ H. P. Lazarus, "The Symbolical Apple", *The Nation*, 174 (24 May 1952): 506.

a little disappointing... because it is not, as publishers are fond of saying, “an advance on his last book”; because it is the kind of book that Mr. Green’s audience might have expected him to write; because it is not surprising.¹⁸

Initial sales of *Doting*, however, were stronger than they had been for *Nothing* or *Concluding*:

Leonard Woolf, who had already asked for an option on Henry’s next book, was not surprised when *Doting* sold a comfortable 6,700 copies within ten months, bringing it close to the total figures by that date for *Concluding* (7,100) and *Nothing* (8,900).¹⁹

Despite this early success, though, there were soon fears about what Green would follow *Doting* with. In the 1954 *Times Literary Supplement* feature – “An Absolute Gift” – Rosamond Lehmann concluded her essay with a prescient question: “What comes after *Nothing? Doting*. What comes next?”²⁰ And by the time that Stokes, Russell and Weatherhead published the first monographs on Green in 1959, 1960 and 1961, the shape of critical response was forming with more clarity. Nothing new had been published for almost ten years and this awareness began to filter into and affect the form of critical responses:

It is now six years since *Doting* appeared – the longest gap in Green’s work since the ten-year hiatus between *Living* and *Party Going*. One cannot help wondering whether these two most recent books were signs of the withering of the creative impulse in Green, and whether he now prefers silence to repetition and self-imitation.²¹

The fact that Green published nothing more became retrospective evidence for the failings of these two repetitive and self-imitating novels.

All the monographs on Green pair together *Nothing* and *Doting*, emphasising the repetition, but far fewer lay such a weight on the crosscurrents which clearly run

¹⁸ J. D. Scott, Review of *Doting*, *The New Statesman*: 566.

¹⁹ Treglown, *Romancing*, 219.

²⁰ Rosamond Lehmann, “An Absolute Gift”, *Times Literary Supplement*: xli.

²¹ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 182. Even Welty’s 1961 celebration of Green, and in particular her defence of his last two novels, could not hide a fear over whether he could escape the lions’ den for a third time. See Welty, “Henry Green”, *Texas Quarterly*: 255: “He has not shown a sign of repeating himself, unless this could be said in some respects of *Nothing* and *Doting*, and it was said; even so, the repeat in itself is remarkable, as if Daniel had got out of the lions’ den twice in a row.”

through the earlier novels.²² This focus tends to be on the most obvious of the similarities between *Nothing* and *Doting*: the episodic mirroring and quasi-poetic structure;²³ the repeated centrality of two generations of upper-middle class families;²⁴ and the exotic passages of purple prose standing out garishly from the platitudinous dialogues which proliferate. Critics focus on the external structure of *Nothing* and *Doting* – both Stokes and Russell go so far as to draw diagrams to represent the episodic modulations within each novel – or concentrate on the increasingly rare descriptive passages or set pieces. Such approaches have invariably found fault with the repetition of structure, character and setting or they have found the unsustainable juxtaposition of poetic prose and cliché-filled dialogue unsustainable or guilty of indulgent and stagnant self-parody. This is most neatly, if rather bizarrely expressed in Stokes’s image of a pawpaw tree:

Stylistically, *Nothing* reminds me of a pawpaw tree – a leafless, spindly-limbed plant out of which sprout, incredibly, and with no apparent relationship to the slender branches which can barely support them, and from which it is inconceivable that they can draw their sustenance, a few monstrous, globular fruit. That is what strikes one in reading *Nothing* – the disproportion, the lack of connection and relationship, the effect of lush, artfully designed patches of purple (or rather of white, rose and blue) arbitrarily superimposed on the abstract, colourless background.²⁵

²² North, *Henry Green and the Writing of his Generation* is the only published monograph to pair all of Green’s novels: *Blindness* with the memoir *Pack My Bag*; *Living with Party Going*; *Caught with Back*; *Loving with Concluding* and, of course, *Nothing* with *Doting*.

²³ Both Weatherhead and Bassoff give a detailed breakdown of each episode and their placement within the novels, such that a poetic rhyming structure is suggested. For an example, see Weatherhead, *A Reading of Henry Green*, 130: “The structural symmetry consists in matching scenes that arrange themselves into patterns after the manner in which rhyming lines form patterns in various stanzas or couplets” and p. 132: “The first six scenes, then, match as follows: AABCCA... The next four scenes [eight to eleven] are paired off into two matching ‘couplets.’” See also Weatherhead, “Structure and Texture in Henry Green’s Latest Novels”, *Accent: A Quarterly of New Literature* 19 (Spring 1959): 117-20.

²⁴ See Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 20: “both deal with the same small segment of upper-class, well-to-do society in post-war London” and also MacDermott, *A Convergence of the Creative and the Critical*, 231-60. MacDermott focuses largely on the inter-generational divide in the novels; however, his chapter clearly recognises, as my thesis contends, that “Green is concerned with developing an oblique approach to novel writing that allows readers to perceive many different layers of meaning in the one novel” in *Nothing* and *Doting*, and he is also aware that this is not limited to these two novels: “that obliquity is nothing new to Green” (233).

²⁵ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 221.

Neat though this image is, it is also entirely misleading. For although the “lush, artfully designed patches of purple” or, as less delicately implied, the “monstrous, globular fruit” might stand out more readily for attention or critical analysis, this chapter will look at how Green’s prose consciously undercuts itself in order to dissuade such a direct approach. The critics’ focus on these set pieces also fails to consider the doubts Green himself was registering about such “passages of description” in his BBC broadcasts:

How is the reader’s imagination to be fired? For a long time I thought this was best lit by very carefully arranged passages of description. But if I have come to hold, as I do now, that we learn almost everything in life from what is done after a great deal of talk, then it follows that I am beginning to have my doubts about the uses of description.²⁶

Consequently, the passages which Green was attempting to keep to an “absolute minimum” – “what I should like to read and what I am trying to write now, is a novel with an absolute minimum of descriptive passages in it” – are the passages which his later novels have come to be judged on.²⁷

Significant Irrelevance

This chapter aims, ultimately, to realign the critical balance by exploring how these descriptive passages work in conjunction with, rather than in contradiction to, the predominantly dialogic form of the novels. Initially, this will involve another close, critical analysis of these over-emphasised passages. But my analysis reveals how each passage contains within it an oblique, self-referential undercutting of its own

²⁶ Green, “A Novelist to his Readers: I”, 140.

²⁷ Stokes points out the inappropriate allure of these passages. See *The Novels of Henry Green*, 179-80: “Perhaps it is mere perversity on the reader’s part, but the sections of these novels that seem to have the strongest hold on the reader’s imagination (and it is none too strong) are the very passages which, according to Green’s new theory of the novel, are illegitimate and redundant – the description of the private room in the great hotel, where the twenty-first birthday party is to be held in one novel; in the other the opening and closing scenes in the night clubs, with their snake-dancers and jugglers and changing lights.”

existence: where the finely-wrought lyricism of the prose draws attention to a promised event or moment which is never witnessed to happen. It is a crucial element of the descriptions which critics, up until now, have failed to acknowledge. It also builds on the way *Party Going* manipulates and undercuts the one-day novel form to explore broader-reaching notions of the everyday. Chapter 5 argued that *Party Going* provides a host of potential starting points, rather than offering up fully formed moments of illumination or clear destinations. That nothing much happens and that levels of uncertainty increase rather than decrease as the foggy afternoon turns to evening; that the party never leaves the station and that our understanding of the individuals within that party becomes progressively less clear: these circumstances point to the multiplicity and hermeneutic variety which lies behind any potential singularity. In this way, I have argued that *Party Going* refuses to foreground the epiphanic moment or the individual character but instead creates a fluid, indivisible cityscape which offers senses and suggestions rather than certainty.

With the increased reliance upon dialogue in *Nothing* and *Doting*, there is a similar emphasis on the accumulation of sense rather than on any particularised, solidifying certainty; the effect of this on the reading process, whereby any certainty of knowledge is replaced by a more nebulous and slippery “sense”, is destabilising and potentially frustrating for the reader. As H. P. Lazarus stated, in an often-quoted line from his review of *Doting*, “The Symbolic Apple”, published in May 1952: the characters in Green’s later work “destroy the whole fiction of self-knowledge.”²⁸ It is a point which Michael North later acknowledges, in order to take it a step further:

Green shows that knowledge is fiction, that an individual achieves self-creation, not in the existential sense A. Kingsley Weatherhead intends when

²⁸ H. P. Lazarus, “The Symbolic Apple”, *The Nation*: 506. Weatherhead, Russell and North place particular emphasis on this point made by Lazarus.

he adopts that term as the centerpiece of his study of Green, not by stripping off influence to emerge as a truly autonomous being, but by concocting, from whatever trash is available, a narrative to inhabit.²⁹

These narrative concoctions are fashioned, in *Nothing* and *Doting* particularly, through the trash of conversation; the dialogic form which is constantly in flux, shifting between speakers, none of whom have any time to say exactly what they mean: “we do not have time to define what we mean in conversation”.³⁰ But it is important to note that the descriptive passages also reveal this oblique awareness of multiple, possible meanings surrounding what is being said. These beautiful prose constructions also refuse to allow any one particular moment or viewpoint to be treated as transcendent or singularly significant.

The passages of detailed description – “the description of the private room in the great hotel, where the twenty-first birthday party is to be held in one novel [*Nothing*]; in the other [*Doting*] the opening and closing scenes in the night clubs, with their snake-dancers and jugglers and changing lights”³¹ – ultimately reveal an increased emphasis on the non-event, on what does not happen or on what goes by unnoticed. What is of particular interest is that the demonstrative nature of the prose draws attention to the significance of the event described. It is not necessarily a “perversity” in the reader which attracts one to these passages; the passages themselves are carefully constructed to entice. They stand out as spectacular moments within the otherwise “abstract, colourless background”;³² consequently, the treatment of and response to these emphatic, signposted moments within the text takes on a heightened significance.

²⁹ North, *Henry Green and the Writing of his Generation*, 195-6.

³⁰ Green, “The English Novel of the Future”, *Contact*, 22.

³¹ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 179-80.

³² Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 179, 221.

The enticing moment which describes the private room in the great hotel prior to the party is built up through anticipation and through absence. A blank page and a half precedes its placement as introduction to the middle section of the novel. This blankness is emptied further by the total absence of chatter; it is the only moment in the novel where no person is present. This is pure setting, but it is also set-up. For within the emptiness of this moment resounds an anticipatory silence; it is a moment created out of silence – a silence which clashes jarringly with the histrionic screaming which draws the previous chapter to a close:

“Io furiosa” she yelled “Isabella!”
A long wail in Italian was the answer.
“No don’t darling, I can smell it at last” Mr Pomfret laughed. “And it is going to be delicious.” (*N*, 80)

Mr Pomfret’s closing words stop the yelling and prepare us for the deliciousness of the silence to follow, as much as the jugged hare which he smells. All in preparation for “Philip’s twenty-firster”; or all in preparation for the anticipation of Philip’s twenty-firster, which will soon be superseded by the rather limp announcement of his engagement to Mary. This opening scene is one of silent expectation, where the anticipation creates tensions out of multiplying images of movements which somehow take place unseen:

Standing prepared, empty, curtained, shuttered, tall mirrors facing across laid tables crowned by napkins, with space rocketing transparence from one glass silvered surface to the other, supporting walls covered in olive coloured silk, chandeliers repeated to a thousand thousand profiles to be lost in olive gray depths as quiet as the room’s untenanted attention... here then time stood still for Jane, even in wine bottles over to one side holding the single movement, that unseen of bubbles rising just as the air, similarly trapped even if conditioned, watched unseen across itself in a superb but not indifferent pause of mirrors. (*N*, 82)

The anticipation creates a private, hidden (“curtained, shuttered”) space; it is both present and absent; it is empty, but simultaneously filled with the multiple tensions of

reflected transparencies which will ultimately “be lost in the olive gray depths as quiet as the room’s untenanted attention”. The reflections exist within the “space rocketing transparence” of the room, the bubbles rise in the wine bottles, but the unwitnessed scene, without any specific human presence or reaction, is like a text without a reader. The significance of the staging is rendered irrelevant by the “untenanted attention”.

The reader is drawn into an intensely lyrical build-up to what is ostensibly Philip’s twenty-first birthday party, but the anticipation overpowers the event itself. For the event is fragmented. On one level, it is made abundantly clear that this is more Jane’s party “to entertain old friends” than a celebration of Philip’s birthday. This uncertain shifting of emphasis is redirected again in Philip’s momentary upstaging of his mother, when he surprises everyone by announcing his engagement. But Philip rushes his moment (“he now started to speak very fast” [*N*, 107]) and empties the intensity of the announcement with an inappropriate cliché – “Mary and I thought now or never which is why we want to announce that we’re engaged” (*N*, 108) – only to be upstaged, again, by his mother:

as Mrs Weatherby took the young lady to her heart it must have seemed to most the finest thing they had ever seen, the epitome of how such moments should be, perfection in other words, the acme of manners. (*N*, 109)

The moment is seen as a show, an exemplary performance, where the exuberance of the audience’s response is undercut with irony: the marriage between Philip and Mary will never take place and it will be Jane who makes sure that it doesn’t. In another twist, Philip’s clichéd announcement becomes a direct sign of his present unsuitability for marriage, whilst Jane’s transcendence of the moment – “Mrs Weatherby was superb while she crossed the room afloat between one tall mirror and the other, a look of infinite humility on her proud features” (*N*, 108) – points directly to her own future

success. It is not just the process of staging an event, especially as the focus and nature of the event seems constantly to shift, which is important here; but the fact that the event is created by the response of its audience, in this case the guests of Mrs Weatherby and the readers of *Nothing*.

There are interesting parallels, here, with the work of the avant-garde American composer John Cage at this time. In 1950, Cage gave his own “Lecture on Nothing” at the Artists’ Club, in New York. There is an uncanny similarity with its rhythmic structuring and those of *Nothing* and *Doting*:

The “Lecture on Nothing,” then, serves as an explanation and demonstration of rhythmic structure by being written within such a structure. The structure used is of five parts with proportions {7, 6, 14, 14, 7}, or a total of forty-eight units of forty-eight measures each.³³

Then there is Cage’s famous composition, 4’33’’, which premiered in New York in 1952, but was first alluded to in his lecture, “A Composer’s Confessions”, given at Vassar College in 1948: “I have, for instance, several new desires... first, to compose a piece of uninterrupted silence”.³⁴ In describing 4’33’’ over twenty years later, Cage revealed what lay behind this emptiness:

It has three movements and in all of the movements there are no sounds. I wanted my work to be free of my own likes and dislikes, because I think music should be free of the feelings and ideas of the composer.³⁵

Green attests to a similar desire for authorial exclusion when he dismisses the notion of a novelist’s certainty:

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 sure?³⁶

³³ James Pritchett, *The Music of James Cage*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 56.

³⁴ Pritchett, *The Music of James Cage*, 59.

³⁵ John Cage, Quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with John Cage* (London: Routledge, 2003), 70.

³⁶ Green, “A Novelist to his Readers: I”, 139.

In what Donald Taylor refers to as the “final abdication of the determining, evaluative authorial role”,³⁷ Green relinquishes his prose to the reader: “to create life in the reader, it will be necessary for the dialogue to mean different things to different readers at one and the same time.”³⁸ This mirrors the emphasis Cage puts on his audience’s response. More specifically, Cage’s description of the audience’s reaction at the premiere of 4’33’’ can help to illuminate my own reading of Green’s notion of “untenanted attention” or “significant irrelevance”:

They [the audience] missed the point. There’s no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn’t know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began patterning the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out.³⁹

The role of the audience and the external context in creating the “accidental sounds”, which combine to make up the piece, resonate forcefully with the eventful non-event of Green’s passage. It is not the single, definable, anticipated event that deserves significance, but the uncertainty and unexpected nature of what might occur. The multiple resonances created by the anticipation of a certain moment, the unanticipated moments which follow and the subsequent absorption of those moments back into the flux of daily life hold more interest than the simpler satisfaction of expectations. It is impossible for nothing to happen.

The non-eventfulness, the “untenanted attention” of Green’s private room in *Nothing* opens itself up to the potentiality of a moment with the description of “one small seen movement”. This movement, once seen, fractures the stillness:

Into this waiting shivered one small seen movement that seemed to snap the room apart, a door handle turning.

³⁷ Donald Taylor, “Catalytic Rhetoric: Henry Green’s Theory of the Modern Novel” in *Criticism* 7 (Winter 1965): 82.

³⁸ Green, “A Novelist to his Readers: I”, 140.

³⁹ Cage, Quoted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing with John Cage*, 70.

Then with a cry unheard, sung now, unuttered then by hinges and which fled back to creation in those limitless centuries of staring glass, with a shriek only of silent motion the portals came ajar with as it were an unoperated clash of cymbal to usher Mrs Weatherby in, her fine head made tiny by the intrusion perhaps because she was alone, but upon which, as upon the rising swell of violas untouched by bows strung from none other than the manes of unicorns that quiet was ended, the room could gather itself up at last. (*N*, 82-3)

As Mrs Weatherby enters, the silence of the scene is destroyed yet simultaneously retained. There is an increasingly cacophonous accumulation of noises, each of which at its moment of sounding is immediately rendered silent: the “cry unheard, sung now, unuttered then”; “a shriek only of silent motion”; “an unoperated clash of cymbal”; “the rising swell of violas untouched by bows”. The outlandishness of “bows strung from... the manes of unicorns” serves to heighten the fantastical nature of the event itself, whilst the fact that the violas are untouched by these bows simultaneously negates the very possibility of its existence. This repeated process of attempted utterance followed by the immediate and emphatic negation of that potentially performative moment reveals a built-in undercutting of the singled-out moment. Mrs Weatherby – “perhaps because she was alone”⁴⁰ – cannot give this moment life; life arrives with the incoming guests and their mundane conversations. This is the only moment in either *Nothing* or *Doting* when a character is witnessed alone. It is, in this respect, a significant but empty moment.

What is consistent within Green’s set pieces is the overwhelming sense of insignificance which ultimately undercuts their initial significance. Moving on to the opening chapter of *Doting*, the “miracles of skill being spun out a few feet beneath” are “altogether ignored” (*D*, 8). Rather implausibly, the juggler has “a dozen [balls] chasing themselves up and down into his lazy-seeming hands”, and yet it is all to no

⁴⁰ Mrs Weatherby’s solitude is also reminiscent of when Mrs Dalloway is alone during her party. See chapter 5, 154.

applause. Equally absurd is the bathos of Mr Middleton's unimpressed response: "Well surely our Sicilians will find nothing to admire in this" (*D*, 7). And yet the text continues in its lyrical celebration of this act of juggling, by extending and elaborating upon the implausibility of the performer's feat, despite the fact that none of the party seems at all interested:

no less than the balancing of a billiard ivory ball on the juggler's chin, then a pint beer mug on top of that ball at the exact angle needed to cheat gravity, and at last the second ivory sphere which this man placed from a stick, or cue, to top all on the mug's handle: - the ball supporting a pint pot, then the pint pot the second ball until, unnoticed by our party, the man removed his chin and these separate objects fell, balls of ivory each to a hand, and the jug to a toe of his patent leather shoe where he let it hang and shine to a faint look of surprise, the artist. (*D*, 8)

In a state of breathless shock after the eventual completion of such a prolonged and incredulous feat, both the reader and the artist await some form of acknowledgement or response. The tumultuous applause never comes:

But in spite of all this and another roll of drums Miss Paynton insisted on asking Peter,
"D'you know Terence Shone at your place?"
"Who?" he said. "No one of that name!" (*D*, 8)

The moment, despite yet another call to attention by the second roll of the drums, passes, cut off by the beginning of yet another inconclusive and misleading conversation. For two lines later, Peter will admit that he is lying and that, in fact, he could not fail to know of Terence Shone, as he is the school Captain of Games. The juggler, the artist, is forgotten, quickly submerged back into the flux of ordinary, inconsequential chat. Until, that is, the penultimate page of the novel:

At this moment the dance music stopped, and the players walked off, except for a drummer. A curtain went up and onto the stage came the identical conjuror Peter had watched on the first night of his holidays.
"Oh God!" he said. (*D*, 251)

Second time around, the man – now more definitively recognised as a conjuror, someone who plays tricks on or deceives his audience – is robbed of his performance. The lyrical spectacle is noticeably absent, replaced by Peter's pettily blasphemous

outburst. An outburst which is not clearly interpretable: it could be a sign of his frustration that there has been no wrestling, as advertised, but it could also be totally unlinked to either spectacle, referring in fact to the return of Claire with a rather drunk Charles: “Claire reappeared with Charles Addinsell, holding the man tight by the arm. He did not say a word” (*D*, 251). In the context, it is uncertain whether it is Peter or Charles who does not say a word, even though it is more than likely that neither speaks. Here the fact that a word might have been spoken creates the “event” that no word was spoken and draws attention to the way all events are in the perception of them as such.

So why create a stylistically significant moment within an otherwise opaque text and then render that very moment empty? And why place these descriptive passages, passages which Green states he sought to keep to an “absolute minimum”, in such prominent positions? Both Stokes and Mengham see the opening and closing passages of *Nothing* as rather empty, nostalgic revisits of earlier motifs and earlier novels:

To me it [the opening passage of *Nothing*] seems a rather painful piece of self-imitation. So many of the familiar Green properties are here – “sad tears”, the “rose” fire, the light reflected in a thousand rain drops, “the huge eyes which the fire’s glow sowed with sparkling points of rose”. The things we have accepted in *Caught*, *Loving* and *Back* as fresh and vivid perceptions here seem stale and shop-soiled.⁴¹

The opening passage of *Nothing* is an elegant rigmarole of motifs borrowed from *Caught*, *Loving*, *Back*, and *Concluding*... Predictably, the text rounds itself off with a formal reciprocation, both of this material, and of what is episodically related to it in earlier texts... The undoubted pleasure which this writing brings is one of nostalgia, of recognition rather than of invention.⁴²

Green himself admits that he struggled with eliminating the descriptive passages from *Nothing* and *Doting* entirely – “Until *Nothing* and *Doting* I tried to establish the mood

⁴¹ Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green*, 219-20.

⁴² Mengham. *The Idiom of the Time*, 207-8.

of any scene by a few highly pointed descriptions. Since then I've tried to keep everything down to bare dialogue and found it very difficult."⁴³ But this does not explain the prominent positioning of such passages, where the "highly pointed descriptions" act to bookend the dialogic text, effectively introducing and completing it.

What becomes apparent on a fuller exploration of these descriptive spectacles is that they are more connected with, and potentially subordinate to, the mundane, platitudinous dialogues which take place between them. Critics writing on Green, thus far, have preferred to treat the descriptive passages and the dialogues as totally separate and counter-productive stylistic devices, placing more emphasis on the ornate prose event of descriptive passages rather than on the flux of dialogue. But the broad focus of this thesis is on the diversity and connectivity of Green's prose. It is possible to separate individual strands of the fugue created by Green's writing, but I argue that the power of Green's prose is in its openness to multiple readings and interpretation. Too long a focus on one strand threatens to offer a misleading sense of clarity. It is by looking at how Green interlaces these singular strands – whether the strand is a symbol (chapter 3), wartime trauma (chapter 6) or a dialogic structure – and exploring how these recognisable strands enmesh with and constantly reshape each other, that a much less tightly defined, connotatively energised, fugal whole is formed. When examined within the scope of this plurality, both dialogues and set-pieces of *Nothing* and *Doting* become more revelatory and innovative than they have thus far been given credit for.

⁴³ Green, "The Art of Fiction", 240.

The Everyday: “The next day they all went on very much the same.”

The set-pieces in *Nothing* and in *Doting* and their relationship with the carefully organised dialogic and episodic structure of the novels are, in many ways, similar to the ambivalent relationship between “*la fête*” and everyday life as discussed in the writings of the French philosopher, Henri Lefebvre, most especially in his *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947). Lefebvre sketches out a programme for “a critique of everyday life” which he sums up at the end of Volume I of his *Critique*:

human reality appears as an opposition and “contrast” between a certain number of terms: everyday life and festival – mass moments and exceptional moments – triviality and splendour – seriousness and play – reality and dreams, etc.

The critique of everyday life involves an investigation of the exact relations between these terms. It implies criticism of the trivial by the exceptional – but at the same time criticism of the exceptional by the trivial, of the “elite” by the mass – of festival, dreams, art and poetry, by reality.⁴⁴

This critical ambivalence found in Lefebvre’s critique, which is drawn through the opposition of certain terms, such as “everyday life and festival – mass moments and exceptional moments – triviality and splendour – seriousness and play”, could also be describing the frictions created within many of Green’s novels: the significance or irrelevance of the pigeon, for example, in *Living*; or the refusal in *Party Going* to commit to a meaningful or epiphanic moment; or the depths of darkness underlying the surface comedy of *Nothing* and *Doting*. What Lefebvre’s oppositional pairings offer to a reading of Green, though, is the notion of a simultaneous “criticism of the exceptional by the trivial” occurring alongside any implied “criticism of the trivial by the exceptional”. Here the traditional hierarchies are complicated. What might otherwise have been deemed insignificant (“*l’insignifiance*”), uneventful (“*sans événement*”) or unperceived/unnoticed (“*inaperçu*”) – features of Maurice Blanchot’s

⁴⁴ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2008), Vol. 1, 251.

“everyday”⁴⁵ – have as much critical importance as what might be considered exceptional.

Lefebvre takes the idea of the moment or the event, concepts which have historically been celebrated for their uniqueness, their epiphanic potential or their ability to stand outside the everyday, and places them within a more complex critical dynamic. At this early stage of Lefebvre’s thought on the everyday, this dynamic requires that the power of “*la fête*” be disabled:

Mystics and metaphysicians used to acknowledge that everything in life revolved around exceptional moments. In their view, life found expression and was concentrated in them. These moments were festivals: festivals of the mind or the heart, public or intimate festivals. In order to attack and mortally wound mysticism, it was necessary to show that in fact festivals had lost their meaning, the power they had in the days when all their magnificence came from life, and when life drew its magnificence from festivals.⁴⁶

But Lefebvre’s thinking about “*la fête*” alters over time. The second volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday* (1961), published fourteen years later, reveals this, as Lefebvre moves away from his initial drive to show that “festivals had lost their meaning” in order to follow a different aim: “The aim is not to let festivals die out or disappear beneath all that is prosaic in the world. It is to unite Festival with everyday life.”⁴⁷ This involves seeing the everyday as “doubly determined...: at one and the same time as unformed, and as what forms contain”: the “everyday is residual, [but] it also expresses itself as the product of forms.”⁴⁸ Lefebvre explores such a double determination by means of his “Theory of Moments”, which “derives from a need to organize, programme and structure

⁴⁵ Blanchot, *L’Entretien infini*, 364, 363, 361.

⁴⁶ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* 1 (1947), 250.

⁴⁷ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday* (1961), trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2008), Vol. 2, 348.

⁴⁸ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* 2 (1961), 64.

everyday life by transforming it according to its own tendencies and laws.”⁴⁹ It is this transformative, resistant nature of the structured “moment” (and its relation to the “situation”) within the everyday, where, for Lefebvre, the “brilliance” of Festival “lights up the sad hinterland of everyday dullness”, which came to figure so prominently in the revolutionary theories of the Situationist International.⁵⁰

The architecture or construction of “situations”, as established by Cobra (composed of the first letters of Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam) and then the Situationist International, had its foundations in Lefebvre’s concept of the “moment”. Certainly this is the clear assertion of Lefebvre himself in an interview with Kristin Ross in 1983. Lefebvre deals with the relationship between his “moment” and the “situation” of the SI directly, if rather vaguely:

KR: Did the situationist theory of constructing situations have a direct relationship with your theory of “moments”?

HL: Yes, that was the basis of our understanding. They more or less said to me during discussions – discussions that lasted whole nights – “What you call ‘moments,’ we call ‘situations,’ but we’re taking it farther than you. You accept as ‘moments’ everything that has occurred in the course of history: love, poetry, thought. We want to create new moments.”⁵¹

But Lefebvre is much clearer and more persuasive when he discusses the impact of *Critique* on Cobra and, more specifically, Constant Nieuwenhuys:

HL: In 1953 Constant published a text called “*Pour une architecture de situation.*” This was a fundamental text based on the idea that architecture would allow a transformation of daily reality. This was the connection with

⁴⁹ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life 2* (1961), 343. Lefebvre sees the “moment” as “an individual and freely celebrated festival” (348) and his theory of moments “conceives of a twofold critical and totalizing experience, and of a ‘programmatic’ which would not be reduced to a dogmatism or a pure problematic: the uniting of the Moment and the everyday, of poetry and all that is prosaic in the world, in short, of Festival and ordinary life, on a higher plane than anything which has hitherto been accomplished” (349).

⁵⁰ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life 2* (1961), 356. There is a section within “The Theory of Moments” where Lefebvre “attempt(s) to define the relation between the moment and the situation” (352). Moore’s note to his translation states that the differences between Lefebvre’s “Theory of Moments” and “the theory of situations developed by Debord in the *Internationale situationniste*... led to the intellectual rift between the two men in the 1960s” (*n. 1*, 370).

⁵¹ Kristin Ross, “Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview” in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 271.

Critique de la vie quotidienne: to create an architecture that would itself instigate the creation of new situations.⁵²

It was a further four years before Guy Debord produced his “Report on the Construction of Situations” in which he described what he believed would be the essential purpose of Situationist International:

Our central purpose is the construction of situations, that is, the concrete construction of temporary settings [momentary ambiances] of life and their transformation into a higher, passionate [superior, passional] nature.⁵³

It is interesting to note Debord’s potentially incongruous juxtaposing of “concrete constructions” with “temporary settings” or “momentary ambiances”. Such juxtapositions resemble Green’s prominent placement of lyrically heightened descriptions of stand-alone events (“concrete constructions”) in the midst of constantly flowing, everyday platitudinous dialogue (“temporary settings”) in *Nothing and Doting*. Such comparisons create an even greater resonance with Debord’s later, famous work, *La Société du spectacle* (1967). “The spectacle”, according to Debord, “corresponds to the historical moment at which commodity completes its colonization of social life”, as such it is to be fought against and opposed. The spectacle, Debord states in Thesis 18 of the same text, “is the opposite of dialogue.”⁵⁴ Green’s extensive use of dialogue in *Nothing and Doting* and his complete oeuvre’s grappling with the shifting permutations of “the insignificant signified”,⁵⁵ although not consciously political in the Marxist tradition of Lefebvre and Debord, reveal a line of

⁵² Ross, “Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview”, 269. See also Michel Trebitsch’s “Preface” in *Critique of Everyday Life 1* (1947), xxvii: “In fact we need perhaps to go back here to 1948, when the Cobra group was founded, and to Constant, whose manifesto for an architecture of situations was explicitly inspired by *Critique of Everyday Life*.”

⁵³ Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency” (1957) in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, 44. [Bracketed glosses are from the *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 22.]

⁵⁴ “Thesis 42” in Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 29 and “Thesis 18”, 17.

⁵⁵ Raoul Vaniegem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Left Bank Books and Rebel Press, 1983), 11. The original text by Vaniegem, *Traité de savoir-faire à l’usage des jeunes generations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967) was published in the same month as Debord’s, *La Société du spectacle*.

experimentation which would continue for decades after him in these, and later, thoughts about the everyday.⁵⁶

Both *Nothing* and *Doting* are dominated by the friction of marriage as an extraordinary, one-off event and by its continuity: by the ceremonial, individualised moment of getting married and the repetitive, day-to-day involved in the state of being married.⁵⁷ In the opening pages of *Nothing*, the ceremony of marriage as performance or act is emphasised by the retelling of a mock ceremony which occurred “the previous Sunday” (already a day that is “doubly determined”)⁵⁸ between John Pomfret, a forty-five-year-old widower, and Penelope, the six-year-old daughter of his friend and ex-lover, Jane Weatherby:

“Then you’re to be married” Jane had cried and so it was he realised, as he now told Miss Jennings, that the veil of window muslin twisted in a mist on top of the child’s head to fall to dark snow at her heels, with the book pressed between two white palms in supplication, in adorable humility, that all this spelled marriage, heralded a bride without music by firelight, a black mouth trembling mischief and eyes, huge in one so young, which the fire’s glow sowed with sparkling points of rose. (*N*, 1-2)

The fact that this childish game or act is reported back in indirect speech (“as he now told Miss Jennings”) emphasises its distance from the flux of “daily lived experience”: it is the retelling of a performance of a performance. This story, selected in order to be

⁵⁶ See Barthes, “The Reality Effect” (1967) in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). In this essay, Barthes asks the question: “Is everything in narrative significant, and if not, if insignificant stretches subsist in the narrative syntagm, what is ultimately, so to speak, the significance of this insignificance?”

⁵⁷ This distinction between extraordinary moments and daily lived experience is detailed again in the introduction of Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: From Modernity to Modernism (A Metaphilosophy of Daily Life)* (1981), trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2005), Vol. 3, 14: “There was a distinction, but not a division; although it was distinct from daily life, the Festival – its preparation, its celebration, and the traces and memories it left behind – was never far off. Nor was the supernatural, or the extraordinary dimension of the ordinary. Rather than fragmenting it, the time of festivals doubled everyday time.”

⁵⁸ “Oh don’t mention Sunday darling please, that brings up tomorrow, our all inevitably going back to work. Why it’s too despairing,” and his voice rose, “too too awful” and he flapped both hands, “like a dip into the future, every hope gone, endless work, work, work!” (*N*, 6).

retold, bristles with multiple, possible significances.⁵⁹ The question of age difference, for example, is exaggeratedly sent up in the mock ceremony of Penelope and John's marriage. But it is more than possible that Jane's introduction of the topic of marriage to Penelope ("Then you're to be married") is carefully positioned to remind John of the age difference between himself and Liz,⁶⁰ to whom he might realistically propose, and consequently to set herself up as more suitable marriage material.

The context of the mock ceremony's retelling also reveals a host of other significances, which are released further by the conversations which follow. Thus, the event of John's proposal to Penelope, as a "form", in Lefebvre's terms, becomes submerged back into the product of that form, back into the flux of daily lived experience as *résidu*. This creates a dynamic synergy between the descriptive passage of the remembered event and future linked conversations, which gives a depth of resonance to what might initially come across as thoughtless asides. There are, for example, the repeated comments made by Liz Jennings on the subject of marriage later in the same chapter:

"Oh I'm too old" she muttered. "No one will marry me now."
"Please Liz don't!" he protested. "In your heart of hearts you know you will."
"But I'm over twenty nine John." (N, 8)

"Haven't I already told you? It's too late, I'm too old" she wailed in a bright voice.
He reached across and laid his hand over hers on top of the white table cloth. Her nails were scarlet. He stroked the bare ring finger.
"I know it's all finished between us where you're concerned but it isn't for me" she said quite cheerfully.
"Good heavens what nonsense you can talk" he replied in tones as clear as the skin of their two hands and the gold scrolls on the coffee cups. (N, 10)

⁵⁹ See Green, "A Novelist to his Readers: I", 139-40: "the moment anything happens which is worth while – you could say memorable – one goes over it verbally after, and because conversation comes into almost any experience, in going over it one adds favourable interpretations, favourable to oneself, which colour and falsify the account one gives... What *actually* may have happened probably lies somewhere, east or west, of what one is told of an experience."

⁶⁰ The text itself certainly suggests that John is in the process of making this link: "and so it was he realised, as he now told Miss Jennings".

John's clichéd response to Liz's first muttered complaint ("in your heart of hearts you know you will") doesn't tell us anything in and of itself; for John it is a "social lubricant" at an awkward moment.⁶¹

But this ostensibly phatic protest does more than fill in time and aural space; it is not, by means of its clichéd status, simply voided of all "heuristic and semantic pith".⁶² In fact, the clichés resonate with a particular heuristic density when looked at as part of a contextual accumulation of John's (and Liz's) unspoken fears. Throughout this opening chapter, John is continually seeking reassurance from Liz that he hasn't behaved indecently in acting out a marriage with this vulnerable young girl:

"But look here Liz you can't think it was indecent can you now?"
"Not a very nice thing after all."
"But I couldn't tell how she would react to sitting on my knee could I?"
"You should never have married her."
"Yes but Liz she didn't once in practice settle on my knee."
"That's not the point dear." (N, 4)⁶³

John is not sure how he feels about the retrospectively tawdry-seeming mock ceremony, nor do Liz's responses give him a great deal of reassurance.⁶⁴ On a host of oblique levels, then, both John and Liz (with the percipient insistence of Jane) are playing out fears over the appropriateness of their own relationship. The clichés should not, therefore, be dismissed as necessarily thoughtless or inauthentic

⁶¹ Nicholas Bagnall, *A Defence of Cliché* (London: Constable, 1985), 117.

⁶² Anton C. Zijderveld, *On Clichés: The Supersedure of Meaning by Function in Modernity* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 11.

⁶³ See also: "Liz do say you don't think it was dreadful of me!" (N, 4); "Then do you think I played Penelope a dirty trick?" (N, 8); and also Jane's reference to the wedding episode: "'Oh weren't you wicked! I suppose he's confessed to you Liz? Isn't it simply unbelievable!' But she was smiling with great good-nature" (N, 5).

⁶⁴ See also "'Oh my dear' she gasped 'you should never be allowed to play with small children. Particularly not little girls!'" (N, 2). This theme is revisited in *Doting*, too, with Arthur Middleton's memory of inappropriately grabbing Annabel Paynton's ankle when she was six: "'I'm allergic to children if you want to know.' 'You mustn't even pretend you are about your Peter.' 'I am with little girls' he said in a satisfied voice" (D, 52).

repetitions, but rather looked at as more oblique, non-representational tools of analysis.

Cliché and Repetition

The rituals of social convention and the reliance upon insubstantial cliché, particularly at times of emotional intensity, momentarily highlight the unspoken; where the phatic lubrication of a cliché is relied upon to articulate a silence. There are many such moments of intensity in *Nothing* and *Doting*, when the conversation avoids direct confrontation of an issue by smattering cliché around the edges. The issue itself is judged too tender to broach head-on; it is never articulated. Instead it is suggested, insinuated and hinted at until it begins to gain an indistinct outlining shape. We see this in the dealings of Liz Jennings and Richard Abbott. Richard is the most eager to avoid confrontation and consequently relies heavily on cliché to avoid it; Liz counters this with an oblique, cliché-ridden approach herself, opening Richard's eyes to the complexity of the situation:

“Oh come now Richard you aren't going to say ‘mountains out of molehills’, not as late in the day as this surely?”

“I could.”

“But don't you see what's going on under your very own nose?” she goodhumouredly demanded.

“Cheer up” he said. “It needn't happen.”

“And shan't if I have anything to do with things. I used to love old John. I can't bear to stand by and see him ruined.”

Mr Abbott's eyes widened. He watched the woman with plain amazement and some cunning. (*N*, 189)

This cliché-ridden dialogue builds on its platitudes, until both characters seem to accrue new dimensions. Richard is empowered with an unexpected cunning and Liz with the sagacity to make her demands to Richard with good humour; yet they have said nothing in particular. This is reinforced a few pages later. Nothing has been said and done and yet there is a sense that everything has been said and done:

As she straightened the heavy folds he came behind, turned her with a hand on her shoulder and kissed the woman hard on the lips.

“Here” she cried drawing back. “What’s this?”

“Oh nothing Liz.”

“I like that after all we’ve discussed.” She gaily laughed. “Anyone would think you’d taken our little gossip seriously.”

“Must have been this excellent meal you’ve just given us” he grumbled in a goodhumoured voice. (*N*, 204)

Richard acts with an unusual daring and conviction here, only to revert to a platitude about the food. We could argue that nothing has changed, but we could also argue the opposite.

But the cliché is not the only tool; it works in partnership with the reflexive function of Green’s imagery and language, too. Jane’s persistence, for example, rears up again, on an imagistic level, at the end of the first and beginning of the second chapter. Liz’s scarlet nails and the “tones” of John’s earlier reply – described “as clear as the skin of their two hands and the gold scrolls of coffee cups” (*N*, 10) – are revisited a page later:

Reaching across she laid her hand over his on the white table cloth. Her nails were scarlet. She gently scratched the skin by his thumbnail. Gold scrolls over white soup plates sparkled clear in the Park’s sun without. (*N*, 11)

This time, though, the people have changed: now the nails belong to Jane Weatherby and the clarity suggested by the earlier skin is replaced by the gentle scratching of the skin around Dick Abbott’s thumbnail. The language has remained the same – a repeated, quasi-clichéd formulation – which is brought to life by the constant interchanging of the characters. The language is static; it is the people shifting places behind the repetitive linguistic forms which seek to create life for the reader:

Now if it cannot be the purpose of the novelist to create in his books a life in the reader which cannot eat, drink or procreate, but which can die; and if the arrangement of words and the “placing” of his characters are the only means whereby he can do this, then the superimposing of one scene on another, or

the telescoping of two scenes into one, are methods which the novelist is bound to adopt in order to obtain substance and depth.⁶⁵

A reflective function of this kind occurs on the part of the mock ceremony, which creates through its various forms of retelling a distorting and faceted mirror on events. On one level, the mock ceremony reminds the reader of the inserted story “From the Souvenirs du Madame DE CREQUY” in *Back*⁶⁶ – the significance of which completely passes Charley by as insignificant (the significant has been unsignified); on another level, the mock ceremony reappears in different guises and accumulates nuances and uncertainties within the text of *Nothing*. Take, as an example, when Jane Weatherby

changed course, made her way between the tables to kiss Liz, to lay with a look of mischief and delight between John’s two palms a white hand which he pressed as had her own child the imaginary psalter. (*N*, 4)

It is not just the pressed hands which consciously draw to mind the mock ceremony. On a more subtle, associative level, Jane’s look of mischief resonates with Penelope’s “black mouth trembling mischief and eyes, huge in one so young, which the fire’s glow sowed with sparkling points of rose” in John’s indirectly descriptive retelling of that moment. Penelope’s eyes are not actually described as containing “a look of mischief and delight” in the way that Jane’s are, but the links between them are patently present in the juxtaposition of eyes and mouths. These indirect links become interwoven on a more complex reflexive level, both within the accumulations of *Nothing*, but also in the retrospective extensions carried out in *Doting*.

⁶⁵ Green, “A Novelist to his Readers: II”, 145.

⁶⁶ See Green, *Back*, 91.

“Nothing happens, twice”

Within *Nothing*, the opening descriptive scene of the novel is picked up and reflected back with variations in the very last scene. The reflexive motifs are numerous, but the scene has become more direct; our knowledge and understanding of the characters seemingly increased by “an aggregate of words over a period”.⁶⁷ In the opening scene John describes the previous Sunday to Liz:

It was wet then, did she remember he was saying, so unlike this he said, and turned his face to the dazzle of window, it had been dark with sad tears on the panes and streets of blue canals as he sat by her fire for Jane liked dusk, would not turn on the lights until she couldn't see to move, while outside a single street lamp was yellow, reflected over a thousand rain drops on the glass, the fire was rose, and Penelope came in. (*N*, 1)

But in the closing scene, it is Jane and John together, undisturbed by reflection or extra impinging contexts:

It was dusk and as they were seated next each other on the sofa, his arm around her shoulders while she held his free hand moist in both of hers; as the fire glowed a powerful rose and it rained outside so that drops on the dark panes, which were a deep blue of ink, by reflection left small snails' tracks across and down the glass in rose, for Mrs Weatherby had not drawn the curtains; as he could outline her heavy head laid next his only a soft blur with darker hair over her great eye... and, because he was nearest to this living pile of coals in the grate, he could see into this eye, into the two transparencies which veiled it, down to that last surface which at three separate points glowed with the fire's same rose. (*N*, 244)

In the later passage the “sad tears” have gone; the “thousand rain drops” combining to form the more unified, if delicately inconsequential, “small snails' tracks”. John's conflict of interest with Liz is no longer present. In the literal sense, Liz is not there, but also in the emotional sense, as the previous chapter ended with Richard and Liz having spent the night together – “and next morning she seemed entirely jubilant.” (*N*, 244)

⁶⁷ Green, “A Novelist to his Readers: II”, 141.

This increased directness, however, cannot be construed as stable or certain. Liz only “seemed” entirely jubilant and there are still awkward reminders of Penelope haunting the scene. Although Penelope is physically absent from the scene, the moist free hand held by Jane “in both of hers” is a clammy reminder of her earlier supplicant palms, whilst her “eyes...which the fire’s glow sowed with sparkling points of rose” are subliminally present in those of Mrs Weatherby “which at three separate points glowed with the fire’s same rose”. This awkward uncertainty over the presence of Penelope is picked up on the last page of the novel where John misunderstands Jane’s intention of sending Penelope away to boarding school:

“Now just when she’s going to have a stepfather you speak of sending her off to ah...” and he yawned yet once more “to one of those sleeping places, how d’you call ’em...” and he came to an end.
“Boarding schools” she gently prompted.
“Yes...thick ankles...hockey, Jane.”
“Oh no the poor angel, then I’d never allow it” the mother protested comfortably but with a trifle more animation.
“There you are...” he mumbled. “Always knew you couldn’t send her away...when things came to the point.”
“Oh no” she quietly said “I’d stop her playing those games at school then.”
“Expect you know best” he commented, yawning a last time. (*N*, 246-7)

It is a humorous and disconcerting conversation which picks up on and negates the certainty of an earlier description:

They had been talking by fits and starts, not so much in reply to one another as to make peaceful barely related statements which had advanced very little what they presumably meant by everything they said because they now seemed in all things to agree, in comfort in quiet and rest. (*N*, 245)

The silent acquiescence and comfortable agreement which lie beneath John and Jane’s “barely related statements” – the deeper, somehow fuller sense of their sub-linguistic communication; the solidity of their intended marriage – is rendered less convincing in light of the confusion over Penelope. The reflexive functioning within the text, the repetition and variation of a literal or a linguistic scene, becomes a subversive force rendering the initially familiar surface increasingly slippery and uncertain. This repeated slippage of our understanding of the text, whereby clichés might be imbued

with an unexpected directness of meaning or long-anticipated events come to nothing, continues in *Doting*'s repetition of *Nothing*.

It is, for many, a repetition too far. Rod Mengham, as already cited, finds that “there is almost nothing to read for in *Doting*.” The goose, prominent on the opening page of Green’s novel – “several weeks later, he was to carry a goose under one arm, its dead beak almost trailing the platform” (*D*, 1) – is, for Mengham, symbolic of Green’s thoughtless reversion to empty reflexive techniques. Nor is it possible to dismiss such a criticism without careful scrutiny. For this goose, with its connotations of *Party Going*'s dead pigeon (and also, though unremarked by Mengham, of Ted, the perceptive goose in *Concluding*) never exists within the present of the text. The goose’s moment of being within *Doting* is removed of all vitality: its future, promised appearance (“several weeks later”) occurs the day after the novel finishes. It is not referred to again in the novel. Add to this the fact that at the time of the goose’s non-appearance, it will already be dead. But – and this is the crucial paradox – the oblique reference to the future dead goose does attest to its life and presence in the text’s moment of outward reference; in absence the goose is given life. This confronts a complication which lies at the heart of Green’s oblique approach to the everyday and his fascination with significant irrelevance: there is a great deal to read for in *Doting*, but it is often unstated. This draws attention to the potentially apophatic nature of Green’s last novel. For it is truer to say, with Treglown, that “nothing much happens in *Doting*” – in fact, in a pairing with *Nothing* it is possible to argue that “nothing happens, twice”.⁶⁸ But this does not need to suggest a “failing”, as it does for Mengham. Rather, for Treglown, it draws attention to the theme of “continuity” in

⁶⁸ Vivian Mercier’s review of *Waiting for Godot*, “The Uneventful Event” describes it as: “a play in which nothing happens, *twice*.” See Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 74. The review was originally published in *Irish Times*, 18 February 1956.

Green's fiction: "especially in the negative sense that most of the drama in most people's lives fail to transform anything".⁶⁹ The dramatic moments in *Nothing* and *Doting* change nothing; their very existence as moments which can or should be reflected upon is thrown into doubt. For if we draw attention to the significance of an irrelevance, doesn't that form of attention transform the irrelevance into something relevant? It is this paradox which is familiar to thinkers about the everyday – "*Rien ne se passe, voilà le quotidien*" (Nothing happens; this is the everyday)⁷⁰ – but which is also central to the experience of reading Henry Green and particularly his last two novels.

Nothing and *Doting*, building on the work of *Party Going* and its foregrounding of the backdrop, remove the transformative nature of individual events or moments by submerging them back into the everyday flow of thoughtless routine and platitudinous dialogue. Take Mary and Philip, in *Nothing*; even after their engagement they are in the same pub in Knightsbridge, following the same routine:

Their becoming engaged to be married had not made the smallest difference in either's manner or appearance. As usual they sat over two light ales and, when they talked, spoke for a time in asides to one another.
"You know my blue hat darling?" she asked.
"Which one?" he vaguely said.
Mary gave a short technical description.
"Well I might" he admitted but did not seem as if he could. (*N*, 139)

Though they are conversing, there is rarely any sense of connection or spark in their conversations; in fact, they speak in asides which meekly fade out, hitting nothing directly. Nothing is clarified; nothing is stable; nothing happens. Philip admits that he "might" know the hat, but the conditional tense suggests that the opposite is an equally plausible assumption.

⁶⁹ Treglown, *Romancing*, 217.

⁷⁰ Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 360; *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), 241.

Something similar occurs on the very night of their engagement, when Philip and Mary are out dancing. It is a moment of culmination, made more intense by the fact that they have “made good their escape” (*N*, 122) and are at last alone, albeit in a nightclub. Once they are on the dance-floor Philip asks Mary whether she feels any better. What follows typifies much of what I have been discussing:

“I say” he said “you do feel better now, you must?”
“I think so, yes.”
“Can’t you find out yes or no?”
“But no one can. First something inside says everything is fine” she wailed “and the next moment it tells you that something which overshadows everything else is very bad just like an avalanche!”
“I’m so sorry” he said. “I truly am.” (*N*, 124)

Philip is keen to get a straight, unequivocal answer about the state of Mary’s emotional wellbeing; hence the “yes or no” question. This only exasperates Mary and she wails her response. It is rare for Green to insert such an emotive verb to describe the way in which Mary responds; it belies a narratorial slant which he was keen to avoid: the writer, he says, “has no business with the story he is writing.”⁷¹ To assert, then, that Mary “wailed” is particularly powerful. This moment points to the impossibility of finding resolution or clarity. It is exasperating for both Philip and Mary. However, this outburst, although resolving nothing, does at least momentarily seem to bring the two closer than they have ever been: “They danced again and again until, as the long night went on they had got into a state of unthinking happiness perhaps” (*N*, 124). Nothing is certain, the “perhaps” assures us. Their happiness is based upon a rhythmically-induced thoughtlessness; it is suggested, rather than ascertained. The marriage will not, ultimately, take place, but the placement of this passage exactly halfway through the novel, and the specific directions on Green’s manuscript to “leave a whole half page blank, please”, create a carefully

⁷¹ Green, “A Novelist to his Readers: I”, 139.

choreographed moment of silence for the reader⁷² – a moment of silence in which the modifier hangs, along with the reader, in undecided anticipation. Philip and Mary’s marriage might never happen, but this moment of “unthinking happiness” will always linger in the absence of this possible, unfulfilled outcome.

Doting goes on to reduce the number of descriptive passages further than even *Nothing* manages and continues the process of swamping any potential moment with the instability of iterable cliché and ritual. The repeated conversational gambits and the mirroring of scenes in *Doting* themselves act as clichés reiterated in different contexts; each theme and its minute variations offers another angle of obliqueness from which to view the shifting whole. There is nothing constant about the marriage of Arthur and Diana Middleton: Arthur makes approaches to Annabel Paynton, a girl twenty-five years younger than him, whilst Diana veers closer and closer to an affair with Arthur’s best friend, Charles Addinsell. Yet throughout this inconstancy, the familiar routines are fulfilled: the smaller, defining routines played out in the scenes with Annabel and her confidante, Claire Belaine, for example, which regularly take place over a light ale at the pub near the office; or the fact that Diana and Arthur routinely end their scenes in bed together. In themselves, these quotidian routines might go by unnoticed.

When there is a slight shift in the routine, though, when the cliché is manipulated due to a contextual variation at its moment of repetition, the text offers a

⁷² Treglown notes that “Green’s manuscript asked for a minor interval here: ‘Leave a whole half page blank please’... In a pattern so artificial, it is noticeable that this sentence – the apex of Philip and Mary’s relationship, and the point at which so many of the novel’s doubts are simply gathered – comes exactly halfway through the novel.” Treglown, *Romancing*, 201. See also 301, n. 65: “To be precise, halfway down p. 124. The book ends on p. 247.”

more “habitable” space for interpretative potential.⁷³ The relationship between Annabel and Claire, for example, begins to break down as soon as the formulaic structure of their meetings alters. Once another individual enters the equation, in the shape of Charles Addinsell, and their points of contact extend past the pub and the office, their “understanding” of each other dissolves. The ritual does not hold. For Diana and Arthur, though, the ritual is flexible and strong enough to alter slightly and their (nineteen years of) marriage benefits from these variations. In their first two scenes, Arthur comes to bed after Diana, they converse briefly and sleepily, and Arthur falls asleep. If we compare the episodes, the ritual is virtually identical. The first time Diana tells him she loves him:

“You must go to sleep now, you’re tired. Yes, you must. Go to sleep. Oh you’ll never know how much I love you.”
He snored.
“There, sleep darling” she murmured, she yawned. (*D*, 21)

Her declarations are affected by the timing of his sleep and by her own yawning. The second time, Arthur is able to stay awake long enough to tell Di that he loves her:

“I love you” he murmured, shutting his eyes.
She put a lazy arm warm across his throat. He laid a heavy fist over her legs.
“There, sleep my darling” she mumbled.
And in a moment or two he snored. (*D*, 41)

There is no love-making or any intimation of love-making in either of these scenes. As the novel progresses, Arthur is seen to be more eager to sleep with Annabel than Diana, the thought of which drives Diana dangerously close to sleeping with Charles. So close, in fact, that her aborted liaison with Charles is echoed when finally we witness Arthur and Diana on their way to bed together. With Charles:

He put his mouth close to her ear.
“Let’s go upstairs” he suggested, in a flat voice.
“But, my dear” she objected “you’re all on the one floor in this place!”
“Next door” he levelly corrected.

⁷³ See Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), xxi: “The thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces. A different world (the reader’s) slips into the author’s place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment.”

She pecked a kiss at him.
“No Charles. Two wrongs don’t make a right, do they?” (*D*, 101)

Charles’s verbal slip here gives Diana the upper hand and she resorts to the cliché to slip out of an increasingly precarious situation. Later, though, under different circumstances, the same verbal slip is modified and results in a different outcome:

“Darling” she next said to her husband. “You don’t have to work tonight, do you? Let’s go up now.”
“Go up?” Mr Middleton laughed. “We’re all on one floor here, you know.”
She turned. She kissed him on the lips and took her time.
“Silly” she said smiling. “Well, all right then! Next door.” (*D*, 117-8)

The echoes are multiple. The silence after “she turned”, drawn out by the staccato of the sudden full stop, is loaded. The text slides into slow motion as we witness Diana take her time. The previous scene with Charles is vividly present to Diana and to us, but Arthur is unaware of and oblivious to its existence, except obliquely; the absent presence of Diana’s near infidelity adds a frisson and sexual energy which momentarily breaks their nightly routine, Arthur will not work tonight. But this modulation of the nightly routine does not necessarily threaten the routine itself; in fact the promise of connubial sex could even act to strengthen the stability of such a routine through its very variation of it.

In *Doting*, perhaps even more than in *Nothing*, this sense of absence, and the impact of the presence of that absence, becomes centralised.⁷⁴ The structure of the novel forms itself around the presence of Arthur and Diana Middleton’s son, Peter. It opens with the ritual of dinner out on the first night of Peter’s school holidays and ends with the same ritual on the last night. However, in this context, Peter’s absences through most of the novel are notable. His first absence, due to “a taxi smash” (*D*, 76),

⁷⁴ *Nothing* is similar in that it pushes the centrality of events – Philip’s twenty-first or Philip and Mary’s marriage – to the margins, in *Doting* it is the central character.

is the reason that Arthur is caught by his wife with Peter's holiday dinner date, Annabel Paynton. Once discharged from hospital, Arthur and Di treat him "as though he were back from the dead" (*D*, 91); and yet, moments later, it is decided that Philip should visit his Uncle Dick for a spot of fishing – "he journeyed up alone the next day" (*D*, 93); from which he does not return until the penultimate night of his holidays (*D*, 226). Although we regularly hear tales of Peter's fishing exploits – "he's caught a fish"; "a fifteen pounder"; "his first salmon" (*D*, 117); "he's caught three fish" (*D*, 161); "he's already got four fish" (*D*, 171); "now let me tell you about his last fish. It took all of three quarters of an hour to land..." (*D*, 181); "that makes twelve in all" (*D*, 227) – these occurrences take place away from the main story; in the reported, indirect impact on the actions of those reading or hearing about them. As the purported centrepiece of Arthur and Diana's lives and of the novel itself, Peter is significant for his frequent absences.⁷⁵

This chapter has looked at how the ordinary nature of the cliché-ridden dialogue in *Nothing* and *Doting* and their uneventful plotlines, which follow the repetition of rituals and routines, can lull the reader into a frustrated apathy. Liesl Olson, in *Modernism and the Ordinary*, warns that:

ordinariness allows for a reader's own affective disinterest: the great risk that modernist literature takes is to bore its readers, pulling us into the very ordinariness that the text represents and embodies.⁷⁶

It is my contention that these last two novels work together in the subtlest of ways to reward the reader for paying attention to that very ordinariness. There is a converse

⁷⁵ Peter's significance is drawn into question, again, by Bassoff's analysis of the St Peter theme, which Mengham quotes at length. See Bassoff, 116, where he suggests that "this evocation of... a priggish and ineffectual Simon Peter is rather a heavy joke which undermines the delicate farce of the book." See Mengham, 211: "Even more insouciant is *Doting's* aggravation of a St Peter theme: an unrewarding obduracy, expertly compassed by Bruce Bassoff".

⁷⁶ Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 6.

risk, though, that in paying direct attention to the ordinary, to the everyday, one removes what makes it ordinary and renders it literary or extraordinary. It is for this reason that Henry Green's oblique approach is so applicable to thoughts about the everyday. Rather than focus directly on what Roland Barthes would later describe as "the singularity of description (or of the 'useless detail') in narrative fabric, its isolated situation,"⁷⁷ Green's events and moments, as the quoted examples have shown, are constantly absented of their eventfulness, their singularity as event, and are quickly subsumed within the multiplicities of dialogue, repetition, cliché and daily life.

This removal of the significant event or description to relay the constant flux and dialogue of the everyday does more than simply run the risk of boredom:

Boredom is the everyday become manifest: consequently, the everyday after it has lost its essential – constitutive – trait of being unperceived. Thus the everyday always sends us back to that inapparent and nonetheless unconcealed part of existence that is insignificant because it remains always to the hither side of what signifies it; silent, but with a silence that has already dissipated as soon as we keep still in order to hear it and that we hear better in idle chatter, in the unspeaking speech that is the soft human murmuring in us and around us.⁷⁸

So, in contrast to the majority of critics who have claimed that the clichéd dialogue and repetition of *Nothing* and *Doting* are boring and self-parodic failings, I feel that the potential for boredom or repetition to represent what is *inaperçu*, that which has already escaped, in these last two novels offers up a more fully realistic sense of the ambivalence of the everyday. The attention of literature takes from the everyday "its essential – constitutive – trait of being unperceived." Green's last two novels, especially, play with notions of what is perceived and what passes by unnoticed, what is considered significant or insignificant, relevant or irrelevant: Green provides the

⁷⁷ Barthes, "The Reality Effect" (1967), 143.

⁷⁸ Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 242.

backdrop of the everyday with its potential for the event and its potential for boredom. The reader experiences the indeterminacy of the everyday throughout Green's fiction. In it nothing is seen to require particular emphasis. Everything is experienced indirectly. For although the novelist must select his material, the understated comedy of Green's fiction lies in its constant sensitivity to life's uncertainties: "And if the novel is alive of course the reader will be irritated by discrepancies – life, after all, is one discrepancy after another."⁷⁹ In Green's last two novels the reader experiences the backdrop of the everyday, what often passes us by as unnoticed, insignificant and uneventful; it is up to us what we make of it.

⁷⁹ Green, "The Art of Fiction", 244-5.

Conclusion

Creative advance in our age is in prose fiction – the novels of Henry Green, for instance.

T. S. Eliot¹

Interest in and acclaim for Henry Green and his writing have seesawed in the years since 1953, when T. S. Eliot made this statement to John Lehmann in a *New York Times Book Review* interview. Over the last ten years, though, it could be argued that Green and his novels have gradually secured a more stable position within literary history. Such a claim is bolstered by the publication, in 2000, of Jeremy Treglown's impressive biography of Green and by the recent publication of *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists* in 2009, which includes Green in its list of twenty-seven "of the most celebrated and enduring novelists from the British Isles".² Treglown prefaces *Romancing* with the modest suggestion that "a life of Henry Green was needed, but so, now, is another one."³ Since then, although another biography has not appeared, each of the novels has been reissued at least once and a constant stream of articles, chapters and essays has been published.⁴ The most inspiring of these recent publications, for enthusiasts of Green, is the *Companion to English Novelists*, which places his "less familiar" work within "a strong developing

¹ T. S. Eliot, Quoted in John Lehmann, "T. S. Eliot Talks About Himself and the Drive to Create", *New York Times Book Review*, 29 November 1953: 5.

² Adrian Poole, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), i.

³ Treglown, *Romancing*, ix.

⁴ This includes a monograph and two separate chapters in 2009 alone. See MacDermott, *A Convergence of the Creative and the Critical*; Julia Jordan, "'Swear to tell me everything that goes wrong': Henry Green and Free Will in the Novel" in *Chance and the Modern British Novel: From Henry Green to Iris Murdoch* (London: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 2010), 35-65; and Bharat Tandon, "Henry Green" in *Companion to English Novelists*, ed. Adrian Poole, 393-406.

tradition of the writing of fictional prose over the past three hundred years.”⁵ Almost sixty years after T. S. Eliot’s rarely quoted praise, Green’s novels are accumulating a wider audience and a more consistent level of appreciation.

My thesis has sought to strengthen this wider reception of Green’s novels by focusing on the potential for multiple rather than single readings within the writing’s indirectness and indeterminacy. It has traced some (for, such is the nature of the writing, there will always be more) of this rewarding potentiality in the earliest short stories and in the later dialogic novels, as well as in the more renowned 1940s works. It is hoped that this emphasis will go some way to realign what I see as a critical imbalance, whereby writing on Green often celebrates the 1940s fiction whilst dismissing the early and late work.⁶ To give such a direct, singular approach, to give “a reading of Henry Green”, would be, for me, reductive and misleading; just as it would be inappropriate to describe the everyday simply in terms of individual days. I have argued that Green himself fought to avoid such a singularity of approach throughout his writing career, beginning with his choice of a pseudonym and culminating with the almost total elimination of the author in the repetitions of *Nothing in Doting*. At the beginning of his writing career, Henry Vincent Yorke – with all his accompanying biography – disappeared, to allow for the less ostentatious but more intensely open-ended pseudonym, Henry Green. With the last two novels, *Nothing* and *Doting*, the presence of that author, Green, is virtually erased, creating a

⁵ Poole, ed., *Companion to English Novelists*, i: “This volume... will allow readers to consider the significance of less familiar authors such as Henry Green and Elizabeth Bowen alongside those with a more established place in literary history.” Poole goes on to justify the novelists included in the *Companion*. See “Introduction”, 10: “these are the figures who have seemed most important to their novelist peers, the richest and the most fertile models against whom contemporary and subsequent writers have sought to measure themselves, from whom to draw strength – the most valuable to emulate. Let us avoid the depressing word ‘canon’.”

⁶ Such is still, disappointingly, the contention of Bharat Tandon, “Henry Green” in *Companion to English Novelists*, 403: “*Nothing* (1950) and *Doting* (1952), despite their more rigid adherence to Green’s ethic of showing rather than telling, read like less accomplished works.”

similar connotative intensity – albeit stylistically rather than nominally – where the everyday surface repetition of conversation and cliché holds the potential to go by unnoticed, to be read as “a kind of sad lyrical poetry”, or anything in between.⁷

A requirement of any thesis is that it finds a clear line through such multiplicity and uncertainty. In my attempt to avoid following too simply one direction of Green’s writing, I have, of course, had to cling to my own singular thread: the oblique approach. There is no doubt that “Green is a virtuoso of obliquity”, as Bharat Tandon states emphatically in his essay on Green in the *Companion to English Novelists*;⁸ what I have tried to go on to show is how such obliquity opens up an almost limitless variety of avenues for exploration and interpretation, akin to the everyday. Rather than try to “explain” Green’s work or “make it plain”, this thesis has aimed to deliver a sense of it in its entirety, to introduce and then deliver Green’s writing to future readers, with its massive potential intact. In this way, I hope that each chapter combines with the next to “put the whole in a sort of proportion”,⁹ but nothing more concrete. From this indistinct shape I hope that other readers will form their own multiplicitous readings.

However diligently I have worked to avoid unconsciously parodying Green’s writing style throughout this thesis, it seems that in the overall structure I have failed; for there is something resolutely inconclusive about this final vision – “put the whole

⁷ Pritchett, “Back From the War”, *New York Times Book Review*: 28.

⁸ Tandon, “Henry Green” in *Companion to English Novelists*, 401. In fact, Tandon goes on to mock gently both Green’s and Treglown’s fondness for the word: “indeed, ‘oblique’ is one of his [Green’s] favourite adjectives for describing his own style, and Jeremy Treglown’s excellent biography *Romancing* registers its sympathy with its subject by being comparably fond of the word.”

⁹ Green, “Unloving” in *Surviving*, 281-2. Originally published in *The Times*, 1961: “Living one’s own life can be a great muddle, but the great writers do not make it plain, they palliate, and put the whole in a sort of proportion. Which helps; and on the whole, year after year, help is what one needs.”

in a sort of proportion”. Advice when writing a thesis generally boils down to this: “Say what you’re going to say. Say it. And then say what you’ve said.” In true Greenian fashion, my introduction says what I am not going to say; the following chapters go about not saying it. And here, in the conclusion, I have said, again, what I did not say. The most heartening aspect of which is that I am sure Green is, as ever, chuckling away, out of sight, in the backdrop.

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