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discovered by the Process: A Methodology for Twentieth-Century Moral Fiction

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

"DISCOVERED BY THE PROCESS":

A METHODOLOGY FOR

TWENTIETH-CENTURY MORAL FICTION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN ENGLISH

BY

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For Fidan, Brendan, and Hope.

Art also has its morality, and many of the rules of this morality are the same as, or at least analogous to, the rules of ordinary ethics.

---Aldous Huxley, "Foreword," *Brave New World*

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"DISCOVERED BY THE PROCESS":

A METHODOLOGY FOR

TWENTIETH-CENTURY MORAL FICTION

One of the great ironies of the "ethical turn" that literary criticism has taken in the last several decades is that while we as literary critics strive to be ethical or moral, we usually feel embarrassed at actually taking about moral concepts, especially as they are manifested in literary texts. As I am interested in how to discuss moral issues depicted in literary texts without reading them naively and reductively for guidelines to live by or for a social program to implement, my dissertation is designed to model a method of inquiry that approaches literary texts of the twentieth century as "moral fiction," i.e., as explorations of the moral enabled through deployment of form, narrative methods, rhetorical and linguistic devices, and literary techniques. My method is to select texts in which particular thematic moral issues appear especially salient, but then, through a careful rhetorical and narratological analysis of the texts' specific literary techniques, devices and narrative strategies, to focus on how the texts handle the issues aesthetically, structurally, and rhetorically.

What I call "moral fiction" is fiction that confronts and engages moral issues, dilemmas, and questions but that resists overt moralizing through the use of distinctive narrative strategies and literary techniques. The most interesting "moral fiction," I argue, integrates aesthetic complexity with moral responsibility and confronts moral complexity with aesthetic responsibility.

INTRODUCTION:

ETHICAL CRITICISM'S BIG BANG

> Ethical Critics, like cartographers, do not necessarily discover or make a territory but, instead, describe and give shape to what has always existed. (Davis and Womack ix)

> What kind of turn is the turn to ethics? A Right turn? A Left turn? A wrong turn? A U-turn? (Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz vii)

> Where we're going, we don't use roads. (Dr. Emmett "Doc" Brown, *Back to the Future*)

This introductory chapter has a number of interrelated, overlapping, and overarching goals. One of my primary aims in this dissertation is to resolve a critical quandary. I am interested in how to discuss the moral issues manifested in literary texts but want to do more than offer thematic readings. Accordingly, I first reconsider the "ethical turn" that literary criticism has taken over the last twenty years or so. I explore three main emphases of the new ethical criticism: reconsidering the human, reformulating responsibility, and returning to narrative. I attend to what paradigmatic critics say about the larger project of ethical criticism, but more importantly I examine and critique what these critics actually *do* with literary texts. Whereas an early ethical critic like F. R. Leavis dealt with an author's moral vision, new ethical critics may focus, as J. Hillis Miller does, on the "ethics of reading"; or, following Wayne Booth's lead, they may trace out the moral implications of the use of particular literary devices; or, like Martha

Nussbaum, they may read literary texts as moral-philosophical test cases to ponder and weigh.

My approach to "moral fiction" will incorporate elements from these critics' practices but differ in key respects. Like Miller, I zero in on passages where a text sends mixed rhetorical signals; however, Miller's idea that the main "lesson" that texts impart involves their own indeterminacy is overly restrictive. Similarly, Attridge's discussion of the features a literary text deploys to evoke its singularity or distinctive literariness is worthy of emulation. His Levinasian rationale is less compelling: critics are never to read for a moral lesson but only to attempt to respond responsibly to the work's irreducible otherness. Like Adam Zachary Newton, I consider the ethical implications of various narrative situations but discard the Levinasian critical apparatus. Like Nussbaum, I register some dissatisfaction with the way poststructuralist theories focus on how institutionalized discourses and ideologies are thought to determine and mediate human experience, but I want to devote more attention to the ways in which a text's examination of moral concepts is facilitated by its deployment of linguistic and literary techniques and devices. Like Booth, I plan to analyze the use of specific literary devices, rhetorical and narrative techniques and strategies, but not to laud some and disparage others.

My interceding is necessitated by the impasse that many new ethical critics have reached. For example, I wish not so much to restore discussion of human experience to literary criticism as to "reset" it by reemphasizing how, through what technical means, texts represent human experience. I hope to integrate new ethical critics' constructive moves into a new turn towards the "moral," rhetorical, and narrative-theoretical. (This I

detail in the next chapter, "What is 'Moral Fiction'?") However, before I "map" the

critical landscape of ethical criticism, plotting where and how these ethical critics'

theories and practices converge and diverge, I begin by discussing the mapping

metaphors that govern so much talk about new ethical literary criticism. Even though I

will still be involved in a kind of mapping, I want to challenge this prevailing metaphor,

to transition away from using this static geographical figure of speech with fixed borders

to a more dynamic metaphor with open frontiers.

Not *Another* New Map

Does even so slippery, elusive, and unwieldy a critical enterprise as ethical

criticism truly need another map charting its terrain, landscape, or topography? From its

comeback in the 1980s to its heyday in the 1990s and cachet in the new millennium,

ethical criticism has probably prompted more metaphorical mapping and remapping of its

figurative terrain than any other recent critical development in English literary studies.

Writing in the 1980s, Wayne Booth launches his ethical project in *The Company We*

Keep by first "Relocating Ethical Criticism," in which he registers ethical impulses even

in forms of literary criticism considered inimical to ethics, such as Marxist, feminist, and

postcolonial criticisms.[1] A decade later, Robert Eaglestone explicitly stresses

cartographical metaphors, stating that since the "old maps of criticism and its ethical

commitments have utterly changed, [and] the newer maps of criticism are unclear," he

aims to draw a new map as an aid to "critical orientation" (1-3).

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[1] In *The Ethics of Criticism*, Tobin Siebers makes a parallel claim, albeit without the mapping metaphors, that such theorists as Derrida, Foucault, and de Man, despite their often avowed antipathy to ethics, justify their "theoretical choices" in an "ethical way" (2)

Orientation and direction are also implicit in the phrases "the ethical turn" and

"the turn to ethics," phrases which originate in a footnote in Martha Nussbaum's *Love's*

Knowledge (*LK*). Commenting that "literary theorists allied with deconstruction have

[also] taken a marked turn toward the ethical," Nussbaum suggests that these theorists

have literally changed direction and are now heading towards a new destination (*LK*

29n52). As my second epigraph shows, Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca

L. Walkowitz express their misgivings about an ethical turn by belaboring Nussbaum's

metaphor.[2] For them, a turn in critical orientation may signal a turn in political

orientation, to the right, or to the left, or an apolitical, nostalgic u-turn back to past

models. (My next section retells the story of ethical criticism's demise, "banishment,"

and resurgence to review it but also to complicate the "official" version.) Davis and

Womack emphasize mapping more than any other critics. As my first epigraph shows,

they consider the "marriage of ethical thought and literary study" to be a specific "terrain

that has always been there": their task is merely to tell its story (ix). What their brief

sketch (and oddly mixed metaphor) problematically skirts, however, is the active role that

theorists, critics, scholars, and philosophical thinkers play in dynamically shaping that

terrain: they do not simply put up signposts to an "area" or "field" of ethical criticism but

"sketch out," "draft," or "landscape" an area that others come to work in.[3]

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[2] Their "riffing" on this metaphor is understandable: it is hard to resist, but slightly facile. One can pose all sorts of questions along these lines: Is the ethical turn still turning; has it made the turn, how is the turn turning out; has the turn hit a cul-de-sac?

[3] For an interesting discussion of how the word topography, which originally means "the creation of a metaphorical equivalent in words of a landscape," has changed, see J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (3). Miller asserts that mapping conventions are so powerful that they make us see "the landscape as though it were already a map, complete with place names and the names of geographical features" (4). See also Paul

Why do commentators use cartographical and geographical metaphors when they debate the relation of ethics to literary studies? Arguably, these figures of speech are more conventional than symptomatic. After all, when we talk about our areas of study or fields of interest, are we not using convenient descriptors rather than conceiving of our literary interests as actual places? These figures of speech are nothing new. Eaglestone quotes Hayden White, who, in 1978, is already using overt mapping metaphors to describe criticism: its "contours […] are unclear, its geography unspecified, and its topography therefore uncertain" (qtd. in Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism* 2). So, the idea of exploring a critical landscape with an eye towards mapping it is hardly novel. It is plausible that commentators writing about ethical criticism are merely taking up a common metaphor and elaborating on it, but overworking it, turning a once evocative trope into a hackneyed chestnut. But this explanation is inadequate: literary critics seldom refer to any other criticism so specifically as a territory to be charted. Why does ethical criticism come in for so much mapping? Is there something peculiar about ethics that encourages, even necessitates such metaphors? Charles Taylor would argue that there is something peculiar (in the fullest sense of the word) about ethics that invites spatial metaphors. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor convincingly argues that ethics, considered broadly, including ideas about morality, right and wrong, qualitative evaluations, represents "inescapable frameworks" for interpreting everyday events and orienting ourselves in the world. Taylor lays heavy stress on the "space-analogue" and argues that humans are as inescapably "moral beings" as they are inescapably "spatial beings": just

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Jay, who asserts that "the locations we study […] are not fixed, static, or unchanging": we critics actively "create the locations we study" (4).

as humans cannot live without concepts for up and down and left and right, so too they

cannot live without concepts of right and wrong, morality, and ethical evaluations (31). If

we lose our moral bearings, we feel profoundly disoriented, unsure of where we are, who

we are. For Taylor, where we are, i.e., where we stand, *is* who we are (28-9). Taylor is

not arguing that all humans have the same morality, nor is he arguing that one particular

morality sets the standard by which we judge the others; rather, he is only claiming that

all humans have *a* morality, a sense of what is right and what is wrong, what is worth

doing and what is not.[4]

This set of circumstances presents me with a unique challenge: I want to discuss

how ethics affects a number of ethical critics and theorists engaged in the ethical turn, but

I want to avoid following the maps plotted by others, useful as they are as starting points

and orienting devices. As humorously suggested by my third epigraph, from the end of

the popular 1985 film *Back to the Future*, where I am going, I do not use roads---at least I

hope not to trek down the same well-traveled and (in some cases) deeply rutted ones.

This aim is made more difficult by what Taylor argues about ethics: maps, charts,

compasses are all particularly apt metaphors for our sense of what is ethical, what ethics

is, for we can no more do without a sense of ethics than we can do without a sense of

direction. Indeed, we often think of ethics as providing us with a sense of direction. In

this introductory chapter, my aim then is less to remap ethical criticism or chart the

ethical turn and more to reconceptualize these developments as a theoretical explosion, a

big bang, or a series of big bangs, followed by surges of critical energy, still coursing,

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[4] Of course there are certain key constants. All human societies everywhere consider incest a fundamental
taboo, one which, as J. Hillis Miller points out, separates human from animal societies ("Narrative" 72-3).

still reverberating through literary studies, even at this late remove from ethical criticism's zenith. In fact, ethical criticism's ongoing relevance represents a major reason for my goal here. Maps, whether they chart ethical or some other form of criticism, imply containment, boundaries imposed artificially on elusive trends and phenomena. While Davis's and Womack's impulse to map springs from a desire to help orient critics in ethical criticism, they do ethical criticism and themselves a disservice when they reductively equate it to a terrain that has long existed. Critics should not take ethical criticism's existence for granted, nor contain or quarantine ethical criticism in some limited sphere, nor deny critics' active role in shaping the ethical critical enterprise. This view sees ethical criticism as a static terrain or territory, with boundaries and paths, and downplays a sense of agency on the part of critics. One of the arguments I want to make is that the two main clusters, which I refer to as the "literary ethicists" and the "ethical textualists," whether viewed jointly or separately, represent no monolithic model: they resist attempts to write them up in any neat topography.

This "big-bang" metaphor leaves me open to other criticisms: overstating the case, overdoing it, overemphasizing or overestimating the magnitude of ethical criticism's effects, or aping physics to lend my study a scientific aura, a higher degree of credence. However, the metaphor is apt for two main reasons. First, critics at work on ethical criticism now use a similar metaphor in their own commentaries. James Phelan situates his *Living to Tell about It* (2005) in the "explosion of work on ethical criticism of the last decade or so" (21). In his 2008 essay, "An Ethical Narratology," Wolfgang G. Müller notes that the "explosion of work on the relation between ethics and literature"

has had "profound reverberations in narrative theory" (117). More importantly, however, this new analogy acts as a heuristic for posing questions to dispute the canonical story of the demise and return of ethics in literary criticism: what made the new ethical literary criticism suddenly go bang? Was not ethical criticism always smoldering or simmering somewhere anyway, ready to erupt? Is ethical criticism expanding or contracting? Is it speeding up or slowing down, spreading out and seeping in, or dissipating and evaporating?[5] To suggest answers to these questions, I start with an exploration of the "before" before ethics exploded: how did ethical considerations figure in literary criticism before the advent of theory in the late 1960s? How did it come to be "banned" during what Geoffery Galt Harpham terms the "Theoretical Era" ("Ethics" 387)? How and why did the new ethical criticism then explode?

Each of the next three sections then focuses on one of three major emphases in the "new ethical criticism," a phrase that acts as a default descriptor for the work of a wide range of critics and theorists. First, some new ethical criticism restores discussion of practical human experience and agency to literary criticism, a discussion which poststructuralist theories, focusing on institutionalized discourse and textualist issues, were seen largely to have neglected, ignored, or denied. Second, much new ethical criticism rethinks and reformulates notions of responsibility, albeit narrowly construed in Levinasian and deconstructive terms entailing responsibility to the text. Third, much new ethical criticism also reasserts the significance of narrative. Proponents of this view

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[5] Though the impetus for my reformulation here owes much to Rorty's idea of developing increasingly useful metaphors, the idea to reconceptualize ethical criticism along astrophysical lines came from Adam Frank's popular scientific article "The Day before Genesis." Frank explores three alternative theories that challenge the Big Bang theory. These theories consider the conundrum of what came before the Big Bang: if the Big Bang creates time, how can a "before" exist before it? (66).

consider narrative as comprising not just stories or novels but also the shapes or patterns

that human agents impute to their lives, and from which they derive the narratives that

they hear, read, see, and tell one another and themselves. In these three emphases, I

discern two main clusters of new ethical critics: the "posthumanists" of the ethical turn,

whom I refer to as the "ethical textualists," and the neo-Aristotelian or neo-humanist

proponents of ethical criticism, whom I call "literary ethicists."[6] Of course, this is not

meant to suggest that these are the only clusters, or that these two are absolutely,

diametrically opposed. Indeed, we discover that despite marked differences in their

theoretical underpinnings, their critical practices are sometimes broadly analogous: both

neo-Aristotelians and Levinasians tend to read texts for how the texts exemplify specific

philosophical concepts associated with or propounded by the respective philosophers

themselves. In other words, both groups carry out vaguely thematic readings.

For each of the emphases I mentioned earlier, I identify paradigmatic critics and

theorists and then focus as much on what these critics and theorists *do* with literary works

as what they *say* about ethical criticism. Some issues I explore involve the following:

how does a sense of ethics affect or infuse their critical practices? How consistent are

their critical practices with their ethico-critical principles? How radically different is what

these critics say about and do with texts from what past literary critics did? My

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[6] I conceive this terminology for two principal reasons. To begin with, these descriptors better represent what these thinkers do with texts, instead of pigeonholing the actual thinkers themselves in this philosophical or that theoretical box. The phrases "neo-humanist ethical critics" and "posthumanists of the ethical turn" also presented themselves, but they are too cumbersome. Additionally, the term "posthumanist" has a self-congratulatory ring. It also places critics who disagree with "posthumanists" at a distinct disadvantage, for their name for themselves suggests that "posthumanists" have evolved beyond such pedestrian but malign concepts as the "human."

conclusion is that both the literary ethicists and the ethical textualists have useful points

to make, but they leave critics at an impasse. As Liesbeth Korthals Altes convincingly

argues, critical approaches that view "language as radically intransitive" and extol

"literature as the experience of strangeness, absence of meaning, and the evanescence of

the self" are every bit as reductive as critical approaches that "privilege language as

simply transitive" and that hold "literature [up] as offering clear moral guidance" (145).

Given this situation, what are critics to do if we wish to encourage reflection on moral

issues rendered in literary texts, but still take into account the complexity, ambiguity, and

self-reflexivity of literary language?

Demise, "Banishment," and Resurgence

We all probably recognize the sanctioned chronicle of the demise of the old

moralistic ethical criticism, the perceived banishment of ethical criticism during the era

of theory, and the resurgence of the new ethical criticism(s), but, because I want to

critique some of the received wisdom about the old ethical criticism and contrast this old

ethical criticism with my methodology of moral fiction, this story requires a brief

synopsis before we proceed. A long time ago, when, in David Parker's phraseology,

"straw dinosaurs walked the earth," such critics as Lionel Trilling in the U.S. and F.R.

Leavis in Great Britain wrote vague, undertheorized, ahistorical criticism that assumed

that texts somehow had "intrinsic artistic worth," and they extolled the moral vision of

the authors who weaved this quality into their texts (Parker, "Introduction" 1; Eaglestone,

Doing English 16, italicized in original). These early ethical critics "instrumentalized"

texts, the story goes, reading complex literary works reductively to glean moral lessons

about life from them. Leavis in particular believed that literary art could somehow

civilize and humanize populaces in danger of being dehumanized by technological

encroachments, and that the study of authors from one's native culture could foster a

sense of national identity---or, chauvinistic, parochial nationalism, his detractors argue,---

in a time of breakdown and fragmentation.

For Leavis, writing in *The Great Tradition*, the major novelists "not only change

the possibilities of art for practitioners and readers, but […] are significant in terms of the

human awareness they promote"; they are, moreover, "all distinguished by a vital

capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral

intensity" (10, 18). While this all sounds positive, if not slightly genteel, Leavis's criteria

here are hardly objective, but largely reflect and reinforce his own personal tastes and

class-based interests. Joseph Conrad excluded, the "marked moral intensity" of which

Leavis speaks so highly appears only in white, English-speaking, middle-class

Protestants: Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and later, D. H. Lawrence. Neither

James Joyce nor Virginia Woolf passes muster.

As the chronicle progresses, we hear of how this old moralistic ethics in literary

criticism cracks under pressure from many sides, and from inside, too. First to go is the

idea that literary art, or any art, civilizes or humanizes. As Davis and Womack point out,

the moves by theorists to distance themselves from "any mention of ethical or moral

perspective in their work" make perfect sense when we consider them in light of the

carnage of the "two world wars, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the horror of

genocide and the holocaust, and the oppression of peoples whose narratives somehow fell

outside the bounds of an Anglo- or Eurocentric point of view" (ix). For many, modern humanism had flat-out failed in its purported mission. By the late 1960s, humanistic notions of cultural betterment were further eroded as "disillusionment" about the conflict in Vietnam spread through US society (Schwartz 9). Literary art comes to be derided not for being ineffectual in combating established forms of power but for being complicit with them, with patriarchy, rigid class-systems, colonialism, and imperialism. Literary art's ideology is critiqued, demystified, unmasked, deconstructed: there is something for everybody to abhor. For Marxists, literary art serves the interests of the ruling and propertied classes; for feminists, it posits a normative male view that excludes the female and reinforces patriarchal social structures; and, for postcolonialist critics, it represent a Eurocentric view of the world that excludes non-Europeans. Moreover, the late 1960s was not a time for solitary ethics; it was a time for collective political action. Students demonstrated for civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, for ending the conflict in Vietnam, and for a host of other issues. They stormed campus buildings and agitated for change. They wanted literary studies that seemed more relevant to a changing world, and they wanted to see universities with student populations that more accurately mirrored the make-up of the rest of the U.S. It was not a time for moral criticism; it was a time for moral indignation---directed at a narrow conception of ethics and morality, a straw man, a scarecrow with admittedly loose stuffing.

　　At the same time that all these events are happening, the poststructuralist critique of humanism really gets underway. In the 1970s, ethics becomes a byword for derision. In Harpham's tongue-in-cheek account, ethics is viewed as an "inadequate Enlightenment

leftover[]," or "the proper name of power, hypocrisy, and unreality" ("Ethics" 387). In

fact, as Terry Eagleton points out in his landmark 1982 work, *Literary Theory: An*

Introduction, news circulated that some Nazi commandants "whiled away their leisure

hours with a volume of Goethe" when not "superintending the murder of Jews," and such

examples as these seriously undermined notions that art humanized a person in any of the

"direct ways that [the humanizing argument] at its most euphoric had imagined" (35).[7]

The theorists of this era deplored ethics in literary criticism as a "master discourse,"

which "presumed a universal humanism and an ideal, autonomous, and sovereign

subject"; and, these theorists targeted ethics as such relentlessly in scathing critiques

(Buell, "Talk" 2; Harpham, "Ethics" 387). Ethics, as Fredric Jameson disdainfully

regards it, propagates the "ideology of the binary opposition," encouraging adherents to

view elements of the world as either positive or negative, good or evil; Jameson declares

that "it is ethics itself which is the ideological vehicle and legitimation of concrete

structures of power and domination" (114). But it must be stressed that neither Harpham

nor Jameson is talking about ethics per se, about "moral utterances as such," as Alasdair

MacIntyre would argue (17). Rather, they are taking one branch of ethics, a Kantian-

influenced deontological, universalizing one, as representative of all branches of ethics.

These critics might find Aristotelian virtue ethics or Utilitarian ethics to be as

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[7] Philipp Wolf challenges such sweeping claims as Eagleton's. For Wolf, the Nazi represents a "totalitarian personality [that] is driven by an almost pathological […] desire to control everything private and public" (103). Wolf argues that such a personality is flatly incapable of responding to ethical claims in literary or other arts, as these stem from an art work's suggestion of "phenomenological otherness" (103). Nussbaum also convincingly refutes it in her essay "Exactly and Responsibly." There she reminds us that the Germans of the Nazi era also read explicitly and grotesquely anti-Semitic texts and tracts, the pervasive influence of which Goethe probably had little chance of counteracting (69).

problematic as Kantian ethics. But they are still markedly different, a point which harsh critics of ethics tend to overlook.

For roughly two decades, the poststructuralist critique of humanism amounts to a de facto ban on ethics in literary criticism, a ban that only lifts with what Lawrence Buell refers to as the "fall of de Man" in 1987 ("Talk" 3). Prior to that scandal, a critic here and there mounts something of a stand against what they perceive as the forces of theory. Many are simply ignored; some get belittled. When *New Literary History* runs an issue on "Literature and/as Moral Philosophy" in 1983, Murray Krieger notes how a particular deconstructive critic ridiculed his appearance by condescendingly and dismissively claiming that if the audience found themselves "unreceptive to [the deconstructionist's] hard message, they could wait for the more agreeable pieties that would issue from [Krieger] as a representative of 'the moral gang'" (119). John Gardner encounters a harsher reception when he publishes *On Moral Fiction* in 1978, a year before Gerald Graff publishes *Literature against Itself*, which makes the same kinds of provocative arguments as does Gardner's book, in an equally polemical tone. As one naysayer colorfully summed up the reaction to *On Moral Fiction*, "John Gardner is full of shit" (Exley, qtd. in Bellamy 10).[8] In 1986, Christopher Clausen publishes the largely overlooked *The Moral Imagination: Essays on Literature and Ethics*. In this collection of essays, Clausen demonstrates an eclectic approach, in which he seeks not to "elucidate the moral implications of a work," but instead attempts to examine "those implications, attitudes, or assumptions within and beyond their immediate literary context, with full

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[8] See the next chapter for a more detailed discussion of Gardner's theory of "moral fiction," and the misunderstandings that it causes.

attention to the ways in which that context determines and qualifies them, as part of a total evaluation of the work" (20). So, for example, he looks at Sherlock Holmes stories, situating his discussion in relation to Victorian views about the connection between "crime and revolution" so that his readers may more fully appreciate Holmes's resonance as a literary character (59). Finally, J. Hillis Miller presents the paper that will appear in print as *The Ethics of Reading*. As Derek Attridge acknowledges, even though "de Man had used it in *Allegories of Reading* in 1979 […] and this interest [of de Man's] in ethics and "ethicity" was one of Miller's starting points for the Wellek lectures" on the "ethics of reading," the title of the paper and book represented a risky move on Miller's part: ethics was still "a word little used and treated with much suspicion in literary studies, especially on the left (including the deconstructive left)" (*Reading* 133).

De Man's interest in ethics is thus ironic, for his detractors point to the scandal, which ensues after de Man's death, of his wartime writings, as a key moment in the resurgence of ethical criticism. Now high literary theory, which once inspired "anger and dread in an older generation" has itself become an ossified "orthodoxy," and criticism mounts about what it has excluded and "occluded" (Attridge, *Reading* 9; Parker, *Ethics* 1). Now ethics, once seen as an "*agent* of repression," comes itself to be seen as the one repressed (Harpham "Ethics" 387). New work on the relation between ethics and literature explodes and gains such notice that, as Steven Connor claims, ethics "replace[s] 'textuality' as the most charged term in contemporary literary and cultural study" (qtd. in Hadfield, Rainsford, and Woods 1, 13n1). Everybody is talking about ethics and, as

Lawrence Buell notes in 1999, "as more parties lay claim to it," the "challenge of pinning

down what counts as ethics [only] intensifies ("Pursuit" 7).

It is in part this challenge that prompts so many critics to survey, chart, and map

the landscape of ethical criticism. Some critics celebrate the new work in ethical

criticism. A few behave as contemptuously of theory, especially deconstruction, as they

perceived deconstructionists behaved towards ethics. Daniel R. Schwartz mars an

otherwise interesting article with a snide salvo against deconstructive criticism: "who

really reads in terms of discovering where meaning goes astray? Is that kind of

engagement something other than reading, or a subcategory of picaresque reading, where

the reader stands outside the text's imagined world as a carping cynic?" (3). Schwartz's

attitude might confirm a theorist's fears that new ethical criticism is antithetical to high

literary theory, but most new ethical critics emphasize that the project of ethical criticism

should build on theory and not back away from it. As Parker states at the outset of *Ethics,*

Theory and the Novel, this new attention to the ethical in literary studies cannot ignore

poststructuralist theory's "new insights" for these are "simply there to be had," expressed

in literary studies' upgraded lexicon of critical terms: we cannot "unthink" them (3). Still,

while Parker acknowledges the cogent arguments that poststructuralists have made, he

insists that "some vital continuities with the past are in danger of being occluded," and he

stresses the idea that just as critics and theorists cannot escape the new insights without

handicapping their projects, so too "there is no escape route from certain old thoughts either" (*Ethics* 3).[9]

Many theorists and critics voice their misgivings about the resurgent ethical criticism. Some assert that stressing one's ethics is distasteful. Buell admits that while "there is something that feels extremely heartening and reassuring about placing ethics, with its implication of right conduct, at the center of one's intellectual enterprise," critics and theorists should be wary, for that "sense of exhilaration at engaging in the noble pursuit of ethics" can shrink back and "haunt [them] with the demand for a keener, more scrupulous self-criticism about the rigor and consistency of [their] critical practice," especially if we remember how "freely that signifier ("ethics") can slide around and metamorphose into something other or less than it seems to denote at first" ("Talk" 3). Similarly, Charles Altieri argues that the most credible ethical critics are those "evidently embarrassed by their talk" of ethics: this "embarrassment can, or should, stem from taking ourselves as somehow spokespersons for self-congratulatory values in reading that are extremely difficult to state in any public language" (30).

Certain thinkers have more profound concerns about ethics. For Judith Butler, the renewed interest in ethics represents a corresponding disinterest in politics, i.e., of the left, and, for her part, she offers a "map" of her "resistance" to "the return to ethics" (15-28). In this deeply personal essay, Butler attempts to reconcile Nietzsche with Levinas, albeit with considerable and admitted unease. On the one hand, Butler mistrusts ethics as much as Nietzsche, and sees how Levinas's ethics of the other can lead to a dangerous

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[9] Lee Oser makes a related claim at the end of *The Ethics of Modernism*. Taking up what Beckett's Hamm says---"Ah, the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them!",---Oser suggests that humanity's fate is "tied to the old questions": [w]e will go with them if they go" (133).

passivity, especially when a person faces an "other" who has murderous intentions.[10] On

the other hand, Butler, who is of Jewish descent, cannot forget Nietzsche's anti-Semitic

comments in his writings. She hopes for an ethics that continually questions "the value of

ethics itself" (27). For his part, Vincent P. Pecora sees the resurgence as a corollary of the

failure of communism and socialism. Writing in 1991, circa the destruction of the Berlin

Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the resultant confusion among Marxists,

Pecora sadly notes that it is no surprise that "ethics should return to critical discourse"

when the "possibility of a viable adversary politics in Western Democracies has been

once again reduced to mere neurotic fantasy" (204). Other detractors have more

specifically academic concerns. For many, ethical criticism necessarily involves

appraisal, evaluation, and judgment. Yet the texts evaluated are usually the old so-called

canonical works. Booth deplores how the "aggressive and often carelessly performed

denigrations of first-class works on grounds of sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, or

"classism" have served to confirm literary critics' anxieties about ethical criticism

("Why" 16-7).

    The most problematical issue of all, however, concerns conceptions of the subject

or the self. As Siebers points out, much poststructuralist theory "subordinat[es] selfhood

to linguistic structure" or discursive practices (2). This "substitution of language for the

self […] has created a view of human consciousness in which ethical reflection is always

destined to fail," in that these theories deny human agency: people do not reflect and then

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[10] In her 1997 review of Zygmunt Bauman's Levinasian *Postmodern Ethics*, Wendy Wheeler voices a similar concern. She considers Bauman (and Levinas) naïve for thinking "most people, left to themselves, would actually demonstrate a moral impulse in their non-legislatible dealings with others," and concludes that Levinasian thought is "Seductive [only] for already moral persons": "the carnivores will laugh drunkenly all the way to the blood bank" (153).

choose; disembodied discursive practices and powers reflect through people, who

mistakenly believe it is they who are making the choices (Siebers 10). As Parker

elaborates, poststructuralist projects such as deconstruction "rule[] out moral interest in at

least two ways": first, it views language as unstable, and thus the "very notion of 'moral

questions' or 'dilemmas' is defeated" from the outset; second, deconstruction claims that

the inner life of moral deliberation, intentionality, and choice [is not] "prior to language

but [is only] a mere effect of language" ("Introduction" 8). Moreover, the "supposedly

autonomous rational subject of Kantian ethics is decentered into the various different

discourses of which he is constituted" (Parker, "Introduction" 8). For my own part, I have

never found such poststructuralist theories wholly plausible, but I realize they have been

tremendously influential. Nonetheless, I am largely in agreement with Taylor and Iris

Murdoch on this topic. Murdoch argues that approaches such as deconstruction do not

proceed by "argument" but by "decree," by "appeals to plausibly reinforced or

dramatised half-truths or truisms: such as our realisation that *of course* we are influenced

by innumerable forces which are beyond our control and of which we are unconscious

and so should come to see as illusions many aspects of our being in which we have had

naïve belief" (185-6). Murdoch thus represents the theoretical underpinnings of

deconstruction as a variant of a common fallacy, a hasty or sweeping generalization, with

an admixture of false dichotomies: either humans speak language or language speaks

them, for example. Further, while Murdoch concedes that the idea of language as a "vast

non-human *system*" is impressive, for her, such ideas are scarcely new and mainly

represent old ideas of determinism, of "siding with the system against the individual," in

new phraseology (190, 197). For her part, Murdoch stresses her agreement with

Wittgenstein's more commonsensical conclusion "that meaning comes through use and

forms of life, presumed to be in a common-sense sense, the local property of individuals"

(187). Similarly, Taylor would argue that the terms of deconstructive approaches "change

the subject," in that they constrain discussion by their own conceptions. What he

advocates for is the "BA (best account) principle" (58). This principle holds that "human

reality cannot be understood in the terms appropriate" for the sciences, mathematics, or

linguistics. The language that will offer the best account of human reality is, as Taylor

phrases it, "the language in which I actually live my life" (58). In other words, for Taylor,

while the terms associated with linguistics, for example, might offer the best account of

linguistics, "anthropocentric terms, terms which relate to the meanings things have for

us," offer, at least for now, the best account of human reality as everyday lived

experience (72; also cited and discussed in Parker, "Introduction" 10-11).

Regarding the diverse conceptions of the subject, poststructuralists overlook a key

aspect of much new ethical criticism, which Parker hints at above, and which I have

already mentioned in connection with Jameson's objections. Briefly, when I say "ethics,"

or "morality," a poststructuralist often thinks of "Kant" and of "such [inadequate]

Enlightenment leftovers as 'the universal subject,' the 'sovereign subject,' [and] the

'traditional concept of the self'" (Harpham 387). This conception of the self dates from

the early modern era, and represents a conception that few new ethical critics actually

espouse. These thinkers more often embrace a classical Aristotelian concept of the self.

In this view, "[i]ndividuals inherit a particular space within an interlocking set of

relationships; lacking that space, they are nobody, at best a stranger or an outcast"
(MacIntyre 33-4). As Herbert Grabes describes, philosophers like MacIntyre, Nussbaum,
and Bernard Williams do "not even bother to protest at the postmodern assumptions
undercutting" these conceptions; rather, they have "simply bypassed them by leaving
behind moral rules and obligations and the problem of justifying them and [have
returned] to the actually premodern, yet now freshly urgent question: 'what shall I do to
lead a good life?'" (1).

These thinkers' return to the premodern is important for two reasons. It
reconceptualizes the idea of the self or subject along Aristotelian lines, in which the idea
of an unencumbered self is unthinkable. Second, as Grabes emphasizes, the move
represents a "radical change of direction": instead of viewing literature through a set of
assumptions about the self, these thinkers consider literary works to be a "domain of
concrete representations of human agency that [is] beyond any epistemological and
ontological strictures" (1). In other words, while poststructuralist theory makes sweeping
claims that deny human agency and then views literature in light of them, these thinkers
stress how literary narratives simply afford discussion of representations of human
agency. What these thinkers suggest then is that while they may not be able to verify how
much or even if living humans actually have agency, literary works offer a glimpse of
what human agency might look like, a facsimile. In short, it allows for a practical
discussion of an abstract and elusive concept.

The goal of this chronicle has been to briefly account for how and why ethical
criticism, once viewed as a "master discourse," went away, and then how and why new

forms of ethical criticism have reappeared over the last twenty or so years. The

resurgence strikes many theorists as a critical reaction against theory, and, while many

new ethical critics do in fact have little time for theory, many of the theoretical counter-

attacks miss their mark. Too many theorists confuse Kantian ethics with ethics per se and

they assail a version of ethics that few new ethical critics actually advocate. They attack a

straw Kantian figure or invoke a schoolmasterish pantomime villain like Leavis, whom

no new ethical critic, apart possibly from Nussbaum, strives to emulate. As I will show

more fully in my discussion of several paradigmatic ethical critics in my next three

sections, new ethical criticism, despite shortcomings, resists and exceeds these narrow

conceptions.[11]

First Emphasis: Reconsidering the Human

For scholars, critics, and thinkers who stress reconsidering the "human" in literary

studies, probably the most persistent and insidious belief about any literary text is that the

text is somehow only about itself and is not about life, not about (or by) living human

beings, not about (or by) "us." As Martha Nussbaum eloquently phrases it, literature

"speaks *about us*, about our lives and choices and emotions, about our social existence

and the totality of our connections": it explores fundamental philosophical questions,

such as "How should one live?" (*LK* 168). For this reason, she expressly hopes that "talk

about literature will return, increasingly, to a concern with the practical---and to the

ethical and social questions that give literature its high importance to our lives" (*LK* 171,

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[11] I sound here, using terms such as "resist" and "exceed," as if I have a deconstructive project of my own. I cannot deny that deconstructive practices have shaped the way I read, but I am trying to make a different argument here, more dependent on basic rhetoric than on deconstructive terminology: that when critics deal with ethical criticism, they often rely on many basic logical fallacies, presenting false dichotomies, making hasty generalizations, or attacking a straw man.

168). While the idea that literature offers insights into life strikes some literary critics as pedestrian, it animates the work of several new ethical critics, including Nussbaum, Booth, and Lee Oser. While I appreciate the motives behind their approach, when these critics apply it to complex literary texts, they often focus overmuch on content, explicating, for example, how it illustrates aspects of Aristotelian virtue ethics, and do not pay enough attention to how authors use literary devices to explore moral questions and issues. They tend to "privilege language as simply transitive" and to see "literature as offering clear moral guidance" (Korthals 145). In other words, while they are dealing with complex, ambiguous, and self-reflexive literary texts, their analyses are not specifically literary but philosophical, a different kind of writing: what we note is that they take a character's behavior as it is depicted, at face value, instead of attending enough to the range of formal, rhetorical, and linguistic devices authors use to represent the character's behavior.

Nussbaum's goals, which center on relating literature to practical human experience, are central to the ethical turn and new ethical criticism. Along with other new ethical critics, Nussbaum registers dissatisfaction with much poststructuralist theory, which subordinates the human to language, system, discursive power, superstructure, or mechanism.[12] The first of Nussbaum's two main aims initially sounds reasonable, especially if we remember that her intended audience is her peers in philosophy. Nussbaum insists that moral philosophy needs literary texts and argues that a "literary

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[12] Despite his differences with Nussbaum, Harpham concurs with her in this respect. He notes that early Foucault shows an almost "visible relish" in describing humiliating "forms of discipline, observation, and punishment" (*Character* 3-4). Harpham sees Foucault's attention to cruelty perpetrated on the human body as bordering on the obsessively "perverse" (*Character* 4).

narrative of a certain sort is the only type of text that can [explore crucial questions about life] fully and fittingly, without contradiction"; thus, in order for moral philosophy to "pursue its own tasks in a complete way," it needs to look at such texts (*LK* 7, "Exactly" 62). Nussbaum bases her argument on her belief that literary texts help readers develop "phronesis," an Aristotelian virtue or areté. Her reasoning is that although Aristotle catalogues virtues in great detail, he offers few specific examples of them in concrete practice. Since she considers his ethics too sketchy and general for practical use, Nussbaum concludes that an Aristotelian ethical project requires narratives to flesh out the broad strokes of the philosopher's principles.[13] For her, only by reading selected literary texts can readers hope to develop phronesis, a literacy not just of words but of the world, an ability to be responsive and imaginative, and to be able to "improvise what is required" in situations marked by contingency and unpredictability, and in circumstances replete with conflicting obligations (Thucydides, qtd. in Nussbaum, *LK* 71).[14] It seems a lot to expect from any literary text, and a notion that literary critics reject. But it is worth bearing in mind that Nussbaum is telling ethicists *what* they should read more than she is telling literary critics *how* they should read.

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[13] For Nussbaum, this is not a weakness. She argues that his guidelines are flexible and inclusive but not merely relative; they stem from Aristotle's identification of various constant features of "our common humanity": all humans face mortality, they are born with a body, with all its vulnerabilities, they experience pleasure and pain, though what humans conceive these to be may differ, and they attempt in some way to plan their lives, as much as possible ("Non-Relative" 48-9).

[14] Harpham argues that Nussbaum's claim in fact runs counter to an Aristotelian ethics, which involves how an agent should act more than how an agent perceives (*Getting it Right* 43). Grabes, however, logically stresses that phronesis is "highly dependent on acute observation, *aesthesis*" to guide an agent. In other words, how an agent should act necessarily involves how acutely and accurately the agent perceives what a given situation calls for (36).

However, when Nussbaum demonstrates her approach, it is hard for literary critics to get past its flaws. Nussbaum shows she speaks the language of a literary critic when she asserts that a text's "form and style" are as important as its "paraphrasable content" in expressing an author's "sense of life and of value, [his or her] sense of what matters and what does not, of what learning and communicating are, of life's relations and connections" (*LK* 5). Nussbaum specifies that all the choices that authors make---in style, genre, sentences, even vocabulary,---establish, in the reader, "certain activities and transactions rather than others"; the features act together in a "telling" that does not simply present life but represents a view of life, as conceived by the author (*LK* 5). What Nussbaum states here, at the beginning of *Love's Knowledge*, sounds practicable. Her wording suggests a method that another critic can, in theory, replicate. But the brief demonstration she offers is at variance with her stated aims. Selecting works of "high literary excellence," in which the "fit between content and form seem to [her] to be particularly well realized and particularly artful," Nussbaum carries out what is an ethically-infused rhetorical analysis (*LK* 31-2). She poses obvious though potentially useful questions about who is speaking, to whom, in what tone, and in what circumstances (*LK* 31-2). She emphasizes that she looks for key questions that the text poses or for issues that it explores, and then claims that she analyzes the style, including metaphors, vocabulary, and form, for how the style and form fit (or do not fit) the "official content," for how they work in tandem (or do not) and are expressive of the "author's presence" and "sense of life" (32-5). There are two main problems here. This approach or method is hardly likely to strike literary critics as innovative or original.

Worse, however, is that her analyses appear vague in comparison with Newton's, Phelan's, and Booth's. She states magisterially that these works represent felicitous marriages of form and content but does not do enough to show why she makes such claims. This amounts to a rhetorical blunder. At the outset of *Love's Knowledge*, Nussbaum states that she is tasking herself with showing that form and style express a moral vision, that, taken together, they set up certain transactions between a reader and a text. With this stated aim, she sets up expectations in her readers, which she does not fulfill.[15]

For example, her discussion of Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* is sometimes unsatisfactory, failing to pay sufficient attention to the novel's literariness. For Nussbaum, the novel is replete with weighty moral issues, topics ripe for fruitful ethical discussion: "moral ambition, moralism, and the nature of our worldly relation to value," as well as contingency and conflicting obligations (*LK* 126-7). Nussbaum concentrates on the character of Maggie Verver, whom Nussbaum seemingly regards as an actual person with an actual moral life: her first line jarringly refers to the character as "this woman" in a parenthetical appositive, as if to emphasize that Nussbaum is discussing an actual human being instead of a literary construct (*LK* 125). Subsequently, Nussbaum

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[15] First, Nussbaum's problematical principles of selection are initially vague, though they become clearer in light of the works she discusses in her essays. For her, "high literary excellence" resembles Leavis's idea about "marked moral intensity": it appears mainly in classic works of literature, such as in the works of Henry James, Charles Dickens, and Marcel Proust. Nussbaum implies that with the possible exception of Samuel Beckett's works, few if any twentieth-century literary texts are of high enough literary excellence to merit her critical attention. Nussbaum refers explicitly to Leavis and Trilling in several places in *Love's Knowledge*, holding them up as models for what she is trying to accomplish with her project. But even though we seldom read Leavis or Trilling, some of their essays, such as Trilling's "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," still seem more insightful than Nussbaum's. Whatever his other failings, Trilling shows a kind of humility when he writes about texts. Nussbaum, conversely, often comes across as imperious in her pronouncements, as if she has just singlehandedly settled an issue that has plagued thinkers for centuries.

emphasizes Maggie's thematic function, claiming that she represents a strict rule-based

morality associated with prohibitions on behavior. To support this claim, Nussbaum cites

passages in which Maggie tells another character, usually Fanny, about her aspirations to

be as morally perfect as possible. Taking into account the symbols and metaphors

associated with water that appear in Maggie's dialogue, Nussbaum carries out a vaguely

Freudian analysis, claiming that Maggie is morally simplistic, in that she strives to be the

moral equivalent of a "'water-tight' steamer," aloof from "a harm or a violation, and […]

from complication" (*LK* 128). In the course of the essay, Nussbaum argues that the novel

charts Maggie's development from an immature, morally idealistic but morally simplistic

young woman to a mature and perceptive "reader of nuance and complexity," a woman

with a significantly enhanced degree of Aristotelian phronesis (*LK* 134). Initially, Maggie

clings to rigid codes of morality, which prescribe every action; by the end, she

improvises, deliberating in light of the particulars of each new situation (*LK* 138). But it

is not this element of the content that Nussbaum claims as the novel's contribution to

moral philosophy. In fact, Nussbaum notes that what the novel teaches or develops is not

a code, even a flexible one, but a "perceptive intuition," in which readers carry out a kind

of parallel deliberation and "improvisatory response" (*LK* 141). As Nussbaum concludes,

the novel has a goal similar to that of moral philosophy. It seeks to give readers

"understanding of the human good through a scrutiny of alternative conceptions of the

good" (*LK* 142). Nussbaum argues that this novel "calls upon and also develops our

ability to confront mystery with cognitive engagement of both thought and feeling" (*LK*

143). Nussbaum argues that James's style in the novel places readers in a situation akin to Maggie's.

A number of problems vitiate Nussbaum's arguments here, several of which are well-known but still deserving of reassessment. In his analysis of this essay, Eaglestone convincingly indicts Nussbaum for "poor and sometimes inaccurate readings," which are "reductive," and, for "epi-reading," for failing to take into account the "textual nature of a literary work" and reading the work as though it were a window on "real situations and real events" (*Ethical Criticism* 46).[16] Eaglestone claims that for Nussbaum "reading works of literature principally evokes only emotional responses," and that "Nussbaum's approach demands that the reader identifies with the characters in order to enact their stories and it is this enactment which generates the emotional response" (*Ethical Criticism* 48-9). Though his preference for a Levinasian deconstructive mode of reading is also equally unappealing, Eaglestone is fairly accurate in his criticisms. Reading Nussbaum's essay, we come away with little sense that she takes into account the "representation of the events," [the] "medium, the text," and instead has focused exclusively on events and characters in the text (*Ethical Criticism* 47). Nussbaum thus appears, as Philipp Wolf describes the propensity, too "content-oriented," so overly focused on the nuts-and-bolts of the "practical human experience" depicted that she neglects textual and linguistic dimensions (89).

Most difficult to reconcile is that Nussbaum only fleetingly touches on literary and linguistic devices. In my approach to moral fiction, I want to be able to talk about

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[16] Part of Eaglestone's aversion to Nussbaum certainly stems from her own ambivalence towards Derrida. As she phrases it, she "hungers […] for […] writing about literature that talks about human lives and choices as if they matter to us all" after reading Derrida (171).

moral issues in literary works with a firmer textual basis, not mainly as test-cases for

fleshing out an ethical philosophy. Thus, I focus my critical attention largely on the

formal, narrative, rhetorical, and linguistic devices that a text uses to take up moral

questions and problems. I will not be analyzing *The Golden Bowl* in a later chapter, but I

want to refer to it here to suggest some outlines of my approach. While the novel deals

with an adulterous, incestuously-tinged relationship, it often seems to view the adulterers

more sympathetically than their "wronged" spouses. In fact, many critics take it as read

that the novel critiques the highly principled but rigid morality embodied by Maggie and

her father and implicitly endorses the organic, flexible morality embodied by Prince

Amerigo. Some, like Nussbaum, argue that the novel charts how Maggie gradually

develops an improvisatory morality, in which she becomes more acutely perceptive and

subtly responsive to those around her. This is an altogether plausible reading, but it

requires more textual evidence. Locating this support is made difficult by the fact that

much of the novel is told in an oblique fashion, as interior narrated monologue, as

narrative spoken in dialogue, with little direct commentary intruded by the narrator. For

example, we learn about the Prince's and Charlotte's previous relationship from Fanny,

who holds a favorable view of the Prince. Fanny exemplifies a particular Jamesian

literary device, the *ficelle*, a character that strings together the plot, and this means we

should pay special attention to her. Her personal feelings no doubt color her account, as

does the fact that she is relating it at least several years afterwards. Greater attention to

textual points such as these would shore up Nussbaum's reading.[17]

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[17] Against this view, Cora Diamond unconvincingly argues that "people tend to get distracted" by
Nussbaum's paying "direct attention to (among other things) the deliberations of characters in the novels"

As he stresses throughout his 1988 *The Company We Keep* (*CWK*), Booth also

wants to reconnect human experience and literature. But whereas Nussbaum values some

texts as high moral accomplishments, Booth evaluates them as potential friends for

readers. He works out from an etymologically fuller sense of "ethics," emphasizing how

the original Greek root, "ethos," entails connotations of "'character' or 'collection of

habitual characteristics,'" and then defines ethical criticism as that which "attempts to

describe the encounters of a story-teller's ethos with that of the reader or listener"; or, as

Booth later describes it, "how the virtues of narratives relate to the virtues of selves and

societies, or how the ethos of any story affects or is affected by the ethos---the collection

of virtues---of any given reader" (*CWK* 8, 11). What Booth implies is that some texts will

prove better friends than others to some readers, but also that some readers will be better

friends to some texts. In other words, texts express certain values, which can influence

readers, but readers also come to texts with their own values, which can influence how

they read the text.[18] While Booth is interested in analyzing this reciprocal relationship, he

acknowledges that this is not an end in itself, and he moves on from it to questions

regarding appraisal, evaluation, and judgment. As Booth contends, some encounters will

prove more beneficial than others, some books will be better friends than others (*CWK*

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(42). But what Diamond is asking is that we, in effect, do as Nussbaum says, not as she does. Still, Nussbaum attends more to the text than several recent ethical critics whose work I am not examining in detail. Frank Palmer, for example, claims that fiction helps us to have a better understanding of actual persons. S. L. Goldberg argues for viewing literary characters as voluntary agents, with "lives" critics should consider. Colin McGinn appraises the moral character of characters by their actions in the text, what they do and how they act.

[18] Kwame Anthony Appiah and Arjun Appadurai make much the same point about cultural and consumer goods in a global economy, arguing that these goods do not assimilate consumers to a particular worldview predicated on western-style consumerism but are assimilated by local consumers and worked into their own specific local context. See Chapter 5, "The Moral is History," for a fuller discussion.

126, passim). What Booth advocates is a "coductive" approach, which should offset irresponsible attacks on texts of which readers simply disapprove for personal or political reasons. For Booth, coduction is a way of evaluating the relative worth of narrative based on the evaluator's expertise and knowledge of other such works, an evaluation that remains provisional and is subject to alteration and amendment when the evaluator encounters the coduction of other critics (*CWK* 72-3).

Booth's approach sounds reasonable, but when he applies it to particular literary texts, the results are not entirely satisfactory. Like Nussbaum, Booth offers sample analyses early on to give readers a taste of what is to come in the longer analyses of Rabelais, Jane Austen, Mark Twain, and D. H. Lawrence. In these, Booth sometimes neglects the role literary devices play in the texts he discusses, sometimes relying on personal anecdotes and experiences as support for his claims. For example, Booth begins by offering an anecdote about an incident that eventually led him to reconsider ethical appraisals. He relates a sentimental story about Paul Moses, a black colleague who refuses to teach *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* because he cannot abide its racism: that the novel is so cleverly written only compounds the matter for him (*CWK* 3). Booth confesses that though he initially found Moses's outburst incomprehensible because it suggested that novels or pieces of literature might have effects on the people who read them, he has since had a change of heart, brought about by his experiences with Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Booth confesses to relishing the novel's trafficking in sexism, in which it posits a male world of unlimited freedom, exemplified by the rambunctious hothead McMurphy, in contrast to and in conflict with a female

world of civilization and rules, represented by the icily reptilian Nurse Ratched [sic],

whose name itself suggests a device for medieval torture, and also "wretched." Booth

quotes a lengthy passage from the novel, in which the protagonist assaults the head nurse,

emphasizing how the passage plays up male fantasies of rape. But Booth does not take

into account how the novel's specific literary devices undermine his reading. This is

difficult to explain considering Booth's expertise in categorizing literary devices. Kesey's

novel may be sexist, but the scene in question is focalized through and narrated by a

character-narrator, the Chief, and a reading should deal with this device thoroughly

before accusing the novel or the writer of sexism. That the Chief relishes the attack on

Nurse Ratched probably stems from his being victimized not just by her and her minions

in the asylum but also by the whole rational, clinical ethos represented by her. This

character-narrator's sexism is still unacceptable but it is also more understandable. The

same caveat applies to *Huckleberry Finn*: it is a tale told by a character-narrator, an

aspect which must be factored into the account. The problem for Booth here is that both

of these character-narrators introduce instabilities into his reading which would

complicate the kind of judgment Booth seems intent on passing.[19]

Booth's longer essays better demonstrate a "coductive" approach, but Booth still

seems concerned mainly with rendering negative judgments, as if to stress his *bona fides*.

His "Rabelais and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism" illustrates this tendency in

particular. After a lengthy introduction, Booth sidles up to his topic: how worthy of

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[19] Booth's ambivalence about unreliable narrators, especially impersonal ones, shows up in his early, most famous work, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Not only that, but Booth generally concentrates on nineteenth-century British authors. Except for Henry James, there are no American authors, and few authors at all from the twentieth century. Twain in particular represents a problem: he may be nineteenth-century in terms of the period in which he lived, but his work, especially *Huckleberry Finn*, anticipates modernist works in many ways.

review are re-evaluations by "political victims" of what "White, male, bourgeois critics" have stressed are canonical works (*CWK* 384)? What he concludes is that Rabelais's works are ethically faulty, and that these faults render the implied author somewhat less than a best friend. Booth stresses how feminist criticism has long provided a model of ethical criticism because it presupposes that texts have effects on readers, negative ones if the readers are female and the writers male. Considering a question many feminist critics address in their work, Booth focuses on how and in what ways a text by Rabelais "implies […] women can enter its imaginative world as equals or they cannot" (*CWK* 387). The quotations taken from Rabelais's texts suggest that their implied author is no friend of women, since "he" positively delights in degrading the female characters. Booth initially resists arriving at this conclusion. Throughout the essay, he considers opposing views, including whether Rabelais's works themselves might criticize the sexist views that the works seem to be espousing. In a bizarre interlude, he introduces a sample letter from *Penthouse* magazine and a poem by John Donne, both of which he argues exclude women from their imaginary worlds. He finds that Rabelais offers an example not as egregious as these. However, after a careful analysis and consideration of context, Booth cannot exonerate Rabelais, even in light of the fact that Bakhtin's "Carnivalesque" theory claims an ethical dimension to the earthy, anarchic humor. Instead, Booth concludes, or rather "pass[es] the sentence": Rabelais is systematically unjust to "one half of human reality," and this ethical fault vitiates his many aesthetic strengths (*CWK* 387). In sum, while Booth makes recognizable, replicable theoretical "moves" in his analyses, his tendency to pass judgment on them is at variance with my methodology's aims. Moral

fiction is not about passing a sentence or making a judgment, but about attending to the processes of exploration and discovery enabled by a literary text's deployment of form.

Writing more recently, Lee Oser reconsiders the maligned idea that humans possess a common human nature. Like Nussbaum, Oser is an avowed Aristotelian; unlike Nussbaum, Oser is a literary critic, a T. S. Eliot scholar in particular. In his 2007 *The Ethics of Modernism*, Oser argues that readers must reconsider human nature, or human character, if they are to fully understand the "modernist moral project," which Oser argues is to "transform human nature through the use of art," particularly to replace a human's embodied ethical sense with a disembodied aesthetic perceptiveness (1-2). As Oser contends, if artists aim to "dehumanize" us through their art, to change what we think of as human nature or character, then they must have a baseline notion of that human nature or character is before they can dehumanize it; and critics, if they are to comprehend this aim, must also have a similar baseline understanding of this human nature so that they will know what they are looking for in the literary works (120-1). In his analyses, Oser proceeds with an Aristotelian theory of human nature. As Oser points out, this theory does not see the mind and body as split or the cognitive and the biological as separate (9). More specifically, Oser stresses that the mind has a "purchase on reality" through the body, which is "in close contact with actual life" (9). Oser contrasts this idea with that of the modernists, who emphasize a split between the mind and body. According to Oser, modernists manifest this emphasis through their concentration on mental processes, through stressing the psychological processes of protagonists over physical actions: what matters is not what they do but how they perceive the world.

According to Oser, Aristotle's view holds that the mind or soul realizes and manifests itself in its actions: it is what it does (5). The problem with all this is that it is clear enough to an Aristotelian but is unlikely to have much effect on others. This is exacerbated by Oser's terse and sometimes cryptic style. He could do more to clarify the Aristotelian notion of human nature, especially since many critics reject ideas of human nature much more categorically and forcefully than did the modernists that Oser studies.[20]

One problem with Oser's work is that because he deplores the modernist "moral project" many of his essays amount largely to negative critiques of the modernists he selects for analysis. Oser faults them, in effect, for not being Aristotelian enough, for, as he sees it, wrong-headedly perpetuating a Cartesian separation of mind and body. The problem is that while Oser cites specific techniques in support of his argument, the idea that the modernists worked systematically and expressly to undo the Aristotelian theory of human nature strains plausibility. For example, he claims that Yeats and Eliot use "masks" and "personae" in their poetry to "denigrate the practical self engaged in the business of life" (9-10). It is more reasonable to conclude that Yeats and Eliot used these devices probably because they helped them extend the range of their poetry, not because "masks" run counter to Aristotelian notions of human nature. It seems at times that Oser, like Nussbaum, is pitching his argument to philosophers interested in the history of ideas,

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[20] In her review of the book, Marian Eide finds Oser's "position so traditional as to appear almost eccentric" ("*The Ethics of Modernism*" 163). Oser would not be surprised. He is dismissive of Eide's Levinas because, for Oser, Levinas's philosophy is at too much variance with human nature. Though human nature is a problematic concept, Oser's view is still worthy of our attention. His perspective on human nature is not celebratory or self-congratulatory; if anything, it is pessimistic, as it accepts the idea that some aspects of human behavior have a fairly fixed biological basis, that they are constants that cannot be changed overnight by programmatic art.

rather than to literary critics and theorists. Though he offers many insights into Aristotelian thought, Oser's Aristotelian framework seems overly restrictive when it is applied to complex literary texts. Whereas Booth values texts as potential friends, Oser values them, not unlike Nussbaum, as exemplars (or not) of Aristotelian philosophy.

Second Emphasis: Reformulating Responsibility

I have been arguing that traditional ethical critics like Booth, Nussbaum and Oser do not usually pay enough attention to literary devices and the role they play in dealing with moral issues in literature. Of course, it is not so much that these critics do not focus on responsibility, but that they do so in a way that links responsibility to a vague notion of human experience rather than to the rhetorical and linguistic details of texts themselves. This leads them to develop vaguely thematic rather than specifically literary analyses. We can see this kind of attention to textuality developing among the poststructuralist critics I call "ethical textualists": where for Nussbaum criticism should be "responsible to actual human experience," for these key poststructuralist critics, criticism should be responsible to the text (*LK* 173). This shift involves more than the substitution of one dative for another. Whereas for Nussbaum ethics necessarily involves the human, and thus implies responsibility, for these Levinasian and poststructuralist critics, ethics necessarily involves responsibility, and thus implies a text. Their focus on responsibility to the text does not preclude responsibility to the human, albeit indirectly. For these critics, only by responding responsibly to a text do readers respond responsibly to the human who has written the text. However, these ethical textualists often rely overmuch on a Levinasian framework. While they attend to the complexities of literary

texts, they seem to value the texts for how they illustrate aspects of Levinasian philosophy.

The phrase "responsibility to the text" initially evokes ideas and practices associated with New Criticism. However, it would be a mistake to think of the kind of ethical criticism I am discussing as simply "close reading." Gerald Graff describes how many New Critics operated under the "assumption of the 'objective' nature of the literary text, [the] view that a poem is an object whose meaning can be analyzed [e.g., through "close reading"] by a detached, ideally disinterested critic" (129). Opponents of this view have long denied that a text has a nature or intrinsic value and scoff at the idea of the disinterested critic. Further, New Criticism's "'methodology' of interpretation, a technique of close reading by which texts are induced---or forced---to give up their ambiguities, ironies, and complexities," came to be linked with a "Western technological mentality," and was seen as "petty," "constricting and deadening," if not "aggressive," "militaristic" and imperialistic (Graff 129-31). Graff, however, registers the irony of these allegations, for, as he argues, the proponents of New Criticism intended exactly the opposite (133). For them, as for their antagonists, the great nemesis was "scientific empiricism," and they hoped techniques such as close reading would refute the scientific "devaluation of literature" by laying bare the "rich complexity of meaning within even the simplest poem" (Graff 133-4). But as their opponents would argue, New Critics do not "discover" qualities of a text but project or "impose their mental 'paradigms' on it" (Graff 137).

Ethical textualists strive to explore the richness of literary works but attempt to avoid imposing such a grid or paradigm over a text. Such ethical textual critics as J. Hillis Miller and Derek Attridge deplore "instrumentalizing" literary texts: reading them reductively for a moral, sociological or historical lesson, reading literary texts, in other words, as something other than literary texts. In *The Ethics of Reading* (*ER*), Miller seems at first to be writing in opposition to critics like Booth and Nussbaum. But Miller's anxiety stems from literary criticism that deals explicitly with political or social issues. The essays collected in *The Ethics of Reading* serve as counter-examples to overtly political interpretations of literary works, an aim which Miller discusses at some length in his first chapter. His goal is to "shift[] the ground from investigations of the political, historical, and social connections of literature" to the "ethics of reading," namely, that which obtains in the "real situation of a man or woman reading a book, teaching a class, [or] writing an essay" (4). Somewhat unpersuasively, Miller claims that his goal is to be less "vague and speculative" and more concrete and practical than an attempt to explain works of literature by their "political, social, and historical 'contexts'" would be (4-5). This claim seems unusual at first, for Miller's textualist approach is often vague or speculative, not concrete or practical: as Eaglestone argues, Miller's "work is concerned only with the textuality of texts---so much so, that the world seems to disappear in relation to the individual looking at the words on the page" (92). Also, Miller weakly asserts that contextual or historical criticism springs from a desire to master literature, to "tame, control, or repress" it, by reducing it to a mere effect of history instead of a cause of history (5-6). For Miller, literature has performative power: it does not constatively

describe an a priori reality but brings into being a kind of virtual reality in the work and

that reality may have after-effects in the real lives of readers, teachers, and critics.[21]

Miller's linguistic focus also springs somewhat paradoxically from a will to master

literature. Miller wants to focus on the basic situation of the reader and the text because

he thinks that this is the only situation critics can even begin to deal with adequately. For

Miller, to read for how the "adduced historical context inheres in the fine grain of [a

text's] language" entangles critics in boundless reading and interpretation (7). In effect,

he argues that as we cannot hope to master the context of a text, for this would involve us

in innumerable acts of reading and interpretation, we should focus on how texts resist and

subvert being reduced to historical by-products through deconstructive reading (8).

A corollary aim in Miller's *The Ethics of Reading* is to defend deconstructive

reading. For Miller, only deconstructive reading is "good reading" (10). Only this mode

of reading attends to the ethical in reading. As Miller asserts, reading entails a "response

to something," a response that is "responsible to it, responsive to it, respectful of it,"

whatever that "it" or something is (4). Miller speculates that in "writing or narrating

novels, acting as a character within them, reading novels, [and] writing about them,"

there is what he calls "the ethical moment"; in this moment, "there is a claim made on the

author writing the novel, on the narrator [...], on the characters [...], and on the reader,

teacher, or critic responding to the work [... that] cannot be accounted for by the social

and historical forces that impinge on it" (8). For Miller, we cannot hope to get at the

ineffable thing that animates a text. The text is a product of many events: the writing,

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[21] Interestingly, Miller's assertion evokes one of Aristotle's most famous quotes: "the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened [as a historian would do], but a kind of thing that might happen" (*Poetics* 1451b1-5).

rewriting, editing, proofing, and printing (10). Thus, a reading is an event of many other events. In this respect, Miller shows a Platonic tincture, only it is not an imitation that is several times removed from the Idea, but the critic's reading which is removed from the events involved in the writing. So far Miller's points are reasonable. But when he concludes that all readers must become deconstructive readers, if they want to be attentive to the ethical moment that he describes, he sounds intolerant of other critical approaches. While Miller argues that deconstructive reading forbids making a text mean whatever the deconstructive reader wants it to mean, as opponents critical of deconstructive reading argue, Miller's assertion here does not hold up in light of his practice: his essays frequently illustrate this alleged fault (10).

Miller's most whimsical reading comes in his chapter on George Eliot. He quotes a lengthy passage in which Eliot describes a curious aspect of writing, of how when she writes, her "pencil" becomes conscious and adept at drawing a fantastic creature such as a griffin, but it loses this capacity when she wants to "draw a real unexaggerated lion" (qtd. in Miller, *ER* 68). Miller rightly draws attention to this account. It illustrates his point about the difficulty of plainly describing something and suggests that writers have less control over language than they would like to have. But there are two problems with his argument. First, Miller uses a description of the difficulty of representing something faithfully to suggest that writers cannot represent things faithfully. Why should this statement be authoritative? Why should any of the statements in any of the moments in which Miller sees authors stepping back and reading themselves be read as more authoritative than another? In other words, Miller takes moments when authors claim not

to be in authority over their writing at face-value; he is still taking what they say as authoritative. Second, his gloss of the passage sounds like a parody of a Freudian reading. Miller asks his readers to accept that the pencil represents a phallus, then that this "phallic-shaped instrument of writing" has an "impulse toward falsehood," and then that since this "impulse" has an "implicit male gender," the impulse towards "faithfully representing [..] commonplace things is perhaps therefore implicitly female" (68). Miller concludes then that Eliot's "work turns on a dismantling of the 'phallogocentric' male system of metaphysics" (68). I can see how some might view Miller's reading as plausible, but even he seems aware of the speculative nature of what he "argues" here through his frequent "hedging" moves: he uses a form of "implicit" and of "impulse" twice in his explication of Eliot's passage, as well as the odd combination of "perhaps therefore," either of which alone would suggest lack of certainty or hesitation. As Miller rightly concedes, it all seems an "implausibly large issue to pin on" a pencil.

Unlike Miller, who is often vague and speculative, Attridge defines his terms carefully and offers more plausible arguments. Like Miller, his main aim is to counter critical practices that instrumentalize literary works, for this precludes the possibility of responsible reading. As Attridge summarizes, "crudely," by his own admission, instrumentalizing is "the treating of a text (or other cultural artifact) as a means to a predetermined end" (*Singularity* 7). It seems though that to read any text of any kind without some idea of what we are reading for is impossible, in which respect Nussbaum makes the convincing claim that readers' relation to books is "messy, complex, erotic," since readers cannot disengage their "pressing questions and perplexities" when they read

(*LK* 29). To some degree, we all instrumentalize every text we ever read. What Attridge

advocates, however, is "responsible textual instrumentality," in which critics concentrate

on what Attridge initially terms the "deployment of form" (*Singularity* 13). In the brief

examples in *The Singularity of Literature* (*SL*), Attridge focuses on such elements as a

work's "verbal particularity," e.g., the "specific words in a specific arrangement," its

relation to other texts, and to its own genre and other genres (65). So far, Attridge's

principles sound consistent with those of the New Critics. However, in his reading of

Blake's "The Sick Rose," while Attridge carries out a brief but illuminating close

reading, his purpose is not to stress the poem's unity or harmony, but rather to emphasize

how it disrupts and subverts sameness and thus represents a "singularity," a phenomenon

which Attridge defines as an effort to "go beyond the possibilities pre-programmed by a

culture's norms" (63). Blake's poem, for example, embodies this singularity in myriad

ways: its "nursery-rhyme rhythm" suggests a childlike artlessness, yet the poem

"challenges cultural norms" associated with nursery rhymes, roses, and love through its

wording (69). For Attridge, this phenomenon of singularity, moreover, has an ethical

dimension, albeit a meticulously circumscribed and circular one: singularity serves to

"introduce otherness into our world and open up fresh possibilities for further

inventiveness," in that it challenges readers to accommodate but not wholly assimilate a

given text's inventiveness and otherness (52, 130-1).

     Though a detractor could object that using literary works for the singularity they

invoke still amounts to instrumentalizing them, Attridge's critical practice---the way he

reads, the moves he makes---is worthy of emulation. There are problems, however, with

his Levinasian deconstructive interpretive framework. In short, the critical approach he

practices is more technically sophisticated than his theoretical rationale for implementing

it. As is the case with Miller, there is something self-congratulatory about his motivation

for his preferred approach. First, where Miller claims that deconstructive reading "is

nothing more or less than good reading," Attridge claims that deconstruction inspired

"fascination in the brightest of [his] students" (Miller, *ER* 10; Attridge, *Reading and

Responsibility* 9). Second, when Attridge deemphasizes his deconstructive background,

as he does in *The Singularity of Literature*, the self-congratulatory tone surfaces in his

insistence that approaches that find "historical evidence," a "moral lesson," or "political

inspiration" must necessarily neglect the text, unlike his approach. Indeed, Attridge

implies that his is the only way a critic can be responsible to a text.

   Some of Attridge's claims themselves merit a little deconstructive reading.

Attridge's main concern is about instrumentalizing literary works, about their being

press-ganged into social or political causes, including those with which he sympathizes

(*SL* 8). He makes an important point in arguing that the "instrumental attitude" stems

from market-based thinking, from "profit- and productivity-oriented approaches" that

have infiltrated and permeated the academy (9). This is a plausible claim, but Attridge

undermines it when, early in *The Singularity of Literature*, he belabors accounting

metaphors in his discussion of how in "our transactions with art, whether as creators,

consumers, critics, or dealers, we put a premium on the uniqueness of the work" (2).

Attridge possibly uses these economic metaphors intentionally, but it seems a misstep on

his part, an effect that diminishes his claim, unless his point is to suggest that such

metaphors, given the encroachment of markets and such, are inescapable. Attridge thus seems to make an argumentum a fortiori: if he, as one who seeks to avoid instrumentalizing, shows traces of this mentality, then less reflective critics must show much stronger instrumentalizing tendencies.

There are several problems with Attridge's placing a Levinasian deconstructive grid over reading literary works.[22] One need not be a philosopher to reject Levinas's philosophy. As Oser sums it up, stripping away the "protective mask of character" to "lay bare the pretensions of the ego" might be "necessary" in certain instances, but one "would hesitate to build an entire ethics on such precarious and painful moments" (126-7). Oser is also correct when he suggests that Levinasians such as Attridge deny human nature too categorically, in that they neglect "the body's physiological (non-intentional) contributions to mental activity" (126). Indeed, in addition to his use of accounting and financial metaphors, Attridge resorts to biological and even pathological ones. For him, introducing singularity is like introducing a "germ, a foreign body" into the "cultural matrix[] that cannot be accounted for by its existing codes" (55). Attridge seems to conflate biology- and computer-speak, and it leads him to imply that like a computer code, human DNA is rewriteable. Second, a Levinas-influenced mode of reading repeats and perhaps even exacerbates the problem of reading inherent in the Aristotelian way: literary texts serve as handmaidens for philosophy. For Aristotelians, literature offers concrete examples of what ethicists only discuss abstractly; for Levinasians, literary works stage encounters between the self and the "other." The problem with this latter

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[22] Adam Zachary Newton's concepts about "narrative ethics" are problematic for much the same reason in the next section, "Returning to Narrative."

approach is that Levinasian literary critics tend to deal only with texts which reinforce what they already believe, texts with "face-to-face" encounter between one self and an "other." Finally, Attridge's goal, while it seems broad if not almost infinite, severely limits what literary critics are to read for. Whereas Miller would have us believe that the main "lesson" that a text imparts involves its indeterminacy, Attridge would have us believe that we are ethically culpable if we note a social, historical or moral lesson instead of striving merely to respond responsibly to texts' irreducible otherness.[23]

Third Emphasis: Returning to Narrative

We have seen that the problem with traditional ethical critics like Booth and Nussbaum is that they pay insufficient attention to literary and linguistic devices and that while ethical textualists improve on the traditionalists by focusing specifically on texts' formal elements, their work is marred by an attenuated notion of the ethical. This third emphasis on narrative links up with the other key emphases of the new ethical criticisms: indeed, the concern for responsibility and the interest in human experience leads logically to a reconsideration of the deep significance of narrative, understood not only as stories with plots and characters but as ethical structures, shaped by humans, that in turn shape human responses and desires in a complex reciprocal fashion. The thinkers here stress the importance of narrative in a time of crisis for many literary critics, who sometimes fear that literary art is dying, if not already dead. Miller's 2002 prognosis is especially dire: the "end of literature is at hand" (*On Literature* 1). In an era of new media, the internet,

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[23] Attridge's "Touching 'Clay': Reference and Reality in Dubliners" in *Joyce Effects* illustrates this tendency in particular. In this reading, Attridge's insights are intriguing, but his conclusion, that we should strive to avoid trying to figure out the substance that Maria touches in the game, falls flat. Not identifying it, leaving it unidentified, by Attridge's reckoning, allows the text's ethereal "otherness to remain other, unassimilable, unconceptualizable, irreducible, [and] resistant" (51).

computer games, DVDs, CDs, online movies, gaming, downloadable music, cable and

satellite TV, when fewer students opt for degrees in literary studies, when fewer people

even seem to read fiction, reports of literature's death or impending death sound sadly

plausible.[24] However, as Miller goes on to suggest, only the social institution of literature

is terminal. "Literature" understood as a "feature of any human culture at any time and

place," Miller optimistically declares, "will survive all historical and technological

changes" (*On Literature* 1). Miller's redefined "literature" parallels conceptions of

narrative recently reemphasized by a number of contemporary moral philosophers. And,

if we stress the connection between literature and storytelling or narrative, the prognosis

for "literature" looks less grim. Literature understood as printed books of imaginative

writing may end---soon. But "literature" understood more broadly as narrative, story-

telling, represents a different and hardier species altogether.

Moral philosophers such as Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre reconsider

human experience by reasserting the constitutive role narrative plays in our lives---

narrative for these thinkers makes human experience what it is. There are two ways to

understand this. As long as human beings exist, narrative, storytelling, "literature," as

Miller inclusively defines it, will also exist; conversely, if this kind of "literature" dies

out, human beings will die out, too: we need narrative to survive. Accordingly, the critics

and thinkers I am dealing with shift their focus from literature as a social institution to an

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[24] Interestingly, Attridge makes precisely the opposite claim at the beginning of *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). For him, the superabundance of reading groups, book clubs, and "testimony" in various periodicals about "literature's unsettling, intoxicating, moving, delighting powers" suggests that interest in literature qua literature is at an all-time high. Possibly, but literature is surely not preeminent. As Gregory Jusdanis laments in his 2010 *Fiction Agonistes*, literature leads a more precarious existence now than it ever has because it is viewed as just another commodity, one which must compete with a whole range of popular entertainment (2).

inclusive understanding of narrative. They insist on a clear and direct link between this sense of narrative and ethics, whether they work from a postmodern or poststructuralist framework, or from a more traditional Aristotelian, Hegelian or rhetorical and narrative-theoretical framework. However, the most useful of these critics do more than simply emphasize narrative's impact on social cohesiveness or personal identity: more than any of the other critics I have been discussing they balance a sense of narrative's ethical dimension with careful attention to the specific techniques and devices storytellers use in constructing narratives.

It is useful to note how the renewed interest in narrative's moral implications developed alongside the resurgence of ethical criticism, anticipating it in some cases. I discuss his importance in more detail later, but John Gardner merits recognition here for drawing attention to narrative's moral implications long before it was again fashionable to do so. Writing in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the era of theory and anti-novels, Gardner asserts that art including fiction represents a "civilization's single most significant device for learning what must be affirmed and what must be denied" (146). This rather extravagant claim parallels ideas stated more recently (and more modestly) by a group of thinkers I term "narrative ethicists." Their contribution to the kind of approach I am proposing is their belief in narrative's constitutive role in human existence: they provide a basis or rationale for my approach. For example, in *After Virtue* (1981), MacIntyre stresses that if humans are "unscripted" and deprived of the "dramatic resources" of narratives and stories, they become "anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words" (216). In *Sources of the Self* (1989), Taylor argues that our identity, who we

are or who we think we are, depends on inescapable moral frameworks, and that "our

sense of the good," or "qualitative discrimination," is necessarily "woven into [our]

understanding of [our] life as an unfolding story" (47). In her 1992 *Situating the Self*,

Seyla Benhabib contends that people identify actions "narratively," i.e., with reference to

person, time, and place, and that, moreover, the "whoness of the self is constituted by the

story of a life---a coherent narrative of which we are always the protagonist, but not

always the author or the producer" (127).[25]

The problem, however, with narrative ethicists is that when they actually turn

towards a literary narrative, the results are rather lackluster: none pays enough attention

to the specific literary devices that undergird the narratives. As Andrew Gibson wryly

remarks in a different context, while these thinkers "may feel that [… that they are on

new ground, [..] literary critics and theorists will not" (9). MacIntyre, for example,

concentrates on the content and characters of literary works that, for him, demonstrate a

coherent set of virtues, especially Aristotelian ones. He gloomily announces that the

novels of Jane Austen represent an end-point, the end of the line for virtues (240).

MacIntyre argues that Austen's works systematically explore vices and virtue,

emphasizing self-knowledge and "constancy," or the ability to "recognize threats to the

integrity of [one's] personality" and then to act accordingly to thwart the threat (242).

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[25] Booth, Nussbaum and Parker make similar claims. For example, Booth asserts that as "narratives make and remake what in realist views are considered more primary experiences," they "make and remake [us] ourselves" (14). Nussbaum claims that "throughout our living we are, in a sense, makers of fictions"; and, the "activity of literary imagining" extends and deepens the reader's experience, "bringing the reader into contact with locations or persons or problems he or she has not otherwise met," and "giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life" (46-7). Finally, in 1994's *Ethics, Theory and the Novel*, Parker emphasizes that a person's individual "identity is embedded with communal stories": a culture's narratives "are part of who we are" (17).

Similarly, Taylor holds Proust's *À la recherché du temps perdu* in special regard, since in this novel, readers see a character-narrator who establishes a "meaningful unity" of his past life, present, and future, in that that past life, all that "'wasted' time," comes to be seen as a necessary "time of preparation for the work of the writer who will give shape to this unity" (51). "Marcel" regains the lost time through writing it up and concluding, paradoxically and circularly, that the time has not been lost at all because it has prepared him for the work of narration that he shall now undertake. This conclusion represents more of a starting point for discussion than a summation of an issue raised by Proust's work. More importantly, though, Proust's masterpiece finds its expression in a half-dozen thick substantial volumes. Taylor's brief summation cannot do justice to such a complex literary text. While narrative ethicists rely on literary texts to help them make some of their philosophical arguments, their readings of literary texts are sometimes unimpressive to literary critics and theorists.[26]

More impressive are the ways in which ethics, narrative theory, and rhetoric converge in the work of "ethical narrativists," as I call them. These critics are Adam Zachary Newton, a Levinasian literary critic, and James Phelan, a narrative-theoretical critic. Newton's value is that he locates ethics in the act of narrating and not in a lesson in the narrative. In other words, for Newton, narrative *is* ethics, ethics *is* narrative. Newton defines his idea of "narrative ethics" conjoined as an "armature of intersubjective relation accomplished through story," narrative understood as "relationship and human

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[26] This is of course not to denigrate the important work of these estimable moral philosophers. I rely heavily on MacIntyre and Taylor in my later chapters, using many of their insights to situate my readings. I only mean to emphasize that I note their main strengths in their philosophical writings rather than in their literary-critical writings.

connectivity," as "claim, as risk, as responsibility, as gift, as price," all of which are "[i]ndependent of any external moral brought to bear upon" them (7). This requires some unpacking. For Newton, literary narrative affords a kind of dramatic, fictional access to the internal psychology of characters. In this we can see how they work and think through---or fail to work and think through---what are ultimately moral choices. By and large we encounter this dimension only in literary narrative: no other form of writing does this. However, problems emerge even before Newton carries out his analyses. For one thing, as helpful as it is, Newton's terminology often recalls the kind of arcane jargon commonly associated with poststructuralist criticism. At the same time, he makes frequent reference to Judaic teachings, even beginning *Narrative Ethics* with a pair of epigraphs in Hebrew, one from Genesis, the other from "Kiddushin." This combination is often discordant. His commentary also features abundant metaphors of bondage and sadism. For example, as Newton phrases it, "storytelling fastens on to its participants only to sever them from the world"; these participants are "driven out […] yoked to one another only through involuntary and baleful narrative enchainment" (7). In other words, Levinas's ethics connect the other to "me," and thus this ethical sense imparts the impression of being held or bound by this other. To borrow an idea from Oser, this is not a situation upon which I would seek to establish an entire ethical philosophy---or a full-scale approach to literary texts.

Newton is of course a devout Levinasian, and his belief in Levinas's ethics seems to warp not only his lexical choices but also some of his critical practices, including his principles of selection. Newton's choices are exclusively canonical. He discusses

Sherwood Anderson, Joseph Conrad, and Henry James, to name a few. The only non-white authors he includes are Richard Wright and Kazuo Ishiguro, and these two appear each in a discussion involving two other canonical authors. Wright, for instance, appears in a chapter that deals also with Stephen Crane and Herman Melville. Second, while his readings are engaging, Newton chooses literary texts, particularly Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio,* based on the degree to which they exemplify and illustrate the theories of Emmanuel Levinas. Newton claims the short-story form is not "ethical" in a Levinasian sense, and differs from "Narrative": where stories "traffic in theme and plot, devices of curtailment and constraint," "Narrative," Newton declares, involves the interruption of a self by an "other," an interruption that a story, with its plot, is seen itself to interrupt (105). Initially, for Newton, what is valuable about the stories in *Winesburg, Ohio* is that the characters in them are seen to resist being "Said" or flattened in a plotted story but instead narrate themselves in a performance or "Saying" (105). In other words, Newton discusses Anderson's book because its characters, as if aware of Levinas's teachings, illustrate and exemplify his theories. What we get are thematic readings, ethical readings based on revealing Levinasian themes. For Newton, at his most homiletic, the town of Winesburg and its inhabitants represent a "pre-Levinasian world," in that the characters enact the risky ethical encounters with others only without the "transcendence or succor" that Levinas "describes" (106).

Although Newton claims that knowledge of Levinas adds a "helpful gloss" to Anderson's book, he relies so heavily on Levinas that *Winesburg, Ohio* comes to seem a gloss to Levinas, not the other way around. Much of the section on *Winesburg, Ohio*

reads kaleidoscopically, with a glance at one story, then another, then another in a confusing clash of sermonizing, generalizing and invoking Levinas's name at almost every possible juncture. Even following Newton's train of thought through one section, let alone through the whole chapter, poses significant challenges. In one section, "Words Carry with Them the Places They Have Been," Newton touches on seven different stories in the space of only nine paragraphs, which are freighted besides with quotations from Levinas's works. He quotes Levinas, and then makes a generalization about one of the stories, as if Newton wishes simply to overwhelm his readers with his impressive, confident decrees. He does slow down long enough to support an assertion when he devotes four whole and insightful paragraphs to "Hands," the story of Wing Biddlebaum. Newton focuses on passages where Wing's hands follow their own logic, refusing to match the restraint Wing shows in what he says. For Newton, Wing's hands represent the "Saying" or performance, his words, the "Said," or defined. He relates this plausible interpretation to his over-arching idea about how Winesburg is "pre-Levinasian": narration in Winesburg, as most tellingly exemplified by Wing's plight, "becomes self-damning," in that instead of "binding" (a word Newton emphasizes again and again) the characters together, Wing's act of narration, in which he tells of how he was run out of a town, underscores Wing's separateness from his hearer, George (109-11).

While Phelan acknowledges similarities between his work and Newton's, he is also quick to stress what I regard as absolutely central differences. Whereas Newton considers narrative *as* ethics, Phelan views narrative as rhetoric: he claims that rhetoric necessarily involves ethics but does not equate ethics with narrative (21-2). Like Attridge

only more so, Newton derives his ethical categories from Levinas; Phelan stresses that he

strives to "let those categories arise out of an examination of narrative technique" (22).

This is wholly in synch with my methodology's attending so much to process; my

analyses do not impose a grid over the literary texts I am examining but let the moral

concepts arise out of dealing with the texts' literary devices and techniques. More on this

later, but for now we note that a positive effect of Phelan's rationale is that it allows him

to talk about a much wider range of texts and genres, an effect I hope to approximate in

this study. In *Living to Tell About It*, Phelan discusses literary texts by Sandra Cisneros,

Ishiguro, Nabokov, Hemingway, as well as non-fiction, memoirs by Frank McCourt and

a confessional memoir by Kathryn Harrison, in which the author describes a four-year

incestuous relationship with her father. Where Newton's Levinasian underpinnings put

restrictive parameters on what he reads, Phelan tests out his approach through attempts to

engage critically with texts that initially would seem ill-suited to his project. For

example, one technique he examines is dual focalization, which he describes as a

character-narrator's later reflecting on the significance of his or her past actions in the

narrative that he or she is narrating. In this move, the character-narrator "pans out" or

"freezes the frame" and comments on what he or she was doing or thinking or not

thinking at the time. Phelan finds this technique deployed in Nabokov's *Lolita* and also in

McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*. In sum, Phelan organizes texts by their techniques and not by

their content or by their exemplifying a particular strain of philosophical thought. My

analyses take this strategy up with an important variation: they link texts' use of

techniques to examining the particular moral paradoxes relevant to specific periods in the twentieth century.

In his essays, Phelan combines many of the strengths of other ethical critics but avoids their weaknesses and excesses. For example, he examines Cisneros's short story "Barbie-Q," concentrating on a technique that he calls "redundant telling": "a narrator's apparently unmotivated report of information to a narratee that the narratee already possesses" (11). In other words, a narrator tells a narratee a story or account that the narratee already knows, creating a situation which raises the question of why the narrator feels compelled to tell it. This technique suggests to Phelan indirect and often ethically freighted communication from the implied author. As Phelan claims, a character, including character-narrators, can serve three functions: mimetic, thematic, and synthetic (13). The mimetic involves resemblances to possible people, while the thematic refers to types or representatives of particular ideas, and the synthetic concerns the devices or techniques, the technical means that an author uses for "indirect communication" to and with an audience (13). When, as Phelan argues in this case, the mimetic is compromised by a narrator's otherwise inexplicable redundant telling, the rhetorical weight of the narrative's purpose shifts to thematic and synthetic considerations (15). Instead of the narrator necessarily needing to tell her narratee something, as in Cisneros's story, Phelan stresses that the implied author here needs to tell her implied audience something about the "cultural narratives" associated with Barbie-dolls, narratives that have to do with "mainstream culture's ideas about female beauty," for example, or how a cultural narrative emphasizes "steady acquisition" of fashion items (15-6). Cisneros, the implied

author, calls some attention to the mimetic function of a narrator in a narrative in order to make a thematic point, in order for the authorial narrator to communicate indirectly with an authorial audience (16).

Phelan's approach avoids the kind of impasse or standoff that obtains between my two main clusters of ethical critics, the literary ethicists and the ethical textualists. Phelan's approach allows for discussion of moral problems and topical issues by drawing attention to specific textual markers. In this way, Phelan puts into practice what Altes advocates as a way to avoid the reductiveness of ethicists and of the textualists: Phelan explores "how---through what devices---narrative texts, written and read in specific contexts, thematise, problematise, or consolidate specific moral values and norms; and how their ethical value can lie in the questioning of morality itself" (Altes 145).

With this rhetorical narrative-theoretical approach to ethics in literary criticism in mind, I plan to chart and navigate a prudent middle course between the practices of the literary ethicists and ethical textualists I have been discussing. Accordingly, in Chapter 1, taking Gardner's *On Moral Fiction* as a point of departure, I lay out some principles for selecting and analyzing literary texts called "moral fiction." Moral fiction is fiction that integrates aesthetic complexity with moral responsibility and confronts moral complexity with aesthetic responsibility. In this way, it highlights the complexity of a host of vexing twentieth-century moral problems and at the same time thwarts the kind of vaguely thematic criticism of traditional ethical critics. In Chapter 2, I focus on Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, a novel dealing with the moral chaos of a modern urban civilization at the advent of the twentieth century, an era in which many conventional moral concepts

were fragmenting. After attending to the ways in which critics have valued Conrad's

work for its implicit moral vision, I devote the bulk of my discussion to analyzing

Conrad's use of literary devices and techniques to allegorize the moral chaos of London

at the turn of the twentieth century in the author's 1907 *The Secret Agent*. My argument

is that Conrad enacts this moral chaos on the lexical, diegetic, and generic levels of his

novel. For example, critics have long debated about the narrator, noting how "his" voice

is reactionary if not "ideologically guilty" (Eagleton, *Against the Grain* 23). I argue that

the narrator represents a complex composite of several different types of narrator: an

authorial, covert, and dramatized narrator, whose irony varies in intensity, becoming

multiplex or "two-way" in key passages, thus creating a kind of narrative chaos that

mirrors London's moral chaos. In addition, this chapter briefly discusses questions about

Conrad as a writer. Conrad wrote many monumental modernist literary works, and also

talked about a relation between art and morality, but his reputation is tarnished due to

charges that he is a racist, sexist, political reactionary, or complicit with western

imperialism. Though these allegations are still open to debate, my point is not necessarily

to rebut them: a writer's personal morality is less important than her or his writerly or

textual morality. Still, I stress my disagreement with these views by pointing up how they

depend on imputing the views of Conrad's characters and narrators to Conrad himself.

Leaving behind the moral chaos of Conrad's London, Chapter 3 plunges into the

moral paralysis of James Joyce's Dublin, analyzing the ways in which several of Joyce's

major texts, taken together, enact what I am calling a "moralogue": an attempt to deal

with the moral chaos and moral paralysis of the early twentieth century. My argument is

that this process involves identifying the effects of moral paralysis, charting a narrative of

artistic development to escape it, as exemplified by Stephen Dedalus, and then linking

this to the development and deployment of a moral imagination, as embodied by Leopold

Bloom. My reason for choosing Joyce's texts is that they tend to be viewed as aesthetic

or technical breakthroughs, participating in a modernist trend of liberating texts from

moral evaluative criteria, whereas I note a sustained engagement with concepts of the

moral throughout them. As I claim, the moral and the aesthetic are intertwined in Joyce's

work, and I pay attention to ways my reading is sustained by Joyce's use of literary and

linguistic devices. To cite one instance, in *Dubliners*, we discover characters that are

shaped by cultural narratives, a situation that is mirrored by the shaping influence of an

external but also subtle and elusive narrative or textual voice. *A Portrait* loosens this

framework by using an impersonal or absent narrator, one that makes little intrusive

commentary. This feature has given rise to the recurring critical question of whether the

implied or "inferred" author views Stephen ironically or indulgently. The device of the

absent or covert narrator requires readers to tolerate ambiguity and to focus carefully on

the text and look for subtle clues in an unfolding and ongoing exploration.

In Chapter 4, I examine John Gardner's attempt to reboot the moral, to

rehabilitate it as a serious literary category, in the early 1970s, during the heyday of

postmodernism, a time when terms like "moral" and "ethics" were derided, excluded, and

arguably banished from domains of the literary and the literary-critical. However,

Gardner's literary project does not aim to illustrate moral concepts, let alone make banal

moral judgments about literary characters, but rather seeks to examine such concepts

through dramatizing them in a narrative. This process is carried out in the most sustained manner in Gardner's 1972 masterpiece, *The Sunlight Dialogues*. My argument is that Gardner's example challenges the longstanding consensus in which literary critics and artists valued the literary primarily for its perceived separation from the moral, a view that had prevailed for many decades by the time Gardner arrived on the literary scene. Gardner's work belies the notion that an author's interest in moral issues suggests inadequate commitment to the aesthetic and literary, to style and form. While the novel examines urgent social issues in the light of perennial moral-philosophical questions, my focus is on the moral dimensions suggested by Gardner's formal, aesthetic, and stylistic choices. Over and above linguistic texture, aesthetic artifice, and verbal play, the novel stresses the interaction and dialoguing of its main characters. It draws attention to the moral functions of the storyteller-figure not by reasserting authorial voice but by deemphasizing it, through the use of what I call an "abdicating narrator," a figure that becomes conspicuous due to his lack of involvement, his reluctance to comment directly on the actions and motivations of the characters.

In Chapter 5, "The Moral is History," I turn to two recent texts associated with globalization to wrap up and round out this study, to bring it up to the present-day: Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. While both of these novels engage diverse contemporary moral issues, related to immigration, religious fundamentalism, globalization, multiculturalism, and chance versus design, my analysis deals with the question of whether the past determines the future, of whether, in this period of accelerating globalization, we are witnessing a rerun of past or perhaps a

new pilot episode in human history. My argument is that both of these novels seek to reverse reruns or reenactments of past history in the present, while still acknowledging the difficulty of such an undertaking. For example, Smith reasserts the kind of authorial voice we associate with the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but indigenizes or contaminates this device through an emphasis on randomness and chance over and above design and fate. Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* calls attention to how a storyteller-figure in some ways reenacts tendencies of the dictator, as his or her voice alone is heard, and dissenting ones are frequently silenced. My argument is that while Díaz's character-narrator resembles the dictator-figure in key respects, in Díaz's treatment, this narrator is portrayed as undergoing a partial process of reversing these dictatorial tendencies mainly through his process of acknowledging and trying to deal with the new world curse, the fukú, with the ways in which it perpetuates itself through silence and evasion.

Taken together, these chapters will model, I hope, several useful methods and techniques. First, they emphasize selecting and grouping texts around flexible clusters of overlapping and interrelated concerns and structural components instead of selecting and grouping them based on national paradigms or time-periods. Second, the chapters should reinforce the idea that approaches that focus on narrative strategies and literary techniques make for productive scholarly discussion, but they can and perhaps should still foster an appreciation for probing the range of complex moral issues, questions, and dilemmas explored in texts. Finally, these chapters should suggest that if we focus on particular moral issues as they feature in complex literary works through a "moral-

fiction" lens or set of lenses, if we look at how a text challenges its own purported assertions, we do much to avoid the pitfalls associated with the ethical textualists and the literary ethicists I have discussed in this chapter. In this way, we can take into account the complexity, ambiguity, self-reflexivity, and self-referentiality of literary fiction, but still foster awareness of the kinds of moral issues that figure in most if not all literary narratives in some way.

CHAPTER 1:

WHAT IS "MORAL FICTION"?

> Art, in sworn opposition to chaos, discovers *by its process* what it can say. That is art's morality. (Gardner, *On Moral Fiction* 14)

> [Art] is good (as opposed to pernicious or vacuous) only when it has a clear moral effect, presenting valid models for imitation, eternal verities worth keeping in mind, and a benevolent vision of the possible which can inspire and incite human beings toward virtue, toward life affirmation as opposed to destruction and indifference. (Gardner, *On Moral Fiction* 18)

> Novels convey moral truths, though not in any sense of the term that Oral Roberts or Ian Paisley would recognize. A novel with a moral is not likely to be morally interesting. (Eagleton, *After Theory* 144)

> Genre is a minimum-security prison. (Shields 70)

The overarching goal of this dissertation is to devise a method of critical inquiry that allows us to talk about moral issues manifested in literary texts, a method which synthesizes the most productive practices of the new ethical critics, but which avoids their drawbacks as much as possible. More specifically, I want to rehabilitate the moral as a serious critical category, which, I contend, is not covered by the new ethical criticism. In this chapter, I first elaborate my methodology for addressing the question of the moral in fiction. I want to draw on John Gardner, a once popular, then notorious, and now neglected figure, to concentrate on process, narrative, and rhetorical devices that literary texts feature to pose and work through moral questions. I focus specifically on the aesthetic, formal, and rhetorical choices that authors make in carrying out the

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responsibility Gardner claims writers are supposed to demonstrate as they grapple with moral issues. What I call "moral fiction" is fiction that confronts and engages moral issues, dilemmas, and questions but which resists or undercuts overt didacticism or heavy-handed moralizing through processes of testing out, dramatic-embedding, and narrative and rhetorical devices and strategies. The most interesting "moral fiction," I argue, integrates aesthetic complexity with moral responsibility and confronts moral complexity with aesthetic responsibility.

A Methodology for Moral Fiction

This focus on aesthetic complexity in its relation to moral responsibility is connected to my desire to avoid reading complex literary texts simplistically or naively: I am not looking for guidelines to live by, a moral stance to adopt toward a given topical issue, let alone for a comprehensive moral code to implement in my life or anyone else's. The most sophisticated moral fiction offers few such guarantees. However, moral issues animate most if not all literary texts, and we should be able to attend to them intelligently, with a solid textual basis, when we perceive them. Thus, we are presented with the quandary of how to discuss moral issues in a text without irresponsibly instrumentalizing what is a complex literary text. My solution is to cross new ethical criticism with narrative theory and rhetorical approaches to fiction, to carry out careful rhetorical and narratological analyses to get at the "morality" in the text. Since my approach deals with particular literary techniques, devices, methods, mechanisms, and strategies, it avoids concentrating overmuch on content but still fosters reflection on the various moral issues depicted or moral virtues represented in texts. This approach to moral fiction should

allow me to chart and navigate a middle course between the literary ethicists and the ethical textualists, but still make use of the insights facilitated by their critical practices. As Gardner might phrase it, the method I am trying to develop here calls for dealing with how literary works are constructed but also allows for considering what they are constructed to do (*On Writers* 14).

Many of Gardner's precepts in *On Moral Fiction* serve as points of departure for my approach, and it is useful to review some of these before I outline my own methodology. Gardner believes that art, including literary fiction, has positive and negative effects on audiences, readers, viewers, or hearers: art is seldom if ever morally neutral. Concerned with societal fragmentation, disintegration, and "entropy," Gardner asserts that "bad [cynical, morally evasive, escapist, indifferent] art has a harmful effect on society": for him, a "society is cynical and debased because its art is, not the other way around" (*OMF* 148-9, 42; MacCurdy 137). What Gardner advocates in the literary domain is the contentiously named "moral fiction." Tracing his idea back to Homer, Gardner asserts that all narrative fiction, all art, is "moral" if it integrates artistic achievement with societal responsibility, if artists discover what they want to say through a process of creation, and if they forego gimmickry and cheap, sensational, or otherwise unearned effects. In other words, for Gardner, literary artists have a paradoxical, two-fold, and two-way responsibility: to their society or community but also equally to their craft, the art of writing literature. To satisfy the first criterion, moral fiction might offer "valid models for imitation" or "inspire and incite human beings toward virtue, toward life affirmation" (*OMF* 18). At the same time, "moral fiction" must avoid didacticism. As

Gardner frequently rephrases it, moral fiction "does *not* start out with a clear knowledge

of what it means to say": "it is too complex to reflect the party line"; and, it "tests values

and rouses trustworthy feelings about the better and worse in human action" (*OMF* 13,

15, 19).

For my approach, the most crucial component of Gardner's theory is his

insistence on *process*, on the range of aesthetic choices writers make to test out their

ideas to see how they hold up once embedded in dramatized situations. Gardner

repeatedly emphasizes this assertion, formulating it not just in *On Moral Fiction* but in a

range of critical writings undertaken at various stages of his literary and academic

career.[1] In his introduction to the 1962 anthology, *The Forms of Fiction*, his earliest

published writing, Gardner already stresses the crucial distinction that while literary

fiction has "moral implications," it should never be "cheaply moralistic" (Gardner,

"Introduction" 3). For Gardner, a moralistic narrative seeks to "illustrate" "social,

psychological, and metaphysical truths," whereas "good fiction" endeavors to "examine"

them (Gardner, "Introduction" 13). Authors can do this is by commenting on "value

systems by implication": for example, Chekhov and Faulkner do not intrude comments

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[1] A recurring point here is that many of the ideas in *On Moral Fiction*---and the debates they sparked--- hardly begin (or end) with the book's publication in 1978.This is not too surprising, for although he substantially revised it in the mid-1970s, Gardner wrote the bulk of *On Moral Fiction* in 1965, before he had published any of his literary works (MacCurdy136). In fact, one controversy about Gardner involves the question of whether Gardner, after having enjoyed a fruitful career as an author of postmodernist works, experienced a late conversion to literary conservatism, or had only bided his time during the "heyday of literary game-playing and formalist experimentation in the sixties and early seventies," waiting for the "inevitable waning of this 'side-show' literature," when he could again assert the preeminence of the kind of writing he had always preferred (Ekelund 99).The numerous early formulations suggest that Gardner's view remained constant; also, as MacCurdy asserts, Gardner's belief in the "value and morality of art is pervasive in all of Gardner's fiction" as well (136).

on honor or make "explicit moral judgments" about characters; instead, such comments and judgments are "embodied in the dramatic situation" (Gardner, "Introduction" 14). In *On Moral Fiction*, Gardner frequently asserts that the morality of fiction consists in a "discovery *by its process* of what it can say": fiction, if "moral," "tests values," hypothesizes, "clarifies," and "explores, open-mindedly, what it should teach" (*OMF* 14, 19). Eschewing didacticism, moral fiction propagates no "predetermined message," offering instead a "meticulously qualified belief," a belief, Gardner stresses, which only emerges through a rigorous testing out in the "process of the fiction's creation" (*OMF* 85, 65, 108).

This rationale of Gardner's theory of moral fiction is constructive, generative of scholarly discussion, in two interrelated ways. It suggests guidelines for provisionally clarifying a category of "moral fiction" texts and calls for a distinctive if eclectic critical approach that uses and combines key elements of new ethical criticism, rhetorical approaches to fiction, and narrative theory. Most critics have overlooked Gardner's insistence on process, techniques, and mechanisms, or they have applied them only to his own literary creations. No critic has used Gardner's theory of moral fiction as a lens for viewing literary fiction by other authors, whether they come before or follow after Gardner chronologically. My method is to select literary texts in which particular moral issues appear especially salient, especially moral paradoxes or impasses, problems with no easy answers or quick solutions, but then to carry out careful rhetorical and narratological analyses of the specific literary and narrative techniques, devices, and strategies that enable the fictional exploration of these moral issues, these paradoxes, or

riddles. To phrase this workaround in narrative-theoretical terms, my principles of selection entail aspects of "story," the elements, thematic content, topical issues, or "raw material," but my critical and scholarly attention focuses primarily on characteristics of "discourse," the treatment, rendering, and ordering of the elements, content, and issues. One reason for my repeated emphasis on analyses of literary devices is that exploration of morality itself is the domain of philosophy and theology, and these involve different kinds of writing. A *literary* exploration of moral issues requires an analysis of the *literary* devices used in this exploration, not just the moral issues. Literary narratives are effective conduits for exploring and perhaps expounding morality, but if they simply strive to promulgate or defend moral positions, they are not properly literary, fictive works but philosophical or theological tracts---or bad, poor, uninteresting fiction!

Drawing on Gardner and other moral and ethical critics, I note three central concerns around which to group the texts to be examined in this study. These of course tend to overlap, complement, and at times contradict each other. First, my conception of moral fiction assumes that storytellers, narrators, and writers have moral responsibilities to their society and community, and many of these texts dramatize this assumption by foregrounding a storyteller-figure or by emphasizing the communal function of narrative and storytelling, i.e., how the stories characters tell themselves counteract or fail to counteract social anomie, disorientation, disorder, or entropy, disintegration. I concentrate on characters, as well as narrators, that function as embedded storytellers or "moral artists," examining how and why and the degree to which they succeed or fail in

carrying out their responsibilities.[2] In short, some texts of moral fiction gloss the idea of

moral fiction, staging or enacting the storyteller's moral responsibility within the

narrative, stressing the social function of narrative in this and other ways. Since I argue

that the most interesting moral fiction avoids didacticism, I also want to examine how the

texts critique storytellers, narrators, and the social function of narrative, how the texts

point up the shortcomings of characters or narrators as much as their successes. For

example, the narrator in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* maintains an ironic tone which

imparts an impression of detachment. Detachment can serve a protective function but it

can also strongly suggest apathy, a lack of involvement.

The subject of my next two concerns involves how storytellers, narrators, and

writers perform their responsibilities to their societies and to their craft. Following

Gardner's criticism of escapist and evasive fiction, I argue that moral fiction confronts

and engages moral issues, dilemmas, and questions, especially those that represent

deeply-entrenched problems, such as wide-spread anomie, i.e., a situation in which

normative standards of personal conduct and belief are unclear, weak, or absent, or

questions that arise from phenomena with mixed legacies, such as the accelerating pace

of technological developments, the erosion, collapse, or abandonment of many traditional

and conventional moral codes, including increased disbelief in an ordered universe

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[2] The main reason for my abiding interest in this device, why I claim that it represents a hallmark of twentieth-century moral fiction, is that it is used in effect to replace the kind of authorial teller or omniscient narrator of earlier fiction. As we discover in my analyses, most of the novels are indicative of the shift from overt authorial telling to covert narration. This is why I pay special attention to storyteller-figures embedded in the narratives, why my methodology values this figure as a device peculiar to texts of moral fiction (and will spend so much time analyzing it).

presided over by a benevolent God, serious doubts regarding human reason and judgment, and mounting skepticism about human nature or essential reality. Finally, moral fiction also deals with more recent and diverse contemporary moral issues related to totalitarianism, immigration, religious fundamentalism, globalization, and multiculturalism. The fictive works in this study grapple with these and other topical and often intersecting twentieth-century moral problems, such as the lingering effects of colonialism, religious fanaticism, immigration, and the difficulty of having a coherent sense of morality, ethics, or virtue in a fragmented world.[3] Such conditions make for a wariness of and weariness with texts that seem didactic or moralistic, a point which brings us to the third concern. Despite the sensitive and controversial thematic content, texts of moral fiction resist criticism that would instrumentalize them, readings that would celebrate these texts as novels of social progress, didacticism, ideologies, or agitprop. Moral fiction circumvents reductive readings through the deployment of literary techniques, rhetorical devices, and narrative strategies, which include focalization through multiple characters, irony, humor, problematic narrators, the quest as a structuring device, genre-crossing, and chronological discontinuity, distortion, and disruption. By these various means, texts of moral fiction test out what assertions they make as they complicate, problematize, critique, or qualify them.

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[3] This study's inventory of twentieth-century moral problems is not, of course, comprehensive, but reflects particular concerns I share with a number of other critics and theorists, such as MacIntyre, Taylor, and Halliwell. Other critics might point up bigotry, chauvinism, and nationalism as the most significant moral issues of the twentieth-century. One reason that this study does not focus on them specifically is that they lend themselves less readily to the idea of "moral fiction": bigotry, chauvinism, and nationalism are abhorrent, and we should never tolerate them. Technological developments and the erosion of conventional moral values represent more complex legacies, suited to the kind of process of exploration called for by a Gardnerian theory of "moral fiction."

Gardner encourages us to analyze how a text of moral fiction achieves its effects in several ways. Critics may examine successive drafts of literary works to gain a sense of how writers, following out implications raised by their assumptions and assertions, have sought to complicate their key points. They may compare and contrast how a literary text manifests and manipulates generic conventions and common societal beliefs. Most important, critics should analyze the specific strategies and techniques the text features to achieve effects with morally positive implications, such as seeking meaning in a world that seems to have no meaning, fending off societal breakdown yet avoiding simply reinforcing the status quo, or offering glimpses of "aretai ēthikai" and "aretai dianoētikai," which I discuss later in this chapter: particular ethical aretai (moral virtues) and dianoetic aretai (intellectual virtues) performed in culturally and socially specific locations and circumstances.

While I note thematic issues and consider the moral values implied in the texts, I devote the bulk of my analyses to each text's *process*. I focus less on *what* these texts suggest, assert, endorse, and deny, and concentrate mainly on *how*, through what particular literary techniques, the texts structure and stage their explorations of moral issues, impasses, and contradictions, the process through which they discover what they have to teach. The devices and techniques these texts employ serve several interrelated functions. They of course highlight the complexity and contradictory nature of many moral problems but, equally important, they prevent facile moralizing about them, leading, we hope, to a more nuanced understanding of the problems being examined. The use of such devices places significant demands on readers to engage with the text

responsibly, to tolerate ambiguity and inconclusiveness, and to recognize and reflect on how, through what specific devices, techniques, and strategies the texts stage, enact, or replicate particular moral problems.

As I mentioned earlier, I am especially interested in how texts evaluate, critique, or endorse specific moral norms, values, or ethical and dianoetic aretai (moral and intellectual virtues) as embodied by the texts' characters. For example, I dwell on how writers evaluate their characters' motives, goals, and actions, whether through the direct commentary of an intrusive narrator, or through the implicit evaluation suggested by contextualizing one character's words and actions in relation to another's. I also consider techniques writers use to elicit sympathy for these figures by depicting them as embattled and beleaguered by opposing forces, or by echoing or paralleling well-known characters from other texts in the literary tradition. In addition, I explore how particular characters can be taken to represent larger issues, specific ideologies, discourses, or cultural narratives, how they register the pernicious effects of these issues, and how they deal with them: how effectively do they overcome or navigate them---do they merely circumvent them? While I do not want to discount or neglect thematic content, my primary aim is not to extract paraphrasable moral lessons from it; rather, I want to concentrate mainly on the process by which texts advance but test out, problematize, and complicate their points, beliefs, and claims, how they "trouble" what they purport to teach.

The texts I am going to examine feature a range of literary techniques, rhetorical devices, and narrative strategies, which I argue serve moral ends. (I outline my definition

of "moral" in greater detail later in this chapter.) For example, Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* employs the device of an ironic, authorial narrator, which seems extradiegetic, detached and omniscient. My argument is that this narrator represents a composite of an authorial, covert, and dramatized narrator, a complex narrator whose irony fluctuates in intensity and at points becomes multiplex or "two-way." I explore this device in more detail in the next chapter, focusing on how this device affords what Mark Currie calls "image management": the way in which a narrator controls readers' moral sympathy through managing the flow of information about a particular character (22). Other devices include what John Krapp designates as the "pedagogical target," a protagonist-pupil that other characters seek to educate in some manner (39). We see this device in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as well as in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. I discuss this device in more detail in my analysis of Joyce's novel, but for now I will use Díaz's example to explain how this device works. Díaz's novel, like many that feature a homodiegetic or character-narrator, proceeds by indirection, and reflects Yunior's efforts to understand and deal with the fukú or New World curse through his attempt to tell how manifestations of this curse resulted in the death of his friend "Oscar Wao." Yunior is telling us about the fukú, pedagogically targeting readers, but he is also struggling to come to terms with the fukú himself, making himself his own pedagogical target. Finally, the texts feature several overarching and overlapping narrative strategies: they engage literary traditions, manipulate, hybridize, upset and overturn generic conventions---Gardner calls this method or strategy "genre-jumping,"--- dramatize dialectical pressures through antithetical characters, and

indirectly comment by juxtaposing chapters or scenes that critique or complicate previous

or later chapters or scenes.[4]

My critical approach crosses narrative theory with rhetorical and ethical criticism.

This means that I am interested in how, through what specific literary techniques and

devices and narrative strategies, these literary works construct and critique the moral

ethos of their particular characters and through that communicate something to readers,

make some point, even assert a belief, for some purpose. What virtues or "aretai,"

broadly understood, do these characters manifest: practical wisdom, courage, generosity,

theoretical intelligence? Why do we as readers find a character to be morally virtuous,

ambiguous, offensive, or simply deficient in some regard? As a means for exploring such

questions, Phelan's taxonomy of character functions is highly useful, especially the

"thematic function": the "key issues and values [or discourses] within [a] culture or

subculture" a character embodies, resists, or subverts (8-9). Other questions in this regard

involve the general truth-claims the texts make or illustrate, the particular moral

characteristics or virtues they appear to endorse, and the ways they conceptualize a

human's life, including how these works figure individual subjectivity: as an autonomous

subject, a discursive subject lacking autonomy, or a networked self of intersecting

influences? In addition to analyzing the rhetoric *in* the text, i.e., the devices and

strategies, I also examine the rhetoric *of* the text, considering the situation in which the

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[4] My thinking here derives from two main sources. Gardner discusses engaging the literary tradition and putting dialectical pressures on characters throughout the second half of *On Moral Fiction*. Per Winther claims that Gardner's engagement with literary tradition, his "dialectical method" and his "collage technique" represent three key ways in which Gardner's art tests out what it asserts. Gardner's idea of "genre-jumping" appears in several works on writing; the phrase comes from a 1978 interview with Marshall Harvey (qtd. in Winther 68).

text appeared, contextualizing it in relation to historical events and literary traditions. In

the later chapters, I will seek to pose and answer questions about what cultural

conversations the literary works respond to, participate in, or modulate. I will consider

whom these texts view as a target audience, and examine how they manage that

audience's expectations: do they consolidate that audience's beliefs, critique them, or call

them into question entirely, even encourage repudiation of them?[5]

John Gardner's Theory of Moral Fiction

I began this chapter by invoking the figure of John Gardner. Who was he, and

why should we care about an artistic theory of moral fiction expounded by a long-dead

author whose confrontational and uneven *On Moral Fiction* (*OMF*) seriously tarnished

his reputation and career?[6] There are many reasons for taking a renewed interest in

Gardner, in his theory of moral fiction, and in the *On Moral Fiction* debate. As critics

now note, Gardner anticipates the resurgence of ethical criticism. Though he deserves

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[5] While many of the texts in this study are critical of conventional moral concepts, including those associated with marriage, the family, or religion, it might seem that this point favors texts that critique anything held sacred, such as specific religious beliefs. But texts of moral fiction are not necessarily adversarial towards established religion or moral concepts, and my method is not intended to favor texts that question these in a cheap manner. In fact, texts of moral fiction should seek to complicate these kinds of prejudices and stereotypes. For example, as Murray Roston argues, Graham Greene's novels, especially *The Power and the Glory*, often begin with negative Catholic stereotypes but gradually complicate and critique them through the use of specific narrative strategies until readers view the characters in question more sympathetically, even favorably in some cases.

[6] Andrew Gibson, in his 1999 *Postmodernity, Ethics, and the Novel*, offers a relevant precedent. "It is time to go back to Leavis," Gibson declares, though he knows that his statement will probably invite "yawns of boredom, wry smiles, [and] ironical jeers" (1). Asserting that it is time to go back to Gardner may elicit analogous reactions: furrowed brows, rolling eyes, snickers. But what Gibson claims about Leavis applies equally to Gardner. "Leavis thought that novels had effects on those who read them---that, ethically it mattered which novels you valued and how you valued them; how you read them, too, the kind of commentary you produced about them, because commentary itself was a mode of valuation" (1). Gibson, however, distances himself from Leavis and moves on to Levinas, whom he really wants to talk about, in fewer than five pages. My project does more than simply invoke Gardner as an opening gambit; it engages Gardner's theory of moral fiction in a sustained manner.

recognition, to attempt to reconcile his feisty *On Moral Fiction* with later works of new

ethical criticism would be a misguided and futile gesture. Literary critics need him for

other, more important reasons. When cable and satellite TV, YouTube, Facebook, DVDs,

video games, tweets and twitters all vie for our attention, Gardner's theory can act as a

timely and robust corrective to views that dispute literary art's value; at the same time,

his attention to *process* forestalls facile celebrations of literature and prevents making

exuberant, exorbitant claims about it.

   Gardner's relation to the resurgence of ethical criticism requires a brief review.

The aim here is not to rewrite accounts of new ethical criticism wholesale, such that

Gardner gains recognition as its godfather or midwife, but to demonstrate that the issues

Gardner raises and new ethical critics take up are critical to mount a spirited defense of

literature's relevance now. In *On Moral Fiction*, Gardner repeatedly argues that art has a

crucial societal purpose. Art's purpose goes beyond mere instruction: it "creates myths a

society can live instead of die by"; it is a "civilization's single most significant device for

learning what must be affirmed and what must be denied" (*OMF* 126, 146).[7] In 1981's

After Virtue, Alasdair MacIntyre credits Gardner by name for having "traced [how] the

cultural place of narrative has been diminished" to such a degree that theorists understand

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[7] Gardner's views here are already apparent in two early essays: his "'Bartleby': Art and Social Commitment," published in the January 1964 issue of *Philosophical Quarterly*, and the more contentiously titled, "An Invective against Mere Fiction," published in the spring 1967 issue of *The Southern Review* (Gardner, *On Writers* 297). In the first essay, Gardner imputes a messianic function to art, comparing artistic creation to Christ's resurrection: Melville's narrator "rolls the stone away" through the artistic creation of his narrative to "escape[] from the Tombs" (Gardner, *On Writers* 12). In the second essay, Gardner asserts that the artist's voice is like that of the "Holy Ghost," that it has "holy wells" for its source, and style is like a cathedral, i.e., it is not just an edifice or a form but the seat, focal point, or glue that holds a community together (Gardner, *On Writers* 27).

narrative "not as that which connects story-telling with [a] form of human life, but precisely as that which segregates narrative from life, which confines it to what [these theorists take] to be a separate and distinctive realm of art" (226). MacIntyre argues that the stories that humans tell function as resources upon which they draw in response to events and experiences, insisting that "man [..] in his actions and practices, as well as in his fictions, [is] essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth" (216). As MacIntyre stresses, if humans are "unscripted," deprived of the "dramatic resources" of narratives and stories, they become "anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words" (216). As this chapter's second epigraph shows, Gardner believes that art should offer "a benevolent vision of the possible which can inspire and incite human beings toward virtue, toward life affirmation as opposed to destruction and indifference" (*OMF* 18).[8] In 1989's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty makes a similar argument when he asserts that narratives provide members of a society with the new vocabularies they need in order "to be able to tell themselves a story about how things might get better, and to see no insuperable obstacles to this story's coming true" (86). Though Nussbaum never names Gardner, her main claims in *Love's Knowledge* (1990) strongly resemble several of Gardner's key assumptions. For example, according to Gardner, "morality is infinitely complex, too complex to be *knowable* and far too complex to be reduced to any code, which is why it is suitable matter for fiction, which deals in understanding, not knowledge" (*OMF* 135).

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[8] As with many of his ideas, Gardner repeats himself here several times, as in art "casts nets towards the future," or as in his discussion of *The Ticket that Exploded*, a book which he argues likens the "machinelike repetition of old opinions, [and] prejudices" to a "vast tape recording" that can be cut up, edited, spliced, and played back differently (*OMF* 193).

Defending her view of novels as forms of ethical inquiry, Nussbaum states that a "literary

text" allows for exploring the "important truths" about human life "more adequately"

than philosophical treatises as these latter texts display scant interest in "concrete"

particulars and the "fine-tuned perceptions" based on them (*LK* 7). Their "abstract

theoretical style," logic, and cogency inadequately address the importance of the

emotions, for example, and reflection (*LK* 7). Nussbaum hardly "lifted" these ideas from

Gardner. However, they both reemphasize or reassert a view that defends literature,

reopening a longstanding debate about its vital functions in a society.

Gardner's emphasis on *process* and testing out, which undergirds my approach,

reverberates in the practices of several other new ethical critics. While Gardner advocates

that we read a literary text for how it productively complicates itself, Booth, in his 1988

The Company We Keep, advocates that we select and read literary texts for how they

productively complicate one another; for Booth, reading texts in this fashion can act as

one means to counteract the inadequacies of "mono-myths" in contemporary society,

such as "an ever rising gross national product" or unquestioning faith in "technological

advances" (*CWK* 348-50). Booth's work resembles Gardner's in some particulars, but

David Parker's work actually offers something of a precedent for what I am trying to do:

though he never alludes to his project as such, Parker's analyses in *Ethics, Theory, and

the Novel* (1994) look like "applied Gardner," or a "moral fiction" approach in action. For

example, Parker supports an approach to critical reading that takes ideas about "*process*,

[..] art as discovery, exploration" into account (*ETN* 148, emphasis added). Parker

analyzes a group of Victorian-era and twentieth-century texts for how they "entertain[]

doubts" about any "binary oppositions" they may start out with, for how these particular novels allow their "terms to interact, become unstable, fluid, even altogether to change places" (*ETN* 148). Parker concentrates on several of D.H. Lawrence's novels, illustrating his point through a contrastive analysis of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The First Lady Chatterley*, the first completed draft of the novel. Parker argues that in the earlier work, "insights" about attitudes towards the body are dramatized and "searchingly tested against all resistant realities" (*ETN* 172). In the later version, this interest in the body weakens to a "narrow didactic preoccupation with sex itself" (*ETN* 176). Though Parker never cites Gardner, his insistence on process resembles and perhaps owes a debt to Gardner's theory of moral fiction.[9]

Several critics now acknowledge Gardner's relation to new ethical criticism. In his 2001 *From Richard Wright to Toni Morrison: Ethics in Modern and Postmodern American Narrative*, Jeffrey J. Folks specifically cites Gardner and then takes his view about literature's social function, adopting it as a recurring theme in his case studies of Southern and black writers. Folks stresses literature's capacity for providing readers in communities beset by antagonistic forces with "moral guidelines if not [with] actual 'rules' of conduct" (5). In his 2002 "Introduction: Ethical Criticism and Postwar Literary Theory," Kenneth Womack discusses Gardner's *On Moral Fiction* side-by-side with

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[9] Parker and Gardner are possibly indebted to D. H. Lawrence's 1925 essay "Morality and the Novel": "Morality in the novel," Lawrence states, "is the trembling instability of the balance. When the novelist puts his thumb on the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality" (528-9). Similarly, Gardner argues that the "didactic writer is anything but moral because he is always simplifying the argument, always narrowing away, getting rid of legitimate objections" ("Art of Fiction" 151).

books by Booth, Siebers, Hillis Miller, and Nussbaum, valuing him equally in relation to these foundational "practitioners of [new] ethical criticism" (9-10).

However, not every new ethical critic holds positive views of Gardner even when that critic's own project shows clear traces of Gardner's theory. Writing in his 2002 *An Aesthetics of Morality*, John Krapp envisages a "responsible ethical criticism" modeled on the ways in which literary texts put one "pedagogic" voice "in dialogue with other competing pedagogic voices" (34). In his examination of "Heart of Darkness," Krapp claims that Marlow is not a transmitter of a moral lesson; rather he represents a pedagogical target for competing value systems, such as "capitalist culture and its mechanism of imperialism," and Marlow's own "ethics of the merchant seaman vocation" (102). Marlow meets and enters into dialogue with pedagogic characters that tend to "magnify" or "temporarily repair" Marlow's conflicts, and through this process he "refines [his] moral consciousness" by considering the contending claims of the voices that he hears (103). For Krapp, such a process offers an instructive analogy for ethical criticism, since characters such as Marlow dialogically weigh competing authoritative claims in the text against one another instead of judging them in terms of some "extratextual criterion" (103). Given this, it is slightly ironic that Krapp cites Gardner's supposed "reductivist, monologic" criticism as representing precisely the opposite kind of criticism that Krapp is advocating (6). Krapp argues that "Gardner takes for granted the credibility of a nonideological critical perspective that is not implicated in the mundane sociopolitical effects that inflect perception" (7). While Krapp registers a valid complaint about one aspect that comes through in some of Gardner's critical writings, Krapp

completely ignores Gardner's creative theory of moral fiction, to which Krapp's critical

project bears some resemblances.[10] For example, Krapp emphasizes a morality that

emerges from being "exposed to an array of voices, each of which conveys some measure

of ideological significance within the text." (26). Gardner makes much the same point,

albeit about literary creation instead of criticism, when he claims that in *October Light* he

put pressure on key and "oversimple" New England virtues by bringing their

representative character James Page into conflict with rival views, typified by Sally Page

Abbot (*OMF* 114). Finally, Krapp insists that reluctance to endorse any particular

monological code, moral or otherwise, is a necessary trait of responsible ethical criticism.

Thus, Krapp does not read the texts for moral lessons on how we should order our lives;

rather, he reads them as lessons on how to carry out responsible ethical criticism. Instead

of holding up models of virtue for everyday folk, as Gardner would have it, literary art,

for Krapp, holds up models of ethical behavior for critics.

Gardner's theory of moral fiction appears to have influenced the work of a range

of new ethical critics. But simply relating Gardner to the new ethical criticism is not my

main goal here. For one thing, *On Moral Fiction* is not a collection of scholarly essays

but a literary manifesto.[11] As Marilyn Edelstein argues in a 1996 article, although it

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[10] Krapp also neglects to mention Gardner's view of morality and truth as "relative-absolute" concepts. This view sees moral ideals and truths as concepts that are firmly rooted in people's minds. They are not permanent, however. They are absolute in that many people believe them now to be hard and fast, but they are relative in terms of history, and are mutable and revisable. Edelstein draws particular attention to this concept of Gardner's, claiming that it prefigures Judith Butler's notion of "contingent foundations" (47). Probably Gardner and Butler would both find Edelstein's comparison something of a stretch, the one point they have in common in the face of numerous other points of difference.

[11] *On Moral Fiction* initially seems a last "literary manifesto," written partly in response to John Barth's 1967 mini-manifesto, "The Literature of Exhaustion." But the form continues. In the 1980s, Tom Wolfe wrote the "The Billion-Footed Beast," a self-congratulatory piece that criticizes writers for ignoring

anticipates the resurgence of ethical criticism, *On Moral Fiction* differs "substantially"

from later books by Booth, Parker, or Hillis Miller. Most notably, whereas new ethical

critics argue about how (and sometimes what) readers should read, Gardner "seeks to

prescribe how creative writers themselves *should write*" (Edelstein 48). On this view, it is

a text many would consider more suitable for a course in creative writing than as a basis

for a critical approach. Writing in the early 1990s, Bo Ekelund goes further, claiming that

Gardner's treatise has a split-personality: "it is at once part pedagogical text, a vehement,

character-based polemic and an excursion into philosophical-ethical *terrains*" (336,

emphasis added). The confusion *about* the book reflects the confusion *in* and *of* the book.

I cannot rectify the confusion in or of the book but I hope to clear up some of the

confusion about the book. To rephrase one of Gardner's assertions, I want to affirm what

should be affirmed in Gardner's theory---and leave aside much of the rest. We need to

explore the elements of Gardner's approach to moral fiction that critics have found

troubling, in an effort to separate out the problems from what Gardner has to offer.

Gardner is a contentious though misunderstood figure, a loaded choice, not unlike

F. R. Leavis, but an improbable choice, too. As a medievalist and creative writing

instructor, Gardner had an academic career, but he was primarily a novelist, not a literary

critic or scholar. His academic career saw a major scandal, which involved his *The Life*

and Times of Chaucer (1977) (Winther 1). Some scholars only reviewed the work

negatively, citing it for "whimsical interpretations and unreliable scholarship," but most

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realistic social problems in their novels. More recently, in his 2002 *A Reader's Manifesto*, B. R. Myers
analyzes passages from contemporary American literary giants to point up heavy-handed irony, opaque
prose, pedestrian thinking, and pervasive pretentiousness.

serious were allegations that Gardner had plagiarized portions of it (Howell 3).[12] His

literary career, however, sustained greater damage from the outrage that erupted upon the

1978 publication of *On Moral Fiction*. As Ekelund claims, this polemical, uneven, and

confrontational "literary manifesto" effectively ended Gardner's literary career: once

lustrous, it lapsed into a "strange penumbral phase that was cut short by [Gardner's]

premature death in a motorcycle accident" in 1982 (2). Gardner's renown almost ended

entirely right then. For many years after his death, much of his fiction went out of print,

and Gardner was known as the author of *Grendel* and for his posthumously published

creative writing handbooks, *On Becoming a Novelist* and *The Craft of Fiction*. The latter

is still commonly used in creative writing courses. The resurgence of ethical criticism in

the 1980s and 1990s has restored discussion of his work on moral fiction. This discussion

is not without controversy, but I hope to show that Gardner's focus on process offers a

blueprint for a productive approach to the handling of morality in fiction, one that was

possibly overlooked in the initial firestorm of criticism that Gardner's book received.

    Negative reaction took two main forms. Some critics simply attacked Gardner

personally. Joseph Heller spitefully claims that Gardner "talks a lot and has little of

intelligence to say": he "writes dull novels and dull, carping criticism" (qtd. in Cowart

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[12] Based on my reading of this work, the first charge seems more apt. Archibald A. Hill, for example, criticizes Gardner for anachronism, particularly for finding puns in Chaucer's works that depend on connotations that did not appear in English until centuries after Chaucer's death (66-78). We see anachronistic tendencies even in descriptive passages meant to evoke a sense of London in Chaucer's age. For example, Gardner describes the horses used in jousting tournaments as "lumbering but swift medieval destriers exactly like the Busch Beer Clydesdales" (*Chaucer* 10). Such statements do not enhance Gardner's scholarly ethos.

17; also in Gardner, "Sound" 223).[13] For John Barth, Gardner is "making a shrill pitch to the literary right-wing that wants to repudiate all of modernism and jump back into the arms of their 19th-century literary grandfathers"; his *On Moral Fiction* is little more than a "literary kneecapping that lumps modernists and postmodernists together without distinction and consigns us all to Hell with the indiscriminate fervor of a late convert to the right" (qtd. in Gardner, "Sound" 222; Barth 196-7). As if to prove Barth right and much to his puzzlement, mortification, and fury, Gardner received fulsome letters from Jerry Falwell's evangelical and "archconservative" Moral Majority, and even from political hate groups, including the American Nazi Party (Silesky 256).[14] Other critics, however, attempted to address Gardner's argument, though they misconstrued it. Indeed, many of Gardner's harshest critics later admitted that they had never even read Gardner's book (Butts, "Process" 13). As Leonard Butts points out, Gardner's detractors---and putative supporters like Falwell---"reacted to the phrase *moral fiction* rather than to John

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[13] Heller's reaction is uncharitable but understandable. Though later recanting slightly, Gardner harshly criticizes Heller's *Something Happened* in *On Moral Fiction*, claiming that Heller "refuses to take any bold, potentially embarrassing moral stand," and instead traffics in "cant, cynicism, [and] dramatic gimmickry" (*OMF* 89-91). Though sometimes mildly amusing, Gardner's broadsides against his contemporaries are unfortunate. Because they result from rushed and reductive readings, they undermine the larger, more important points that he is trying to make.

[14] Gardner, unlike many in his literary cohort, did self-identify as politically and socially conservative (Silesky 104). But Gardner resists being lumped in with groups of this or that political shading. Early on, Gardner claims that he is a "radical conservative---always iconoclastic---and against the masses" (Silesky 104). In a 1977 interview, he describes himself as a conflicted mix of a conservative "New York State Republican" and a kind of liberal "bohemian type" (Cowart 10). Ekelund goes further and claims that Gardner oscillated between extremes in many aspects of his life, veering between "conviction and doubt in the reach of a sentence": Gardner is "Swaggering braggadocio one moment, self-abnegation the next" (9). For his part, Barth is not above couching his disapproval of Gardner in classist terms, as when he condescendingly retorts that Gardner is "banging his betters over the head with terminology, and when the smoke clears, nobody is left in the room but Mr. Gardner himself" (qtd. in Gardner, Sound" 222). Barth is magnanimously willing to share the room with Gardner, provided that Gardner, as Barth's inferior, remembers his place.

Gardner's use of the term as it applies to literature": when critics (or supporters) heard

"moral fiction," they mistakenly thought of "propaganda for fundamentalist religious

beliefs or conservative political or literary stances" (Butts, *Novels* x-xii). Several critics'

reactions highlight this tendency, but that is not the only thing that is curious in their

comments. These critics' responses suggest that they do not dispute the idea that

literature has a kind of morality. In fact, though articulated to rival "moral fiction," their

views sound like variations of it. Annie Dillard and Jonathan Baumbach, for example,

mistakenly believe that Gardner is advocating a kind of wholesome even sentimental

family entertainment that offers simplistic but morally uplifting lessons. For Dillard,

"[m]orality in fiction is a matter of artistic integrity"; writers "must make significance,

not plead it or borrow it" (qtd. in Bellamy 10). And Baumbach argues that "the job of

moral fiction […] is to make large demands on the reader, to trouble his most cherished

preconceptions" (qtd. in Bellamy 6). Both incorrectly imply that Gardner would oppose

these kinds of aims. A more difficult criticism comes from John Updike. He accepts the

idea that fiction has a "morality" but refutes the notion that fiction has the kinds of effects

on society that Gardner claims. Updike claims he is uninterested in "whatever life-

affirming thing" Gardner ascribes to fiction; he considers "fiction's morality to be its […]

will toward the truth, from accuracy in minor details to fidelity in matters of form and

style to the author's intimate intuition and sense of things" (qtd. in Bellamy 22). Updike

values literature not for how it may affirm life but for how it accurately depicts it, for

how authors formally achieve their "sense of things." Updike's objection to Gardner's

ideas about literature's supposed "life-affirming" qualities is plausible and reasonable,

especially as Gardner often overstates the case for them. But Updike, not surprisingly, since he never read *On Moral Fiction*, overlooks Gardner's insistence on process, discovery, and "testing out."

The literary critics and journalists who covered the *On Moral Fiction* media event probably make these "honest differences of opinion sound like vendettas" (Cowart 17). But as David Cowart points out, it is regrettable that "none of these contemporary masters makes an attempt to engage Gardner in any substantial way"; instead they try to paint Gardner as an extremist, a reactionary, a "crackpot, to be dismissed, not argued with" (Cowart 17). The same criticism applies to the conservatives and neo-conservatives at the time who rejoiced at the phrase "moral fiction": they erroneously assumed that Gardner was calling for didactic fiction that somehow spiritually nourished one's soul or provided consolation in a desolate world (Edelstein 40; Butts xii). As Robert J. Begiebing sums up, *On Moral Fiction* is often unsubtle, reductive, and wrongheaded, but neither its supposed detractors or its proponents voice informed criticism or informed support for it; both camps traffic in "gross caricature and misreading" (53). If they had read *On Moral Fiction*, these commentators might still have angrily denounced it, or, for that matter, euphorically commended it. Most probably, both camps would have developed a more nuanced criticism of the book.[15]

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[15] This criticism holds true for Krapp, who does not read Gardner ethically or responsibly in terms of Krapp's approach. Instead of looking for passages that modify or complicate Gardner's more problematic assertions, he focuses on only one passage from the second half of the book. Like many of Gardner's initial critics, Krapp appears to be reacting to Gardner's theory rather than responding to it. Also, as I pointed out earlier, his own approach sounds like "applied Gardner," only with more theoretical jargon to lend it a more rigorous-sounding tone.

What Gardner scholars write presents more difficulties, since they have actually read the book in question. Many are unsure what to do with or what to make of *On Moral Fiction*. They consider the book's standing in one of three main ways. One group views the book as an unfortunate or regrettable lapse on Gardner's part. Cowart calls the book "hasty," unbalanced, and judgmental (17). For Per Winther, *On Moral Fiction* is a "rambunctious," repetitious book, whose "clumsily" and "bombastically" advanced points undermine Gardner's whole undertaking (5). Dean McWilliams considers the book an outright "failure," with "mistakes in argument and tone that are evident already in the first paragraph" (1). For McWilliams, even the book's "controlling metaphor," which likens artistic creation to Thor's swinging his hammer, noisily misses hitting the nail on the head. As McWilliams points out, none of us needs "instructions in how to swing the moral hammer---Americans are world champions at *that* event---but we are deeply confused and divided about where to stand when we do so" (2). McWilliams concludes that critics should disregard *On Moral Fiction* and focus instead on Gardner's other writings, *On Becoming a Novelist*, for example, or *The Art of Fiction*, in both of which we encounter "the sensitive, tolerant, and generous spirit that we find in [Gardner's] fiction" (9).[16]

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[16] McWilliams closes with the following passage from Gardner's posthumously published, *On Becoming a Novelist*. To become one of the "highest class of novelists, the writer must be not only capable of understanding people different from himself but fascinated by such people. He must have sufficient self-esteem that he is not threatened by difference, and sufficient warmth and sympathy, and a sufficient concern with fairness, that he wants to value people different from himself, and finally he must have, I think, sufficient faith in the goodness of life that he can not only tolerate but celebrate a world of differences, conflicts, oppositions" (32). McWilliams values this Gardner as opposed to the Gardner of *On Moral Fiction*. Certainly, Gardner's tone sounds warmer and more positive, barring of course his exclusionary use of masculine pronouns. But in *On Moral Fiction* Gardner is faulting writers whose work

In almost diametric opposition to this trend, a second cluster of Gardner critics reverently reads Gardner's novels and stories in light of *On Moral Fiction*. Drawn to its negative attacks, Gregory Morris claims that this "lively and controversial test-by-fire of most of America's contemporary writers" explains Gardner's fiction, especially *October Light*, which explores how "bad art" can "skew a person's moral standard" (146-7). Similarly, while Jeff Henderson acknowledges that "Gardner's large claims for the influence art has on life are debatable," he insists, circularly, that the idea of that influence is a given within "Gardner's aesthetic system," and so critics must proceed from that understanding (63). As Morris does with the novels, Henderson does with the short stories: he reads them reductively for how they reflect key tenets in *On Moral Fiction*. His reading of "Nimram" in particular illustrates this tendency. This story deals with an encounter between a maestro and a terminally ill girl, first on a plane, and then in a concert. Henderson interprets this story as a lesson about how "life and art interpenetrate" in a redemptive "artistic moment," which, in this case, moves "the musicians and the audience to a serenity beyond death" (64-5). Henderson's reading sounds plausible. The problem is the story. Too much of Gardner's short fiction, especially the later stories published around the time of *On Moral Fiction*, comes across as didactic and heavy-handed, as if Gardner wrote it specifically to illustrate key assumptions or tenets expressed in *On Moral Fiction*. For this reason, Butts omits discussion of Gardner's short stories in his study: they are too "direct and obvious" (xiii). According to Butts, since Gardner's theory of moral fiction stresses process, testing out,

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falls short of these ideals. His main gripe with Heller's *Something Happened*, for example, is that the work shows such little concern for its characters: Bob Slocum and his son are not "worth it" to Heller (*OMF* 89).

and exploration, it lends itself much more readily to longer novel-length works. The short

story, at least as used by Gardner, represents a form that is too compact for the process of

testing out to test itself out enough.[17]

A third approach acknowledges the problems with Gardner's treatise but focuses

our attention on aspects of its argument that have value, instead of dismissing the whole

book out of hand. Butts, for example, stresses that the key component of Gardner's

theory is its abiding concern with process, technique, and testing out. He writes that for

Gardner, a literary work's "morality," its "truth,"

> is not discovered in its [the work's] final lines, nor is it revealed entirely in
> any one character's actions. Morality or truth is discovered in the *process*
> of creating and in the *process* of reading a piece of fiction. It is the sum of
> a novel's or story's effect, what Aristotle calls its "exegesis," that
> determines its moral qualities. (*Novels* xii)

Butts focuses on the core of Gardner's theory. No one character is a moral exemplar,

virtue incarnate, just as no one other character is vice or villainy embodied. Gardner's

theory involves "search-and-discovery": it seeks to find out "what meaning life holds for

us all" but not to "impose an external scheme of behavior upon everyone" (Butts, *Novels*

xiii). Of course, these key elements of Gardner's theory are still problematic, paradoxical,

contradictory, and perhaps even irresoluble. The theory stresses discovery in the process

of creation, but creation suggests "making things up," maybe even as the writer goes

along, whereas "discovery" suggests finding something that was always there to begin

with. It raises questions of circularity and tautology: how are literary artists to realize

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[17] We notice a similar quality in the "scrupulously mean" prose of Joyce's *Dubliners:* a spare, lean style
working in tandem with symbolism that is sometimes heavy-handed. I discuss this in more detail later. See
my analysis of Joyce's "The Boarding House" in Chapter 3.

they have created something worth discovering if they only discover it by creating it? Don't they need some notion of what they are going to create in order to create it, a notion from past models? Similarly, don't literary critics, especially those concerned with ethics in literature, need a notion of what ethical or moral issues are in order to recognize them when they discover them?

These questions touch on and reopen aspects of several larger debates, including one with significant stakes. Gardner's theory of moral fiction appears in a literary manifesto, which, despite its unevenness, reads now like a much-needed robust defense of literary art. Many defenses of literature, literary art, art, and study in the humanities in general, are simply too weak, too hesitant, too cynical, or too removed from the kinds of practical everyday concerns that readers have when and if they take the time to sit down and read a text instead of doing something else.[18] Literary art competes now against cinema, TV, radio, the internet, video games, social networking sites, downloadable music, streamed movies, and televised sporting events, all things that many undergraduates find more engaging or relevant to their lives. Faced with such competition, literary art's chances look slim. Telling readers that literature is only about itself, or about language, or that literary works are worth reading only insofar as they

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[18] My points here all draw heavily on Jusdanis's *Fiction Agonistes*, especially his Preface and first chapter, "Overture and Themes." Jusdanis explores reasons why literary scholars, in contradistinction to scholars in other disciplines, offer unconvincing reasons for pursuing study in their field, literature. According to Jusdanis, this state of affairs results from a range of factors. One factor is of course "technological changes," which scholars can do little to "undo," even if they wanted to. More important, literary scholars and professional academics do not give compelling reasons for studying literature, because, he claims, they themselves are too skeptical about the value of literature. Self-criticism, skepticism, and self-reflexivity are well and good. But they cannot be the only aims of literary study, for, if we take the dwindling and shrinking numbers of students pursuing degrees in literature as one indicator, they are not as convincing as we think.

reflect this or that current theory, is not likely to increase the odds much in literature's favor. If literary critics stress these aspects overmuch, they should not be surprised when many undergraduates, for example, take them at their word and choose to study something else. This crisis is of course a large-scale one, and simply stressing that literary art is "relevant" to life is hardly going to resolve the issue. There is no guarantee of such an effect. In fact, evaluating and interpreting a novel based on perceptions of its relevance is problematic, to say the least, and I will discuss this in more detail later in my next chapter on Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Still, Gardner is important here because his belief that the reading and study of fiction sharpens students' moral thinking can be vital to arguing for the value of its study over arguments that are harder to pitch. It is for the reasons I have been discussing that Gardner is so crucial for my project. Others might find him useful for theirs, too.

Liberating "Morality," "Virtue," and "Truth"

One of the great ironies of ethical or moral criticism is that while nearly all of us seek to be ethical and moral, literary critics remain embarrassed by criticism that focuses on the moral, the virtuous, and the truthful. Even some new ethical critics themselves show uneasiness with the idea of the moral by emphasizing a lexical distinction between new ethical criticism and old "moral criticism." Booth and Nussbaum, for example, both favor "ethics" over "morality." This is reasonable. However, there is a problem with ascribing all negative associations to "morality," and all positive ones to "ethics." Viewed cynically, they build "ethics" up by tearing "morality" down, ignoring these words' intertwined histories and linked etymologies. My aim here is not to exonerate or resurrect

old moral criticism. As I stated earlier, my critical approach represents a cross between new ethical criticism, narrative theory, and rhetorical approaches to fiction. However, none of these terms, including ethical criticism, really does justice to my approach. My goal in this dissertation is to model a method of inquiry that approaches literary texts as examples of "moral fiction." These texts differ in degree from other texts, in that they deal explicitly with moral or ethical issues, especially moral paradoxes, in distinctive and demonstrable ways. This category could be called "ethical fiction" but such phrasing would connote abstract theoretical or philosophical concerns or possibly imply a professional code prescribing how authors should write lest they be somehow "disbarred" or expelled. In addition, I consider "ethical" to be partly a victim of its own success: too many critics use it, and the word has lost its edge. "Moral," on the other hand, is still quite provocative. If anything, critics dismiss it too readily. The divisiveness of "moral" works in its favor: it is unlikely that disparate groups of critics will specifically invoke the idea or question of the moral in relation to a range of mutually incompatible and contradictory theories and practices, emptying "moral" of *its* distinctiveness. My goal, however, is not to formulate a new "moral criticism" or to link my project with the old one. Rather, I want to recuperate "moral" in particular but also "virtue" and even "truth" for use in my project but not to define it per se.

I acknowledge that these three terms are deeply problematical, but I also counter that they are probably the three most reductively misunderstood words in the English language. In its general sense, "moral" often suggests rigid, oppressive codes of social conduct, especially regarding sexual restraint: as Eagleton wryly sums it up, in many

people's mind "moral" has mainly to do with "forbidding people to go to bed with each

other" (*After Theory* 104). In relation to literary works, moral suggests overtly "didactic,"

visibly "preachy," or explicitly "ideological" fiction, with extractable moral lessons.[19] In

literary criticism, addressing the question of the "moral" mainly entailed assessing the

"moral vision" of the author, and "moral" critics could be harshly evaluative if not

censorious. Many new ethical critics no doubt distance themselves from "moral" because

of this, and also because of censorship and obscenity trials, such as the cases against

Ulysses and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.[20] In slight contrast, "virtue" sounds quaint, old-

fashioned, sentimental, but also sexist, since it invites images of conduct novels, such as

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, *or Virtue Rewarded*, or "glad books," such as Eleanor H.

Porter's *Pollyanna* series. Pamela's "virtue" allows her to resist seduction and rape, and

as a "reward" for this "virtue," she is married to her would-be rapist! Pollyanna's virtue,

her unflagging optimism in even the direst circumstances, suggests repression, or

stupidity, and even points up a lack of virtue, such as phronesis, or practical wisdom.

More recently, the idea of "virtue" is seen as essentialist: its detractors think it signifies a

property that is immanent in an agent, an intrinsic attribute. Despite these problems,

"moral" and "virtue" have a major advantage over "truth." They refer to observable

behavior. They may seem antiquated, unpleasant, repressive, or incompatible with

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[19] Many critics, following Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, argue of course that all fiction is ideological, didactic, preachy or moral to some degree. Herbert Grabes, for example, suggests that literary works cannot but disseminate values, but some do so more directly than others ("Being Ethical" 43). Susan Suleiman also usefully distinguishes between overtly ideological and broadly ideological works, calling a work of fiction "ideological" only if it "refers explicitly to, and identifies with, a recognized body of doctrine or system of ideas" (1).

[20] For a fuller discussion of how moral criticism became suspect and how new ethical criticism arose, see "Demise, 'Banishment,' and Resurgence" in my Introduction.

professional literary study, but various codes and standards exist for measuring a person's or a character's morality. "Truth," especially as the concept relates to literature, raises much larger problems, chiefly regarding the controversial and now largely discredited idea that literary works become classics----great, enduring, monumental works---because they manifest so-called "universal truths" about human existence. Critics nowadays vociferously refute such ideas, and have done so for several decades. They claim that this notion has us believe, à la Matthew Arnold, that literary works have "singular, essential natures," and that the "best" literary works somehow tap into and mine a rich vein of common human experience and lay bare what it means to be human, regardless of our personal circumstances: they are seen to "transcend the local, historical circumstances of [their] production and come to embody universal truths about reality and what it means to be human" (Jay 17). As the critique has it, this Arnoldian view "mask[s] its particular [masculine, European, bourgeois] interests by calling them universal" (Jay 17). It sees art as "something above politics and attainable by all"; its detractors of course claim that such a view, among other pernicious effects, maintains and reinforces oppressive social class structures (Fowler 10).[21]

We literary critics should be able to talk about "truths," even "universal" ones, without fear of being denounced as class traitors, class enemies, ideologues, or reactionaries. And we should have the same recourse to the categories of "moral" and

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[21] Fowler is ambivalent about the anti-Arnoldian view. On one hand, he opposes the idea of "intrinsic criticism"; on the other, he laments how circa-1980 criticism avoids "questions of value" (10). In other words, he approves of the move away from Arnoldian intrinsic criticism but he regrets some of the effects of this, namely, what he sees as an increasingly narrow interest in only very recent, often trivial literature, at the expense of significant past works (10).

"virtue." Those who critique these terms in the manner I suggest above make valid

points, but as Eagleton points out in an analogous context, they "reject an idea [of

"moral," "virtue," and "truth"] that no reasonable person would defend in the first place,"

attacking a straw man, a partial, inaccurate concept of what these terms mean (*After*

Theory 104). It does not follow, for example, that when critics talk about "universal

truths," i.e., as Nussbaum phrases it, "our common humanity," that they believe that

literary texts possess some ethereal quintessence that permeates the pages like a kind of

magic spell cast by the author-as-alchemist.[22] Of course, all literary works result from

specific local and historical circumstances; some of them, for whatever reason, hold

interest for readers and critics in different contexts and cultures and at later times. As

Frank Palmer points out in another context, it is unreasonable, implausible, and

preposterous to claim that "Shakespeare's heroes [for example] 'stand for' or 'represent'

men in general"; one can, however, more modestly assert that "universality [in terms of

literary texts] consists in the fact that [such literary texts] speak to people living in

different societies and at different times" (241). There is no need to say that "great"

literary works transcend their time and place and speak to all people of all time; rather,

some literary texts, for some reason, retain the interest of a variety of readers who may

value them in any number of ways. This interest might stem from treatment of a theme,

from deployment of specific literary techniques and devices, a combination of these, or

some other thing. Further, to argue this is not to claim that literary texts that last are

necessarily timeless. A play, poem, or other fictive work may seem particularly resonant

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[22] See "First Emphasis: Reconsidering the Human" in the Introduction for a fuller discussion of what
Nussbaum means by "our common humanity" ("Non-Relative" 48-9).

and relevant for generations, centuries, millennia, or much less: a year or two, a decade, a half-century, or just a season or a month. A literary work's or a character's universality, i.e., its wide and enduring appeal, stems from the debates sparked by the literary work or character and not from some ethereal essence that supposedly permeates the text.[23]

One way to recuperate "moral" and "virtue" is to examine their rich etymologies. The point here is not to turn back the clock and use these words exclusively in their earlier senses. It is true that these terms have much "baggage," but the negative baggage is mainly of quite recent manufacture. For most of the history of its use, "virtue," or "areté" in the Greek, most definitely did not refer primarily to sexual restraint or prudery in women.[24] A look at the original meanings and etymological roots of both the Greek and Latin terms reveals other concepts altogether. Areté is etymologically linked to Ares, the Greek god of war, and initially refers mainly to a warrior ethos of military prowess and leadership, while virtue originally signifies "good sportsmanship, respect for values, and all-around nobility," particularly in men: in fact, its Latin form, "virtus," translates literally as "manliness" (Heinrichs 58; Berthoff 17, 45). In short order, both words soon refer to more than what these "virile, red-faced, strenuous connotations" would suggest

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[23] Much of the argument here relies on Eagleton's discussion of "truth" in *After Theory*. There, Eagleton argues that we tend to think there are two kinds of truth: "a superior class of absolute truths," taken to be timeless and changeless, as opposed to an inferior "class of mundane, historically changeable truths" (104). Eagleton claims that too many people take "absolute" as an intensifier, when they should read it as "in all cases" (108). Still, Eagleton emphasizes that establishing something as true is a "taxing, messy business," which necessarily involves a context, or "framework," and which is "always open to revision" (106-7). See also Steven Pinker's 1997 *How the Mind Works*. There, Pinker argues that humans cannot act without "truths": for him, truths are the rational beliefs that humans depend on to pursue and "attain goals in the face of obstacles" (61-2).

[24] As Charles Frankel peevishly and chauvinistically laments, "the sad history of our civilization can be told in the decline of the word of the word 'Virtue': it began among the Greeks by meaning strength in a man and it ended among the Victorians by meaning weakness in a woman" (22).

(Eagleton, *After Theory* 124). Already in Homer, areté also entailed skills, techniques,

mental and physical traits, including comeliness, and refers to women as well as men: in

short, areté involves a wide range of characteristic and practical skills that allow a human

to discharge his or her role in society (MacIntyre 127).[25] On this view, these skills are not

morally neutral since they enabled human agents to fulfill their responsibilities to their

societies, which would be worse off without them. The concept of areté or virtue thence

grew into a much more complicated problem, in which thinkers pondered how they

developed. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle divides the "aretai" into

two types: moral (ēthikai), which includes courage, temperance, and justice, and

intellectual (dianoētikai), which includes practical wisdom (phronesis), philosophic

wisdom (sophia), and art or craft (techne) (Foot 2). Aristotle emphasizes that neither type

of areté or virtue is innate, intrinsic, or inherent: the intellectual virtues are developed

through instruction, the moral through habit (1103a14-25). In fact, for Aristotle, the

virtues are not about what is natural but about what is difficult: they are seen as

"correctives" or "motivations" (Foot 8). Anti-essentialist critics might still oppose the

Aristotelian "aretai," since they necessarily involve conceptions about human nature as

well as ideas about the aims of human life, i.e., to be virtuous, so as to flourish or live

well. But as both Foot and Eagleton emphasize, Aristotelian virtues constitute a "worldly

affair": they do not emanate from intrinsic endowments but stem from "practice" and

"rehearsal": humans get better at them the more they do them; and, societies that lack

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[25] Interestingly, this definition calls to mind the word "magis" in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. It is defined as a particular "genius" or "excellence in all things": for example, Beli's magis involves her strength, endurance, tenaciousness, and protectiveness for her family (102).

them, such as "Russia [..] under the Stalinist terror, or Sicily under the Mafia," tend to be

"wretched places to live" (Foot 2-3; Eagleton, *After Theory* 125).

Although detractors tend to believe that "virtues" involve fixed, immutable

essences, moral philosophers, such as Foot, Nussbaum, and MacIntyre have convincingly

reasserted that virtues result from learned behaviors and dispositions that benefit those

who manifest them and their society and communities. They assert that virtues in this

Aristotelian sense do not involve inherent properties but refer to an ensemble of acquired

skills, which are demonstrable. Of course, an Aristotelian taxonomy of virtues is still

problematic. Ethnocentrically taking his class to represent humankind in general,

Aristotle strives to be universal, but his virtues reflect the particular concerns of his

specific local and historical circumstances, i.e., his catalogue of virtues stems from a

particular concern with political stability, with maintaining the-then status quo. Still,

critics can reject Aristotle's specific virtues, courage, for example, claiming that they are

less relevant today but retain Aristotle's useful general framework. The Aristotelian

conception of the virtues emphasizes that human beings develop virtues through acting

and behaving in certain ways, which become characteristic. They are "performed": they

are not what one is but what one does, and what one does amounts largely to who one is.

In sum, while Aristotle does not exclude the idea of human nature, he emphasizes that the

idea that virtues, both intellectual and moral, are learned through explicit instruction or

acquired through habitual actions. Of course, the most difficult of these is phronesis: the

kind of practical wisdom we need to develop to know which actions are worth making

habitual, and humans only develop this through gaining experience: our powers of

phronesis "correspond to our time of life" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1143b5-10). They allow a human being to behave in certain ways, but they are not inside the person, genetically encoded, or in existence as some essence or property.

This notion should not be alien to us. The word "virtuoso," whose etymology is directly linked to virtue, bears this point out. A virtuoso does not necessarily have some intrinsic attribute that sets him or her apart from others. Rather, a virtuoso demonstrates an "extreme degree of performative skill," which is" beyond ordinary imitation" but still "within the domain of the teachable" (Berthoff 18n10). And this idea has applications beyond the performing arts, world-class musicians, athletes, and artists, as Hannah Arendt and Eagleton both suggest in analogous contexts. According to Halliwell, for Arendt, virtuosity involves an ability to "morally improvise": it is constituted by an act or activity that is its own end, like a performance by a musician in a symphony (Halliwell 22). Basing her assertion on an understanding of Machiavelli's concept of "virtù," Arendt stresses that "the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and *not* in an end product that outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it" (Arendt 153, emphasis added).[26] Finally, as Eagleton also points out, the concept of virtuosity extends to those who are virtuosi at "showing mercy or sympathetic listening" as well, not just to professional musicians or artists (*After Theory* 112-24).

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[26] As Arendt concisely sums it up, Machiavelli's concept of "virtù" involves "the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of *fortuna*" (153). Two clarifications are necessary here. Though Arendt uses the word "excellence" to translate Machiavelli's "virtù," Machiavelli in *The Prince* implies that princes, i.e., rulers, can acquire this "virtù" by implementing what he advises. Second, for Machiavelli, Fortuna is more than just luck, good or bad. It more accurately suggests chaotic forces, chance, randomness, as in the modern holdover, "Murphy's law": what can go wrong will go wrong. Given such conditions, Machiavelli's concept of "virtù" takes on more serious overtones, implications of matters of life and death.

In this project, I do not intend, however, to place a grid of Aristotle's taxonomy of virtues mechanically over a complex literary work and then analyze characters for the degree to which they embody or represent certain virtues or vices. As laid out in the first section of this chapter, my approach involves attention to a text's process, how in this case it would discover models (but not paragons) of virtue, and how it might focus on how particular characters perform socially specific forms of virtue and vice. Phelan's approach to identifying characters' function offers an illustrative example. Focusing on a range of characters, including narrators, Phelan contends that character analysis involves attention to their three main functions: the mimetic, which involves how they "work as representations of possible people"; the thematic, or how they "are representative of larger groups or ideas"; and, the synthetic, or how they work as devices "within the larger construct of the work" (12-3). Following Booth's example in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Phelan understands narratives as rhetoric, as communication, especially as indirect communication between an implied author and a "hypothetical" audience (19). For Phelan, one way that implied authors communicate, especially indirectly, is by stressing a particular function by deemphasizing another or others. For example, if a narrative situation's events strain the logic of the mimetic function, e.g., characters tell each other information that they already know, this set of circumstances shifts the emphasis to a different function. It may highlight a character's thematic function or point up the character's status as an artificial construct (12-3). An emphasis on the thematic can involve a character's representing a socially specific virtue, a vice, a mixture of both, even a critique of the virtue, embedded in a dramatic situation.

The word "moral" is also subject to contemporary misapprehension, much like "truth" and "virtue." As is true for "virtue," the restrictive, negative connotations of "moral" have only arisen fairly recently, in the last couple hundred years. In fact, for most of their history "ethical" and "moral" were not just near synonyms but were interchangeable: "ethical" derived from the Greek adjective "ethikos," and "moral" from the adjective "moralis," Cicero's Latin translation of the Greek (MacIntyre 38). Like "ethical," "moral" originally means "'pertaining to character,' where a *man's* character is nothing other than his set dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead one particular kind of life": its early sense is most accurately translated as "practical," not as "religious" or "legal" (MacIntyre 38, emphasis added).[27] In fact, MacIntyre asserts that the ancient Greeks and classical Romans had no one word that corresponded to what we think of as "moral" now---just as we now have no one word that corresponds to what they meant by moral then: "ethical" for the Greeks and "moral" for the Romans encompassed a whole range of characteristics. In MacIntyre's account, this broad sense of "moral" only begins shrinking in the Enlightenment, when it first becomes a noun, as in a person's "morals," or the "moral" of a story, and then reaches its narrow, restrictive sense in the late nineteenth century, when it becomes associated almost exclusively with priggishness and prudery (38). For MacIntyre, the most pernicious effect of these shifts in meaning is that they enable an Enlightenment project of attempting to

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[27] Even though MacIntyre faults the Enlightenment for universalizing concepts such as "man," he uses "man" so insistently throughout *After Virtue* that it comes to seem symptomatic of male chauvinism. This dissertation seeks to avoid using "man" in place of "human" but at the same it does not wish to emulate Nussbaum or Rorty, who employ female pronouns throughout their works cited in this study, a trope that soon becomes jarringly pedantic. On this stylistic note, while I do not feel myself personally diminished by an author's particular choice of gendered pronouns, I strive to employ inclusive plural forms, though these are problematic, too, as they suggest sameness in all readers.

rationalize and universalize "morality," instead of grounding it socially or communally

along Aristotelian lines, as MacIntyre would do. The Enlightenment sees a splintering

effect, in which "moral" becomes separated from concrete and local practices of

individuals playing out their roles in their respective societies. A detached Kantian ethics

arises, which presumes a universal subject who can mentally insulate himself from

quotidian pressures and render a "moral" judgment in accordance with an abstract

timeless law identified through reason from a neutral vantage point. During roughly the

same period, "moral" also becomes separated from the aesthetic. Literary artists such as

Oscar Wilde dispute that literature has anything to teach. "There is no such thing as a

moral or immoral book," Wilde famously declares: a book is only "well-written, or

badly-written" (3).[28] In their work, modernists go further: unlike a neo-Classicist like

Samuel Johnson, they worry not about how to be moral but about how to avoid being

moral (Sidorsky 138). By the time Gardner enters this debate with his calls for "moral

fiction," the apparent separation between the aesthetic and the moral looks permanent.

For many postmodernists, literary art is not simply to be free *from* morality; it is to be

free *of* morality.

At this point, literary theorists might ask, why insist on using "moral" if, as I have

been stressing, there is strictly and etymologically speaking no clear difference between

the ethical and the moral? Hasn't the difference between them evolved historically for

pragmatic reasons? These are valid points. It may be true that "moral" took on its

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[28] Still, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in the preface of which this quotation appears, problematizes this assertion. Although it appears to glorify decadence, the plot hinges on Christian notions of sinning and damnation, selling one's soul to the devil.

negative connotations through the phenomenon of etymological drift over a period of time. However, I argue that the difference stressed by the new ethical critics results mainly from fiat and decree: in *Ethical Joyce* (2002), Marian Eide, for example, argues that the *creation* of the distinction between ethics and morality is "among the contributions made in twentieth-century ethical philosophy" (13, emphasis added).[29] In his 1999 *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel*, Andrew Gibson insists that the whole Levinasian ethical enterprise hinges on the difference between "moral" and "ethical." As Gibson patiently explains to us, postmodernity is a time or condition characterized by skepticism if not outright disbelief in master narratives, metaphysical foundations, and universalizing concepts (15-6). Because Gibson finds its religious and metaphysical overtones objectionable, he believes "morality" ill-suits such a condition, and should be rejected (16). Since, for him, a Levinasian ethics has no prescriptive codes or categories but emerges from "immediate and singular" encounters with the other, only it can meet the need for an ethics that is "non-foundational" and "non-ontological" (16). Gibson's point that postmodern conditions make many old "moral" codes seem inadequate is convincing but his argument in favor of a Levinasian "ethics" is less persuasive. It strains credibility to assert that a Levinasian ethics alone suffices to meet the challenges of postmodernity.

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[29] Eide does acknowledge Paul Ricoeur's objection in *Soi-Même comme un Autre* that nothing in the terms' etymology or history of use warrants making such a clear distinction (qtd. in Eide 13). Still, Ricoeur lays out his own distinction: for him, "morale" refers to a deontological view, concerned with practices and norms, "éthique" to a teleological view, concerned with aims of life, and which, moreover, includes "morale" (200).

The aversion of the literary ethicists to "moral" makes less sense. In fact, their attempt to distance themselves from associations with "morality" arguably undermines their project of ethical criticism. One reason for their renewed interest in ethics in literature and criticism stems from their perception that poststructuralist theories focused on institutionalized discourses and on the ways in which ideologies determined and mediated human experience. That new ethical critics want to distinguish themselves from "moral" critics is understandable, but, unfortunately, in the process, they reinforce reductive misconceptions about the moral, linking it with unproductive critical tendencies. Both Nussbaum and Booth perpetuate this view by conflating "moral" with "moralistic" and "moralizing." Nussbaum attributes unconstructive critical tendencies, such as using narratives to teach conventional moral lessons, not to ethical critics but to "didactic moralist[s]" (*LK* 168-9). To be sure, "didactic" and "ethicist" do not collocate, but Nussbaum, intentionally or through carelessness, perpetuates the slightly specious distinction between "moral" and "ethical," as she implies that a "moral" critic is necessarily a "moralist."[30] Booth uses "moral" in a similar way. He contrasts the work of new ethical critics with that of the "extreme moralists" who yield to the temptation to "judge narratives by standards they might use in teaching a Sunday school class or conducting a court for juvenile offenders" (*CWK* 7).[31] Booth's conflation of "moral" and

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[30] Though she sometimes uses "ethics" and "morality" synonymously in *Love's Knowledge* (1990), Nussbaum clearly favors "ethics" and its word-formations. For her, "moral" is a relic, useful because it collocates with "philosophy" more readily than "ethical" (*LK* 169n2).

[31] For Booth, Gardner figures among this group. Though Booth is generally sympathetic to Gardner's overall purpose, he finds *On Moral Fiction* to be "careless" (*CWK* 7n2). One argument that this chapter advances, however, is that "moral fiction" as a critical approach has little to do with the kind of Sunday-

"moralistic" undermines his point about the need for nuance: "moral" versus "moralistic" represents a finer distinction than "ethical" versus "moral."

Interestingly, however, some recent critics have revisited the "moral" and contrasted it with the "ethical" in a less reductive fashion. These critics view these two concepts as different but related, with vital links between them. In *Getting it Right* (1993), Geoffery Harpham stresses that "morality performs the worldly work of ethics," suggesting that morality involves practical codes that arise out of abstract ethical imperatives, and that both need the other for their existence (55). Though this idea sounds indebted to Levinas, Harpham (and also Siebers) traces it to Foucault's (later) thinking in *L'Usage Des Plaisirs* (1984): according to Harpham, for Foucault, the "prescriptive ensemble" of rules of conduct promulgated through various institutions equals "morality," whereas "the practices of the self" equal "ethics" (Harpham, *GR* 3; Siebers 33-4n14). But Harpham distorts Foucault's terminology, laying too much stress on an implied distinction. Foucault concentrates on "l'ambuïgité du mot" "morale," which refers to both the "ensemble prescriptif,"---the "rule of conduct," as Robert Hurley translates it,---and also to "le comportement réel des individus, dans son rapport aux règles et valuers qui leur sont proposées," that is, the "conduct that may be measured by this rule" (Foucault, *L'Usage* 32; Foucault, *History* 25-6). Although Foucault implies a distinction by the title, "Morale et Pratique de Soi" ("Morality and Practice of the Self"), he does not stress the lexical distinction between morality and ethics to the degree that Harpham claims; rather, Foucault distinguishes between "morality" and the "practice of

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school lessons to which Booth alludes. In fact, they often question just such kinds of lessons as well as mistaken notions about those lessons.

the self," the latter of which Harpham explicitly labels "ethics." It seems more accurate to say that Foucault points up rather than clears up the ambiguity of morality's relation to ethics. Some literary critics proceed with a similar distinction. Martin Halliwell, in *Modernism and Morality* (2001), claims that morality has to do with an "experiential" sphere of existence, ethics with a more "abstract" one (3). For Halliwell, social problems are moral problems not ethical ones, and Halliwell's main focus is on how modernist writers engage moral problems intensified by modernity, such as the "individual's isolation" in a "world without purpose"; and, through depicting characters who grapple with moral dilemmas, these authors suggest a "repertoire of responses from which the reader can learn" (3, 13).

It is for these reasons that I have been discussing that I now want to proceed in carefully outlining my own definition of the word "moral." I begin with a broad definition, much like the classical sense described by MacIntyre. In this fuller sense, "moral" has to do with the range of habitual characteristics that allow human agents to carry out their responsibilities in their specific social and historical circumstances and particular location: one's morality is akin to one's ethos and involves dispositions, habits, skills, strengths, and systems of belief, one's virtues or "aretai," in other words. As I have suggested earlier, these skills cannot be regarded as neutral, since human agents use them or perform them to fulfill their various communal or social obligations. One of my focuses is on how literary characters perform (or fail to perform) socially and culturally specific skills, strengths, and dispositions; but the goal is not to make explicit "moral" judgments of actual human beings, authors, fictive works, or literary characters. As Booth

usefully points out, a potential drawback to using "ethical" and "moral" is that these terms seem only to "refer to the approved side of the choices [that each] suggests" (*CWK* 8).[32] This is a point worth bearing in mind, but not because it asks us to then become moral relativists, or to think of morality as simply a neutral ensemble of skills. Rather, it reminds us that most of the distinctions we make imply some kind of value judgment, that behaving *this* way as opposed to *that* way is beneficial to our well-being as socially situated human beings. As Susan Sontag suggests, morality is not reducible to a specific "repertoire of choices," but it still necessarily involves prescribing certain "standard[s] for behaving or trying to behave [expressly] toward other human beings" (145).

More importantly, I also relate the "moral" to how literary texts construct a character's moral ethos, for instance, embedding it in a range of narrative situations to test out whatever socially specific virtue the character might be said to demonstrate. In this way, I hope to engage topical and frequently vexing thematic issues but avoid reductively and mistakenly reading complex literary works for actual guidelines or "truths" to live by, or for "paragons" of virtue, let alone a metaphysics or overarching system of morality. Over and against such reductive approaches, following Gardner's focus on process, my aim is to analyze the range of linguistic, formal, narrative, and rhetorical devices deployed by writers as they deal with the question of the moral in fiction. I hope to foster and encourage reflection on such issues but build discussion of them up from a firm textual basis. This in itself also represents a kind of moral education:

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[32] Of course, as Booth also emphasizes, any grouping of texts necessarily involves evaluation and judgment, though not of "moral" narrowly construed, but rather belief that reading one certain grouping of texts as opposed to another certain grouping is "what will do us the most good" (*CWK* 5).

it is no substitute for action, it is not "performing a good deed for the day," but it does

allow for sharpening our perception through close observation and careful consideration,

which are necessary bases for taking action and performing "good deeds."

"Moral Fiction" of the Twentieth Century

One question remains: how do we define a category of "moral fiction"? Is it a

genre, or a critical approach? For Susan Suleiman, the "perception and naming of [a]

genre are interpretive and evaluative acts, which indicate, prior to any commentary, a

certain attitude on the part of the reader or critic": to "name [genres] is already to

interpret them by half" (4). We can turn this claim around: to perceive and name a critical

approach is already to entail a literary genre, i.e., a principled grouping of literary works

based on shared textual components, frequently including thematic content as well. To

distinguish and identify "moral fiction" as a literary genre implies a critical approach

developed to focus on salient thematic content and pertinent textual components;

similarly, laying out the critical approach's emphases and methods suggests a group of

texts that will "respond" or lend themselves to this particular type of critical attention. In

this way, "moral fiction" represents a fusion of both literary genre and critical approach.

The reason for this view is "pragmatic, not ontological," to borrow Seymour Chatman's

phraseology: we are not setting out to prove that "moral fiction" exists; rather, we are

interested in what "we *get* from positing such a concept," what we get from

hypothesizing such a genre, indistinct and provisional though it will be (75).[33]

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[33] Writing in 1990, Chatman makes this point in a defense of Booth's idea of the implied author. For his part, Chatman suggests critics would do better to speak of the author as "inferred" instead of as "implied," for this term takes into account the fact not all readers read alike (*Coming to Terms* 77).

Although the concept of genre is slightly out of style, critics still respect generic distinctions when they organize scholarly work, courses, and programs. Writing in 1982, Heather Dubrow, for example, claims that genre "functions much like a code of behavior," or a social institution, such as an "established church or a legislative body": we can "challenge" them, maybe "overthrow" them, but we cannot simply "exclude them from our lives" (2-3). Critics and scholars necessarily identify and isolate "textual components worthy of attention" and then cluster "texts together on the basis of certain shared features," and these steps allow them to discuss a given text in relation to other "similar" texts (Pyrhönen 109). Genres are thus at least partially "self-referential"; that is, they "contribute to the institution of the historical reality that they claim to describe" (Schaeffer 169). Certainly, our sense of a text's genre influences how we read that text; but we develop this sense through encounters with texts that manifest similar generic features and textual components. Not only that, but our reading of a text in terms of its perceived genre will cover only a fraction of the text's features: any text, and especially a complex literary work, will lend itself to "being analyzed in terms of more than one genre," since any given literary text participates in any number of genres (Suleiman 8).[34] As a corollary, the literary texts in a literary genre share only certain salient features in common; they are not similar in every respect and in fact probably vary widely (Schaeffer 173-77). Finally, literary works cluster in literary genres in terms of shared

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[34] Though belabored, Derrida's point that literary works do not belong to genres but participate in them is an important insight, one which pervades the work of many recent genre theorists. In fact, roughly after his essay, "The Law of Genre" (1979), critics spoke of literary works as participating in, manifesting, or modulating genres, not "belonging to." See pages 230-1 in Derrida for discussion of this particular point.

thematic content, as in detective fiction, *Bildungsromanen*, and Gothic novels, or in terms

of common structural components, as in sonnets, pastoral elegies, and epithalamia, or in

terms of both: sonnets have similar structures, and frequently deal with romantic love,

while pastoral elegies deal with lamentation and consolation, and epithalamia with

marriage ceremonies (Dubrow 4-7).

When critics speculate about clusters of literary works, they note specific textual

markers in the given texts. Moral fiction will always be a blurry, shifting, porous,

somewhat implausible "literary genre," but comparing it with three other recent

groupings of texts can help us to get a clearer sense of it. In her 1983 *Authoritarian

Fictions*, Suleiman specifically names a genre of "ideological fiction": texts that are

"primarily didactic in intent, seeking to demonstrate the validity of a political,

philosophical, or religious doctrine" (7, cited phrases italicized in original passage).

Moral fiction is not primarily didactic; in fact, if it is didactic, i.e., heavy-handedly so, it

is not "moral" in the sense we are developing here. Next, in his 2005 *Graham Greene's

Catholic Imagination*, Mark Bosco contextualizes Greene's works in relation to the genre

of the "Catholic" novel. According to Bosco, this genre arose in nineteenth-century

France, largely as a critique of the "reigning ideology of bourgeois, materialist French

society" (7). It gained notice in England, when Evelyn Waugh and Greene published their

early works, and faded roughly about the time of the Second Vatican Council (Bosco 8-

9). For Bosco, the "Catholic" novel should be viewed as a "permeable" designation of a

literary genre. This designation should not entail reading particular "Catholic" novels

instrumentally, for how faithfully or not they reinforce Catholic orthodoxy; rather, it

enumerates and "articulates predispositions in the Catholic imagination," including "the

obsession with the effects of the doctrine of the Incarnation on human life," for example,

"sacramental reality that stresses divine immanence in concrete reality," as well as the

"biases and prejudices that pervade the Catholic tradition" (15). Bosco's discussion is

more useful, since it stresses that even a literary genre that ought to be clearly demarcated

is still "permeable," porous, and inclusive. But "moral fiction" is not pegged to a specific

religious faith---though it might reflect many similar concerns. As a category, moral

fiction is too catholic to be Catholic. Finally, in *Global Matters* (2010), Jay concentrates

on a cluster of transnational literary texts. Jay never refers to them as constituting a genre,

and in fact acknowledges that it would be impossible to gather together a "geographically

or culturally comprehensive range of texts from all over the globe" (92). Instead, he

concentrates on a group of texts "from an intersecting set of representative locations in

the Americas, South Asia, Africa, and Western Europe, texts that fit within the

framework of a broadened and more complex version of Gilroy's black Atlantic, or that

explore historical, cultural, and social links between India, Britain, and the Americas"

(92).

Taken together, the three approaches suggest rationales for provisionally grouping

together a number of texts of moral fiction. As I outlined earlier, my method is to select

texts in which particular moral issues predominate, but then to carry out a careful

rhetorical and narratological analysis of the texts' specific literary techniques, devices,

and narrative strategies. The chosen texts cluster around a handful of central and

overlapping concerns related to moral fiction. These include the idea that storytellers,

narrators, and authors have moral obligations to their society or community, that they

must confront and engage moral issues, dilemmas, and questions, try to offer glimpses of

ethical and dianoetic aretai (moral and intellectual virtues) as performed in specific

cultural and historical circumstances, but still maintain a balance between topical and

aesthetic concerns. That is, they seldom advance a specific program for solving a specific

social or political problem: in fact, they often deal more with moral impasses, paradoxes,

and dilemmas than social issues or problems per se. However, I have selected these texts

not because they mechanically illustrate the principles of moral fiction. Rather, as a

sampling or cross-section of twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century texts, these

texts often "push back," representing paradoxes as much as paradigms of moral fiction:

they question, dispute, and test out many of the key criteria of moral fiction. Indeed, this

larger process is analogous to that which I have stressed is central to a given text's

constitution as moral fiction, its process of testing out. In other words, we can regard

texts such as *The Secret Agent*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, *The*

Sunlight Dialogues, *White Teeth*, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as moral

fiction not because they demonstrate some of its criteria but because they almost always

challenge these criteria. In fact, some of these texts exemplify the principles of moral

fiction by calling these very principles into question, by dramatically embedding them,

putting pressure on them, and testing them out, too.

CHAPTER 2:

THE MORAL CHAOS OF JOSEPH CONRAD'S

THE SECRET AGENT

> In this immoral atmosphere the Assistant Commissioner, reflecting upon his enterprise, seemed to lose some more of his identity. (*SA* 115)

> To see [his ambition] thwarted opened his [the Professor's] eyes to the true nature of world, whose morality was artificial, corrupt, and blasphemous. (*SA* 66)

> "What do you want to make a scandal for?---from morality---or what?" (Mr. Vladimir, *SA* 171)

Given the approach I sketched out in the previous chapter, Joseph Conrad's 1907

The Secret Agent (*SA*) might initially seem ill-suited for inclusion in my study, due in part

to its content and themes. One of my interests is virtue ethics, and I want, ideally, to

analyze how examples of moral fiction do not just illustrate ethical and dianoetic aretai

(moral and intellectual virtues) but test them out by dramatically embedding them in

culturally and socially specific locations and circumstances, i.e., as they are performed by

a text's characters in particular settings under specific conditions. That *The Secret Agent*

offers no straightforward or unambiguous models of any aretai or virtues requires little

emphasizing. Its characters---the novel does not have a single protagonist per se but

several core characters---traffic by and large in secrecy, deceit, and fraud. At best they

are pragmatic (Inspector Heat, the Assistant Commissioner, Winnie), or, if "moral," they

are imbecilic (Stevie), or ridiculous (Winnie's and Stevie's mother); at worst, they are

hypocritical (Ossipon, Yundt), indifferent (Verloc), or nihilistic (Vladimir, the Professor).
What Conrad stages in *The Secret Agent* is an encounter with the kind of moral
fragmentation delineated by MacIntyre in his 1981 *After Virtue*. In words that are
particularly apt for *The Secret Agent*, MacIntyre argues that while the "language and
appearances of morality persist, […] the integral substance of morality has to a large
degree been fragmented and then in part destroyed" (5). If, as MacIntyre proposes, we
regard a text's characters as "moral representatives of their culture[s]," as embodiments
of specific moral outlooks, *The Secret Agent* becomes a text that is largely about dealing
with just the kinds of tensions generated by a fragmented morality. Although its treatment
of the Assistant Commissioner, Stevie, and Winnie suggests certain ethical and dianoetic
aretai, the text also implies that the set of circumstances it depicts are not conducive to
heroically virtuous actions. What I hope to show by analyzing *The Secret Agent* in the
context of my definition of moral fiction is how Conrad stages an encounter with the
moral chaos of a modern urban civilization at the turn of the twentieth century. More
specifically, my claim is that *The Secret Agent* is not just about the moral chaos that
results from a fragmented morality---it *is* that moral chaos,---and the text enacts this
moral chaos stylistically by contrasting morally representative characters, by filtering the
narrative through an unstable hybrid narrator, and by incorporating elements from diverse
genres such as the domestic melodrama, detective story, and spy-thriller.

The Secret Agent as Prototypical Moral Fiction

Although *The Secret Agent* is assigned in university courses less than *Lord Jim* or
"Heart of Darkness," it has sparked a number of critical debates, and before I begin my

analysis of the novel's literary and linguistic devices, I need to address how three of these debates are directly related to my exploration of the novel as moral fiction. First, while Conrad scholars demonstrate a similar overarching concern with the moral in relation to literary texts, they usually aim at "interpreting Conrad's novels" to determine "Conrad's orientation toward morality" (Lackey 20). A problem with this approach is that it regards Conrad's texts as moral-philosophical tracts, not complex literary works, in which critics seek to specify whether the "moral vision" articulated in *The Secret Agent* is primarily negative or, conversely, implicitly positive. Similarly, although some Conrad critics explore how the text tackles vexing moral issues pertinent to twentieth-century societies, they frequently evaluate the text based on a paradigm of relevance, i.e., how it diagnoses contemporary societal problems and perhaps also forecasts future ones. Finally, a number of critics insist that while *The Secret Agent* represents a "technical tour-de-force" or "super-sophisticated construct," it is a "conceptually low-powered work," if not an "intellectual void" (Berthoud, "*The Secret Agent*" 103-4).

While my intention is not to try to denigrate or supersede the work of the many estimable critics engaged in Conrad scholarship, I call attention to this predicament because it mirrors the impasse I noted earlier in much new ethical criticism. Like "literary ethicists," some critics concentrate on this novel's themes but overlook how its literary and linguistic devices afford Conrad's exploration of them. Or like "ethical textualists," they analyze the text's formal features but dismiss its subject matter as unimaginative. Perhaps *The Secret Agent* has inhibited the method of analysis I advocate because it lends itself to both content-based and formalist critical approaches, but critics usually take up only one or the other of these, rarely both. Moreover, as Jakob Lothe points out, even the

critics who value the technical achievement of the novel generally avoid subjecting it to

the sort of detailed analysis they carry out on Conrad's other major texts.[1] Thus, while

my main objective in examining *The Secret Agent* as moral fiction is to show how the

text integrates moral responsibility with aesthetic complexity, and thereby model my

method of inquiry, I also hope to contribute to the more specific critical debates about

Conrad's novel.

For much of the novel's history, critics have understandably valued *The Secret*

Agent for what Peter Mallios calls its "contemporaneity": how it seems to diagnose,

predict, or explain, social phenomena, historical events, or political developments (155).

Indeed, some of its earliest reviewers regarded the novel almost as a political treatise,

considering it a serious analysis of the radical European political ideology of its era, and

they praised it for what they took to be an "accurate portrayal of the inside workings of

the anarchist mind," much to Conrad's own confusion and consternation (Arata 168).

Later critics have taken precisely the opposite view and deplore what they insist is an

inaccurate depiction of radical political figures. In his still widely-cited *Politics and the*

Novel (1957), Irving Howe considers *The Secret Agent* an all-out attack on the anarchists,

which Howe ascribes to the "conservative" Conrad's hatred of such political movements

(82). Writing in 1978, Eagleton criticizes *The Secret Agent* for offering a factitious

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[1] Nonetheless, Lothe rightly acknowledges that "many of the most suggestive insights into Conrad's narrative method" appear in work by critics whose approaches Lothe considers "predominantly thematic" (17). Albert Guerard, for example, offers a useful schematic of recurring "conflicts" that animate Conrad's major novels, such as a "declared belief that ethical matters are simple---doubled by an extraordinary sense of ethical complexities" (57). Berthoud notes how *The Secret Agent* contrasts two ways of seeing, a "normal or practical mode, and the naïve or visionary mode," and suggests that both modes proceed from and depend on their adherents' "almost incurable propensity for evading painful truths" (*Major Phase* 140-3). Finally, Ian Watt identifies "delayed decoding" as one of Conrad's most fundamental devices: "it combines the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower process of making out their meaning" (175).

"vision of an anarchist-haunted London," for failing to adequately differentiate between Marxists, anarchists, and nihilists---instead lumping them all together "under the same political heading,"---and, lastly, for condescendingly parodying these political radicals as "conformist parasites or febrile freaks" ("Form" 23-5).

While these critics raise interesting questions, they frequently exclude textual elements that undermine their assertions. For instance, Eagleton mistakenly claims that the text's "anarchists emerge, after all, as repugnant killers, responsible for dismembering a mentally defective child" ("Form" 26). But it is Mr. Vladimir, an aristocrat and reactionary, who instigates the attack, not the anarchists. Indeed, many critics convincingly refute Eagleton's reading by demonstrating how the text's portrayal of the anarchists departs completely from the anarchist-prototype that developed in the popular terrorist fiction of the late nineteenth century. Jacques Berthoud illustrates this in his argument that this terrorist fiction invariably portrayed social agitators and anarchists as "hyperactive," unstable, volatile, and as liable to detonate as the chemical compounds they concocted to use as explosive devices ("*The Secret Agent*" 109). In contrast, Conrad's anarchists are lethargic, sloppy, and obese; except for the Professor, they are, in David Mulry's words, "complete humbugs---they utter imprecations and vociferations upon which they will never act" (3).[2] As Eloise Knapp Hay usefully summarizes, they "neither set the world on fire nor rise to sterile heroisms," but only "achieve disaster inadvertently" (219).

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[2] In a chapter-length study of *The Secret Agent* in *Conrad: The Major Phase*, Berthoud suggests that the novel points up how the British government's "toleration of revolutionary refugees from abroad smothers them in a demoralizing embrace, reducing their principles to vacant clichés, and their programmes to private posturings" (133). This view, that Conrad's real target is not the anarchists but modern liberal democracy, is so prevalent, despite Howe and Eagleton, that it requires little further rehearsing here.

This sort of overly reductive reading is not the only problem with valuing *The Secret Agent* for relevance or "contemporaneity." What is worse for us literary critics is that this paradigm seldom serves any text well for long. It places the text at the whim of whatever we think is "relevant" at a given moment in time, and this is highly variable. While it is unavoidable and desirable that political, historical, and socio-cultural developments affect critical practices, this has resulted in a mixed legacy in the case of *The Secret Agent*. After the First World War, critics rarely explored the "nature of the novel's humor" (English 139). In fact, for us now, it may seem troubling that some early reviews categorized the novel as an "essentially good-spirited comedy, a mock melodrama" whose "bleakness" is offset by macabre humor and scathing irony (English 139). Such humor becomes more apparent if we look at the text's gory passages side-by-side with a skit, say, from Monty Python. To cite one instance, the humor of Inspector Heat's inspection of the mutilated remains of Stevie, unidentified at this point, resembles that of the duel in the 1975 film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. There, after King Arthur lops each of the Black Knight's limbs off in turn, the armless, legless Black Knight agrees to "call it a draw." In *The Secret Agent*, a constable tries to deduce the height and weight of Stevie's corpse based on the dimensions of its foot. As the constable tells Heat: "Well, here he is---all of him I could see. Fair. Slight---slight enough. Look at that foot there. I picked up the legs first, one after another. He was that scattered you didn't know where to begin" (*SA* 72). Instead of recounting feelings of horror, as we should expect, the constable tells of how he felt puzzled over how to clean up the mess. In 1907, the idea that a human body could make such a gruesome splatter was fairly remote from most readers' experience---so farfetched as to be comic. But this soon

changed, drastically. In the First World War, scores of living human beings were actually

blown or torn literally to pieces by powerful explosive devices, and such macabre

comedic touches as puzzling over Stevie's remains probably seemed gratuitously

disgusting. It was after this time that critics began regarding *The Secret Agent* as a

"straightforward and frankly depressing account of social and psychological squalor"

(English 140).[3] Indeed, many of these critics adopt an unduly somber, humorless tone, as

if to grimly emphasize that the text deals with grave moral concerns.

However, just as these large-scale events have inhibited potentially generative

scholarly approaches to the text, other events, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, have

renewed both popular and scholarly interest in the text, which was overshadowed by *Lord

Jim* and "Heart of Darkness" in the late twentieth century. After 9/11, especially in

popular media, *The Secret Agent* became possibly *the* text of the new century because it

not only tackled modern terrorism but also dealt with problems that emerged in an

attack's aftermath, such as police surveillance and conspiracy theories. For example,

Mallios notes that in the first several years after the attacks, *The Secret Agent* was

"referenced over a hundred times in newspapers, magazines, and online journalistic

resources across the world" (155). For John Gray, a contributor to the *New Statesmen*,

and expert on Al-Qaida, Conrad became "the first great novelist of the 21st century" (qtd.

in Mallios 155). For Judith Shulevitz, a writer for *Slate*, the author was no less than a

"literary Nostradamus" (qtd. in Mallios 155). Writing in response to such articles,

Mallios claims that what unified these otherwise disparate journalists is the idea that *The

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[3] Questions of the novel's relevance are of course related to those that deal with its moral vision. H. M.
Daleski, for example, contends that *The Secret Agent*, in its rendering of a society beset by a "pervasive and
darkly corrupting moral nihilism," "envisions the disintegration of the society that in fact collapsed in
1914" (157).

Secret Agent offered a terrifying glimpse of a "post-World Trade Center global imaginary" (155).[4] However, as Mallios correctly points out, most mainstream-media commentators took the novel's content at face value; not surprisingly, they paid inadequate attention to the text's literary features but focused almost exclusively on depiction of the "materiality of terror," bombs, terrorists, police, destruction (155).[5]

It is probably impossible *not* to factor some notion of a novel's relevance or "contemporaneity" into our processes of selection and analysis. We can acknowledge that *The Secret Agent* speaks to readers about a range of relevant social issues, but as I have been stressing throughout this study, my objective is not to rehash such issues but to analyze how a text's specific literary devices actually enable its exploration of them. Just as focusing on morality per se is the domain of philosophy and theology, covering historical events as such is the domain of journalism and non-fiction writing. This does not mean that we should discount the idea of contemporaneity altogether, but we do need to recalibrate it slightly. To be sure, *The Secret Agent* grapples with a host of perplexing moral predicaments, such as anonymity in modern urban centers, conflicting political ideologies, terroristic bombing campaigns, police surveillance, and espionage, but what is more central for moral *fiction* is that it deals, often self-reflexively, with narrative,

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[4] For people struggling to make sense of the attacks, which seemed an assault on modernity itself, the text features many elements that probably resonated deeply. The plot hinges on a failed attempt to destroy the Greenwich Observatory, a site targeted mainly because it represents science, facts, knowledge, and reason. As Mr. Vladimir tells it, "The demonstration must be against learning---science. But not every science will do. The attack must have all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy": if possible, Vladimir would have Verloc "throw a bomb into pure mathematics" (*SA* 31).

[5] Unfortunately, Mallios shows a similar tendency. For him, "the true mark of the novel's contemporaneity" is that it deals with the "media phenomenon" after such an attack, in which a figure, whether Michaelis in the novel or "Conrad" in the 9/11 aftermath, "becomes produced [by the media] to explain, contain, and administer threats largely produced by the media as well" (155).

mediation, and the moral at the same time. This is evident in its foregrounding of

storyteller-figures, such as the elusive, enigmatic narrator and the range of raconteurs,

who, while exemplifying conflicting moral outlooks, deploy narrative within the larger

narrative of the text itself. With regard to my approach to moral fiction, the more salient

mark of the text's contemporaneity is that it examines the kind of moral chaos that,

according to MacIntyre, characterizes much of twentieth-century history, and it links this

moral chaos to problems of narrative and storytelling. As do MacIntyre, Newton, and

Phelan, Conrad's text investigates the crucial social and personal functions of storytelling

and narratives, often by pointing up negative examples of failed or inadequate storytellers

or characters that construct, deploy, or act out various "narratives" in the text.[6]

As I noted earlier, after the First World War, critics seldom focused on the text's

comedic elements but instead valued it as a grim critique of the moral squalor of modern

urban civilization. Critics who analyze *The Secret Agent* in this way tend to debate what

kind of moral vision is articulated by the text. For a number of these critics, Conrad's

novel projects an unrelievedly pessimistic, cynical, and even nihilistic view. For example,

Howe famously states that what he "misses in *The Secret Agent* is some dramatic

principle of contradiction, some force of resistance; in a word, a moral positive to serve

literary ends" (96). For Howe, the "corrosive" and "chilling" irony of the narrator is the

problem: what should be a "tactic," he points out, is "transformed" in the novel into a

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[6] One of the ironies of *The Secret Agent* is that while it is part spy-thriller, a genre that emphasizes visual observation---spying---to gather information, the text frequently highlights how the characters try to disseminate information by telling stories. Although I focus on the text's primary storyteller, its elusive and enigmatic narrator, many of its characters also serve to highlight the larger questions of storytelling and narrative by calling attention to the "mode of delivery, the situation of the telling, [and] the response of the listeners" (Lothe, Hawthorn and Phelan, "Introduction" 2). We see this, for example, in the text's treatment of Verloc's speaking ability. Taking his represented thought and speech as a guide, we note how while Verloc regards himself as a formidable speaker, his "great, clear, oratorical bass," as he sees it, strikes Mr. Vladimir as an impertinent "roar" (*SA* 23).

"total perspective," in which the anarchists, who should offer an alternative political vision, appear as repugnant as the aristocratic reactionaries and laissez-faire conservatives; indeed, they also seem complicit with these factions in degrading social conditions (94). Writing in 1968, Joseph Fradin similarly claims that "Conrad undermines or puts in doubt even those possibilities of moral action which he sustains in his other novels" (1414). For Fradin, *The Secret Agent* suggests that "no human action seems capable of stemming the inexorable movement of the community toward inertia and death": none of the characters, neither the saint-figure of Stevie nor the seemingly admirable Assistant Commissioner adequately responds to the "condition in which they find themselves" (1414). In his 1977 *Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession*, H. M. Daleski takes what he regards as the novel's central "theme" for its primary goal: like the anarchists it portrays, Conrad's text is "avowedly dedicated to the disruption of the established social order, to the violent 'breaking up' or 'disintegration' of legality and morality" (158). Similarly, in 2005, Michael Lackey argues that Conrad rejects morality on the grounds of its supposed "inviolability"; it is a "sacred idol" that enables a "charismatic political figure," such as Kurtz, Mr. Vladimir, or Verloc, to cynically commandeer "morality in order to justify crimes against humanity" (22).[7]

In contrast, a number of Conrad scholars claim that the novel's negative vision obliquely hints at a positive one. And, while these critics sometimes pay insufficient

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[7] In regard to Conrad's supposed "moral vision," Lackey argues against trying to specify it. As he points out, the problem is that "to determine whether Conrad's 'literary project' is moral or not, the scholar must have an implicit or explicit set of criteria to determine what constitutes a true moral vision" (21). The problem with Lackey's argument is that, like even some new ethical critics, he proceeds with the same kind of constrained definition of "morality" that I critiqued earlier. Lackey is not dealing with morality per se but with the kind of conventional, hypocritical bourgeois morality that has already been thoroughly critiqued in countless critical writings. In other words, as I stated earlier, Lackey rejects a conception of "morality" that no reasonable person supports.

attention to the novel's linguistic and literary devices, they make the kind of claims about

elements of *The Secret Agent* that are most valuable for exploring a specifically literary

treatment of the moral. As Lackey acknowledges, many critics argue that Conrad is only

skeptical of conventional morality, and that in his texts he shows a distinct moral

perspective in his work, evident in his thorough analysis of characters and their motives

(Lackey 20-1). For example, in *Conrad's Politics* (1967), Avrom Fleishman argues that

The Secret Agent, "by its very representation of a world without [such an] order,"

emphasizes the "value of human community" and "suggests an ideal of social order"

(212). In support of this claim, Fleishman focuses on how Conrad suggests parallels

between opposites, such as the radical Professor and the reactionary Mr. Vladimir:

despite their different perspectives, both are willing to use explosives to achieve their

aims. As I pointed out earlier, some critics believe that this kind of tension reveals that

Conrad is a skeptic, relativist, or nihilist. Writing in 1990, Mark Wollaeger stresses that

while Conrad was a skeptic, he was also skeptical about skepticism. For Wollaeger,

"Conrad distrusted system builders or 'projectors'" because he thought any

"comprehensive system" or "structure of thought" imprisoned its adherents, but he was

also equally wary of the "deconstructive power of unmitigated skepticism": his major

novels "defend against skepticism even as they express it" (xvi, 5).[8] Much along these

lines, in his slightly earlier *The Art of Failure: Conrad's Fiction* (1986) Suresh Raval

claims critics sometimes mistake Conrad for a "strictly [morally] nihilistic writer"

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[8] For similar a point, see Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, who claims that Conrad both maintains and rejects a Nietzschean outlook: on one hand, he is "infected with the ethical relativism of his age," and seeks to strip away Western culture's "sustaining illusions"; on the other, he is an "incurable moralist," who takes on the impossible project of seeking to "reinstate myths" and protect the "the set of fragile [but necessary] illusions imperfectly overlaid on a chaotic, fragmented, and meaningless reality" (3-4).

because they assume that "morality is meaningless" without a secure metaphysical "foundation" (5). As Raval convincingly argues, *The Secret Agent* offers a "critique of bourgeois political morality, and of the ideological conflicts this morality generates"; but it is overstating the case to say it represents a "nihilistic rejection of life [or morality] as such" (104).

While all these critics offer numerous intriguing and useful insights, they seldom analyze how Conrad's "narrative method" affords exploration of moral issues (Lothe 1). A notable exception is Lothe's *Conrad's Narrative Method* (1989), in which Lothe analyzes how Conrad's devices, techniques, and strategies generate the very "reverberating [thematic] suggestiveness" that many of the critics I have mentioned find so engaging (2). For his part, Lothe focuses on how Conrad uses his narrators to carefully modulate "attitudinal distance," varying between a sense of detachment and involvement, even identification with Conrad as an author (10-14). For Lothe, one of the reasons Conrad is labeled a reactionary or a racist is because he "often endows his narrators with an ability or tendency to generalize; and such generalizations [sometimes] appear to approach the author's own views" (10-11).[9] However, while Lothe identifies and assesses narrative techniques in *The Secret Agent*, he does not carry out a "sustained consideration of thematic issues" (1, 17). This kind of focus, in which critics concentrate so tightly on the devices themselves, can lead to a distorted view of the text. This helps explain why several critics appreciate *The Secret Agent* only for its technical achievement. For

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[9] This tendency is even more pronounced when Conrad employs a first-person narrator like Marlow, whose narrative, in "Heart of Darkness," for example, is itself narrated by an unnamed first-person narrator. Thus, we have a first-person narrative within another first-person narrative. Given this, it is understandable that a critic like Chinua Achebe would impute the views of these narrators to Conrad: while these devices function as layers between Conrad and his narrators, they paradoxically create a sense of immediacy, as if we are getting the author's actual opinion spoken through these proxies.

example, in *Conrad the Novelist* (1958), Guerard praises Conrad's control of irony and "chill humor," but he ultimately finds that *The Secret Agent* is "not (so far as ideas are concerned) a work of exploration and discovery," but rather only "dramatizes [predictable] positions already securely held" (224).[10] For similar reasons, Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan excludes *The Secret Agent* from her study of "unresolved structural and thematic tensions" in Conrad's major novels because she regards it as "technically flawless" (5n11). For Erdinast-Vulcan, the problem with *The Secret Agent* is that is not problematic enough, at least in regard to matters of its technique.

My objective in analyzing *The Secret Agent* in the framework of my definition of moral fiction is to intervene in these longstanding debates and complicate them in ways that others might find useful and productive. What I hope to show in my analyses is that applying my approach to *The Secret Agent* can contribute to scholarly discussion of the novel but avoid some of the drawbacks associated with focusing on the text's contemporary relevance, its "moral vision," or its "narrative method" in isolation from each other. As we note, these three emphases are linked closely together in *The Secret Agent*. Its often self-reflexive techniques and devices actually facilitate the book's articulation of a moral vision, and in this way the text can be seen to anticipate many new ethical critics' interest in how narrative and ethics interact with each other.

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[10] Interestingly, George A Panichas, in his 2005 *Joseph Conrad: His Moral Vision*, makes precisely the opposite claim. He argues that *The Secret Agent* is a "novel of rigorous moral exploration," which, for Panichas, aims to strip away the range of "illusions" and "false or safe conceptions" embraced by the novel's cast of characters (3).

Lexical and Semantic Chaos: Conflicting Concepts of the Moral

Earlier, I examined how defining the "ethical" became extremely tricky after work on the new ethical criticism "exploded" in the late twentieth century, when a host of disparate, mutually incompatible critics laid claim to the term. My epigraphs for this chapter are meant to suggest that *The Secret Agent* anticipates this later confusion in a striking way, specifically engaging with the problem of *defining* the moral in the first place: to borrow Buell's phraseology about ethics, the text examines the difficulty of deciding what counts as "morality" when so many disparate parties invoke it by name, at a time, moreover, when the idea was undergoing definitional flux ("Pursuit" 7).[11] Accordingly, my initial focus is on how the characters (and also the narrator) speculate on the question of the moral, whether in intruded commentary or represented thought or speech, in the text itself. My specific claim is that in this way the text enacts the moral chaos I am talking about on the lexical and semantic level.

While *The Secret Agent* deals with conflicting senses of the "moral" in almost every chapter, its critique appears in two main forms: as direct commentary intruded by the narrator and as the represented thought or speech of a character. For example, early on, the narrator describes Verloc as possessing an almost ineffable "air of moral nihilism," while later, just before he is killed by Winnie, Verloc's own thoughts are indirectly represented: reflecting on Stevie's death, on how he had "stumbled within five minutes of being left to himself," Verloc feels himself "shaken morally to pieces" (*SA* 16,

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[11] While the text features a number of biblical allusions, it explores no specifically religious morality. Instead, we see how for many of the characters, such as the Professor, Michaelis, and Ossipon, science or socialism functions as a substitute for religion. One of the most obvious (and heavy-handed) examples is Ossipon's regard for the pseudo-science of Cesare Lombroso, a figure whom Ossipon "invoke[s]" in much the same way "as an Italian peasant recommends himself to his favourite saint" (*SA* 222).

174). Although everything we know about the characters is filtered through the device of the narrator, as the first quotation makes clear, the narrator also scales back his commentary and represents the characters' thoughts indirectly, such that, as in the second example, we experience something closer to Verloc's thinking, his commentary: the illusion of unmediated or less-mediated access to a character's thoughts. I will be discussing the first of these passages in more detail later, but for now I want to stress how while these two forms of moral speculation initially seem to contradict one another, in context, the second one actually confirms the narrator's earlier appraisal of Verloc's morality: he is "shaken morally to pieces" not because Stevie is dead, but because the planned bomb outrage went badly awry, and now, because Winnie had written the shop's address on the label of Stevie's coat, Stevie's death has led the police directly back to Verloc. Thus, Verloc's so-called "moral" concern is due largely to his having misread the situation. He was too cowardly to place the explosive himself, and so he wanted to believe, despite Stevie's mental handicap, that Stevie could carry out the job. In short, Verloc realizes he has duped himself, and this sense is what makes him feel "shaken morally to pieces": Verloc is nonplussed and overwhelmed, stunned, but not morally contrite for his part in Stevie's death, and we should read his thoughts as represented ironically, for there is nothing genuinely moral about or in him to be shaken to pieces.

Verloc's moral phoniness is contrasted with the integrity, trustworthiness, and candor projected by Conrad's narrator in his intrusive commentary specifically regarding moral concepts. In the first passage I mentioned earlier, the narrator is commenting on the impression that Verloc gives off, his "air of moral nihilism" (*SA* 16). I will be analyzing the narrator's tendency to moralize in more detail later, how he comes across as morally

judgmental, but what is significant in this passage is how the narrator is also subject to

moral confusion. This passage is about the difficulty of framing a moral judgment,

whether for lack of words for it, or because the object of the judgment defies easy

categorization:

> [Verloc] might have been anything from a picture-frame maker to a
> locksmith; an employer of labour in a small way. But there was also about
> him an indescribable air which no mechanic could have acquired in the
> practice of his handicraft however dishonestly: the air common to men
> who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fears of mankind; the *air of
> moral nihilism* common to keepers of gambling hells and disorderly
> houses; to private detectives and inquiry agents; to drink sellers and, I
> should say, to the sellers of invigorating electric belts and to the inventors
> of patent medicines. (*SA* 16, my italics)

This is of course a stylistically dense passage. While the bourgeois commonplaces about

the dishonesty of people in the trades tell us something about the narrator's middle-class

affiliations, the passage also hints that this moral nihilism is pervasive in the London of

the time. The phrase "moral nihilism" itself suggests a late nineteenth-century terrorists'

philosophy, but the narrator's list implicates a broad cross-section of society in the

fraudulence and "dishonesty" enabled by a morally nihilistic outlook. These moral

nihilists do not necessarily want to destroy their society outright, as the does the

Professor, for example, but their moral nihilism has a deeply corrosive effect. And an

effect is what the narrator is after, an effect of moral confusion. The narrator is trying to

give a clearer sense of the abstract quality of moral nihilism, to particularize it by linking

it to actual behaviors. However, this quality resists defining because it is not exactly

amorality or immorality. These run counter to, or are the opposite of morality, but they

depend on the concept of morality for their definitions. Moral nihilism is more

destructive than amorality or immorality because it is a negation or repudiation of the

moral as such. What we pick up on most is that the narrator, as suggested by his lengthy

catalogue of skilled but deceitful and corrupting workers, is expending considerable

effort to find the right way to illustrate Verloc's manner and clarify what is bad about it.

The passage thus suggests that part of what is problematic about Verloc's morally

nihilistic air is that it interferes with the narrator's ability to render an accurate moral

judgment, as if Verloc, in effect, jams the narrator's radar. What seems to invite the

narrator's prolonged commentary most is that although he regards Verloc's appearance as

comically disgusting---Verloc is "[u]ndemonstrative and burly in a fat pig style,"---what

the narrator is striving to get at is an effect that goes beyond and is possibly even at odds

with Verloc's physical appearance. As the narrator wraps up this passage, while he thinks

the "expression" of "sellers of invigorating electric belts" and "inventors of patent

medicines" are perhaps "perfectly diabolic," he insists that "Mr Verloc's expression was

by no means diabolic" (*SA* 16).[12]

    This idea of moral nihilism is taken up by Inspector Heat when he cogitates on the

problems of dealing with anarchists, such as the Professor. In his represented thought, we

see that Heat regards his business of tracking down and catching ordinary criminals as a

sort of game, in which, for example, thieves and the police both proceed according to a

set of "perfectly comprehensible rules" (*SA* 74). As Heat reckons, these rules constitute a

kind of procedural "morality," which the thieves resignedly "submit to" if they are caught

(*SA* 78). They tacitly acknowledge that this "morality" or code of behavior between cop

and thief is just and fair, "moral," and they have played according to the rules but have

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[12] Employing the British punctuation style, Conrad does not insert a period after abbreviated honorifics or titles. I follow his usage in direct quotations, but otherwise insert periods in accordance with the American convention.

lost. For Heat, criminals like thieves make up a class, and this makes them easier to deal with, but the anarchists, as criminals, are "distinctly no class---no class at all," and there are "no rules for dealing with [them]" (*SA* 78). We can see that for Heat the idea of the moral is in line with a professional code of ethics. It is as the Assistant Commissioner relates to Sir Ethelred, a kind of "departmental […] morality," which involves proper police procedures, legality, and keeping up the appearance of professional police conduct, of having the public's security in mind. In this way, it is also in line with a kind of conventional public morality, which is suggested by Heat's drawing on the "moral support" of the public to do his job (*SA* 77).

The text highlights problems with Heat's kind of departmental morality. He must follow the rules, but if the rules allow a particular action, however morally questionable, Heat feels himself within his rights to act. And what happens is that Heat's personal interest interferes with his investigation. For example, he is ready to arrest Michaelis not because Heat thinks he took part in the bombing attempt, but because Heat wishes to cover for Verloc, who has been acting as Heat's unofficial informant. For Heat, it is "perfectly legal to arrest [Michaelis] on the barest suspicion," "legal and expedient on the face of it," since the "rules of the game did not protect so much Michaelis who was an ex-convict" (*SA* 95). What is more, as Heat sees the matter, it "would be stupid not to take advantage of legal facilities, and the journalists who had written [Michaelis] up with emotional gush would be ready write him down with emotional indignation" (95-6).

If Heat exemplifies a flexible, pragmatic, but hypocritical morality, the Professor embodies a rigid, idealistic, but severe morality: a Nietzschean or hyperborean "immorality." This is the Professor's negative reaction to Heat's kind of morality: Heat

uses the rules of his departmental morality corruptly to advance his own agenda, and so

the Professor works to destroy such rules and conventions. Contrasting his moral

character with Heat's kind, the Professor claims that while the general populace's

character is "built upon conventional morality," his own "stands free from everything

artificial," i.e., the sorts of rules associated with Heat's departmental and conventional

public morality (*SA* 57). However, the Professor's motivations still derive from his own

self-interest. For example, in a discussion with the other anarchists, his objective is to

demonstrate his "superiority" over the mass of people in London, including people like

Heat (*SA* 57). For the Professor, such people are weak and "inferior" (*SA* 57). Theirs is a

self-imposed weakness, since these people willingly tie themselves up with "all sorts of

conventions," which, as the Professor points out, are actually extremely fragile. These

conventions arise from a desire to protect life, and this, for the professor, is their point of

vulnerability: they "depend on life, [he says], which, in this connection, is a historical fact

surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations, a complex organised fact open to

attack at every point; whereas I depend on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be

attacked. My superiority is evident" (*SA* 57).[13]

The narrator, however, lambastes the Professor's conception of himself as some

sort of Nietzschean "immoralist," hinting that the Professor is not so different from Heat.

Heat depends on departmental and public moralities because they suit him, serving his

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[13] In this respect, the Professor's thinking resembles Mr. Vladimir's. Mr. Vladimir hopes to produce a distinctive "moral effect" through the bomb-outrage that goes beyond the mere "knocking down of a wall" (*SA* 178). He wants to goad the British into enacting repressive measures against the anarchists, into undermining the legality the Professor also wants to efface. Mr. Vladimir's wording even echoes the Professor's sentiments, only instead of regarding "death" as the ultimate threat, Mr. Vladimir makes his claim for destruction that is ferocious but "so absurd [it is] incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable; in fact, mad" (*SA* 30). For Mr. Vladimir, madness can produce the same kind of effect as the Professor's conception of death, for it, like death, is "truly terrifying, inasmuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasion, or bribes" (*SA* 31).

interests. These moralities have not suited the Professor or served his interests. As the

narrator explains, the Professor is the son of an "itinerant and rousing preacher of some

obscure but rigid Christian sect" (*SA* 66). Similar to Ossipon, who is also "free from the

trammels of conventional morality," but who abides wholly by the "rule of science," the

Professor has dropped his puritanical religiosity and opted for an equally puritanical

scientism, through which he hopes to have a similar effect on others: his old "moral

attitude translated itself into a frenzied puritanism of ambition" (*SA* 222, 66). The world,

however, fails to notice the Professor's merit, and so, as my second epigraph shows, the

Professor, seeing his ambition "thwarted," becomes convinced that the morality of the

world is "artificial, corrupt, and blasphemous" (*SA* 66). Of course, the narrator's

treatment here of the Professor is scathingly ironic, as he implies that, like Joyce's

Stephen Dedalus, the Professor still has a religious strain; it is just injected backwards,

and this generates its own hypocrisies. Thus, what we see in the Professor is the

embodiment of a puritanical moral outrage. While his representation here is mediated by

a narrator who intrudes direct commentary, that commentary mimics the Professor's

morally outraged tone. The words, "artificial, corrupt, and blasphemous," even call to

mind the image of a hellfire-and-brimstone preacher, pounding a pulpit before his

congregation. Finally, according to the narrator, the Professor's current mission to

"destroy public faith in legality" is a permutation of his original moral outrage (*SA* 66).

As it does with the Professor, the text also uses Stevie at times to reflect moral

outrage. However, there is a crucial difference between them. Stevie's moral indignation

stems not from seeing his personal goals obstructed, but from his compassion for others,

from empathizing with their thwarted desires and felt pains. In this way, the text uses

Stevie to exemplify a kind of moral purity, untainted by self-interest. His problem,

however, is that because he is imbecilic, he can find no way to channel this moral purity

into meaningful action when he takes moral offence at some injustice (Halliwell 99;

Schwarz 170). What is worse is that he is highly susceptible to having his moral

sensibility manipulated by others. We see this occurring in several passages, such as

when Verloc manages, albeit off-stage, to persuade Stevie to plant the explosive charge:

Verloc, in represented thought, recalls how he has "carefully indoctrinated" Stevie

through a number of "conversations full of subtle reasonings" during the course of many

walks they have taken together (*SA* 174-5). We also note it in the narrator's depiction of

how Stevie, at fourteen, lets "fireworks off on the staircase" of the office where he works

because "two other office boys in the building had worked upon his feelings by [telling

him] tales of injustice and oppression till they had wrought his compassion to the pitch of

that frenzy" (13). The narrator's description of the fireworks reflects Stevie's ultimately

ineffectual fury: "fierce rockets, angry catherine wheels, and loudly exploding squibs"

(13). While this passage functions proleptically to look ahead to Stevie's planting of the

bomb, and while the narrator seems to poke fun at Stevie for being so easily provoked,

there is also an implicit critique of the office boys, as well as of Verloc, who, like the

office boys, provokes Stevie to action, with consequences that are far more disastrous

than simply being dismissed from his job.

The text also shows how Stevie's moral purity is coupled with moral gullibility,

or rather a moral literalism, which can translate into the same kind of single-minded

outrage as that of the Professor. For example, when the anarchists discourse on England's

oppressive justice system, they couch their discussion in metaphors associated with

torture and cannibalism. Karl Yundt regards the rule of law as a "branding instrument

invented by the overfed" to criminalize the "hungry" (*SA* 41). Laying the rhetoric on

thick, Yundt equates laws to "Red hot applications on [the poor's] vile skins," so much

so, that he wonders aloud if his hearers cannot "smell and hear from here the thick hide of

the people burn and sizzle" (*SA* 41). When Michaelis takes up this metaphor to liken the

effects of his imprisonment to branding, ---in prison, his "own skin had sizzled under the

red hot brand,"---he also works on Stevie's compassion. Unfortunately, Stevie takes the

metaphor literally. He stands "staring at [them], as if rooted suddenly to the spot by his

morbid horror and dread of physical pain": "Stevie knew very well that hot iron applied

to one's skin hurt very much" (*SA* 42). As we see, Stevie's "scared eyes blaze[] with

indignation," his "mouth drop[s] open" only to close when he "swallow[s]" Yundt's

"terrifying statement" that the "present economic conditions" are "cannibalistic," that the

powerful are "nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the

people" (*SA* 44). While the immediate effect of this discussion on Stevie is as of a

soporific, it eventually elicits an extreme reaction from him: "gesticulating and

murmuring in the kitchen," he first "prowl[s] round the table like an excited animal in a

cage," and then babbles "out of his mind with something he overheard about eating

people's flesh and drinking blood," a "carving knife" in his hand, staring at Winnie "as if

he didn't know who [she] was," and "shouting and stamping and sobbing"; for, as Winnie

relates, Stevie "can't stand the notion of any cruelty" (*SA* 47, 50-1).[14] That the text

features an imbecile as an exemplar of moral purity and blows him literally to bits

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[14] This recalls the narrator's somewhat ironic commentary about Stevie: as a deeply "moral creature," he is largely "at the mercy of his righteous passions" (*SA* 132).

reinforces the sense of how problematic morality had become by the end of the nineteenth century. The text uses Stevie on one hand to show this moral purity but also to critique simplistic responses. Through Stevie's idiocy, the text suggests that in this corrupt, moral chaos, only the mentally deficient are morally pure, but it also shows how out of place morality is, how ineffectual it is. It also can be read allegorically: one who is moral must seem an idiot to the immoral. Lastly, Stevie embodies or rather disembodies the fragmented morality I have been talking about, in that he is literally reduced to fragments largely as a result of all this moral chaos.

My aim so far in discussing these characters has been to show how each represents some piece of a fragmented morality, and to suggest that by doing this, the text gives us little hope that such figures will establish a sort of baseline notion of the moral anytime soon: it reinforces the idea that if our understanding of the moral is chaotic, our actions will reflect this and probably contribute to a larger moral chaos with observable effects.[15] However, before I move on to discuss the narrator as a moralist, moralizer, or moral artist, I want to concentrate briefly on how the moral is conceptualized by the Assistant Commissioner. As I mentioned earlier, almost everything we know about the characters is mediated through the narrator. The narrator often makes moral judgments, and what he frequently evaluates is precisely how the characters conceptualize morality. While his moral commentary is designed to shape our responses to the characters, it also shapes our response to the narrator as well, since his moral judgments give a strong sense

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[15] After all, these are not the only pieces. See, for example, Michaelis's speechifying about how the "idealization" of "moralists," i.e., their desire to see life in terms of ideals, takes away from life's "character of complexity," making it "poorer" (*SA* 37). The somewhat heavy-handed irony that develops from this is that Michaelis is a grotesque parody who is idealized by his lady patroness in order for her to show off "morally" how forward-thinking and progressive she is (*SA* 83-88, and passim).

of *his* morality, what he regards as wrong or right. Especially from his first description of

Verloc, we get the impression that the narrator's morality is aligned with integrity,

candor, and trustworthiness, with honesty and fair-dealing. From his other descriptions of

the Professor and Stevie, we get the sense that the narrator is critical of rigid moralities,

even when they spring from benevolent motives, as in the case of Stevie. At the same

time, he is critical of a morality that is overly flexible as in the case of Inspector Heat's

departmental and public moralities. My last point here is that the Assistant

Commissioner's conception of the moral has the most in common with that of the

narrator. My first epigraph is meant to show this: the atmosphere and cookery of the

Italian restaurant he is in are "fraudulent," or phony, and hence "immoral" because they

undermine his sense of his identity (*SA* 115). In fact, because the Assistant Commissioner

feels himself at odds with his official position, uncomfortable in his marriage, and out-of-

place in London, he is subject to "pangs of moral discontent," for he is being fraudulent

with himself, with what he actually wants to do, by accepting the job, marrying his wife,

and living in London (*SA* 82). He is uncomfortable with his professional and personal

roles, both of which require him to conform to public morality. Ironically, the only time

the Assistant Commissioner really appears at ease with himself is when he goes out in

disguise to locate Verloc and interrogate him, in contravention of Heat's departmental

morality.

While the Assistant Commissioner's self-interests are what initially motivate him

to get personally involved in the investigation of the bombing, his discovery that Mr.

Vladimir is behind the bombing and his subsequent confrontation with him set up one of

the text's most salient critiques of how the moral was conceptualized at the time. In my

third epigraph, Mr. Vladimir, threatened with exposure, asks the Assistant Commissioner: "What do you want to make a scandal for?---from morality---or what?" (*SA* 171). This is a thematically suggestive line of dialogue. In context, Mr. Vladimir's comment seems calibrated to insult the Assistant Commissioner for pandering to public morality, which Mr. Vladimir understands as an excessive sense of righteousness, a disproportionate zeal for following the rules and playing fair, even for tattling on wrongdoers. The Assistant Commissioner's rejoinder reveals that his objective is in line with the argument I have been sketching out here about him. As the Assistant Commissioner emphasizes, his plan mainly has a "practical side": his police "have really enough to do to look after the genuine article," without also having to investigate "shams" perpetrated by an agent provocateur employed by a foreign government (*SA* 172).

As I have been arguing, the text uses these moral asides, such as the dispute between Mr. Vladimir and the Assistant Commissioner, as part of an examination of the problems of defining the moral at a time in which concepts of morality were fragmenting. Nevertheless, while it explores this lexical and semantic confusion, the text does not conclusively define the moral. Certainly, no one character wholly embodies or exemplifies morality in a straightforward, unambiguous, or unproblematic way, not the Assistant Commissioner, Stevie, or the narrator. The text's recurring focus on defining the moral thus functions less as a process of elimination whereby the text separates out erroneous from valid conceptions of the moral, but more as a process of testing them out mainly to sharpen our sense of the enormous difficulty of defining the moral. To rephrase Mr. Vladimir's line, my conclusion is that the text is making a scandal not *from* morality but *about* and perhaps even *for* morality, by calling attention to how the lexical and

semantic confusion regarding the moral is symptomatic of and probably contributes to the pervasive moral chaos depicted in the text.

Shaking the Tightrope: the Hybrid Narrator's Diegetic Chaos

I have been arguing that one way *The Secret Agent* allegorizes the moral chaos of London in the late 1890s is through showing how certain lexical and semantic elements have become unstable, even volatile. The text puts several characters' conflicting conceptions of the moral into relation with each other to show how difficult it is to classify what counts as the moral when "morality," as construed and misconstrued by these characters, has become so fragmented. From these lexical and semantic elements, I move now to a diegetic or narrative element by concentrating on the device of the narrator.[16] As suggested by my review of criticism on *The Secret Agent*, while Conrad scholars offer markedly divergent conclusions about the narrator's moral vision, they still tend to regard the narrator qua device as an altogether stable entity whose voice is "unwaveringly detached," and whose ironic tone is consistently "corrosive" and "chilling" (Harrington, "Deception"; Howe 94). However, my contention is that we have as much trouble simply specifying what kind of narrator we are dealing with as we have when we endeavor to sort out the text's characters' divergent conceptualizations of the moral. This is made easier for us because while each character is emblematic of a different morality, their moral sense remains stable: throughout the text, Stevie, for example, embodies a pure morality, Inspector Heat a departmental morality, and the

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[16] I am leaving aside the text's chronological disruption because so many critics have already dealt with it. See Mark Eyeington, for example, who argues in "Going for the First Meridian" that Conrad explores the ideas of objective and subjective time by contrasting the idea of an objective Greenwich Mean Time with that of how the characters subjectively interpret time in relation to themselves, such as Inspector Heat's musing on the agonies Stevie might have experienced in his instantaneous death (*SA* 71).

Professor a Nietzschean immorality. But the narrator, as a device, is seldom so static. At times, the narrator is overt, a heterodiegetic presence like one of Henry Fielding's or Charles Dickens's authorial narrators: these do not directly participate in the events of the story but tell it from a remove, offering specific commentary to structure our responses to a given character. At other times, the narrator in *The Secret Agent* goes "undercover" and becomes a covert presence, much like the "invisible" narrator we indirectly perceive in some of James Joyce's texts. (I approach several of Joyce's works as moral fiction in the next chapter.) We detect the outline of this invisible or absent narrator especially in passages that incorporate the represented thought or speech of a character. As Flannery O'Connor puts it, while the first type of narrator is "everywhere in his own work, […] clarifying this and that incident for [us] so that [we] couldn't possibly miss the point," the second kind leaves us to figure things out largely on our own, "floundering around in the thoughts of various unsavory characters" (74). One of the main problems with Conrad's narrator in *The Secret Agent* is that he does both of these things. He tells us explicitly and scathingly what we should think of a character, but then undermines his own judgments by scaling back his vitriol, particularly in passages that shade into the represented thought of the text's characters or that cede to their directly reported speech.

To show how this device functions in a context specifically related to my definition of moral fiction, I advance a number of interrelated claims. First, since the narrator, as a literary device, resists and even defies many specific classifications we associate with narrative theory, it represents a composite or hybrid, and its quality as such makes it a radically unstable entity. This instability contributes to how we experience the text's treatment of the moral chaos of a modern twentieth-century megalopolis. The text's

image of the tightrope walker offers a useful metaphor for this narratorial instability, as the narrator periodically shakes the rope of the narrative that we are carefully following. Accordingly, through this device, the text stages a variety of narrative chaos for readers, who must remain alert to frequent, sudden, but subtle shifts in perspective, voice, and tone. Finally, however, while the text emphasizes the mediating function of the narrator, calling attention to how the narrator frames moral judgments so that we might evaluate and critique *them*, the text's treatment of the narrator also suggests that moral turmoil is linked to and reflected in narrative turmoil. What we encounter is a situation in which narration and storytelling, which were once, as MacIntyre argues, the "chief means of moral education," have become ineffective in confronting and dealing with the pervasive moral chaos of a modern urban civilization (121). The text's narrator reinforces our sense of the difficulty of dealing with this moral chaos narratively without actually worsening it in the process.

Earlier I noted in my definition of moral fiction that a storyteller-figure is regularly foregrounded as a crucial device for exploring the larger question of the moral responsibility of authors and storytellers. One of the fundamental problems we have with the text's narrator is that we never fully know where this storyteller-figure is located in relation to the text's characters. This is important because, according to my criteria of moral fiction, the storyteller-figure usually undergoes a process of exploration and discovery within the narrative which resembles the larger process carried out by the text as a whole. This kind of figure is exemplified by Conrad's Marlow, whose process of discovery we can generally infer from the reactions of his audience. Unlike "Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim*, *The Secret Agent* has no consistently clear storyteller-figure

acting within or directly involved in the narrative itself. Although the text shows us characters telling each other stories or making up stories in which they play a part, the text's primary storyteller is a narrator that is neither wholly in nor completely out of the narrative, but that navigates a neutral zone between the characters, setting, and events *in* the text and the larger narrative *of* the text. That this figure has no clear community whereby we can chart his process of discovery makes measuring how effectively this figure models a process of exploration and discovery considerably more difficult.

In the first paragraph of the text, while we initially infer an undramatized or authorial narrator, a careful rereading of the same paragraph suggests that specifying what category of narrator we are dealing with is quite complicated. At first, the narrator seems a disembodied, mediating presence that does not participate directly in the narrative that is related by him: he appears, in narrative-theoretical terms, heterodiegetic. This type of narrator aims to reassure us that we are in the presence of a dependable guide to the narrative, telling us what to think about the characters, often through explicit commentary about their morality. What we see here is that the narrator's point of view merges with Verloc's. In regard to my definition of moral fiction, this is important for several reasons. As I have been arguing, Conrad's text allegorizes the moral chaos of fin-de-siècle London. What we recognize as early as this first paragraph is the fragmentation of the narrator and a concomitant disintegration of his authority as a reliable moral guide. Additionally, we come to wonder if the narrator is as detached and uninvolved as he appears, if he is actually above the negative influence of the morally corrupt characters described by him. More important for my definition of moral fiction is that the passage

offers a kind of family-tree or flow-chart of how Verloc, for example, shirks some of his

professional and familial responsibilities:

> Mr Verloc, going out in the morning, left his shop nominally in charge of
> his brother-in-law. It could be done, because there was little business at
> any time, and practically none at all before the evening. Mr Verloc cared
> but little about his ostensible business. And, moreover, his wife was in
> charge of his brother-in-law. (9)

Our sense of Verloc's evasiveness in regard to his responsibilities is reinforced by the

narrator's peculiar shiftiness in regard to *his* responsibilities. It is difficult to identify

conclusively whether the narrator is himself focalizing and speaking in his own voice, or

whether he is focalizing through Verloc but speaking in his own voice, or whether the

narrator, having assumed aspects of Verloc's identity, is experiencing this event

impressionistically as it impinges on Verloc's consciousness.[17] For example, we can

attribute the honorific "Mr" to an authorial narrator, who, viewing Verloc from the

outside, relates this mundane event to us from a distance. The same applies to the phrase

"going out in the morning": why would Verloc need to think to himself that he is "going

out in the morning"? More surely, we can ascribe the word "nominally" to the narrator

for the reasons that it ironically exaggerates the importance of this commonplace event

and that it also functions proleptically: it anticipates how Verloc later tasks Stevie with

placing the explosive device in the Greenwich Observatory. Finally, the ambiguous

phrasing implies that the shop is in charge of Stevie, not the other way around.

At the same time, however, we can attribute such phrases as "It could be done" to

Verloc, either as a representation of his thoughts or an adoption of his perspective. The

phrase can be read as an instance of free indirect discourse, possibly suggesting that

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[17] Much of my argument here relies on Jeremy Hawthorn's descriptive but insightful analyses of the
narrative techniques in many of Conrad's novels, including *The Secret Agent* (40-7).

Verloc is rationalizing his actions to himself. As I mean to emphasize, this slipperiness in regard to specifying who is speaking and who is seeing and even who is doing which and when enacts a kind of narrative chaos already in the space of one fairly short and straightforward-seeming paragraph. To recall the tightrope motif I have borrowed from the text, we experience the kind of "moral insecurity" that Inspector Heat's imagined "tight rope artist" would feel "if suddenly, in the middle of the performance, the manager of the Music Hall were to rush out of the proper managerial seclusion and begin to shake the rope" (*SA* 92).[18] In other words, the narrator seems bent on shaking the rope of the narrative---while we are on it.

This sensation is reinforced by our encounter with the narrator in the next paragraph. Now we are dealing with a narrator that appears overt and authorial. Having seen Verloc off, the narrator yanks us back to the shop to describe a later development that is beyond Verloc's knowledge. The narrator tells us that the house to which Verloc's shop is attached is "one of those grimy brick houses which existed in large quantities before the era of reconstruction dawned upon London" (9). As the textual notes suggest, this makes dating the events depicted in the novel rather complicated. This "era of reconstruction" began around 1888, which is roughly the year in which the novel takes place (*SA* 415n9.10-1). The narrator's wording, however, makes for some temporal ambiguity, which further shakes the rope of the narrative. The narrator has focused on the specific event of Verloc's departure from the shop in the first paragraph, only to flash-forward to a later time, after this "era of reconstruction," when this kind of house has

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[18] This image of a deadly fall occurs earlier in Verloc's feelings after his interview with Mr. Vladimir. Musing on the insecurities of being a secret agent, he likens this kind of situation to being astride a horse that has "suddenly fall[en] dead under you in the midst of an uninhabited and thirsty plain" (*SA* 48).

presumably been torn down and replaced. Finally, the narrator's assessment of this later

situation introduces other ambiguities to further stymie our footing. It is difficult for us to

specify whether the narrator approves or disapproves of the changes brought by the "era

of reconstruction." While this phrase initially connotes positively, it also reads ironically

and functions as a critique as well. The word "dawned" suggests that this reconstruction

was long overdue, that the "grimy brick houses" were allowed to exist a long time before

it occurred to anyone that they should be replaced. Also, there is no reference to human

agents conceiving of or carrying out the reconstruction, nor is there is a clear indication

of what happened to the inhabitants who lived in the original houses. As I have been

arguing, as readers we feel the rope of the narrative being shaken by an increasingly

erratic if not schizophrenic narrator: on one hand, he frames a negative moral judgment

of the shop itself; on the other, his ironic wording registers some disapproval of the kind

of respectable moral crusade that would see this type of shop torn down.[19]

So far we have been dealing with relatively inconspicuous but still significant tugs

on the narrative tightrope. The text sets up expectations of an omniscient, dramatized,

authorial narrator but includes elements, such as the shading into Verloc's perspective,

that undermine our confidence that this narrator is a reliable guide. Even more jarringly,

however, the narrator intrudes directly and mysteriously into a scene by referring to

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[19] The sense of a negative moral judgment is made explicit by the narrator's description of the wares displayed in the shop's front window: "photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls; […] a few numbers of ancient French comic publications hung across a string as if to dry; a dingy blue china bowl, […]; a few books, with titles hinting at impropriety; a few apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like *The Torch*, *The Gong*---rousing titles" (*SA* 9). Of course, this judgment is complicated by a much later passage, which is itself also difficult to ascribe completely either to Verloc or the narrator: the shop's "secret wares" are regarded as a kind of pressure-release-valve, the "poor expedients devised by a mediocre mankind for preserving an imperfect society from the dangers of moral and physical corruption" (*SA* 194).

himself in the first-person singular. We note this at the end of the passage describing

Verloc's "air of moral nihilism" that I discussed earlier. After the catalogue of dishonest

tradesmen, the narrator suddenly breaks in:

> […] and, I should say, to the sellers of invigorating electric belts and to the inventors of patent medicines. But of that last I am not sure, not having carried my investigations so far into the depths. For all I know, the expression of these last may be perfectly diabolic. I shouldn't be surprised. What I mean to affirm is that Mr. Verloc's expression was by no means diabolic. (16)

This is a sharp pull on the narrative tightrope. Till now we have been thinking that we are

dealing with an authorial narrator, who is heterodiegetic, not involved directly in the

narrative. But the narrator here claims to have played some kind of active role in the

narrative by personally investigating people engaged in these dishonest occupations. The

heterodiegetic narrator momentarily becomes a homodiegetic narrator, and his intrusion

can have several contradictory effects on us. For example, Lothe convincingly argues that

while these "first-person pronouns" lend the text's authorial narrative a "personal flavor,"

they raise questions about the narrator's identity and, more importantly, they imply that

the narrator is not omniscient, that his knowledge is in some respects severely limited

(230-1). However, what is even more puzzling is that this first-person narrator all but

disappears after this brief appearance. We experience a sort of whiplash from this. We

were not expecting this first-person intrusion, and are briefly disoriented by it, but we are

probably more perplexed by its subsequent and permanent departure in the next

paragraph.

    While the narrator does not evaluate the text's characters in the first-person, his

often scathing judgments suggest a snide, closed-minded, malicious persona, intent on

arousing our moral indignation. However, my final argument here is that the narrator's moral attitude to the characters is extremely erratic, and we can see this in the text's treatment of the characters that the narrator seemingly abhors, e.g., the anarchists, especially Michaelis and Yundt. What we note is not that the narrator alternates between mounting "all-out" attacks on the characters in one passage and then bestowing praise on them in another, but rather that his vituperative is inconsistent, loud, then silent, readily apparent, then imperceptible. As I have been arguing, this kind of inconsistency, like the other tugs on the narrative rope, keeps readers off-balance. In fact, it is possibly the most disorienting tug of the rope because the narrator's judgments seem like the kind of pronouncements we expect from an authorial narrator.

For this narrator, forms of moral deficiency are betokened by various kinds of physical ugliness. This is especially true of Michaelis, whom we first encounter in the text's third chapter. He is introduced specifically after a fairly lengthy paragraph of his quoted speech. In this speech, Michaelis outlines a kind of teleology in which capitalism and the laws it enacts to protect property are regarded as "responsible" for creating socialism and anarchism (*SA* 37). Michaelis claims that he deplores the "idealisation" and social-forecasting of "moralists": for Michaelis, the "force of economic conditions" determines history, not vague speculation or "prophetic phantasies" [sic] about it (*SA* 37). Initially, there are no firm textual markers to signal how we are to take Michaelis's monologue: it stands on its own merits, on the substance of Michaelis's thoughts, which seem derivative but not necessarily ludicrous. However, the narrator's subsequent description of Michaelis's appearance is what undermines the cliché-ridden speech most. As depicted by the narrator, Michaelis cuts an absolutely preposterous figure, and this

suggests that his talk is as bloated as is he. Michaelis is described as having come out of prison as "round like a tub," "with an enormous stomach and distended cheeks of a pale, semitransparent complexion, as though for fifteen years the servants of an outraged society had made a point of stuffing him with fattening foods in a damp and lightless cellar" (*SA* 37). Read in light of this description, Michaelis speech sounds like fattening food for thought stuffed into the heads of his listeners, who presumably are already familiar with this kind of thinking and have no need to be reminded of it. Michaelis's speech comes across as moralizing, preaching to the converted, only not about religion or conventional morality, but about socialism and anarchism. Thus, Michaelis is both morbidly and "morally" obese: unconsciously prone to the "idealisation" that he deplores in "moralists" (*SA* 37). We can conclude that the narrator is not so much critical of Michaelis's weight, which is analogous to the substance of his ideas, but to his inability to lose any of it, and this corresponds to his incapacity to see how his political views are tinged with idealization. That is, Michaelis's inability to lose weight parallels his inability to melt away the contradictory elements of his thinking, despite the fact that "Society has given [him] plenty of time for meditation" (*SA* 37).

If Michaelis's obesity is emblematic of his obtuseness, Karl Yundt's moral defects are paralleled by his numerous physical abnormalities and maladies. However, whereas the text's treatment of Michaelis is designed to show how he is laboring under the weight of his own contradictory thinking, its depiction of Yundt is aimed at emphasizing that, as far as terrorists are concerned, he is a poseur. This is implied rather heavy-handedly by the narrator's description of him: he is "toothless," has "extinguished eyes," and can only stand "painfully" with the aid of a "thick stick," which shakes in his

"skinny groping hand deformed by gouty swellings" (*SA* 38). As this description is our

introduction to Yundt, it colors how we interpret his subsequent incendiary speech. The

toothless Yundt tells of his dream of how a "band of men absolute in their resolve to

discard all scruples," with no "pity for anything on earth, including themselves---and

death," might achieve comprehensive social change (*SA* 38). However, the narrator later

comments that this "famous terrorist had never in his life raised personally as much as his

little finger against the social edifice" (*SA* 42). As is true for Michaelis, the narrator is not

belittling Yundt for his physical decrepitude but rather for his hypocrisy. Yundt is "no

man of action," but is instead an "insolent and venomous evoker of sinister impulses

which lurk in the blind envy and exasperated vanity of ignorance, in the suffering and

misery of poverty, in all the hopeful and noble illusions of righteous anger, pity, and

revolt" (*SA* 42). What this suggests is that for the narrator while Yundt is literally

"toothless," figuratively speaking, he is not "toothless," since he is able to tap into the

grievances of the masses and incite them to a violence in which he himself has never

participated and will never participate. As I suggested earlier, the text uses him to

exemplify moral hypocrisy.

   As I pointed out earlier, when the narrator frames these kinds of moral judgments,

they reflect back on him and tell us a lot about his morality. My last point is that while

the narrator deflates these preposterously self-important characters, he also undermines

his own authority by complicating what appear to be his explicitly and unrelievedly

scathing portrayals of them. In the same scene I have been discussing, we encounter

"Comrade Alexander Ossipon," who is an adherent of the theories of Cesare Lombroso.

As Ellen Burton Harrington points out, Lombroso sought to identify criminals and

degenerates by their physical characteristics, such as the size and shape of their skulls ("Female Offender" 57-8). His theories stress a distinct connection between physical traits and forms of criminality. In the text, for example, Ossipon declares that his knowledge of Lombroso enables him to specify Stevie's "form of degeneracy" simply by studying the "lobes of his ears": one need only "read Lombroso" to see it (*SA* 40-1). But it is not just that Ossipon reads Stevie in light of a set of extremely dubious, pseudo-scientific theories that prompts us to read Yundt or Michaelis in a slightly more favorable light. Rather, as we reflect on the narrator's treatment of Yundt and Michaelis, we see how his reading of them depends on a similar kind of framework as Lombroso's typologies. In this scene especially, the narrator draws explicit attention to the would-be terrorists' grotesque physical attributes, implying that their physical repulsiveness corresponds to a moral hideousness, instead of explaining them in a larger context that would also involve societal factors. We can take Yundt's comment that "Lombroso is an ass," which is aimed at Ossipon, as an indirect judgment of the narrator by one of the characters he is narrating about. The narrator is pulling his own rope, not just ours.

While this narrative rope-tugging might seem peculiar in the context of my definition of moral fiction, my conclusion is that this narrative chaos reinforces on the diegetic level our sense of the pervasive moral chaos of a modern urban civilization. The text's hybrid narrator keeps us off-balance by intruding commentary, reflecting the thought processes of the characters themselves, imitating their points of view, and breaking into the narrative itself. This stages an uncomfortable process of exploration for readers, who need to remain alert to numerous shifts in perspective and voice. As I have been stressing, Conrad's text is not about conclusively specifying what counts as moral,

but about the difficulty of this specification in a morally fragmented society, and the text

uses the narrator not to illustrate or dramatize the storyteller-figure's moral

responsibilities but to challenge and test *them* out.

Generic Fission: The Angel in the House, Detectives, Secret Agents

My overarching claim has been that *The Secret Agent* replicates the moral chaos

of a modern urban civilization through its lexical and semantic and narrative or diegetic

elements. I now conclude by addressing the question of the text's genre---or genres---to

examine how the way the novel crosses genres is also central to its constitution as moral

fiction, specifically, how this genre-crossing contributes to our experience of the text as

moral chaos. One reason for my intervention is that while numerous critics rightly

identify *The Secret Agent* as a generic hybrid and also note three or four genera that go

into this hybrid, their analyses tend to imply that the text's genera fuse and harden into an

"amalgam," as Terry Eagleton words it in his description of the text's "specific form"

("Form" 24). This kind of phraseology suggests that the text synthesizes components

from the spy-thriller, detective story, and domestic melodrama fairly seamlessly.[20] My

aim is to deemphasize this idea of a generic "amalgam" and instead examine how the

text's handling of these three specific and morally-problematic genres produces what I

am calling generic fission: volatizing and breaking up a genre by overturning its

conventions and mashing it up with other (often mutually contradictory) genres. As the

title "promises international intrigue and duplicity" and the novel instead delivers a

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[20] Berthoud and Barbara Melchiori note elements from the dynamite-thrillers and terrorist fiction of the late nineteenth century, such as sensational depictions of the awesome destructive powers of modern-day explosives coupled with lurid descriptions of almost baroque violence (72-3). In support of this, Melchiori quotes the Edward Jenkins thriller *A Week of Passion* (Melchiori 69-75). There, an explosion is "so complete" that the victim is reduced to a "rain of flesh and blood," falling "here and there in large drops, on faces, on hands, on bright dresses, and light bonnets" (Jenkins, qtd. in Melchiori 69).

"domestic drama" interspersed with espionage, sleuthing, and police work, this generic

fission is already suggested by the disjunction created by the novel's title and ostensible

subject matter (Harrington, "Anarchist's Wife" 51; Conrad, *SA* 168). Our sense of this

initial disconnect is then intensified by the often contradictory and sometimes subversive

ways in which the text assumes, manipulates, and overturns conventions and motifs

associated with the genres I have mentioned. While the text's treatment of these

conventions problematizes the genres and the cultural assumptions underlying them, what

is more central to my exploration of the text as moral fiction is how the resulting generic

fission reinforces our sense of the fragmented morality of the text's modern megalopolis.

My focus on these three particular genres is not accidental, and I have chosen

them not because they suit my definition of moral fiction, but because the text's treatment

of them does. In fact, as per my definition of moral fiction, the domestic melodrama,

detective-story, and spy-thriller as such are each especially problematic because,

throughout their history, they have frequently been aligned ideologically with the sorts of

narrow, constrained, and cynical conceptions of "morality" that I discussed and critiqued

earlier. Since they are based in moral assumptions about the nature of the human

predicament, the idea of objective truth, or the place of women in society, each comes

with its own moral "baggage," mirroring now-controversial conceptions of the moral,

which they also projected and probably shaped. To begin with, the domestic melodrama

is concerned with questions of respectability, which is conceptualized as a kind of

conventional, public morality that is exemplified by a demure feminine sexuality. Its

heroines are usually bland, fragile, and submissive, but once they are goaded into acting

for themselves, they commit deeds that are morally questionable. These deeds usually

remain a secret until a detective-figure's exposure of them "lead[s] to the novel's resolution" (Harrington, "Anarchist's Wife" 52). Accordingly, Harrington claims that this genre is socially retrograde because it "argue[s] implicitly for good men's stewardship of weaker women susceptible to mental or moral degradation" ("Anarchist's Wife" 55, 59).

The domestic melodrama is suggested by the text's handling of Winnie. Conrad's text takes advantage of several conventions of the domestic melodrama and, more specifically, of the "sensation" novel popular in England in the 1860s (Harrington, "Anarchist's Wife" 52). Winnie is cast as a type of the "perfect domestic angel" who suffers a number of betrayals by male characters, and this forces her out of her conventional (but unsafe) domestic sphere (Harrington, "Anarchist's Wife" 54-5). What we note initially is how Winnie is used to dramatize and critique a form of maternal selflessness and solicitude. For example, early on Winnie is portrayed as unquestioning and resigned to her marriage to Verloc, a man whom, as we later learn, she reviles, and has lived with for seven years for the sake of her brother. When her mother voices her concern that Verloc might get "tired of seeing Stevie about," Winnie replies that Verloc will "have to get tired of [her] first" (*SA* 35). Further, she is his advocate with Verloc. When Verloc complains that Stevie is prowling around the kitchen table, out of control, with a "carving knife," Winnie retorts that the discussions that go on in the house are inappropriate for him: he "hears too much of what is talked about here" (*SA* 50).

Subsequently, however, the text's handling of her manipulates several of these conventions, showing how Winnie's maternal selflessness verges on a sentimental and obsessive concern with her brother's welfare and leads her to damaging self-sacrifice (Dolan 227; Schwarz 168; Raval 105-6). We note this even before her reported suicide in

the text's depiction of her stabbing of Verloc. This suggests that Winnie has been warped

by her selflessness: the text emphasizes how her life has been for Stevie, and once he is

killed, it draws specific attention to her pent-up frustrations when she kills Verloc: into

the stabbing blow, the text describes how she puts "all the inheritance of her immemorial

and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns, and the unbalanced

nervous fury of the age of the bar-rooms" (*SA* 197).[21] The text emphasizes two things

here. While it calls specific attention to the deep frustration experienced by Winnie,

which is now released, more intriguingly, it underlines and challenges the idea that the

domestic angel commits morally degrading acts once she is outside the domestic sphere.

In Winnie's case, the text suggests that Winnie's original, morally degrading act was to

marry Verloc in the first place. While leaving it hardly solves all her troubles, Winnie's

problems started when she entered the domestic sphere, not when she left it. As Wendy

Moffat convincingly argues, the text does not just contest the ideal of the angel in the

house; it also impugns the ideal of house itself, revealing the domestic sphere not as a

sanctuary but as an "inhospitable" place of considerable danger (467).

In a similar way, *The Secret Agent* reverses the stereotype of the male detective-

figure who exposes the transgressions of the domestic melodrama's wayward angel of the

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[21] One way that the text sets up our sense of this frustration is that it calls frequent attention to the fact that Winnie is perhaps the only physically attractive character in a novel full of obese, misshapen, and even grotesque figures. For example, the text describes Winnie as youthful in appearance, with a "full, rounded form,"---a "full bust, in a tight bodice, and with broad hips,"--- a "clear complexion," and "big eyes" that shine out from under her "dark lids" (*SA* 10-11, 48). These descriptions themselves emphasize constraint and restraint, especially the idea of the "tight bodice." The text contrasts Winnie's youthful appearance and vibrancy with Verloc's sloth, indolence, and possible sexual impotence. For example, after Verloc's interview with Mr. Vladimir, the text reports that Winnie offers her "wifely attentions" as a cure for Verloc's nervous inability to get to sleep: "with all the placidity of an experienced wife, [Winnie] expressed a confident opinion as to the cause [of Verloc's nervousness], and suggested the usual remedies, but her husband, rooted in the middle of the room, shook his lowered head sadly' (*SA* 11, 48).

house. More specifically, Conrad's treatment hardly implies that any of the text's male characters are of a stronger moral fiber than Winnie. This is evident in the way the text reveals Winnie's "domestic drama," as it is called by the Assistant Commissioner (*SA* 168). While the text directs our attention to a number of male detective-figures, we note that their success pertains to the public sphere, not the domestic one. They are able to expose the perpetrators of the bombing outrage, but are unable or unwilling to conclude an investigation of Winnie's plight, and this gap contrasts with the conventions of the domestic melodramas of the time. In these, this detective-figure serves a clear, conventionally moral purpose: as he exposes threats to it, he is seen as a preserver of the social order (Harrington "Detection"). None of the text's detective-figures is able to bring to light Winnie's predicament or the threat posed by her frustration and thwarted desires. Instead, while the text does some of this detective work itself, especially early on when the narrator refers in a general way to Winnie's reasons for marrying Verloc, the fullest account comes directly from Winnie in reported speech. For example, Winnie claims that she was a "young girl," with "two people depending on what [she] could do," and what she could do was either marry Verloc or work "on the streets" (*SA* 206-7). While Winnie claims that as a married woman she was "respectable," Verloc in effect has made her prostitute herself to him for the sake of her brother: "I was a respectable woman," she tells Ossipon, "then added, as if speaking to herself, in sinister resentment, 'Till he made me what I am'" (*SA* 206). In this way, the text does more than simply give Winnie her say. It uses her dialogue to register how Winnie's limited options force her into a kind of genteel prostitution, which contributes to and compounds the warping effect that her killing of Verloc has on her. This is suggested by the fact that although she is speaking as

if to herself, she cannot say specifically by name what Verloc has made her. Thus, Winnie never quite dispels, in her own mind, the mystery of her transgression. What we see, however, is how Winnie's "transgression" implicates the broader society. The mystery that she dispels is of her marriage, a social institution that serves the maintenance of the status quo. Thus, Conrad's text reverses the idea of "solving the crime" or "clearing up the mystery" to preserve the social order; rather, the crime Winnie is shown to solve, albeit unbeknownst to her, *is* the social order: the social order, which leaves her no choice but to marry Verloc or work on the streets, is the crime.

While the text assumes aspects of the domestic melodrama to point up the difficulties of Winnie's plight, it also takes advantage of conventions associated with spy-thriller and the detective-story per se to further deflate, demystify, and deconstruct the figures of the spy-hero and detective-protagonist (Harrington "Detection"). As Harrington argues, detective fiction as such more fully develops the theme that the detective acts as a bulwark against social disorder. Much like the domestic melodrama, this genre of fiction demonstrates a "reassuring moral trajectory": it usually deals with a puzzling transgression whose ramifications threaten the social order; this offense is then investigated by a detective-protagonist who exposes the perpetrator by working backwards chronologically to reconstruct the conditions of the crime, solve it, and dispel the mystery surrounding it (Harrington "Detection"; Tani 45). In Conrad's text, this "moral trajectory" of detective fiction barely gets off the ground. For example, in the narrator's description of Verloc's "air of moral nihilism" I examined earlier, we note how the narrator implicates "private detectives" in the same moral nihilism as Verloc, suggesting that while detective-work might shore up social order, it does so by preying

on human weaknesses. However, what is especially salient in the text's critique is how it shows that its detective-figures are motivated by personal interest as much as by objective search for the truth (Harrington "Detection"). We see this, for example, in the text's treatment of Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner, both of whom represent "gritty," "disenchanted" detective-protagonists (Harrington "Detection"). As noted earlier, the text uses Inspector Heat to represent a form of departmental morality: he is not interested in actually exposing the person responsible for the outrage, in revealing the truth; rather, he wants to be seen to have "solved" the crime from an administrative perspective. In order to contain the threat that a fickle public opinion poses to his carrying out his duties, and to protect Verloc, who is acting as Heat's informant, Heat is prepared to arrest Michaelis, who is innocent of the crime. What the text specifically underscores is how Inspector Heat rationalizes his planned miscarriage of justice. As he tells the Assistant Commissioner, there "will be no difficulty in getting up sufficient evidence against" Michaelis, who, as Heat regards him, has "no business to be at large, anyhow," and the public will be placated by the news of his arrest when it is reported in the "newspaper press" (*SA* 90).

In much the same way as it does with Heat, the text critiques the detective-protagonist in its initial treatment of the Assistant Commissioner by emphasizing how his decision to circumvent Heat's departmental morality and prosecute his own investigation into the bombing outrage also stems from self-interest more than from a desire to expose the guilty party. As we know, Michaelis enjoys the backing of the lady patroness, and the Assistant Commissioner fears that if Michaelis is "laid hold of again," the lady patroness "will never forgive" him (*SA* 89). The Assistant Commissioner wants to clear Michaelis

not because he is innocent, but because his arrest would imperil the Assistant

Commissioner's and his wife's social standing. What we see again is how he, like Heat,

rationalizes this choice. Whereas Heat notes how there are no procedural obstacles to

arresting Michaelis even if only on suspicion, the Assistant Commissioner is shown to

sentimentalize Michaelis in much the same way as the latter's lady benefactress. First, we

see how the Assistant Commissioner downplays Michaelis' role in the crime that sent

him to prison in the first place: he was merely an accomplice "in a rather mad attempt to

rescue some prisoners from a police van" (*SA* 84). As represented by the Assistant

Commissioner's thoughts, this caper just went wrong by itself, by accident: two of the

conspirators, although they are aiming for the horses pulling the police van, accidentally

and fatally shoot a constable instead, and Michaelis is arrested in possession of a "bunch

of skeleton keys," a "heavy chisel," and a "short crowbar," i.e., incriminating but largely

circumstantial evidence (*SA* 84). The Assistant Commissioner is finally described as

regarding Michaelis in the same way as does the lady patroness: "Michaelis," the

Assistant Commissioner thinks, is only a "humanitarian sentimentalist, a little mad, but

on the whole incapable of hurting a fly intentionally" (*SA* 87). While this may or may not

be true, what prompts these thoughts is the Assistant Commissioner's sense that his social

position is jeopardized by Heat's wish to arrest Michaelis.

However, this character is also used to dramatize a form of critical reflection that

is in accord with the constitution of the novel as a moral fiction.[22] In other words, the text

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[22] My point here draws on Marie Jane Luecke's argument that the Assistant Commissioner is a "representative of an intelligent, rational, human order in society in the novel" (46). For Luecke, the Assistant Commissioner is the "only character in the world of *The Secret Agent* whose plans do not miscarry, [and] who is not shown to be either stupid or perverted" (45).

offers a glimpse of a kind of intellectual virtue or dianoetic areté in its treatment of this

character. For example, when he realizes he has made a "reflection extremely

unbecoming his official position without being really creditable to his humanity," i.e.,

that if Michaelis goes to jail, he will die there, and the Assistant Commissioner's

friendship with the Lady Patroness will end, he subjects himself to "some derisive self-

criticism," regarding his "improper" thought "sardonically" even while not completely

rejecting it "from his mind" (*SA* 89). Although his motives are questionable at the outset,

the Assistant Commissioner is shown as becoming more interested in learning the facts of

the bombing. After having conducted his investigation, the Assistant Commissioner's

implied intention is to expose Mr. Vladimir to force an actual threat out of the country,

not just to shame him publicly "from morality," as imagined by Mr. Vladimir (*SA* 171).

In this way, the Assistant Commissioner is also is used to point up the dangers of

espionage and secret-agent work. For example, in his second interview with Sir Ethelred,

the Assistant Commissioner lays down the "principle" that the "existence of secret agents

should not be tolerated" since they often "augment the dangers of the evil against which

they are used" (*SA* 108). For the Assistant Commissioner, the "professional spy" is

especially dangerous because he tends to engineer his information, even to "fabricate the

very facts themselves," to suit himself and the powers he works for (*SA* 108). Still, while

this aspect of the text's treatment of the Assistant Commissioner as a detective figure

shows an alignment with detective-fiction per se, he is only successful at unraveling a

mystery of the public sphere. While he gets to the bottom of the matter of the bombing

outrage, exposes the perpetrator, and dispels the mystery, the Assistant Commissioner is

unable to figure out the mystery of the private sphere, namely, of the drama being played out in the household of the Verlocs.

Of the three genres taken up by Conrad's text, the spy-thriller is possibly the most morally problematic, given its origins, and is thus the most ripe for subversive treatment. While the domestic melodrama and the detective-story deal with tensions of the private and public sphere, the spy-thriller deals additionally with international or global concerns and anxieties. This becomes especially apparent if we briefly review the development of this genre. Most critics agree that the spy-thriller genre appeared about a century ago, when Erskine Childers published his *The Riddle of the Sands* in England in 1903, and that it emerged as a hybrid of the "imperial adventure tale and the detective novel" (Sauerberg 3; Bloom 1). These critics argue that the genre materialized as a response to two larger socio-cultural phenomena. It played on perceptions that England's international influence was diminished, that the nation's domestic security was at risk, and that England was vulnerable to an invasion by a foreign army (Sauerberg 4-5). Additionally, the genre's appearance coincided with the creation of a popular audience. Lars Ole Sauerberg argues that the "spread of literacy" that took place between 1850 and 1920 "created a demand for literary entertainment," for various kinds of "mass-appeal fiction," such as the spy-thriller (4). As Jan Gorak and Michael Denning claim, these early spy-thrillers took advantage of these developments by playing on a popular paranoia of invasion (78, 41). Such an aim is naturally at variance with my definition of moral fiction. These early spy-thrillers did not stage a process of exploration for readers; rather, they were "heavily formulaic," invited "jingoistic" responses from the English working classes, and probably aggravated a "swelling anti-German feeling" among them (Gorak 78; Denning 41). As

Gorak sums it up, the early spy-thriller combined "social forecasting, patriotic

exhortation, and xenophobic ritual in a conventional literary vehicle" (78).

While arguing that *The Secret Agent* is not a spy-thriller at all but a "farce" of one

is overstating the case, Conrad's text does much to discredit the kind of ethos or morality

exemplified by the spy or secret agent (Seed 119). We see this especially in the text's

treatment of Verloc, the eponymous secret agent, but also in its more ambiguous

portrayal of the Assistant Commissioner, who is Verloc's counterpart in several respects:

both are married, and this fact incites them to action. As Gorak argues, the secret agent or

"spy-protagonist" of the early thrillers is "almost invariably a representative of the calm

unruffled aristocracy that preserves all the most valuable of the [English] national

virtues": he is a gentleman of "resourceful courage," whose mission is to restore

"England to its favored self-image" (Gorak 84). In his analysis of Childers's *Riddle of the*

Sands, Gorak notes how the spy-hero Carruthers is a "chivalrous British gentleman" and

"edgy, restless clubman," who is pitted against the "barbarous foreigner" (83). The

process this type of novel enacts is designed to reinforce the idea that if the spy relies on

his quintessentially English, gentlemanly, and aristocratic moral values, he will triumph

over his immoral foreign adversary, and thereby offer a glimpse of "national renewal"

(Gorak 85). While this figure must undergo trials designed to test his mettle, in which he

must resort to disguise, scheming, and manipulation in order to successfully discharge his

duties, as Gorak argues, the spy-hero only temporarily leaves his "signposted public

world of privilege [for] a solitary testing ground of rivers, maps, secret signals,"

scheming, and disguises; since he eventually reasserts privileges of his class, these early

spy-thrillers serve to validate these privileges, suggesting that the spy-hero is entitled to

them, and also, by extension, to justify the status quo, the continuance of England's

"elaborately stratified social system" (Gorak 85).

Conrad's treatment of Verloc and the Assistant Commissioner overturns many of

these aspects of the early spy-thriller, particularly in the divergent ways it deals with the

motif of disguise. Verloc is no chivalrous gentleman, but is disguised as one. In fact, he is

used by the text to poke fun at the concept of gentlemanliness. We see this in a

representation of Winnie's mother's thoughts: while she regards Verloc as a "very nice

gentleman," this appraisal is based on the "ideal of gentlemanliness" she has abstracted

from observing the behavior of "patrons of private-saloon bars" (*SA* 12). It seems for

Winnie's mother that what constitutes a gentleman is his appreciation for leisure and also

a concomitant avoidance of work, if possible. The text reinforces this idea by

emphasizing Verloc's slovenly appearance: Verloc not only has the "air of having

wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed," but in fact often does lie in bed late

with the "bedclothes [..] pulled up to his chin" after long nights out (*SA* 10). The text

suggests that Verloc's laziness acts as a mask of respectability that covers up the fact that

he is working as a double-agent. That he is married, keeps a shop, albeit one that sells

light pornography, and is overweight all contribute to Verloc's disguise or pretense of

respectability.

While Verloc apes certain behaviors of the spy-hero as aristocratic gentleman, the

Assistant Commissioner's disguise deemphasizes his gentlemanliness, as it is designed to

allow him to enter London's seedy areas, to go slumming, so that he can investigate

Verloc's involvement in the bombing without attracting notice. The text's treatment of

the Assistant Commissioner's camouflaging himself suggests that disguise is as much an

attitude as anything, that we perform a disguise rather than put one on. In this way, the

text calls into question some of the class-based ideology of the early spy-thrillers: if

members of the working-class and upper-class can pass themselves off as one another,

the boundary between these classes is shown to be permeable. We perceive this in the

text's detailed handling of the Assistant Commissioner's disguising of himself: while his

"short jacket" and "low, round hat" are important elements, the text emphasizes the

Assistant Commissioner's more subtle touches, how he raises "the collar of his jacket,"

for example, and gives an "upward twist to the ends of his black moustache" (*SA* 114-5).

These slight changes transform the Assistant Commissioner into "an "unobtrusive

shadow" that blends into the surroundings outside such that he appears only as "one more

of the queer foreign fish that can be seen of an evening about [the area] flitting round the

dark corners" (*SA* 114). The Assistant Commissioner's disguise is so convincing Winnie

must study him for a moment before she realizes that he is a "complete stranger," and is

no "customer [of the shop] either" (*SA* 150).

As Gorak argues, spy-thrillers enact these ordeals for the aristocratic spy-

protagonist in order to reinforce the sense that the upper classes are justified in their class

entitlements (85). Gorak points out that the spy-hero as gentleman typically reasserts a

"class privilege" in some manner near the plot's climax, taking afternoon tea or bedding

down for the night in a first-class hotel. Conrad's text takes this idea up and subverts it.

The class privilege reasserted by the Assistant Commissioner involves his playing whist

as a member of an exclusive club, which he can resume now that he has dealt with the

threat posed by Mr. Vladimir. However, the games of whist serve to allay the Assistant

Commissioner's "pangs of moral discontent," specifically, his unease in his current

professional capacity and dislike of conventional police work, in which he must rely on too many "subordinates" (*SA* 80-2). As the text points out, the Assistant Commissioner is suspicious of "police methods (unless the police happened to be a semi-military body organised by himself)" (*SA* 90). What the text implies is that while the Assistant Commissioner's quest to expose the instigator of the attack exemplifies his preferred approach, with the threat posed by Mr. Vladimir contained, the Assistant Commissioner is back to where he started, mired in the "futility of [routine] police work" (*SA* 80). So, while the Assistant Commissioner can reassert this class privilege by playing whist, the text suggests that this privilege is asserted in the first place due to his unease and "moral discontent."

In Verloc's case, the text shows that his every attempt at reasserting something like a "class privilege" falls flat. Before returning home from his disastrous mission, he sits for hours at the "Cheshire Cheese," a pub (*SA* 175). Once back at home in the shop, a far cry from a classy hotel, he moves uneasily "about the parlour," trying to placate Winnie. In place of tea or gin, he drinks three glasses of tap water; instead of a fine meal, he feeds himself slices of cold roast beef "ravenously, without restraint and decency, cutting [the] thick slices with the sharp carving knife, and swallowing them without bread" (*SA* 181, 190-1). Finally, his attempt at "wooing" Winnie sets in motion the train of events that ends with his death by stabbing. In fact, in many respects the scene suggests that Winnie is a more successful "spy-protagonist," as she misdirects Verloc's attempts to read her: moving toward him "as if she were still a loyal woman bound to [him] by an unbroken contract," Winnie picks up the knife, and sinks it into Verloc's chest, who dies "without stirring a limb" (*SA* 197). In this case, the text has done more

than overturn a convention of one genre; it has crossed the conventions of these genres, planting a secret agent in a domestic melodrama and an angel in the house in a spy-thriller, only the text's detectives never figure this out.

As I claimed earlier in a parallel argument about the text's narrator, techniques such as these make the text's "genre" an unstable hybrid. What makes dealing with it particularly difficult is that while the text assumes aspects of these disparate genres, critiques, manipulates and sometimes overturns them, it does not simply spoof them, at least not in a thoroughly consistent manner. That is, it critiques these genres and their underlying cultural assumptions, but it is also uses them to point up how problems associated with narrative and storytelling are symptomatic of and probably contribute of the larger crisis of moral chaos, as if the roles of these narratives are in flux and as fragmented as the morality of the time. Given this, *The Secret Agent* can be seen to represent a paradox of "covert" or "undercover" moral fiction. Not unlike a secret agent, *The Secret Agent* misdirects and confuses us by juxtaposing discordant conceptions of morality, filtering its narrative through an unstable hybrid narrator, and by crossing disparate and controversial genres with each other to generate various kinds of fission. While this process demands that readers engage the text responsibly, tolerate ambiguity and inconclusiveness, and recognize and reflect on how, through what specific devices, techniques, and strategies the text stages, enacts, or replicates some of the particular moral problems it grapples with in its content, my conclusion is that Conrad's treatment is not designed to encourage us to decide whether the novel's moral vision is negative, nihilistic, pragmatic, or positive; rather, it explores the difficulty, in Gardner's wording, of knowing what to affirm and what to deny in a morally chaotic modern urban society in

which normative standards, rules or guidelines governing what one should or should not do, are unclear, weak, or lacking completely, and in which virtually everyone---police, radicals, politicians, and private citizens—is morally corrupt to some degree. It is not about but *is* moral chaos.

Of course, this set of circumstances presents us with the paradox that this "moral chaos" is stylistically enacted by Conrad's use of particular lexical, diegetic, and generic elements. This careful staging of a kind of narrative chaos involves us in the slippery process of picking our way through a disorienting, morally chaotic, urban landscape. While my reading suggests a paradoxically simple moral lesson, ---that we should expect no straightforward, uncomplicated answers to the novel's moral chaos,---it is this process that is central to the novel's constitution as moral fiction, and not a set of paraphrasable moral lessons we can extrapolate from the text's narrative or thematic content. Accordingly, it should be more apparent by now that what motivates my study of "moral fiction" is not an interest in didactic or moralistic literature, i.e., the literature of morality, but an interest in the morality of literature: the processes enacted by a text through its specific linguistic and literary devices to explore, examine, and test out concepts of the moral.

CHAPTER 3:

RE (DE) FINING THE MORAL OUT OF EXISTENCE:

JAMES JOYCE'S "MORALOGUE"

> She [Mrs. Mooney] dealt with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat: and in this case she had made up her mind. (*D* 54)

> On Sunday mornings as he passed the churchdoor he [Stephen] glanced coldly at the worshippers who stood bareheaded, four deep, outside the church, morally present at the mass which they could neither see nor hear. (*P* 98)

> He [Bloom] read on, seated calm above his own rising smell. Neat certainly. *Matcham often thinks of the masterstroke by which he won the laughing witch who now*. Begins and ends morally. *Hand in Hand*. Smart. (*U* 56)

My plan to follow an analysis of *The Secret Agent* with an examination of James Joyce's work underscores a distinctive thematic irony: while Conrad treats the capital of the British Empire as the center of moral chaos, Joyce regards Dublin as the center of moral paralysis largely because of its status as one of this empire's colonial possessions. Moreover, what sets the plot of Conrad's novel in motion, i.e., the catalyst for the bombing outrage, is Mr. Vladimir's perception that England is "absurd with its sentimental regard for individual liberty" (28). As he believes the English social system is overly concerned with securing and protecting the rights of individual citizens, including those who pose a threat to it, Mr. Vladimir wants to make this social order more robust, constrictive, and repressive. In contrast, Joyce's work frequently leads us to concluding

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precisely the opposite about Dublin and Ireland. These locales, in Joyce's treatment, are absurd with their apparent *un*sentimental *dis*regard for individual liberty.[1]

Following a focus on the process staged by a single novel, this chapter attends to a process enacted by the interaction of several texts. To draw attention to this, I stage brief interventions in three of Joyce's four major texts, *Dubliners* (*D*), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (*P*), and *Ulysses* (*U*), to reinforce but also put pressure on the definition of moral fiction I have begun using as a framework for analyzing texts. This definition is intended to be inclusive, not exclusive: its aim is not to identify literary texts that are "morally decent" and separate them out from texts that are "morally indecent." The goal of my study is neither to elucidate the moral concepts suggested by the texts, nor to render moralistic verdicts about them, their characters, narrator, or writer, whether Joyce or anyone else. It is to demonstrate a method of inquiry into the processes by which a text examines moral concepts though the use of its rhetorical and literary devices, narrative structures, and formal approaches. However, while texts of moral fiction need not necessarily critique conventional moral concepts, their "ethical value" is frequently located exactly in a process of interrogating the larger question of the moral itself and this question's relation to the literary. Joyce's treatment usually puts considerable pressure on moral concepts, exposing how they are frequently used "immorally" during the peculiar

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[1] Interestingly, Thomas Jackson Rice argues that Joyce owned a copy of *The Secret Agent* and studied the novel closely, modeling the final bedtime scene in "The Dead" on the similar scenes in Conrad's novel (224-5). Also, given the novels I examine later, it is worth keeping Joyce's depiction of Ireland in perspective. For example, in comparison with Junot Díaz's Dominican Republic in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, a novel I analyze in the fifth and final chapter, Joyce's Ireland is a bastion of individual liberty, tolerance, and political enfranchisement.

era in which Joyce composed his texts and, sometimes with great difficulty, published

them.

Nonetheless, my reasons for examining Joyce's texts stem from more than that

Joyce uses these devices to critique clumsy enactments of conventional morality or the

cultural narratives that enable them. While we note that Joyce continually expands his

repertoire of rhetorical devices and literary and linguistic techniques, refining techniques

borrowed from other authors and devising and incorporating those of his own, such that

any one of Joyce's literary texts enacts myriad processes, my particular focus is on the

ways in which Joyce's treatment enables a process of examining and extending concepts

of the moral, not demolishing them, but making them more nuanced, subtle, and

sophisticated. In other words, while Conrad's text enacts moral chaos, Joyce's texts trace

a process of developing the kind of moral imagination that is necessary to deal with it.[2]

At the same time, Joyce also uses his devices and techniques to investigate the relevance

of moral concepts and questions to literary creation. They deal not just with the question

of the moral but also with the question of whether the question of the moral is applicable

in the domain of the literary and the aesthetic. Not unlike our conclusion about *The Secret*

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[2] While the phrase "moral imagination" is used explicitly throughout Lee Oser's chapter on Joyce in *The Ethics of Modernism*, my formulation here also relies on Barbara Hardy's analogous claim that while Conrad's novels often lament the obsolescence of "heroic virtue" in the modern era, Joyce's *Portrait* explores the possibility of cultivating a kind of "artistic virtue" to replace it (Hardy 49). Further, while a longstanding critical tradition examines Conrad's concept of the moral, a corresponding tradition in Joyce scholarship deals with Joyce's aesthetic concepts. Of course, there are exceptions to this. In 1963's *The Classical Temper*, S. L. Goldberg repeatedly stresses that the commitments of Joyce's art are not "purely technical but, in the widest sense, moral or spiritual": for Goldberg, *Dubliners* is a chapter of the "moral life of Dublin," *Portrait* the "moral life of the isolated individual," and *Ulysses* a "chapter in the moral history of Europe" (15-6). More recent examples include Marilyn French's 1976 *The Book as World*, Daniel Schwarz's 1987 *Reading Joyce's* Ulysses, and Marian Eide's 2002 *Ethical Joyce*. While all of these are instructive and insightful in their own ways, they replicate the tendencies I noted in the criticism on Conrad's *The Secret Agent* or fall into the theoretical traps I discussed in my Introduction: they do not pay enough attention to Joyce's use of rhetorical and literary devices, narrative structuring, and formal approaches, but mainly carry out thematic readings, as does Eide, albeit using the familiar Levinasian framework.

Agent, Joyce's use of such a range of rhetorical and literary devices, narrative structures and formal approaches gives rise to an immense paradox: Joyce's treatment, his "discourse," eventually calls such attention to itself, so asserting its own artifice, that it overwhelms elements of the "story," the "raw materials" and thematic content of the narrative, and this self-referentiality makes talking about the techniques and devices Joyce uses in his texts to examine moral concepts tremendously challenging, since they become increasingly designed precisely to shift our focus away from these concepts.

Because of Joyce's extraordinary technical and formal breakthroughs, many literary critics and authors value Joyce's texts specifically for the idea that their form and style place them beyond, outside, or at odds with the moral. On this view, Joyce's texts become "post-moral": due to their increasing technical complexity, they are found to point up the irrelevance of the moral in relation to the literary, if not systematically efface it, by privileging the aesthetic, linguistic, and formal over and above any moral content or thematic raw material. Naturally, this kind of argument depends a lot on how we read Joyce, and many critics have long valued Joyce's work because they perceive that it disconnects literature and morality. While the relation between a novel's textual features and the critical responses and practices invited by them is complex and reciprocal, much but not all of what we discover in a given text depends on our method of inquiry, our analytical approach. The fact that many Joycean or modernist critics assume that a concern with the aesthetic precludes interest in the moral probably tells us more about the

ways these critics read Joyce, what they read him for, than about Joyce's engagement with moral concepts as such.[3]

My interventions are designed to challenge the idea that Joyce's concern with a text's formal aspects signals his disinterest in or disengagement from moral concepts, norms, and values---indeed, in many respects, Joyce's work epitomizes the phenomenon I am studying: modernist aesthetic techniques used as means for exploration and discovery of the moral. To be more specific, I propose that Joyce's use of literary techniques and devices stages a process or progression regarding the development of a moral imagination as a sort of antidote to the moral chaos and moral paralysis of the early twentieth century. Joyce's techniques underline how Dublin's inhabitants have become morally paralyzed, shaped by specific cultural narratives, and are then used to examine ways of avoiding and possibly overcoming this moral paralysis. My conclusion is that Joyce's texts thus enact what I am calling a "moralogue": a process of testing out the moral that reflects a development of moral imagination across a number of characters, a process which is vital to regarding Joyce's texts as prime examples of moral fiction.

Troubling Orthodoxy: Joyce's Moral Double-Think

One of the great ironies of analyzing Joyce's texts from the perspective of my definition of moral fiction is that for much of Joyce's career his texts were regarded as immoral, indecent, or obscene. The idea that this initial reaction of moral umbrage took place points to a second great irony here: Joyce's texts "entered the modernist canon [largely] *because* they defied" so many social and literary conventions (Wexler 49). Such

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[3] This is not to imply that these critics are necessarily hostile to the idea of morality. They are rightly hostile to the idea that literature is morality's handmaiden or conduit. Herbert Grabes wryly reminds us that "hardly anyone wants to be preached to, although the urge to preach is fairly widespread," because this detracts from the enjoyment of "reading poems, stories or plays" ("Being Ethical" 35).

a situation is liable to elicit some resistance to my valuation of Joyce's texts as moral fiction. A critic might reasonably ask, for example, whether Joyce would ever have characterized his larger literary project as a moral undertaking or enterprise, especially when we remember Joyce's struggles with censorship, his loss of religious belief, and his penchant for dealing frankly with bodily functions in his fiction.

Given this, my decision to include Joyce in a study that aims to rehabilitate the question of the moral might initially strike many critics as misguided. So, before I examine how Joyce's texts demonstrate a sustained engagement with the question of the moral, I want to acknowledge a few potential objections to my decision to include Joyce in this study and deal with them as much as possible. As my heading for this section is meant to suggest, my argument is that even though Joyce as an author frequently finds himself in direct conflict with conventional morality, we are mistaken to regard him as either strongly for or against the concept of the moral, or even as morally neutral, for that matter; rather, what we detect in his novels, critical writings, and letters is that Joyce takes pains to challenge many moral concepts that had become orthodox, ossified, in his time. Though my hope is that critics will find it productive and useful, my methodology of moral fiction is not intended to represent a critical orthodoxy or orthopraxy. Indeed, a significant reason for my decision to include Joyce is because his example "pushes back," resisting my definition of moral fiction as well as my methodology for it. This is not to make light of the fact that, during his career, Joyce paid heavily for his defiance of the orthodox. But what happened to Joyce is not entirely different from what befell Gardner after he published *On Moral Fiction*, as this challenged the postmodern orthodoxy that was then in place. While Gardner's decision to publish *On Moral Fiction* all but ended

his highly successful career, Joyce's struggles with publishing his texts almost prevented

his literary career from ever getting underway in the first place (Wexler 49, 53, 61).

Despite Gardner's and Joyce's disparities, what we perceive in many of Joyce's writings

suggests the two writers shared a firm belief in literature's morality, that both writers are

arguing for an enlarged sense of the moral that goes beyond the specific precepts

promulgated by the guardians of conventional morality, whether they are publishers,

court judges, religious, or political authorities. Not unlike Gardner, Joyce consistently

indicated that his literary project participated in a larger moral undertaking, albeit of an

admittedly idiosyncratic nature.

While Joyce's defiance of conventional morality is central to his monumental

stature as *the* modernist writer, it is plain that during Joyce's lifetime his career was

severely interrupted by many of the prevailing canons of public morality of the period,

insofar as these applied to (and interfered with) the production of literary texts. Joyce's

attempts to publish *Dubliners* met with considerable difficulties, and these caused a delay

of almost a decade between Joyce's completion of the collection and its being printed. As

Joyce described this demoralizing, drawn-out process, while "the type of the abortive first

English edition (Dublin 1906) was broken up," the "second edition (Dublin 1910) was

burnt entire almost in [his] presence," and the book was only finally published, as Joyce

intended it, without expurgations, the third time around, in 1914, in London, after a delay

of nine years (Joyce, qtd. in Casado 91). Much of this had to do with Joyce's refusal to

delete the word "bloody" from several stories, such as "The Boarding House" which gets

discussed in the next section.[4] As Carmelo Medina Casado convincingly argues, the

publication of *Dubliners* was initially prevented by de facto censorship, by the "wary and

fearful attitude of [the] would-be publishers and printers" (90). During this period,

printers and publishers were held liable for libel, an indictable offense, and so they

understandably "feared being prosecuted for defamation by means of the printed word,"

for publishing texts that were condemned for being "blasphemous, obscene, or seditious,"

or for "tending to produce evil consequences to society" (Casado 90). Further, Casado

intriguingly asserts that this set of circumstances was especially "awkward" at the outset

of the twentieth century, for reasons that are similar to those I talked about earlier in my

discussion of *The Secret Agent*'s generic fission, namely, about how perceptions that

England was under threat of attack help us to understand the increased popularity of the

spy-thriller (90). Casado claims that a strain of moral paranoia pervaded Britain in

particular: the "authorities were much concerned with avoiding the weakening of public

morality in a period of growing apprehension of the decline of a British political role"

(90). While the moral paranoia about the supposedly deleterious effects of fiction dates

back to the rise of the novel itself, what is different at the beginning of the twentieth

century is the degree to which this prevailing moral panic is enabled and enforced by a

modern state's legal apparatus. It is not so much that publishers worried about offending

their readers as that they were anxious they might be sued, found guilty, and fined.

While Joyce rightly deplored these circumstances, we note a number of

contradictions in many of Joyce's letters to his early would-be publishers. On one hand,

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[4] This sounds absurd to us now, but we discern analogous tendencies in our current movie ratings system, in which a film that is gruesomely violent is sometimes rated PG or PG-13, but an otherwise innocuous film that features a single utterance of the f-word is automatically rated R, as is true in the case of *The King's Speech*.

as Joyce Wexler argues, while "[o]ffending people was an inextricable part of Joyce's rhetorical purpose," Joyce also sought to allay his publisher's fears by claiming that *Dubliners* would not provoke a critical attack, but that if it did, this would boost its sales (54-5). As Joyce explained, if *Dubliners* created a scandal, it "would have the effect of interesting the public" more than any "tired chorus of imprimaturs with which the critical body greets the appearance of every book which is [deemed] not dangerous to faith or morals" (*Selected Letters* 88; also cited in Wexler 55). In other words, Joyce believed that the reading public was more accepting of the risqué than were the critics. As Wexler concludes, the long-delayed publication of *Dubliners* proved that "Joyce was right on both counts: [*Dubliners*] did not provoke an attack, and it would have sold better if it had" (55). In its first year of publication, 1915, *Dubliners* sold only 499 copies, "and fewer were sold the following year" (Wexler 59). This was a financial disaster for Joyce, who had labored on the book for many years. However, as Wexler points out, the worst part of the whole experience is that it introduced a ten-year gap in Joyce's professional literary career, and this had two interrelated negative effects. First, it confirmed Joyce's belief that he was a "martyr" for art, that he was acting out a "morality play," and that he was "persecuted by philistines": Joyce "cast all who failed to hail his genius as villains" (Wexler 61, 49, 61). The second effect of this gap is that for much of his early career, Joyce was deprived of "critical or popular feedback," and so he increasingly devoted himself to "questions of style," writing *Ulysses*, for example, expressly for a restricted, even snobbish, "avant-garde audience" (Wexler 64). At the same time, Joyce's literary career came to be heavily subsidized by wealthy patrons, such as Harriet Shaw Weaver, whose "moral commitment" to Joyce had much to do with the way he defied literary and

social conventions (Wexler 64). As Wexler concludes, Joyce's appeal to Weaver, for example, was that by flouting social and literary conventions, he "demonstrated a trait [i.e., courage] that she lacked" (Wexler 64).

As his early letters suggest, the young Joyce was already a shrewd and sometimes manipulative self-promoter, who, ironically, was able to turn his "rejections into his best advertisement[s]" (Wexler 57). However, my focus is on the other elements of Joyce's motivation, the genuinely moral. This is sometimes difficult because, as Wexler implies, commercial acumen and moral sense appear equally mixed in Joyce. In many of his letters and early critical essays, Joyce repeatedly stresses that his writings derive from moral or ethical impulses. Most of us are probably familiar with the passages from Joyce's most often-cited letters to the would-be publishers of *Dubliners*, written roughly during the years of 1905 and 1906. As problems with the printers develops, Joyce declares that his "intention" in writing *Dubliners* is to "write a chapter of the moral history of [his] country," and for this reason he has chosen "Dublin for the scene because that city seem[s] to [him] the very center of [the] paralysis" that afflicts all of Ireland, a kind of moral paralysis (*Selected Letters* 83). Grandiosely, he states his belief that his "chapter of the moral history of [his] country" should be valued as the "first step towards [its] spiritual liberation" (*Selected Letters* 88). Joyce even implores Grant Richards not to stand in the way of Ireland's moral development, suggesting that its collective moral paralysis and stunted moral imagination necessitate a scathing exposé: "I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass" (*Selected Letters* 90).

While his letters to his publishers mix a moral purpose with the commercial goal, Joyce's early critical writings, as well as his personal letters, provide further proof of the kind of sustained engagement with the concept of the moral that I am arguing takes place in his writings. Early on, Joyce extends the concept of the moral to the production of literary texts, and this has much in common with my definition of moral fiction. As A. Walton Litz argues, even for the young Joyce, "Didacticism is [already] the enemy of art" (42). Writing in 1902, Joyce views the domain of the literary as existing free of conventional morality. "A man who writes a book cannot be excused by his good intentions, or by his moral character; he enters into a region where there is a question of the written word" (*Critical Writings* 85). Joyce laments the idea that the "region of literature [should be] assailed so fiercely by the enthusiast and the doctrinaire" (*Critical Writings* 85). In "The Day of the Rabblement," Joyce underscores the idea that the artist must not only separate himself from the "multitude" but he must abhor it, he must be "very careful to isolate himself" (*Critical Writings* 69). In this same paper, Joyce laments how the Irish make poor judges of literary merit: "A Nation which never advanced so far as a miracle-play affords no literary model to the artist, and he must look abroad" (*Critical Writings* 70). The artist needs to have "freed himself from the mean influences about him---sodden enthusiasm and clever insinuation and every flattering influence of vanity and low ambition"---otherwise he is no "artist at all" (*Critical Writings* 71-2). Joyce even tries to define his own "moral nature," claiming that he defies conventions not so much to register a "protest" against them as to express a wish to live out his life in "conformity with his moral nature" (*Selected Letters* 70). As Wexler sums up, Joyce's

morality consists of recognizing the rights of an individual person to express himself

freely, to live as he wishes instead of as he is told (51).

The criteria by which Joyce judges writers involve the moral ethos that emerges

from their writing. This has little to do with illustrating a moral lesson, but calls for

dealing with moral issues in a complex manner, as I claim is an essential aspect of moral

fiction. In his letters to his brother, Stanislaus, Joyce regards Guy de Maupassant's

writing as well-done, but laments his "rather obtuse" "moral sense" (*Selected Letters* 70).

This criticism is probably directed at stories like "The Necklace": despite its lean,

objective style, the story relies on a heavy-handed, ironic twist at the end to illustrate a

facile moral lesson about the pitfalls of class envy. Similarly, Joyce regards

"contemporary Irish writing" as only so much "ill-written, morally obtuse formless

caricature" (*Selected Letters* 70). In this case, Joyce is probably referring to George

Moore's *The Untilled Field*. In his criticism of this collection, Joyce suggests that

Moore's straining after rhetorical effects interferes with the narrative's plausibility and

"warps the characters" (Kenner, *Ulysses* 31). For example, Joyce complains that one of

Moore's protagonists looks up the hour of a regular train from a station near where she

has lived for three years: this is "rather stupid of Moore," Joyce concludes (*Selected*

Letters 44). As Hugh Kenner suggests, for Joyce, this kind of lapse points up an

imaginative failure on Moore's part: a "writer should be alert to what his characters

would know; he should not have them "stir up knowledge they'd have left tranquil, or

exchange remarks they'd not have uttered, for the sake of imparting some fact to the

reader" (*Ulysses* 31).

While the problem for Joyce with *Dubliners* was that his publishers feared prosecution, and this delayed the book's publication, the problem with *Ulysses* was more serious since its serial publication in periodicals "entered into direct conflict with legal authority" (Casado 91). The original complaint against parts of the book was brought by a "New York lawyer, whose daughter had received the issue of the *Little Review* containing the 'Nausicaa' episode" (Casado 91). Given the style and content of "Nausicaa," this is ironic on several fronts. Parodying teen romance novels, the chapter includes scenes of voyeurism, exhibitionism, and masturbation. Though we should not read too much into the father-daughter dynamic of the lawyer who originally filed the complaint, this incident illustrates and emphasizes the idea that many readers condemned a book as morally indecent if it had explicit or even highly suggestive references to sex in it. As I have been periodically stressing, my definition of moral fiction should not be understood as fiction that illustrates "family values." What is interesting about the trial of *Ulysses* is that the book, or at least the first fourteen episodes that had been published so far, deals with much more than what is suggested by taking elements of a single scene out of context, whether it is this or another "shocking" scene, such as those dealing with bodily functions, such as Bloom's defecating early in the day or Molly's menstruating at the end of it. While it is uncharitable to censure the publishers overmuch for their fears, it is reasonable to deride this lawyer and the misguided trial for it shows that these readers were reacting simplistically to Joyce's writings, not responding to them sensibly or maturely. This case found the *Little Review* guilty of obscenity, claiming that the episode has "pornographic intent," i.e., it tends to "stir the sex impulses" (Casado 91-95). Thus, *Ulysses* was effectively banned, even in countries where no such trial took place. This de

facto ban lasted for over ten years, during which time Joyce was left unprotected by any copyright law, and was finally lifted by Judge Woolsey in late 1933 (Casado 93). As Casado helpfully reminds us, Judge Woolsey's decision was that while the novel was often "disgusting," its intent was not pornographic: it is Joyce's "loyalty to his technique and [his] objective [of representing the consciousnesses of his characters] which require[s] him to use words which are generally considered impolite" (95). The judge concluded that it was readers' responsibility to avoid the book if they found such material offensive (Casado 97).

The judge's decision largely coincides with my view, and my aim here has been to argue that moral fiction, as I am defining it, is inclusive, not exclusive, that it is not in league with the morally prudish and often paranoid forms of censorship that Joyce had to contend with. However, while Joyce's texts are regarded as modernist masterpieces precisely because they defy numerous social and literary conventions, my reason for including them is not just because they do this. My argument is that while Joyce appears harshly critical of concepts of the moral, what he deplores is not the moral per se, but how conventional morality can become ossified, complacent, and interfere with the development of a "more comprehensive morality" (Cowart 73). What I have meant to stress is that, despite his having many reasons to be disparaging towards moral concepts, Joyce's relation to them is as complex as his relation to Ireland and the Catholic Church: while he critiques them, he never leaves them completely behind.

Morality as Paralysis: *Dubliners'* Scrupulously Mean Style

In a famous exchange with Grant Richards, Joyce declares that he has used a "style of scrupulous meanness" in writing the stories of *Dubliners* so that he can more

accurately represent the city's moral paralysis (*Selected Letters* 83). As Karen Lawrence

argues, Joyce's claim suggests that he regards his "artistic choices as both aesthetic and

moral," that Dublin's collective condition requires a stylistic treatment involving the

"precision of the prose" and a "reduced role for the narrator," so that the characters

"betray their own paralysis" with little "authorial intrusion" (16, 19, 17). In respect to my

definition of moral fiction, Joyce's handling of moral concepts is important because he

uses literary and linguistic techniques in *Dubliners* to register the results of a process that

has already taken place, stylistically underlining the ways in which Dublin's inhabitants

have been shaped by cultural narratives aligned with moral concepts. In this early phase

of his career, Joyce aims for a meticulous, dispassionate style and a reinterpreted role of

the narrator. Together, in Joyce's treatment, these elements make for a discreetly

authorial narrative situation, and this allows Joyce to disclose and comment indirectly on

the condition of Dublin's collective moral paralysis, largely by simulating it stylistically,

technically, and structurally to highlight how the characters have been shaped by cultural

narratives, discourses, or processes, and manifest the influence of them in their thoughts,

speech, and behavior.

Given that the young Joyce strived for a spare, unemotional style in *Dubliners*, it

is somewhat ironic that he should seek to create effects from a number of evocative

symbols. However, instead of hinting at a transcendent, "redemptive meaning," Joyce's

symbols frequently function as "instruments of negation," as devices for "relentlessly"

analyzing and "exposing the paralyzing illusions of the protagonists" in his short stories

(Heller 13). One such example, which is explicitly linked to moral concepts, is the meat

cleaver in "The Boarding House." Beginning as a symbol of the restrictive but

hypocritical morality exemplified by Mrs. Mooney, the cleaver soon becomes a

governing metaphor for the story as a whole, cleaving to it, as it shows how this kind of

conceptualization of the moral entraps and paralyzes Dublin's inhabitants.

Introduced in the first paragraph, the cleaver begins as the commonplace utensil

used by a butcher to chop meat in his shop. However, in the hands of Mr. Mooney, the

cleaver becomes a weapon wielded by the butcher to attack his wife (*D* 52). While it is

not specifically named until Mrs. Mooney's moral sensibility is compared to it, the idea

of the cleaver plays a figurative role in the story's second paragraph, in which the word's

peculiar, ambiguous signification comes into play and is exploited by the text. As we

know, while the word "cleave" usually denotes "cut in half," "divide," or "split," it can

also denote precisely the opposite meaning of "adhere," "cling," or "stick to." In the

context of the story, the cleaver takes on associations with the Catholic, or rather, Biblical

prohibition of divorce, cleaving or splitting the couple physically but not legally.[5] For

example, after Mr. Mooney's attempt at attacking Mrs. Mooney, we are told that Mrs.

Mooney "had to sleep in a neighbour's house," that the couple "lived apart," and finally,

that Mrs. Mooney "went to the priests and got a separation from [her husband] with care

of the children" (*D* 52). While Mrs. Mooney is separated from her husband, they are not

divorced: they are split physically from each other, but still legally connected, still

cleaved to each other.

While the text exploits this ambiguity possibly to complicate our impression of

Mrs. Mooney by demonstrating how her marital life has molded her, it also uses it to

implicate the larger social structures in place as well, specifically the impossibility of

[5] The King James Bible specifically uses "cleave" to describe marriage. See Genesis 2.24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

divorce due to religious strictures even in the cases of dangerous, mismatched marriages.
As Margot Norris argues in an analogous context, "The Boarding House" indicts the
cultural practice of coerced marriages, imparting the moral lesson that "young people
united in shotgun weddings tend not to live happily ever after" and criticizes the ways in
unscrupulous, hypocritical operators like Mrs. Mooney can manipulate moral concepts
and make them "serve immoral purposes" (Norris 93-4). On one level, the text uses the
cleaver as a symbol for a restrictive but hypocritical morality. However, the cleaver-
symbol also has a deeper resonance in the story. It is used to underline the ways in which
families and individual persons replicate the errors of their parents, spouses, or fellow
citizens. In this more subtle process, the symbol of the cleaver is replicated on the
thematic level, transformed into the story's governing metaphor.[6]

Following this discussion of an external representation, specifically, an object that
develops from a symbol in a story to its governing metaphor, we now turn to techniques
Joyce uses for internal representations, for describing how his characters' psychological
processes reflect their moral paralysis. To do this, Joyce adopts and adapts the use of free
indirect discourse, a technique that he, like Conrad, borrows from Gustave Flaubert
(Lawrence 19). As noted in the previous chapter, free indirect discourse is a
representation of a character's thoughts, usually in the third-person, in a grammatical
tense that is anterior to the narrated present. What is new in Joyce's work is that the

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[6] We observe a vaguely similar use of symbolism in "A Mother," a story which associates the moral with
showy and vain display dependent on objects that are evocative of a high social standing. For example, the
text contrasts the lame "Hoppy Holohan" with the "suave" Mr. O'Madden Burke (*D* 123, 131). This latter
character is physically, socially, and onomastically imposing: he is large in body, leans on a "large silk
umbrella," and uses his "magniloquent western name" as a corresponding "moral umbrella" to garner
respect for himself and backing for his financial ventures (*D* 131-2).

discourse is usually colored by a given character's idiomatic way of speaking and

thinking (Lawrence 19). Kenner famously refers to Joyce's modification as the "Uncle

Charles Principle": the narrator's words are "like the components of a sensitive piece of

apparatus, […] detect[ing] the gravitational field of the nearest person" (*Joyce's Voices*

16). For Kenner, the narrator or narrative voice acts something like a radio-receiver,

picking up and playing back the signals transmitted by a particular character, thus

creating the illusion that we are being granted non-mediated access not just to characters'

thoughts but to the ways in which or principles by which they think.

In *Dubliners*, Joyce's use of free indirect discourse frequently reveals the degree

to which his characters think in clichés, and this is often contrasted to the narrator's

carefully objective style. This is sometimes made evident in the first few lines of a story,

and this "one-two" combination usually conveys implicit criticism of the character. For

example, "The Boarding House" begins objectively, telling us that "Mrs Mooney was a

butcher's daughter. She was a woman who was quite able to keep things to herself: a

determined woman" (*D* 52). While the first sentence is such a plain-faced, factual

statement that it seems colored by no character's mental idiom, the second sentence

possibly reflects Mrs. Mooney's guarded view of herself: her mental idiom sticks to

observable facts, and does not divulge secrets. However, the following account of her

marriage appears heavily colored by her manner of speaking: "as soon as his father-in-

law was dead Mr Mooney began to go the devil. He drank, plundered the till, ran

headlong into debt. It was no use making him take the pledge: he was sure to break out

again a few days after" (*D* 52). Taken together, the use of colloquial phrases, such as "go

to the devil," and the noting of slightly obscure references, e.g., taking the pledge [to

abstain from alcohol], are suggestive of private information transformed into rumors and gossip. That this is imparted in this way belies what the first couple of sentences tell us about Mrs. Mooney: think what she might, she cannot keep these things to herself, but seems to delight in trafficking in rumors. In this way, Joyce suggests that this character is lacking in self-awareness, unable to come to grips with basic contradictions in her regard for herself. These offer us brief insights into what Gerald Doherty, in an analogous context, calls such a character's impoverished "psychic life" (140).[7]

While one effect of this free indirect discourse is that it reveals the characters' clichéd thinking, the text also links it to a potential for violence, physical threats, and to the ways in which these act as inhibitors on and enforcers of particular forms of behavior. In the same story, Mrs. Mooney's son Jack is used to exemplify what clichéd thinking might look like in action. In free indirect discourse, he is described or self-described as "being a hard case": while he always has a "good one" to tell his friends, and is "always sure to be on to a good thing, that is to say, a likely horse or a likely *artiste*," he is also "handy with the mits," ready to resort to fisticuffs (*D* 53). And it is this veiled threat of violence, which here sounds innocuous, vaguely like a game, like good-natured sparring, that finally compels the hapless Bob Doran to yield to his entrapment by Polly and Mrs. Mooney. After a guest at the boarding house has made a "rather free allusion to Polly," Doran remembers Jack's outburst in a passage that represents Doran's thoughts as being influenced or infiltrated by Jack's clichés. That is, Joyce incorporates elements of Jack's

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[7] My point here is based also on Gary Davenport's argument that many of Joyce's characters function as "self-conceivers," projecting a narrative about themselves that allows them to regard themselves "flatteringly as though from the outside." For Davenport, this tendency of self-conceiving is the opposite of self-knowledge, which he suggests is the basis for developing a moral imagination. My view is that self-conceiving is not necessarily opposed to self-knowledge. See my introductory chapter for a more detailed discussion of the view of the self as a kind of narrative construct.

free indirect discourse into Doran's free indirect discourse to show how Jack's thinking

has taken root in Doran's mind, effectively paralyzing him: as Doran recalls, "Jack kept

shouting […] that if any fellow tried that sort of game with *his* sister he'd bloody well put

his teeth down his throat, so he would" (*D* 58-9).

My focus so far has been on how Joyce uses symbolism and free indirect

discourse to reveal his characters' moral paralysis. It is his disclosure of this collective

condition through these and other techniques that Joyce initiates the first phase of what I

am calling his "moralogue." Nonetheless, before moving on to *A Portrait*, I want to

briefly note that Joyce also uses a story's narrative structure to simulate the paralysis

experienced by the characters. The example I have been using, "The Boarding House,"

begins with the voice and perspective of an objective narrator, but then becomes colored

by the idiom of Mrs. Mooney within a few lines. What we discover is that this story's

structure allows for the presentation of several perspectives: Mrs. Mooney's, Bob

Doran's, and Polly's. Continuing with the cleaver metaphor, it is as if the narrative itself

has been cleaved, chopped up into discreet, separate segments that still cling to one

another in tenuous ways. More importantly, however, its form itself simulates the

entrapment of Bob Doran, sandwiching his segment between Mrs. Mooney's and Polly's.

Even his free indirect discourse reflects the idea he is being squeezed. That is, the story's

narrative structure is replicated in Doran's thought processes. An impression of coercion

is imparted not only by the placement of Doran's segment but also by the particulars of

its style. Unlike Mrs. Mooney's represented thoughts, which reflect the "weight of [a]

social opinion" that would regard her as an "outraged mother," Bob Doran's free indirect

discourse is suggestive of debilitating timorousness. After we learn that a priest has been

used to draw out "every ridiculous detail of the affair," and that Doran is described as

being "almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation," Doran is shown to

mentally complete the work started by Mrs. Mooney's moral cleaver by, in effect,

chopping himself up (*D* 56). This "chopping up" is suggested by the way in which the

perspective keeps shifting between Doran's voice and other voices of a larger public

morality:

> The harm was done. What could he do now but marry her or run away? He could not brazen it out: the affair would be sure to be talked of. His employer would be certain to hear of it. Dublin is such a small city— everyone knows everyone else's business. He felt his heart leap warmly in his throat as he heard in his excited imagination old Mr Leonard calling him out in his rasping voice *Send Mr Doran here, please*. (*D* 56)

Obviously, while this passage simulates the mental processes of a person under duress, it

also implies that one of the additional effects of moral paralysis is that it disables a

person's basic sense of personal responsibility, which is a necessary prerequisite to the

kind of moral imagination we see exemplified later in Bloom. Here even the passage's

use of passive-voice constructions underlines the idea that Doran is as unimaginative as

the Mooney clan, as he hopes to evade personal responsibility for his actions, viewing

himself as at the mercy of impersonal social and cultural narratives and forces.

We have observed that Joyce deploys his rhetorical and literary devices, narrative

structures, and formal approaches in *Dubliners* to effect an inquiry into how Dublin's

inhabitants have been molded by cultural narratives aligned with the moral concepts of a

repressive value system. In Joyce's treatment, while the social world of Dublin is shown

as excessively ordered for the characters, the characters are also revealed as being

complicit, usually, with this order. Such techniques as symbolism, free indirect discourse,

and narrative structuring serve to disclose how particular moral concepts have shaped

Dublin's inhabitants, in most cases stymieing the development of a moral imagination.

While the text's process is negative, my primary reason for discussing the text's

treatment of moral issues is that it hints at the need for a more sophisticated approach to

them. This is doubly relevant to my definition of moral fiction: while this is concerned

with moral concepts, its main focus is on *how* texts examine them. In this larger context,

Joyce's *Dubliners* also highlights the importance of distinguishing between "moral"

fiction, which enacts a process of examining, problematizing, and critiquing moral

norms, concepts, and values, and "moralistic" fiction, which seeks to "illustrate" them

(Gardner, "Introduction" 3). Borrowing Liesbeth Korthals Altes's phraseology, my

conclusion is that a crucial part of the "ethical value" of *Dubliners* is that its rhetorical

and literary devices, narrative structures, and formal approaches are used to critique

concepts of the moral that are overly defined and restrictive. In this way, the text can be

regarded as emblematic of an early phase of Joyce's "moralogue," as it isolates and

diagnoses negative concepts of the moral before Joyce's attempts to redefine and refine

them in *Portrait* and *Ulysses*.

Repurposing Narrative Nets: A *Portrait* of Moral Fiction

In *Dubliners*, Joyce's techniques and devices help to carry out a critique of

Dublin's restrictive moral concepts, its moral paralysis. In *Portrait*, Joyce thematizes the

role the artistic imagination plays in engaging the moral issues entailed in this collective

condition of paralysis, achieving this effect through the coordinated deployment of

several literary and linguistic devices and techniques. Most markedly, instead of the

"distinctive [and opinionated] narrative-persona" or "authorial teller" that predominated

in *The Secret Agent*, and turned up sporadically in *Dubliners*, in Joyce's *Portrait* we encounter the device of the "reflector-character" (Fludernik 16; Stanzel 144). As its name suggests, the "reflector-character reflects, that is, he mirrors events of the outside world in his consciousness, perceives, feels, registers, but always silently, because he never 'narrates,' that is, he does not verbalize his perceptions, thoughts and feelings in an attempt to communicate them" (Stanzel 144).

In Joyce's treatment, this reflector-character is a specific type: the potential (or would-be?) artist, Stephen Dedalus. As I outlined earlier, texts of moral fiction frequently embed a figure like this to dramatize and examine how, in what ways, writers carry out (or fail to carry out) their moral responsibilities to their societies self-consciously within the narrative itself. While Joyce's handling of Stephen is sometimes mockingly ironic, Stephen functions as a reflector-character that is used as a device for exploring the possibility of escaping the pernicious narratives disclosed by Joyce in *Dubliners* through the deployment of a counter-narrative of artistic development. As a device, Stephen is shown in *Portrait* to engage the problem of Ireland's stunted moral imagination by identifying its causes, which are usually cultural narratives, and resisting them. In this process, Stephen qua device often serves to model an artistic-imaginative response to this pervasive moral paralysis: we observe, for example, how he is used as a device for registering these cultural narratives, questioning them, and rejecting them.

In concert with the device of Stephen as an artistic or literary-minded reflector-character, Joyce extends his use of the technique of free indirect discourse, making it a mainstay of the narrative. As we noted earlier, while both Joyce and Conrad borrow this technique from Flaubert, Joyce modifies it to reflect a character's mental or spoken

idiom.[8] In regard to my definition of moral fiction, Joyce's use of this technique in

Portrait is important for several reasons, and these have a bearing on the argument that

Portrait thematizes the vital role that artistic imaginativeness plays in attending to the

moral issues that many of the characters in *Dubliners* were shown to avoid engaging.

While free indirect discourse is used in *Dubliners* to register the degree to which

particular characters have been shaped by cultural narratives aligned with the moral

concepts of a repressive value system, Joyce's use of this technique in *Portrait* allows us

to chart Stephen's efforts to resist being shaped by Dublin's and Ireland's cultural

narratives and moral concepts through his interactions with hearing stories and reading

literary texts. In Attridge's terminology, Stephen is shown to use literary texts as catalysts

for the kind of "singularity" mentioned earlier: Stephen uses his experiences with

narratives, tales he is told and stories he reads, as means for introducing "otherness into

[his] world" and creating opportunities for developing the kind of imaginativeness that

the characters in *Dubliners* are shown to lack, an imaginativeness that, ideally, "enables

one to see things from different points of view" (Attridge 52, 130-1; Ginsburg 542). This

stylistic and technical process is related to the novel's thematic process. This secondary

process shows us Stephen's progression from a "target" character to a "pedagogical

voice" (in John Krapp's phraseology); the text demonstrates that narratives introduce

singularity in Stephen, and then Stephen is shown to adapt and redeploy these narratives

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[8] Joyce's use of free indirect discourse is extremely subtle and sophisticated, and this has encouraged numerous critics to redefine it as "narrated monologue" (Cohn 14-5, passim) or, in Bakhtin's terminology, as "pseudo-objective discourse" (McKay 32). Cohn also renames interior monologue "quoted monologue," and identifies a third technique, "psycho-narration," which is a narrator's summary of a character's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, including those of which the character is not fully aware. This last term has proven the most useful to later critics. While most have adopted and implemented it, they continue, as do I, to use free indirect discourse and interior monologue, not Cohn's "narrated monologue" or "quoted monologue."

to introduce, or attempt to introduce, singularity into his social world (in Attridge's terminology).

The novel anticipates the central role many new ethical critics ascribe to storytelling and narrative and its significance to my definition of moral fiction in its famous and deceptively simple first lines: the formulaic "Once upon a time" used together with the self-conscious interpolation of "and a very good time it was" (*P* 19). While critics such as Bruce Comens debate whether the narrator or Stephen's father "speaks" these words, what is more pertinent to my investigation is their implication that we come to our identity through story, that this story's existence antedates our own, and that it is only through repeated exposure to such tales that we can orient ourselves in relation to our social world. As MacIntyre emphasizes, we only get an "understanding of [our] society" through its "dramatic resources," its "stock of stories," whose telling plays a "key part in educating us into the virtues" (216). Joyce's novel embodies what MacIntyre is describing through the repeated use of continuous or progressive verb forms. We are told twice that "a moocow was coming down along the road," as if to emphasize the idea that Stephen hears this story many times, and progressive forms are used to describe an event that is already in progress at the moment of speaking, and which is intersected or interrupted by an isolated or discrete event. In this case, "baby tuckoo," with whom Stephen identifies himself, suddenly appears in the middle of this ongoing story. Through his "mapping of story onto world," as Comens describes it, Stephen is shown to locate himself and his home as parts of a narrative, and this helps him make sense of what might otherwise be a bewildering swirl of sensory data:

Stephen's "response" to the story is "part of [the] learning process" that "help[s] him to get his bearings in place, to seize his identity" (Comens 298; Hardy 233).[9]

While the text suggests that seeing ourselves as participants in narratives is probably impossible to avoid, it also underscores the idea that no narrative is morally neutral but contains implicit value judgments about right and wrong and about what is worth doing and what is not. As Comens argues, while Stephen's encounter with the story his father tells him provides him with a "narrative […] framework" that offers "access to the world," it also allows the narratives of Stephen's social world to infiltrate his consciousness (Comens 298). Thus, Joyce's handling of Stephen's relation to narrative underscores the degree to which narrative can be a vexed concept, as it is not only "coincident with a particular moral order," but also constricts its "participants in order to achieve its own goal" (297-8). As Comens asserts, while Stephen takes on an identity, becoming "conscious of himself in distinction to his father and the world" and starting his "own narrative," his identity is still initially "located within his father's story" (298).[10] Comens goes on to argue that this story of the moocow operates as a "master narrative" for Stephen situating him in a narrative of escape and liberation, of transformation through art. For Comens, while Stephen is able to escape his father, he

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[9] We note this mapping of story onto world again in the first section of Chapter II. After reading *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Stephen builds a mock-up of the island on the parlor table out of "transfers and paper flowers and coloured tissue paper and strips of the silver and golden paper in which chocolate is wrapped" (*P* 65). Further, he measures the distance from Blackrock to the mountains by the location of a small whitewashed house, like the one he has read about in Dumas' novel, imagining he has "lived through a long train of adventures, as marvellous as those in the book itself" (*P* 65).

[10] As sketched out by Comens and Don Gifford, this folktale's structure is analogous to the process experienced by Stephen in the whole of the *A Portrait*: in the tale, the "supernatural (white) cow takes children across to an island realm where they are relieved of the petty restraints and dependencies of childhood and magically schooled as heroes before they are returned to their astonished parents and community" (Comens 298; Gifford 131-2).

never shakes off the "general structure" of the "folktale" told by his father (298). Indeed, Stephen comes to regard himself as having a mission to transform his countrymen as he has himself been transformed. This, Stephen's "project of liberation" through "devotion to his art," is itself a net, a "potential narrative of Stephen's life, threatening [like the others] to make him subject to its own teleology" (Comens 297). My point here is that Joyce's treatment of narrative per se reflects an intermediary phase of the "moralogue" I have been discussing. In this phase, Stephen is used to interrogate specific narratives, not narrative as such, as in the sustained manner we note in *Ulysses*. This I discuss in more detail later.

The idea that narratives all carry a particular moral charge is emphasized in Stephen's reflecting on particular sentences he has read, a reflection that takes place intermittently during the football match. His ruminations on what he has read are woven into the narrative of the dramatized scene of the match, and this technique achieves a number of effects, characterizing Stephen as cerebral in contrast to his more physical playmates, for example, and modeling the detachment that Stephen advocates later as part of his aesthetic theory: Stephen is simultaneously involved in the match, but also detached from it, indifferent. Most significantly, that the text alternates between the dramatized match, told in the narrator's "textual voice," and the free indirect discourse of Stephen as reflector-character implies that Stephen uses the order suggested by composed sentences as a bulwark against the disorder that surrounds him. For example, after the narrative voice describes the playgrounds as "swarming with boys" and tells us that Stephen is "caught in the whirl of a scrimmage," it yields to Stephen's perspective, as indicated by the inclusion of passages of free indirect discourse. To cite one instance,

Stephen muses on how the view of the lighted castle there is "nice and warm" to look at, "like something in a book" (*P* 22). This suggests that Stephen's readings have shaped his view of the castle, perhaps encouraging him to regard it as an aesthetic object, imaginatively, as he has probably done when reading a textual description of a castle. Further, in a passage whose word and image association is suggestive of the type of associative stream of consciousness or autonomous narrative we discover in *Ulysses*, Stephen connects this castle with Leicester Abbey, which he has been reading about, and this leads to thoughts of the "nice sentences in Doctor Cornwall's Spelling Book": although they are "only sentences to learn the spelling from," for Stephen they are "like poetry" (*P* 22). This line of thinking culminates in Stephen's idea that it "would be nice to lie on the hearthrug before the fire, leaning his head upon his hands, and think on those sentences," far away from the cold, chaotic playground (*P* 22).

All this gives rise to a number of ironies and paradoxes. One of these stems from how the narrative is structured. The surer narrative voice is used to describe the chaotic football match, while the more tentative, probing free indirect discourse of the reflector-character is used to suggest an attempt to deal with this disorder. The paradox is that the meticulously shaped narrative is used to suggest disorder in carefully controlled sentences, while the looser-seeming free indirect discourse is used to register the reflector-character's efforts at containing or imposing order on the wild encounter. This paradox is linked to a thematic irony. While Stephen regards the sentences as vaguely poetic despite the fact they are intended as educational devices, he is unaware of their larger historical context, and the narrative textual voice inserts no specific commentary about it, but only quotes lines from the primer: Cardinal "Wolsey died in Leicester

Abbey" (*P* 22, original italicized). As we know, the historical Wolsey served as a "powerful and guileful" advisor to King Henry VIII, but his failure to persuade the pope to deem the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon "void from the beginning" precipitated his downfall, and this eventually saw him charged with high treason (Gifford 137). What this piece of trivia suggests is that Stephen, under the guise of learning to spell, is absorbing the English version of this event. To make matters more complicated, this passage is also bound up in the religious strife provoked by Henry's desire to split from the Catholic Church. However, rather than specifically lamenting this historical turn of events, Joyce's treatment here serves to critique the insidiousness of cultural narratives, the way we absorb them from seemingly innocuous sources, and are shaped by them, unawares, as is true thus far for Stephen.

Nevertheless, Joyce's use of a reflector-character in tandem with free indirect discourse reveals that Stephen, even while still young, has the capacity of developing beyond being a passive receptor of such a narrative. Despite being a reflector-character, Stephen is not shown as merely registering these cultural narratives but as engaging them actively. Through this combined use of a reflector-character and free indirect discourse, the text soon depicts Stephen as probing the limits of narrative and questioning its accuracy. One of the first instances occurs in a dramatized scene following the football match, in which Stephen is working on "sums" in class. These passages also take up the educational colonization theme we noted earlier in the example of Leicester Abbey. Here, the boys are divided into the camps of "York," who wear white ribbons, and "Lancaster," who wear red ones, in a set-up that evokes the idea of the "warring English houses in the Wars of the Roses" (Gifford 138). Like the Irish who sided with the historical House of

York, the losing side, Stephen is wearing a white ribbon, and while this is evocative in itself, as a sort of oblique commentary on Stephen's overall chances of achieving some kind of success, what is more interesting is the sort of inchoate dissatisfaction conveyed in Stephen's free indirect discourse. After thinking that roses can be red, white, pink, cream, or lavender, Stephen recalls the song he used to hear about the "wild rose [that] blossoms on the little green place," and this leads him to the following thoughts: "But you could not have a green rose. But perhaps somewhere in the world you could" (*P* 24). This brief passage is interesting for several reasons. First, while it uses forms that antedate the narrated present, as is the case with free indirect discourse, it shades into interior monologue, which uses present terms. It is not clear if these are Stephen's thoughts represented verbatim, as a past tense used to indicate hypothetical or counter-factual present circumstances, or as the kind of paraphrasing we usually note in free indirect discourse. This effect of ambiguity underscores Stephen's speculation about the possibility of green roses, as he is reluctant to rule their existence out entirely. Additionally, the passage shows that Stephen is developing the capability not just to represent what exists in his social world through language, but to imagine what does not exist, also through language. He seems to have learned to exploit a linguistic loophole. Language need not obey the strictures of nature or follow the precepts of a primer.

A more obvious example of what I am describing takes place during the well-known Christmas dinner scene, which constitutes the entire third section of the first chapter. While the second section is reflected almost entirely in Stephen's consciousness, this third section alternates between the brief expository passages of the narrator, lines of quoted speech from the dueling factions of Simon Dedalus and Mr. Casey on one side

and Mrs. "Dante" Riordan on the other, and Stephen's reflections on their dialogue. In itself, this structure underscores the thematic concerns I have been highlighting. In this scene, Stephen is used as a "target" caught in the crossfire of two rival cultural narratives: this "target" is a pupil protagonist that other characters, who usually occupy particular ethical positions, seek to educate in some manner (Krapp 36). Stephen does not participate in this dialogue at all; in fact, it is sometimes possible to forget that Stephen is even present at the dinner. Simon Dedalus and Mr. Casey are used to exemplify a narrative of Irish nationalism, while Mrs. "Dante" Riordan speaks not just for the Catholic Church in Ireland, but for "public morality" (*P* 39). While the men are depicted as nostalgic, sentimental, and maudlin, sounding themes of betrayal and victimhood, Dante is portrayed as shrill, unreasonable, and inflexible. In the middle of this volatile discussion, Stephen is shown to reflect on what he has heard and unpack it, more or less critically.

> But why was he then against the priests? Because Dante must be right then. But he had heard his father say that she was a spoiled nun and that she had come out of the convent in the Alleghanies when her brother had got the money from the savages for the trinkets and the chainies. Perhaps that made her severe against Parnell. (*P* 43)

One of the significant points to be made here is that the passage charts Stephen's attempt to negotiate between two rival factions, implying his avoidance of siding with either camp. Most importantly, because it involves questions and tentative answers, the style itself is suggestive of the moral imagination mentioned earlier. Instead of taking what he hears at face value, Stephen weighs both sides---even though his estimation of Dante shows traces of his father's appraisal of her. My point is that Stephen's free indirect discourse, which has been developing though Stephen's encounters with written and

spoken narratives, models an implicit critique of the thinking exemplified by Simon and Mr. Casey and Mrs. Riordan. Their thinking is monological, one-sided: they make no attempt to recognize the other side's claims. The use of free indirect discourse highlights Stephen's holding a sort of dialogue in his head, weighing the two sides he has heard and trying to make sense of them.

This disinclination to take sides is eventually translated into a wariness of the cultural voices and narratives, the "nets" such as "nationality, language, religion" that Stephen later claims that he "shall try to fly by" (*P* 177).[11] Traces of this reluctance are noticeable in numerous passages in Chapter II. However, instead of free indirect discourse, Joyce uses what Dorrit Cohn calls "psycho-narration": this is the textual voice's description of Stephen's thinking, a kind of paraphrasing of his thoughts, sometimes "tinged" with his idiom (32). While psycho-narration is usually introduced with verbs of perceptions, such as "think" or "feel," Joyce often uses it to introduce ambiguity, suggesting that Stephen is not fully aware of what he thinks or feels, that while he may think it or feel it, he cannot fully verbalize it yet. That this technique features prominently in the middle chapters, in which Stephen is still developing, relates to the thematic issue I have so far been sketching out. At this point, the "gibes and violence of speech" that Stephen discovers in the writings of "subversive writers" is described as having "set up a ferment in his brain" that then passes into and is made manifest in his own "crude writings" (*P* 78). This technique of psycho-narration stylistically simulates Stephen's point of development: he has absorbed counter-

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[11] Of course, as Marian Eide argues, "it is also possible to understand Stephen's metaphor to mean that he will use the very restraints presented by Irish culture as the means for his flight; he will fly by means of those nets," not over or past them, but repurposing and reusing them ("Woman" 386).

narratives, but he is unable to use them effectively: they issue forth in his writings, for example, without his conscious control. Another key example of what I am describing occurs while Stephen is preparing to participate in the school play, when he is shown questioning the concept of honor and gentlemanly behavior. While Stephen ascribes these to the "constant voices of his father and of his masters, urging him to be a gentleman above all things and urging him to be a good catholic above all things," the passage concludes with the idea that these "voices had now come to be hollowsounding in his ears (*P* 82). This suggests that Stephen is not ready to reject these voices outright, but only to find them "hollowsounding" or inauthentic. At the same time, the dispassionate, detached, passive-sounding style is suggestive of Stephen's attempt to neutralize these "pedagogical" voices, to be less of a "target" by stopping the voices in his ears.

So far we have noted how the device of the reflector-character used together with the techniques of free indirect discourse and psycho-narration helps us to chart Stephen's progress away from being a target for the cultural narratives of his social world. In the final chapter, Joyce uses dialogue to imply that Stephen has ceased being a target and has himself become a "pedagogical voice." This is noticeable in Chapter V's three main dialogues, as well as in some of Stephen's diary entries. As it takes up the theme of nationalism we noted earlier in the Christmas dinner scene, I want to focus briefly on the dialogue with Davin, partly because Davin is a character that functions as a thematic counterweight or counterpart to Stephen, and also because Stephen's dialogues with Lynch about his aesthetic theory, and those with Cranly about his decision to leave the

church have already invited much critical commentary.[12] Davin, of course, is used to

voice the concerns and claims of Irish nationalism. As he tells Stephen, "a man's country

comes first. Ireland first, Stevie. You can be a poet or mystic after" (*P* 177). However,

Davin is also used to underscore an acute underlying problem inherent in Stephen's

counter-narrative of escape through artistic creation, of developing a creative

imaginativeness as a means for dealing with moral issues. What their exchanges reveal is

that while Stephen has developed his "pedagogical voice," he turns this against the kind

of country folk exemplified by Davin. In other words, whereas we noted that initially

various voices representing a range of cultural narratives sought to shape Stephen, now

Stephen seeks to reverse the process by shaping Davin. To cite a few instances, he

ironically refers to Davin as his "tame little goose," belittling him by contrasting him

with the "wild geese": Irish soldiers who "went into exile in order to assert themselves as

individuals capable of careers and of distinction" (Gifford 230). Stephen's comment

implies that Davin, probably unwittingly, is exploiting and debasing the memory of the

original "wild geese." Further, Stephen's quoted speech demonstrates that he sees

through the narratives of Irish nationalism and faults the Irish more than the English. As

he tells Davin, his "ancestors threw off their language and took on another," permitting a

"handful of foreigners to subject them"; and, when a few Irish nationalists, such as Tone

and Parnell sought to advance Irish interests, they were invariably "sold" out to the

enemy, left in the lurch, and then often "reviled" by those they would have helped (*P*

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[12] On my view, both Lynch and Cranly serve mainly a synthetic function in their dialogues with Stephen, rather than a thematic one. That is, they operate as devices for punctuating what would otherwise be Stephen's monologues. Still, they are sometimes used to achieve wry comic effects. For example, after Stephen has articulated his concept of the artist as "like the God of the creation," Lynch is used first to deflate what Stephen has said and then to complicate it: "What do you mean […] by prating about beauty and the imagination in this miserable Godforsaken island? No wonder the artist retired within or behind his handiwork after having perpetrated this country" (*P* 187).

177). As Stephen implies, Davin and his fellow fenians are playing fixed roles in a fixed

narrative, a narrative that inevitably features the stock character of the "indispensible

informer" to betray the nationalists' hopes and aspirations, if not send them to prison or

see them executed for treason. Moreover, this stock character is never in short supply: "I

can find you a few in this college," says Stephen (*P* 176).

While Stephen's dialogue and diary entries suggest that he regards the Irish

country folk as primitives, he comes to resemble them in one important aspect: although

Stephen does not share Davin's enthusiasm for Irish folk traditions, and despite his

condescension towards them, Stephen is shown to accord the traditions a begrudging

admiration because these have helped the rural Irish resist being psychologically

colonized by the English and made over in their image, as is the case with Gabriel

Conroy in "The Dead" (Reynolds 228-9). For Stephen, the motif of the Irish country folk

is used to represent both a problem and a solution. On one hand, they represent the claims

of an Irish nationalist narrative; on the other, as they have resisted being shaped by the

importation of English manners and customs, these country folk also exemplify and

model one mode of response to invasive cultural narratives. As a device, this motif also

reveals Stephen's limitations, or rather, the limitations of his project of escape through

artistic creation. Davin is shown to miss the mark in his quoted speech: Stephen's

problem is not that he is a "born sneerer" but that he has become one in his attempt to

avoid the shaping influences of such cultural narratives as Irish nationalism by mapping

the narrative of the artist-hero onto his social world. In this overarching narrative, he has

come to regard himself as superior to the figures, who need him to create their "uncreated

conscience" (*P* 218). This well-known diary entry is used to suggest that Stephen has

developed an enormous self-regard rather than the kind of moral imagination exemplified

by Bloom in *Ulysses*. However, the entry also implies that he has set himself the task of

fostering the development of his compatriots' moral imagination, their "conscience."

While this suggests Stephen has some regard for his fellow Irish, that is, he wishes to

improve them, the text shows that his attitude towards the Irish common folk is too

patronizing. In other words, while Stephen has evaded the nets of language, religion,

nationality, and family, he cannot escape viewing his Irish compatriots uncharitably and

reductively, as little better than a "race of clodhoppers" (*P* 215).

I have been arguing that in *A Portrait*, Stephen is used to examine the possibility

of escaping the moral paralysis we note in *Dubliners* by charting Stephen's attempt to

untangle himself from the nets of language, religion, family, nationality, and culture.

However, while *Portrait* thematizes the idea that the literary or artistic imagination

enables us to engage moral issues through its uses of a reflector-character and free

indirect discourse, it still critiques and undermines this thematic framework, revealing its

limitations.[13] In this respect, *Portrait* anticipates and examines several core assumptions

of my definition of moral fiction. Most notably, it explores and questions the somewhat

grandiose idea that artistic imaginativeness is adequate in dealing with deeply entrenched

social problems, whatever they derive from. This is largely the value of Joyce's *Portrait*

for my approach to moral fiction. The text thematically explores the extreme difficulty of

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[13] The process I have been sketching out raises the longstanding conundrum regarding Joyce's treatment of Stephen in *Portrait*. Given Joyce's handling of him in *Ulysses*, many critics conclude retrospectively that already in *Portrait* Stephen is the "victim of [Joyce's] pitiless irony" (Scholes 123). My thinking is obviously in line with that of critics, such as Robert Scholes and Weldon Thornton, who argue that Stephen is "as much sentimentalized as ironized," is handled with "sympathetic irony," and is even sometimes the "beneficiary of [considerable, perhaps too much] authorial tenderness" (Scholes 123; Thornton 58).

developing and putting into practice the aesthetic required by moral fiction, as I define it, since it is an aesthetic that obliges writers to address serious moral issues but avoid overtly moralizing about them.

Leopold Bloom: *Ulysses'* Moral Infrastructure

We have seen that the process staged in *Dubliners* involves Joyce's use of free indirect discourse, symbolic devices, and narrative structuring to dramatize the moral paralysis of Dublin's inhabitants through stylistic means, thereby disclosing them. In *Portrait*, Joyce thematizes the role the artistic imagination plays in dealing with this moral paralysis by using an artistic reflector-character to model ways of resisting the narratives that would otherwise shape him. While this process models a possible response to Dublin's moral paralysis, in Joyce's treatment, we note that the problem this process reveals is that Stephen's deployment of a counter-narrative catches him and the larger idea he represents in a double-bind: his aim is to shape what he regards as the rudimentary consciousness of his compatriots, but to do this requires his morally isolating himself from his social world. In terms of my definition of moral fiction, Stephen is used to underscore a paradox: he is emblematic of moral fiction's key assumption that writers have moral obligations to their societies, but Stephen is used to demonstrate this ironically through his withdrawal from his society, into a narrative of liberation through artistic creation. While he is used to explore the possibility of escaping the nets of Dublin's narratives of religion, nationality, and language, he is still, as Comens has argued in an analogous context, enmeshed in the nets of other narratives, a narrative of emancipation through artistic creation, caught perhaps even in the net of narrative itself (297).

These processes I have been tracing out across Joyce's first two major texts, their disclosure of moral paralysis and thematization of the literary imagination as a way of dealing with it, are taken up in a more sustained and sophisticated manner and extended in the much longer and more complicated text of *Ulysses*, a novel which many critics regard as the greatest, most fully realized, technically accomplished novel of the twentieth century, if not of all time. Obviously, given the incredible textual density and thematic scope of *Ulysses*, my proviso about staging an intervention into it, rather than carrying out an exhaustive study of it, is more relevant than ever. Accordingly, my focus is on how some of the themes I have been dealing with in my discussion of *Dubliners* and *Portrait* are carried over into and taken up again by Joyce in *Ulysses*. My overarching argument is that while Joyce's use of literary and linguistic devices and techniques is so striking that it sometimes shifts our attention away from the characters and from what is being narrated, focusing our attention on style and form, it still deals thematically with pertinent and often perennial moral issues, such as the part played by the larger idea of narrative as a device for conceptualizing and structuring our notions of how to live, how to lead a life. What we notice in particular is that while *Ulysses* critiques particular narratives, usually through its use of Bloom, who is emblematic of a sort of twentieth-century secular humanism, it also critiques the larger idea of narrative itself most notably through its deployment of numerous literary styles and rhetorical techniques. My conclusion is that this later process, which is apparent in the later, more experimental chapters, such as "Cyclops" and "Oxen of the Sun," mirrors the earlier chapters' focus on Bloom as a kind of exemplar of the moral imagination: just as the thematic character is shown early on to be resistant to the cultural narratives of his social world, so too is the

synthetic character, the character as construct, shown to be resistant to Joyce's narrative techniques.

As I have been stressing, my methodology encourages us to identify and analyze the storyteller-figure used by texts as a device for examining the ways in which writers demonstrate (or fail to demonstrate) their moral obligations to their society in the narrative itself. As we have noted, Joyce's *Portrait* foregrounds this device in the figure of Stephen Dedalus, using him as a means for thematizing the role the artistic imagination plays in dealing with moral issues. Bloom also functions as a storyteller-figure, "who internalizes his world, transforms it, judges it," and thereby regards himself as a "character in a fiction of his own creation" (McCarthy 29). Implicit in this idea is that the artist- or storyteller-figure represents the type of anti-hero who is "heroic" because he disputes, critiques, and flouts his society's moral values. On this view, the heroic is reconceptualized and located in the isolated, artistic individual: the hero is no longer a stalwart or upholder of a society's moral concepts but is frequently an opponent of them. This description fits Stephen, but is less apt for Bloom. Given this, my first claim is that Bloom represents a variation on this device of the antihero. Though he is not an artistic individual, and is just a common fellow, he is still something of a storyteller and also a character in the story he is continually spinning. Thus, instead of the rebellious, artistic antihero exemplified by Stephen, Bloom functions as what I term an anti-antihero: the regular guy whose quiet heroism informs his everyday thoughts, motivations, and actions. I define this device by adopting Murray Roston's description of the antihero. For Roston, not all antiheroes are simply the opposite of heroes, "*schlemiels* or social failures" (15-6). While they sometimes prove themselves "incapable of coping

with the pressures of living" and seem "merely pitiable," they invite our respect or admiration because they highlight the "false standards" of their historical, geographical, and cultural circumstances (16). As Roston sums up, their weaknesses are their virtues. They do not embody contemporary values because these are not values at all; rather, these figures exemplify in "pitiable isolation values that [their] contemporary society appears to have abandoned" or never to have developed in the first place (16). This is an apt summation of Bloom, who operates as a kind of "average-citizen" reflector-character, instead of the quasi-heroic storyteller-figure we identified in Stephen, whose self-styled and self-conscious aestheticism isolates him morally from his social world. Thus, Bloom is used paradoxically: the text deploys a range of radical formal and stylistic techniques not to herald an altogether new kind of hero, i.e., a revolutionary antihero who challenges traditional moral concepts. Instead, these techniques serve to call attention to the virtues of a rather middle-class hero, who is shown to uphold moral concepts his fellow citizens have forgotten or never learned about to begin with.

Still, my aim is not to concentrate on particular passages in which Bloom is shown to demonstrate the "Catholic corporal works of mercy," or where he is used to embody the Greek ideal of "sophrosyne," i.e., "soundness of mind," a "compound of self-knowledge and self-restraint that is opposed to hubris" (Gill 17; Davenport).[14] Nor is it to deny that Stephen and Molly also represent particular moral perspectives. They are also presented with great subtlety and can be valued for expanding the range of possible ways of understanding what is moral. However, I regard Bloom's moral perspective as more

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[14] While I am specifically citing Richard Gill's 1963 "The 'Corporal Works of Mercy' as a Moral Pattern in Joyce's *Ulysses*," numerous critics make the general argument that Bloom, "a Jew, turns out to be a true embodiment of Christian idealism" (17).

central. My interest is in how Bloom, as this anti-antihero and self-narrating or narrative-projecting character, is used to model a type of resistance or immunity to the cultural narratives of his social world. One of the ways this is handled is through the technique of interior monologue. This technique is significant because it creates the illusion of unmediated access to Bloom's thoughts. Through it, we discover what and how Bloom thinks, the contents of his thoughts but also his habits of mind. However, my emphasis is on the narrative or rhetorical effect of Joyce's use of interior monologue, how its use communicates meaning in itself. Sometimes inaccurately referred to as stream of consciousness, interior monologue differs from the free indirect discourse we noted in *Dubliners* and *Portrait*.[15] While free indirect discourse is a representation of a character's thoughts, usually in the third-person, in a grammatical tense that is anterior to the narrated present, and is sometimes colored by the particular character's idiomatic way of speaking, interior monologue in contrast "presents the character's inner discourse [usually] in first person present tense": it is a "narrative technique for presenting a character's consciousness by direct quotation of his thoughts in a surrounding narrative context" and is often used to model the "silent self-communion of a fictional mind" (Beeretz 40; Cohn 15).

While the use of interior monologue sometimes reveals the mundane concerns of a character, such as Bloom's relishing of bodily smells, it still achieves a number of effects that are in synch with my definition of moral fiction. One effect is that the

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[15] The phrase "stream of consciousness" is sometimes used to describe a looser, less-structured form of interior monologue, a technique that emphasizes the often associative, unconscious flux of thoughts: it is used to explore "pre-speech levels of consciousness" in order to highlight a character's "psychic being" (Humphrey 4). It also serves as a general term under which the other techniques I have been describing are subsumed. For example, on this view, while interior monologue is not synonymous with stream of consciousness, it is one technique used to represent it (Beeretz 40).

narrative's focus is shifted from the "external plot" to the "minds of the characters," and this shift invites us to share these characters' views and to see differently, to see not only *what* they see but *as* they see (Beeretz 40, Fludernik 20-1). More importantly, many critics assert that this shift also involves the narrator's ceding of authority to the given character. For example, John Paul Riquelme argues that Joyce's use of interior monologue gives rise to an especially intriguing and ambiguous narrative situation, in which the perspectives of the teller, the character, and readers "oscillate," since the "character begins to take over the teller's role," and the reader "begins to assume the character's part" (155). However, in the context of the themes I have been addressing so far, my claim is that Joyce's use of interior monologue in conjunction with the device of Bloom as anti-antihero subtly emphasizes the idea that Bloom's thinking is resistant to being narrated and can only be quoted or allowed to narrate itself, as Bloom is shown to spin his own narrative, a narrative in which he is his own protagonist, instead of somebody else's. In this way, the text creates a sense of Bloom's agency, suggesting that Bloom is free to think through or narrate to himself a way through particular moral problems. The use of this technique implies that Bloom is not assimilable, not easily appropriated by narrative. Joyce's use of this technique ingeniously reinforces the thematic issue I have been describing, that Bloom is resistant to the cultural narratives of his social world.

In our discussions of *Dubliners* and *Portrait*, we noted that specific cultural narratives led characters, such as Mrs. Mooney, to perpetuate negative socio-cultural practices: Mrs. Mooney is shown to go after Bob Doran with a metaphoric moral cleaver in much the same way as her alcoholic husband has gone after her with the literal meat

cleaver. As illustrated by many of Bloom's interior monologues, this process of

modeling, passing on and replicating negative socio-cultural practices is inverted in

Ulysses, and this is already evident in our first encounters with Bloom. To show this, I

want to focus on two scenes: Bloom's interaction with his cat and his visit to the

outhouse, both of which are in "Calypso." I focus on these because while they initially

seem to involve trivial or crass matters, such as Bloom's interacting with his household

pet and voiding his bowels, they both have more far-reaching implications. They both

involve the inwardness that many critics note serves as a moral basis, framework, or

orientation, but what is especially relevant here is that these scenes offer key insights into

a rationale for regarding *Ulysses* as moral fiction: while the scene with the cat

characterizes Bloom's ethics, his respect for others, his affirmation of everyday living,

and his struggle to maintain a sense of dignity in the face of indignities, the outhouse

scene differentiates the moral aims of *Ulysses* from the kind of simplistic, morally

positive, undemanding fiction exemplified by the "prize titbit" read by Bloom while he is

seated on the provocatively named "cuckstool" (*U* 56).

First of all, while many of us love animals, it is noteworthy that Bloom is perhaps

the sole character in all of Joyce's work that not only notices them but empathizes with

them as fellow sentient beings. This is not to argue that Bloom's morality is reducible to

advocacy or activism for animal rights, but that Bloom's concern for animals functions as

a sort of synecdoche for his larger, more general interest in the welfare of his fellow

citizens. It is a substitution of a species for a genus, i.e., one cat standing in for all

creatures or animals, including humans. In other words, there is an implicit argumentum a

fortiori in Joyce's treatment of Bloom in this scene: if Bloom is so solicitous towards

dumb beasts, it stands to reason that he is even more considerate of human beings, an idea that is taken up and substantiated again and again throughout the novel. A few of these include Bloom's attendance at Paddy Dignam's funeral, his concern for the pregnant Mrs. Purefoy, and his many instances of kindness towards the troubled, drunken, and now-homeless Stephen. In this early scene, Bloom is depicted as trying to communicate with his cat. After the cat meows, Bloom responds with "O, there you are," and then imagines what the cat is "thinking," mentally translating it into human speech, "Prr. Scratch my head. Prr," and then responding to his perception of the cat's desires, we assume, by petting his cat (*U* 45). What this admittedly simple interaction suggests is that Bloom, unlike Stephen, is able to translate a perception of problem into some kind of solution, even though it may strike us as mundane.

The use of interior monologue, however, gives rise to several paradoxes, both stylistic and thematic. While my argument is that this technique emphasizes Bloom's resistance to being narrated, thus setting him apart, in the context of the narrative, it suggests that Bloom, instead of regarding his relation between the cat and himself as hierarchical, perceives himself as only one part of his physical and cultural surroundings, and that he and the other parts are on an equal footing in them. This idea is emphasized by the textual voice's intrusion: "Mr Bloom watched curiously, kindly, the lithe black form," and "bent down to her, his hands on his knees," physically lowering himself to the cat's level (*U* 45). In fact, it goes further than this, because Bloom is shown to entertain the notion, even if momentarily, that the cat is possibly our superior: "They call them stupid. They understand what we say better than we understand them. She understands all

she wants to" (*U* 45).[16] This idea is reinforced by the way the text renders the cat's

meowing as "Mrkrgnao" (*U* 45). The idiosyncratic spelling, which presents the cat's

meowing as quoted speech, and which possibly mirrors the way Bloom interprets and

spells it out to himself, suggests, orthographically, that we cannot pronounce what the cat

says correctly, let alone be able to understand it. Thus, one of my points is that Bloom's

encounter with the cat dramatizes his relation to the narrative within the narrative: my

claim is that he is resistant to being understood, encapsulated, reduced and narrated just

as the cat finally eludes Bloom's understanding of her. The cat resists Bloom's attempt to

account for her in his interior monologue, just as Bloom resists the textual voice's

narrativization. Like Bloom, the cat can only be "quoted"; it resists being narrated.

While Joyce uses Bloom's interior monologue to characterize him in such scenes

as the one we have just examined, it also serves, in combination with the textual voice's

objective-sounding narrative, to distinguish Joyce's larger literary project in his writing

of *Ulysses*. One of my claims is that *Ulysses* represents Joyce's new and more

sophisticated approach to moral fiction, a refining and redefining of the moral in relation

to the literary. This is made manifest in one of the novel's most controversial scenes:

Bloom's excretion in the "jakes." This is, of course, not even a flush-toilet, but a foul-

smelling "outhouse with a bench and a hole" (Horowitz 872). This scene is central to

valuing *Ulysses* as moral fiction. This is not because Joyce includes a startling scene that

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[16] We can contrast Bloom's thoughts here with the cold, condescending view suggested by the passage of psycho-narration quoted in my second epigraph. Of course, Stephen's disregard for the pious country-folk can be read in several ways. The psycho-narration excludes direct authorial commentary, and invites us to identify with Stephen and share in his scorn. But we readers know that Stephen's lapse from religion coincides with his discovery of prostitutes, and we can regard his cooling religious attitude as at least partially self-serving.

deals with defecation or necessarily because, by doing so, Joyce presents Bloom in all his

many-sided humanness. While there is nothing inherently moral about a fictive treatment

of defecating, my focus here is on what we can extrapolate about the literary from this

scene. My claim is that Joyce, through use of interior monologue in combination with

objective narrative and choice of subject matter, critiques morally didactic fiction,

implying that reading and judging this kind of fiction is about as mentally and

psychologically undemanding as voiding one's bowels, that its function is not aesthetic

but grossly physical.[17] In fact, I argue that this scene encapsulates Joyce's aesthetics

much more succinctly and subtly, despite its crass subject matter, than Stephen's

pronouncements in *Portrait* about how true art invites a feeling of stasis, not kinesis. On

a somewhat obvious level, the scene critiques the idea of morally positive, didactic

fiction by equating it with feces and by likening reading this sort of fiction to defecation.

As Evan Horowitz notes, many critics consider the scene amusing because the

confusion of referents invites us to conflate Bloom's bowel movements with his reading

(872).

> Quietly he read, restraining himself, the first column and, yielding but
> resisting, began the second. 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 bring on piles again. No, just right. So. Ah! Costive. One tabloid of
> cascara sagrada. Life might be so. It did not move or touch him but it was
> something quick and neat. Print anything now. Silly season. He read on,
> seated above his own rising smell. (*U* 56)

What Horowitz describes is achieved through the interplay of the narrative's textual

voice, free indirect discourse, and Bloom's interior monologue. The first sentence is in

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[17] My point here owes much to Patrick McCarthy's observation that the story Bloom reads in the jakes
offers us an example of *Ulysses*' "literary antithesis" (24).

the narrative's textual voice, and stylistically simulates the beginning of Bloom's act of

excretion through its rather restrained syntax, specifically, through the interposition of

"restraining himself" between the verb "read' and its direct object, "the first column."

The confusion over whether "column" refers to textual or fecal matter then becomes

more pronounced through the omission of the commas that would seem necessary

following "reading," "still," and "patiently." As is, the sentence suggests that Bloom is

reading his bowel activities as much as he is reading the story: "reading still patiently that

slight constipation of yesterday quite gone." Finally, this link is made most obvious in the

last lines quoted here, which alternate between free indirect discourse and interior

monologue. As the free indirect discourse, "It did not move or touch him but it was

something quick and neat," refers as much to the effects of his bowel movement as to the

effects of the story, Bloom's interior monologue here allows Joyce a medium through

which to voice oblique criticism of the kind of simplistic, undemanding, upbeat, didactic

fiction to which I have been arguing moral fiction is opposed. Thus, my point is what

makes this scene relevant to my definition of moral fiction has to do mainly with its

implicit critique of the kind of moralistic fiction exemplified by "*Matcham's*

Masterstroke." It is not just that Joyce is equating this sort of fiction literally with shit but

that what it demands of readers is merely a simple, involuntary, bodily function, instead

of the complex, literary, artistic, and aesthetic response of a piece of moral fiction.

What Joyce asks us to do is to tolerate what initially seems distasteful and

consider how this focus on the bodily operates in the larger context of the surrounding

narrative. Obviously, it characterizes Bloom, suggesting that he is not alienated from

physicality, as is true of Stephen. More importantly, it sets *Ulysses* apart, implying that a

text's morality is in its process, in its treatment of subject matter, more than in the subject matter itself. Finally, given what we know of Joyce's difficulties following the U.S. ban on *Ulysses*, the phrase "Print anything" functions as a kind of ironic commentary on the vicissitudes of the publishing industry. Preposterously upbeat stories not only encounter few obstacles in getting published, but pass out into the social context "quick and neat," while edgy, demanding texts, such as *Ulysses*, whose "dramatic action is rooted in the 'real world,'" meet with considerable resistance and require much more effort if they are to come out, so to speak (Lawrence 11).

So far we have been focusing on the techniques Joyce uses to represent a character's consciousness. While this is done to differentiate Bloom as a character and *Ulysses* as a novel, it privileges the internal and idiosyncratic views of an individual. While Joyce's use of interior monologue suggests that Bloom is resistant to being subsumed under or taken up by cultural narrative, in the early "Bloom" chapters, Bloom is shown mainly to do this internally, in his mental processes. I now want to examine a few instances in *Ulysses* in which Bloom is viewed externally, first through mediating presence of the two narrators we detect in the "Cyclops" chapter, and then through what Kenner terms "screens of language," the stylistic "rhetorical masks," as Lawrence describes them, in the later chapters, such as "Oxen of the Sun," which I focus briefly on later (Kenner, *Joyce's Voices* 41; Lawrence 8). My argument is that these chapters serve to put different pressures on Bloom, further reinforcing the idea that just as Bloom-as-character is thematically resistant to the cultural narratives of his social world, Boom qua synthetic literary device is also impervious to the mechanics of narrative method itself. This effect is achieved obliquely through a kind of narrative pincer movement or

"crowding-out" maneuver (Maddox 86). In this, Bloom's moral sense is underscored through a narrative structuring that increasingly isolates him, setting him off as a target for the sorts of pedagogical voices that worked on Stephen, and also sometimes as a literal target, scapegoated by a range of voices representing many of the same cultural narratives I mentioned earlier, such as nationalism and intolerance. In these passages, Bloom is shown to resist these narratives in his quoted and reported speech and actions, not just in his thoughts, as represented earlier in passages of interior monologue.

What I am describing is perhaps most forcefully and dramatically exemplified by Joyce's treatment of Bloom in "Cyclops." This is a chapter that allegorizes "faulty vision and metaphorical blindness," that parodies "language that is political and propagandistic," i.e., "language that is a ready-made deception, a kind of sloganeering," in order to critique, for example, simplistic notions of a person's national identity (Maddox 86; Lawrence 104). In fact, in this chapter, and also in "Oxen of the Sun," this motif of faulty vision is linked directly to and even caused by the distortions of the narratives the characters tell themselves and the language they tell them in. As I have been arguing, Bloom is used to exemplify a resistance to cultural narratives, which so far has been suggested mainly though the technique of the interior monologue, a technique that is used to set Bloom apart (and also to imply a kinship with Stephen, the only other character whose consciousness is handled at length by Joyce in this way). In Joyce's treatment here, Bloom is the only character that escapes being used to allegorize the chapter's metaphorical blindness and faulty vision. Initially, Bloom functions to draw attention to this condition of metaphorical blindness, which is exemplified and personified by the chapter's storyteller-figures: the unnamed "I" or "Nameless One" and

the "gigantic narrator," as he is referred to in James H. Maddox's phraseology, or the "grandiose exaggerator" as he is in mine (Maddox 86).

As Maddox argues, these two narrators represent monocular perspectives: as the unnamed "I" is "eager to believe the worst about Bloom or any other subject," he represents the "reductive impulse gone wild," while the grandiose exaggerator exemplifies the opposite tendency of ascribing an "heroic dimension" even to the most commonplace of objects, actions, and motives (86). Neither of these narrators sees Bloom, for example, in "stereoscope" (Maddox 86). My claim, however, is that Bloom is used to model the stereoscopic mode of seeing that Maddox claims is lacking in the narrators and the other characters. This effect is observable in the discussion of the hanging of Joe Brady. While the various barflies zero in on the effect the hanging reportedly had on the "poor bugger's tool," making it stand up "in their faces like a poker," Bloom, as reported by the unnamed "I," relates this anecdote to two larger discussions about capital punishment and human anatomy. Bloom's attempt to broaden and elevate the discussion, to regard it stereoscopically, in deep focus, is mocked by the reflexively anti-Semitic unnamed "I": "[…] of course Bloom comes out with the why and the wherefore and all the codology of the business and the old dog smelling him all the time I'm told those jewies does have a sort of queer odour coming off them for dogs about I don't know what all deterrent effect and so forth and so on" (*U* 205). In this way, the text implies a link between the unnamed narrator's reductive perspective and xenophobia in general and anti-Semitism in particular. As Maddox suggests, part of what makes this passage compelling is that it asks us to read Bloom stereoscopically, to regard the perspectives of both narrators as faulty, partial, and blurred, and to value Bloom as

something that, for these narrators, is largely ineffable. He is neither the crude caricature of the "jewie" painted by the unnamed "I" nor, for that matter, the "distinguished scientist Herr Professor Luitpold Blumenduft" parodied by the grandiose exaggerator.

These monocular perspectives are linked to cultural narratives and also to questions of style and language as well. These are ways of seeing, too, and, like, cultural narratives, they can shape and warp what and how we see. The grandiose exaggerator in particular is used to parody specific types of "dishonest" language, including the epic catalogue, the "newspaper item," and many other "'discourses' of Irish society---the medical, legal, religious, scientific, and social" (Lawrence 107). While the unnamed narrator's language is dishonest due to its reductiveness, the grandiose exaggerator's language is dishonest because it is used to "enhance," puff up, and sentimentalize: it is "aggrandizement carried to its extreme" (Bowen 67). As Zack Bowen claims, and as most of us probably note as well, this extreme parodying of styles often achieves considerable comic effects, "debunking" the values implicit in and coincident with a given style. A case in point is that the use of the pseudo-elevated epic style parodies the sentimentalized view that the Irish have of themselves in much of Joyce's fiction, while not discounting it altogether. Bowen argues that it "offers paradoxically a comically revitalized sense of the injustices done [to] Ireland even while the advocates of Ireland's grandeur are being made to appear inherently foolish" (68). In my view, the effect produced by this is the idea that since the Irish cannot see themselves accurately, as they actually are, but persist in idealizing and romanticizing their past, they cannot realize their actual potential: what they could in reality become.

This is why Bloom, as an exemplar of a sort of honest, undistorted language, becomes increasingly important in this chapter. While some of what he says is parodied by the narrators, such as his pronouncement on love, Bloom's most moving lines are written in the chapter's plainest language, almost overshadowed by the chapter's linguistic pyrotechnics. Bloom's pronouncements on the futility of force and the importance of love, both of which are defined by Bloom as the opposite of something else, function like a few seconds of silence in a piece of loud music. We note this in Bloom's attempt to counter the simplistic assertions of the citizen and the other barflies without provoking them necessarily to violence. For example, after the citizen criticizes the British navy for its harsh disciplinary practices, Bloom asks, "But […] isn't discipline the same everywhere. I mean wouldn't it be the same here if you put force against force?" (*U* 270).

Obviously, while Bloom is saying that an Irish navy would enforce discipline as strictly as do the British, he is also being used here to draw attention to how the citizen and his fellow replicate this enforcement of discipline in their interactions with Bloom, criticizing his statements for failing to conform to their logic. Their logic, or perspective, is monocular, and exclusive: they see the Irish as unique in their having been persecuted. Bloom's logic or perspective is stereoscopic, wider and clearer, and this is useful for redefining or reframing some of the significant moral questions about citizenship, tolerance, and national identity that are explored in the chapter. Bloom's direct speech is used as a counterweight to the discourses of the others. In fact, in this chapter of dual, nearly insuperable narrative voices, Bloom seems a David confronted by Goliaths, a motif that is consonant with the chapter's focus on gigantism, and is subtly suggested

through the use of lengthier paragraphs for the two narrators in contrast with Bloom's much shorter, pithier comments and rejoinders. Bloom is shown to resist in two main ways, as a thematic character representing the larger idea of speaking out against injustices, and as a synthetic character whose speech is unassimilable by the narrators, and can only be quoted or reported directly, not paraphrased, much like Bloom's earlier interior monologue.

We note this resistance in the presentation of Bloom's wider, stereoscopic view of the problem of persecution, in the exchanges between Bloom and the rest of the group, all of whom are shown to challenge Bloom regarding his statements. Joyce's treatment or set-up implies that persecution is replicated on a smaller scale within a nation, even within the dynamics of the group surrounding Bloom in the bar. When Bloom states that "all the history of the world is full" of persecution, which, for Bloom, enables "national hatred among nations," he is asked to clarify and define what a nation is, and Bloom answers that a "nation is the same people living in the same place" (*U* 272). While this definition is intriguing, our interest is in how it is framed. That is, while Bloom's sentiments are appealing, we are more interested in their form than their substance per se. However, Bloom's definition dissolves the content into the form. The sentence is disarmingly straightforward, practical, and, though simplistic, it relies less on the kind of exaggerated or reductive narratives associated with the chapter's two narrators, the unnamed "I" and the grandiose exaggerator. We note a similar effect in Bloom's grappling with the question of cultural and social politics in general. After implicitly critiquing the barflies for persecuting him by referring to the plight of contemporary Jews "sold by auction in Morocco like slaves or cattle," Bloom becomes the kind of

"pedagogical voice" we noted earlier, albeit one that espouses a larger, more

comprehensive narrative and corresponding ethics:

> ---But it's no use, says he. Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life
> for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it's the
> very opposite of that that is really life.
> ---What? says Alf.
> ---Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred. […]. (*U* 273)

As with Bloom's definition of a nation, we are more interested in how it is framed. After

all, love is not the opposite of hatred, but is closely aligned with it, as both are powerful

emotions: the opposite of love (and hatred) is indifference. Still, we can still regard how

Bloom attempts to define love as more significant than what he defines it as. Instead of

forcefully asserting his definition, Bloom attempts to engage his hearers through a

practical appeal to their common humanity, however awkwardly it is stated, as is

especially true of the phrase "the very opposite of that that is really life."

We have seen that these two narrative personae in "Cyclops" function as

embodiments of some of the same insidious and pernicious cultural narratives---the

narrative nets---we focused on earlier, such as nationality. We noted at the outset of this

section that while Stephen is used as a device for exploring the possibility of escaping

these specific narratives, he is still entangled in a narrative of artistic creation, perhaps

even caught in the net of narrative itself. Bloom is used to exemplify resistance to cultural

narratives. This effect is achieved first through the use of interior monologue and then

through the use of dual (and dueling) narrative voices, which attempt to define Bloom

through their respective monocular lenses, one reductive, and the other grandiose and

exaggerated. So we move from seeing Bloom as he views himself to how others regard

him. Of course, while the unnamed "I" is a homodiegetic narrator participating in the

narrative, we cannot pinpoint the identity of the grandiose exaggerator, who is extradiegetic, external to the fictional world. The idea of this sort of narrator leads us to our final point about Bloom's exemplifying a principle of resistance *in* the narrative and *to* the narrative. This is observable in several of the later chapters, such as "Oxen of the Sun," which imitates and borrows the styles of a range of English writers through the centuries to simulate embryonic development and gestation, "Eumaeus," which is written entirely in clichés to convey the impression of fatigue, and "Ithaca," which uses catechistic questioning, a kind of "antiliterary mask of science" to present us with a "welter of undifferentiated facts" to neutralize the sentimental aspect of Bloom's and Stephen's finally meeting and conversing with each other (Lawrence 180; Bowen 76). In each of these chapters, Bloom is not presented internally through interior monologue or externally through narrative voices but through what Kenner calls the "screens of language" (*Joyce's Voices* 41). That is, the focus of this later chapter is not on the consciousness of the characters or on describing their actions but on the style of language itself, whether the pastiches of "Oxen of the Sun," the cliché's of "Eumaeus," or the pseudo-scientific question-and-answer of "Ithaca." In these chapters, Joyce renders the themes linguistically, simulating them abstractly through stylistic treatments. My final point is that even when Bloom is viewed through these "screens of language," when we have to struggle with the text just to figure out what is being described or narrated, Bloom is still used to exemplify the resilient ethical mettle I have been describing.

This is evident even in what is perhaps the novel's most heavily linguistically engineered chapter, "Oxen of the Sun." In this chapter, Joyce takes as "literary models" mainly the "didactic models of the essay and sermon, forms in which the writer seeks to

persuade" us of some moral truth (Lawrence 126). As Lawrence argues, the overall effect

that Joyce achieves through his use of a "compendium of rhetorical models" is the

demonstration that there is "no neutral rhetoric, no basic style from which all depart"

(126). Indeed, Bowen goes further, claiming the chapter underscores the "magnitude of

distortion writers build into their narratives": the more the writer asserts a signature style,

for example, the "more the writer biases the work" (71). Accordingly, that Joyce imitates

and parodies so many styles nullifies the claims of any one style's being authoritative.

My point, though, is that despite this technique of parody and pastiche, Bloom, as well as

the larger thematic idea he represents, remains stable as a kind of moral principle,

resistant to the chapter's stunning (and sometimes bewildering and frustrating) tour-de-

force of literary styles. In fact, as we noted earlier in the "Cyclops" chapter, Bloom

functions as a sort of tiny David-like counterweight that stands in contrast to the Goliath-

like textual voice or narrator.

As we know, Bloom has come to the lying-in hospital to check up on Mrs.

Purefoy, who is in a painful, protracted labor. Despite the opacities of the styles, in this

case Malory's, we learn that Bloom empathizes with Mrs. Purefoy: "Sir Leopold heard

on the upfloor cry on high and he wondered what cry that it was whether of child or

woman and I marvel, said he, that it be not come or now. Meseems it dureth overlong" (*U*

318). Usually, the use of such a style would create a comic effect due to its apparent

incongruity. While there are a number of passages that achieve comic effects, this does

not seem to be one of them. It is of course not played totally straight, but the use of

Malory-like style can be interpreted as a technique for framing Bloom's quest as a noble

enterprise. Further, Bloom is shown to feel sympathy for Stephen, whom he regards, in

an Elizabethan prose-style, as living "riotously with those wastrels [such as Mulligan, Lynch, and Lenehan] and murder[ing] his goods with whores" (*U* 320). While this passage suggests that Bloom is prone to moralizing, his reaction stems from what seems to be genuine solicitousness, and not a distortion that creeps in due to literary style. That is, instead of merely calling attention to itself, and language's capacity for distortion, the style is being used to characterize Bloom, in accordance with what we have been discovering in and about him all along. This is taken up numerous times throughout the chapter. To cite one last instance, when the thunder cracks, and Stephen grows frightened, "Master Bloom" offers him "calming words to slumber his great fear, advertising how it was no other thing but a hubbub noise that he heard, the discharge of fluid from the thunderhead, look you, having taken place, and all of the order of a natural phenomenon" (*U* 323). My point is that while Joyce's parodies and pastiches tend to divert our attention away from the actions being narrated, when we sift through the particularities of the prose-styles, we discover that Bloom is still being used to exemplify the kind of moral imagination, sense of dignity, tolerance, and compassion that we noted in our first encounter with him. It is as if Bloom, having been used to model resistance to the cultural narratives of his social world, internally and externally, is now being used to model a more abstract imperviousness to the pervasive and insidious shaping influence of linguistic styles themselves.

Over the course of this "moralogue," we have discovered that while Joyce's texts deal with questions of personal and public morality, often criticizing specific moral concepts, norms, and values, they hardly demolish the concept of the moral per se--- though, as I note in the next chapter, many critics value them precisely for the idea that

they do this, at least in relation to the question of the literary. In many respects, these texts demonstrate a growing concern with modeling the moral through increasingly radical literary and linguistic devices and techniques. As we have observed, each of the three texts we have analyzed becomes more concerned with refining and redefining the question of the moral, even while they become increasingly innovative in terms of their deployment of formal approaches, literary and rhetorical techniques, and narrative structuring. This deployment reflects the ways in which Joyce's use of techniques and devices becomes increasingly intertwined with a new and more refined approach to moral fiction, a process or "moralogue" that refines the moral not *out of* but *into* existence.

CHAPTER 4:

REBOOTING THE MORAL:

JOHN GARDNER'S *THE SUNLIGHT DIALOGUES*

> [Ben Hodge] knew stories, more than the average man, and when he told them the stories would grow clearer and clearer until the moral stood out like a pearl-handled nickel-plated pistol on a stump. (bk. 1, ch. 3, 30)

> CLUMLY: I can't understand you. You seem such a *moral* person, and yet---
> SUNLIGHT: I make murder possible. Yes! […] It baffles you. (bk. 7, ch. 3, 332)

> "The aesthetic response is in large part a response to order as moral affirmation," Freeman said. (bk. 13, ch. 2, 482)

So far my analyses have concentrated on a number of the innovative literary

devices and techniques deployed by two of the twentieth century's most monumental

writers, Conrad and Joyce, to develop their respective inquiries into the moral. These

authors are master stylists, literary colossi, and we value their texts for epitomizing the

modernist aesthetic, for redefining the category of the literary and problematizing its

relation to the moral. In their treatment, the artistic is increasingly perceived as rivaling

and even supplanting the moral. In this chapter, I turn to the idiosyncratic John Gardner, a

lesser-known but equally pivotal figure in the twentieth-century literary history I have

been laying out in this study. My main argument is that this once-popular, then notorious,

and now neglected author of several "cult-classic" postmodernist texts, such as *Grendel*

(1971) and *The Sunlight Dialogues* (1972), extends the process we identified being

enacted in and by Conrad's and Joyce's novels, dialoguing with them. In fact, just as "moral chaos" was the operative phrase for our analysis of Conrad's process in *The Secret Agent*, and as "moralogue" was for our study of Joyce's *Dubliners*, *Portrait*, and *Ulysses*, the key term in this chapter is "dialogue" (McWilliams 42-3).[1] Building on Dean McWilliams's claim that the novel's subject is dialogue understood as "the search for moral consensus through the generous and sympathetic consideration of opposed perspectives," my overarching argument is that Gardner uses dialogue not only as a thematic idea and device for staging a conflict between the two main characters and their respective philosophies, but that Gardner abstracts and distills the concept of dialogue and develops it into this novel's overarching method, its governing strategy. His deployment of literary devices and techniques serves to simulate---and stimulate---a multidimensional, multilayered, literary dialogue on the question of moral responsibilities in an age of disorder and confusion.

The novel's large-scale process is dialogical, dialectical, and discursive: it aims to reboot or rehabilitate the moral as a serious literary category not by illustrating its characters' morally exemplary behavior but through modeling the ways in which they develop a larger, more comprehensive morality. This is most readily observable in the process of personal development Fred Clumly undergoes. As one example of a "moral-artist" or storyteller-figure embedded in the narrative, Clumly, not unlike Stephen Dedalus, functions initially as a pedagogical target for the Sunlight Man, until, gradually

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[1] Of course, many Gardner scholars observe that the novel's title is deliberately misleading. The Sunlight Man does almost all the talking, and these talks generally take place at night. As McWilliams wryly phrases it, the novel "might better be named *The Twilight Monologues*": it is "suffused with the crepuscular glow of a declining moral order" and the Sunlight Man's "opaque" lectures offer "as much obscurity as light to our understanding of this decline" (43). I discuss this in more detail later.

through interacting and dialoguing with this philosophical opposite, he is shown to synthesize his and his opposite's perspectives and develop into a pedagogical voice in his own right. Clumly's process is reflected on a larger scale in the ongoing, open-ended dialoguing enabled by the text's techniques and devices, its narrative structuring and formal approaches. These include Gardner's putting moral opposites into dialogue with each other, use of an abdicating or disappearing narrator, "monstrous" characters, and even his approximating the effects of a technologically-enabled transmission of discourses---the novel is, in many respects, more of a "multimedia" text than any we have analyzed so far. These components all have their say in the novel's dialogue, inviting us to join in the discussion, interact with it and extend it: the "multimedia" effects add layering to the text, but these layers also offer perspectives on the novel's subject matter.

The paradigm offered by Gardner is crucial to this study because he attempts to rehabilitate the moral as a serious literary category at a time when terms like "moral" and "ethical" were marginalized, excluded, and arguably "banished" from literary-critical discourse. Gardner's work complicates the separation of the moral from the literary that began in the late nineteenth century with the aesthetic movement, gained momentum during the modernist era, and remained constant in the postmodernist age. Gardner's work epitomizes an approach that reconnects the moral and the literary, not to illustrate specific moral concepts or issues, but to examine them through the process of embedding them dramatically in narrative. Thus, Gardner's example serves as a corrective to a longstanding critical consensus that valued the literary chiefly for its perceived separation from the moral, a view that prevailed roughly for the half-century following the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Gardner's work inverts the dynamic we identified in our

analysis of Joyce's "moralogue": while Joyce's work belies the notion that an author's interest in questions of style and form signals his or her disengagement from the moral, Gardner's fiction challenges the related belief that an author's concern with moral issues indicates an insufficient commitment to the aesthetic and literary, to style and form.

The qualities I am describing are most evident in Gardner's masterpiece, *The Sunlight Dialogues*. This novel fuses the technical and structural complexity of *Grendel* with a more sustained, thorough engagement with a range of philosophically weighty, moral questions, such as the difficulty of harmonizing private values with public ones, balancing our desire for personal freedom with our larger community's need for order and structure, and aligning human-made laws with cosmic justice. However, my primary interest is in the moral dimensions of the functions performed by its literary and rhetorical devices, narrative structuring, and formal components, in how these enable the multilayered dialogue mentioned earlier. In particular, I focus on the novel's examination of the role of the storyteller-figure, its stress on the interaction of human characters over and above linguistic play, and its emphasis, through its use of quotations, epigraphs, and allusions, on art's ability to create order in a cosmos that appears meaningless and indifferent. My main points are that the novel draws attention to the importance of the storyteller by making this figure conspicuous by his absence, in effect, dramatizing the death of the author. Instead of dehumanizing its characters through a focus on linguistic play, it paradoxically "re-humanizes" them by *monstrifying* them bodily and by emphasizing the texture of *their* language, their linguistic interplay, in their spoken, "tape-recorded" dialogues. Finally, the novel stresses art's capacity as a structuring device through its deployment of paratextual matter. The novel's use of these

components invites us to rethink the relation of the moral to the literary. It demonstrates more subtly and fully that the moral in literature has to do not with how writers didactically illustrate their characters' morally exemplary behavior, but with how, through which narrative methods, authors use fiction as a dialogical device for modeling the kinds of processes by which their characters, for example, develop a larger, more comprehensive and equally compassionate morality.

Sunlight in an "Icy-Hearted, Ethical Age"[2]

In each chapter so far, I have addressed the cultural and historical circumstances in which a given literary or critical text appeared, analyzing the rhetoric *in* the text as well as the rhetoric *of* the text: how it dialogues with its larger cultural, geographical, and historical context, how it responds to it. My earlier study of Joyce illuminates the situation Gardner encountered when he first started writing and publishing in the mid-1960s, an age in which the concept of the moral and its relation to the literary had been redefined and possibly refined out of existence, i.e., out of consideration. Given this, I argue that while one of Gardner's chief goals is to invite discussion of serious moral issues, not to preach or moralize, we should not regard his aim as modest or unexceptional, since Gardner attempts this "reboot" during the heyday of postmodernism and high literary theory. In this period, it was not just that terms like "moral" and "ethics" were devalued, disqualified, and dismissed from the domain of the literary and the critical, but so were many of the other terms we claimed earlier were directly related to it:

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[2] The phrase "icy-hearted, ethical age" actually appears in Gardner's 1979 *Freddy's Book*. In context, it reflects the first-person narrator's view that a fellow academic will "go far in this icy-hearted, ethical age" because he focuses on "specialization, privatism, and petty rules and distinctions" in order to avoid personal and professional entanglement in messy human affairs (Gardner, *Freddy's Book* 12; Morace 204).

"narrative" was suspect, the self was a fiction, "morality" was a function of language, and the author was dead.

While it is ironic that at virtually the same moment Roland Barthes (and later Michel Foucault) is commemorating the "death of the author," Gardner is tasking writers with discharging moral obligations both to their society and literary craft, my objective is not to dispute these postmodernist beliefs, but to map out the metaphoric crossroads that occasioned Gardner's attempt to reboot the moral's relation to the literary. Still, how we conceptualize the moral is inextricably linked to how we theorize about narrative, the self, and language. For example, while many literary theorists believe that our moral concepts are created wholly by the language we use, e.g., moral terminology, moral philosophers such as Samuel Taylor argue that our moral terms operate like spatial terms, those we use to orient ourselves in physical space: we need our sense of right and wrong every bit as much we need our sense of right and left and up and down; our words for these define, clarify, and situate them in relation to ourselves but they do not "create" these concepts arbitrarily out of nothing, any more than our term "gravity" creates the phenomenon it describes. Similarly, our moral concepts are linked to our ideas of the self. The danger of seeing the self as a product of institutionalized discourses is that it seems to dramatically qualify human agency, to view complex human beings not as people who reflect and then choose but as automata whose actions, thoughts, and motivations are determined by disembodied discursive powers. All of these factors contributed to remapping the literary domain in ways that made dealing with or focusing on moral issues in a text seem inappropriate, irrelevant, or old-fashioned. The moral and the

literary came to be redefined, regarded not just as separate concerns but as immiscible, as

representing contradictory, mutually incompatible impulses.[3]

While the tendency I am describing was probably already underway when Joyce's

work appeared and received critical notice, it gained traction in the subsequent literary

and critical responses to Joyce's fiction. Many critics trace this process back to the later

chapters of *Ulysses*, where a focus on language itself supersedes the novel's earlier focus

on representing consciousness. While we noted that Joyce's texts engage serious moral

issues regarding questions of citizenship, tolerance, and national identity, many literary

critics usually valued them for their form or "discourse" rather than for their thematic

content or "story," let alone for their moral vision. As David Sidorsky argues, literary

critics and artists alike long hailed Joyce and many other modernists as victors in a

struggle to liberate literature from the "illegitimate claims of morality" (137). This point

is especially relevant to our discussion of Gardner because, following Joyce, it became a

commonplace that literature was no longer required to demonstrate some sort of "didactic

moral purpose or overt political commitment" (Sidorsky 150). As is, this

conceptualization of the literary accords with my definition of moral fiction: "moral"

rather than "moralistic," this is fiction that confronts and engages moral issues but avoids

preachy moralizing and overt didacticism through the use of particular narrative

strategies and literary devices and techniques. One of the problems with the tendency that

Sidorsky is describing (and which he is ambivalent about) is that it is eventually taken to

an extreme and congeals into a distinct principle based on the idea that a fully "realized

work of art" is self-contained, and achieves as much as possible the goal of "autonomy

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[3] I address these tendencies in greater detail, registering my dissatisfaction with them, in my Introduction
and also in my first chapter, "What is Moral Fiction?"

from moral purpose" (Sidorsky 137-8). What this meant in terms of the production of novels is that in the decades following Joyce and preceding Gardner, many critics and authors came to esteem literary texts that represented a "closed system or word game," not a "possible moral force in the world": on this view, since a novel's primary worth was its "aesthetic quality and elegance," the chief "moral activity" incumbent on writers was to produce "objects of beauty worthy of contemplation in themselves" (Begiebing 1-2).[4] As summed up by Kevin Dettmar, postmodern stylistics "values textual play over [the] high artistic purpose" that Gardner ascribed to fiction (10). For Dettmar, a typical postmodern text is characterized by a "playful unwillingness to take itself seriously"; it is "Carnivalesque," and laughs at itself (122). But is it not possible that a text can take itself seriously and also laugh at itself in the same process? This is a question left unaddressed, unanswered by Dettmar.

One of the peculiar ironies of this complicated development is that the separation of the moral from the literary itself developed into a type of moral injunction. It was translated into the postmodern credo that a literary text is not only to be completely free *from* the moral but entirely free *of* the moral, that a literary text is heretical if it takes up the question of the moral, that it is somehow less literary if it engages serious moral issues. For many writers and critics following after Joyce, the problem was not how to

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[4] These tendencies were identified by much earlier critics, and they became more pronounced in the work of postmodernists. In his seminal 1925 essay, "The Dehumanization of Art," José Ortega y Gasset observed that the "new style" of art, i.e., the avant-garde, tended to "dehumanize art" by focusing on form (14). Ortega argued that while the new art was wary of "sham," and aimed at "scrupulous realization," it generally regarded art as a "play and nothing else," a "thing of no transcending consequence" (14). Conceptualizing art in this way reflects the anxiety I brought up earlier in my discussion of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, namely, the idea that the universe is a chaos, and human existence is meaningless, so let us maximize as many moments of pleasure through the enjoyment of exquisitely achieved pieces of art. This is, as Per Winther characterizes it, a kind of "cheerful nihilism" (163).

write about the moral but how to avoid writing about it. This view is especially noticeable in Vladimir Nabokov's essays and critical writings. For example, in his 1956 "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*," Nabokov insists that he is "neither a reader nor a writer of didactic fiction," that "*Lolita* has no moral in tow," and that a "work of fiction" is important to him only insofar as it "affords" what he refers to "bluntly" as "aesthetic bliss": this he defines as a "sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm" (314-5). While these states of being involve the moral, and are also applicable to a tremendous range of texts, Nabokov excludes what he calls the "topical trash" of the day as well as the classic "Literature of Ideas" of the past: for Nabokov, there are "not many such books" that provide the "aesthetic bliss" he is talking about (315).

While we are mistaken to take Nabokov's mischievous pronouncements too much at face value, the kind of self-willed emancipation from the moral he describes manifested itself in many ways, several of which have already been touched on in the previous chapters. For example, we noted that Joyce, especially in the later chapters of *Ulysses*, allowed each chapter's dominant themes to determine the chapter's style(s). Instead of being filtered through the consciousness of characters, the narrative is heavily engineered, treated, and mediated through "screens of language" (Kenner, *Joyce's Voices* 41). Accordingly, in lieu of a character's consciousness, we encounter the "stylistic" and "rhetorical masks" of a "chameleonic" textual voice that takes on and performs different literary styles at will (Lawrence 8, passim; Cohn 30). For critics such as Lawrence, Joyce's stressing of the "relativity […] of all styles" not only deemphasized the mimetic role of the characters but also acted as a means for critiquing the larger idea of narrative

itself, and in this way it anticipates the postmodern "incredulity" towards what Dettmar, adopting Jean-François Lyotard's terminology, describes as "metanarratives": the "big stories that societies and cultures tell themselves in order to make sense of their world" (Lawrence 137; Dettmar 8). Dettmar suggests that the "heroic conception of the self" was foremost among the metanarratives Joyce slated for dismantling, a dismantling that Dettmar claims was mirrored in what he regards as Joyce's "relentless demolition of the heroic structure of the novel" (116-7).

As stated, these tendencies are very much in synch with my definition of moral fiction. We observed earlier that Joyce does not demolish heroic ideals or moral concepts as such but refines and redefines them. He conceptualizes the hero not as a rebellious antihero, à la Stephen Dedalus, but as the average, everyday anti-antihero, Leopold Bloom. Bloom's heroic values are manifested in his respect and empathy for others, his affirmation of everyday living, sense of dignity, his ability to resist Dublin's particular cultural narratives, its metanarratives, while charting his own narrative. But what Dettmar claims about Joyce's final text, *Finnegans Wake*, underscores some of the problems Gardner identified in much of the postmodern fiction of his age. While many critics value *Finnegans Wake* as the "ideal proof-text for every aspect of postmodern *écriture*," Dettmar's criticism of it resembles what Gardner scholars claim motivated Gardner's literary project (Dettmar 210). Like many later postmodernist novels, *Finnegans Wake* is a "conceptual novel" to a fault: it is "more interesting as a concept than as art" because it does not "interact dynamically" and "dialogically" with the language(s) of the larger culture but rather settles "statically into a hermetic language of its own" (Dettmar 216-7).

It is this static quality and this lack of an observable process that are at variance with the definition of moral fiction I have been developing here.[5]

As I have been stressing, this concept of process is central to valuing a text as moral fiction. This process is linked to the idea of narrative. For Gardner and for many new ethical critics, narrative is the form par excellence for staging processes, e.g., posing ethical dilemmas and examining moral concepts. As we observed earlier, by Gardner's time, it was not just that the moral had been separated from the literary, but so too had the concept of narrative as a structuring device with a beginning, middle, and end. Instead of valuing narrative as a necessary structuring principle in human life, as a device we cannot live without, many postmodernists strived to subvert the idea of narrative, usually by using devices to expose the artifice and mediation of their texts. As MacIntyre regretfully argues, one of the rationales behind this tendency was the idea that "narrative is very different from life," and to "present human life in the form of a narrative is always to falsify it" (214). This translated into fiction whose techniques and devices were used to emphasize that human life is "composed of discrete actions which lead nowhere, which have no order"; the only order in "human events" is that which is imposed "retrospectively" by the "storyteller: these events had no such order "while they were lived" (MacIntyre 214).

The problems I have been identifying represent many of Gardner's major themes in *The Sunlight Dialogues*. The goal of Gardner's novel is not the explicit "inculcation of

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[5] Dean McWilliams argues further that while much postmodern fiction, especially the American metafiction of the 1960s and 1970s, often seems "witty, playful, and inventive" when compared to the "ponderous sobriety of much realist and modernist writing," it seldom engages us for very long: though they represent "ingenious verbal puzzles," postmodernist and metafictional texts rarely reward multiple readings: "once solved," they can be "put away […] and forgotten" (McWilliams xii).

morality," any more than this is the overarching goal of my study (Daly 422). Read as moral fiction, the novel's main goal is to examine what these postmodern suspicions of moral concepts and narrative, and the attempt to separate them from human life, look like in practice, i.e., as they are translated into and are shown to inform the thoughts and actions of the characters in the novel. The novel critiques a postmodern outlook on the moral, narrative, life and art, not by illustrating its shortcomings but by thematizing and dramatizing them.

Erasing the Narrator, Abdicating Moral Responsibilities

The overarching claim of this chapter is that Gardner's *The Sunlight Dialogues* marks an attempt to rehabilitate the moral in relation to the literary, to reboot it, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period in which the moral was regarded by literary critics and artists with a degree of suspicion, as antiquated and old-fashioned, as irrelevant to literary-critical discourse. Given this set of circumstances, it might initially seem that Gardner's interest in the moral stems from a distaste for the ground-breaking techniques devised by modernist and postmodernist writers, that Gardner's literary project, at least as Gardner articulated it in his problematic *On Moral Fiction*, reflects a reactionary desire to return to using the sorts of literary devices and techniques that prevailed in the nineteenth century, as John Barth claimed (196-7). However, while Gardner's texts *do* emphasize characterization and plotting over linguistic texture and literary game-playing, they do not reflect a wish to adopt the stance of moral certainty exemplified by the use of an omniscient narrator, an authorial teller, as his text's primary "storyteller." This is a figure we have encountered in array of guises: Conrad's hybrid narrator, Joyce's "invisible" or impersonal narrator, the textual voice, as well as the

"chameleonic" "arranger" who, especially in the later chapters of *Ulysses*, speaks through a series of "stylistic" or "rhetorical masks."[6] While the narrative and narrative structuring of *The Sunlight Dialogues* suggests a narrator that is an amalgam of these earlier types, Gardner's narrator is mainly conspicuous by his absence, by his holding back from voicing explicit moral evaluations regarding the novel's characters and events. Not unlike the Sunlight Man, Gardner's narrator operates as a kind of magician who pulls a disappearing act, thus stylistically mimicking the Sunlight Man's indifference. What we discover in *The Sunlight Dialogues* is not so much an invisible, absent, or covert narrator, but rather a narrator that abdicates many of the evaluating functions we associate with such a device. Gardner's narrator or textual voice is largely indifferent towards the narrative's events and characters, seldom framing moral judgments about them. The use of this device makes for moral complexity and ambiguity, not moral certainty, and thematizes the idea of the death or disappearance of the author.

As I have been stressing throughout this study, my methodology asks us to pay special attention to a text's storyteller. While Conrad's and Joyce's narrators or textual voices are often used to call into question ideas of moral certainty by emphasizing the role of mediation in speculating on the moral, a distinctive narrator or narrative presence and concomitant perspective pervades their texts, even if it is unstable or mutable. While the bulk of Gardner's novel sticks close to the perspectives of his main characters, Gardner's aim is less to represent his characters' consciousness and more to avoid having

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[6] In the next, final chapter, we discover what I call the highly-opinionated narrator in *White Teeth*, a narrator that performs its narrative identity not unlike the ways in which the text's characters perform their identities. This is contrasted with the (seemingly) skeptical, evasive, or reluctant first-person narrator(s) of *Oscar Wao*, a novel that thematizes many larger ramifications of narration through its use of a first-person narrator in conjunction with a number of decoy devices designed to divert attention away from the fact that the narrative is told mainly through one voice.

an intrusive narrator telling us what we should think. His narrator's default position is indifferent and objective. The use of this type of narrator achieves the effect of avoiding authorial preaching or moralizing, which many readers find disagreeable, but more interestingly, the narrative situation involves readers in experiencing a kind of narrative and moral void, a vacuum in which the narrator, as the author's stand-in, appears "dead" or non-existent, leaving us readers on our own as we struggle to come to terms, for example, with the Sunlight Man's speeches. Gardner's use of this narrator or textual voice also serves as an oblique or indirect critique of the idea that the author, the storyteller, is discredited or "dead."[7] While this renunciation of a self-assured narrative voice creates the illusion of non-mediated contact with the characters and the events they experience, more importantly, its use in the novel suggests a link between the lawlessness and chaos exemplified by the Sunlight Man and the disappearance of the "moral" storyteller-figure embodied by Ben Hodges and possibly also by Clumly, late in the novel. The novel seems to suggest that if storytellers relinquish their moral obligations to guide and teach their societies or communities, no one should be surprised if our morality, our sense of right and wrong, becomes unmoored, and is up for grabs.

This theme of the abdicating narrator is initially sounded in the novel's ironically titled "Prologue": though placed first before the novel's twenty-four books, the prologue actually functions as an epilogue, describing the situation that obtains following the death of the Sunlight Man, Clumly's forced retirement from the police, and his seemingly

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[7] This sense of the displacement of the narrative voice is further accomplished through the use of a range of heterogeneous textual matter, such as quoted poetry, pseudo-transcriptions of tape-recorded conversations, facsimiles of memoranda and a death certificate, and more than a dozen full-page illustrations drawn by John Napper. I say more about these devices later in my analysis of the novel's use of the device of the tape-recording and my discussion of the novel's "peritext": its use of epigraphs and book titles.

triumphant if rambling speech before the Dairymen's League. This has been Clumly's

moment in the limelight as a storyteller, but, undercutting the positive note on which the

novel is concluded, the Prologue tells us that Clumly's influence is negligible: in town,

"opinion was divided, in fact, over whether he'd gone away somewhere or died"

("Prologue" 1). Further, this "Prologue" contains one of the few scenes in which we can

discern relatively clear traces of the narrator, who renders objective commentary about

the Judge, Clumly, and their interaction. The Judge whom Clumly is visiting exemplifies

the ideas of entropy, societal breakdown, and collapse that Clumly, now as a kind of

storyteller-figure, is trying to stave off. He is symbolic of the moral vacuum that prevails

in the aftermath of the events depicted in the novel when the storyteller has let his moral

obligations slide, i.e., has ceased to engage the actions of his community. Shortly before

retiring from our view, the narrative voice, shifting briefly to the simple present tense,

tells us that although it is May outside, it is "winter in the Judge's room, for nothing in

this world is universal any more [sic]; there is neither wisdom nor stability, and

faithfulness is dead. Or, at any rate, such was the Judge's solemn opinion" ("Prologue"

3). What the narrative voice suggests is that in the absence of "moral artists," such as

Clumly, public officials come to oversee their community's moral concepts. The only

order the amoral Judge posits is largely capricious: chuckling "wickedly" at his Arthurian

pun, the Judge tells Clumly that you can create order merely by giving a "man a weapon-

-say x caliber---" and by having him "fire three times in four directions" ("Prologue 1).[8]

    However, as the Judge's non-artistic vision of order is arbitrary, it is unstable,

incoherent, and ultimately leads to insanity. The Judge represents one conceptualization

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[8] My point here draws on Robert S. Fredrickson's observation that the "mad" Judge is designed to resemble a "violent version of Wallace Stevens," "waffling about an arbitrary aesthetic order" (48).

of the artist, the postmodernist who asserts the artifice of his text, who creates such

characters as Clumly. However, the Prologue contrasts the Judge's example with that of

another artist-figure, the Judge's male nurse, his personal attendant. This ambiguous

personage is suggestive of altogether different conceptions of the artist. First, Gardner's

description of him echoes Stephen Dedalus' description of the invisible artist as akin to

the God of creation. As Clumly and the Judge are holding their tête-à-tête, we learn that

this male nurse

> […] stood in the doorway cleaning the fingernails of his right hand with
> the thumbnail of his left. He was not listening. In the dusk outside, four
> miles away, a traffic light changed, and a police car started up, clean and
> precise as a young child's tooth. The policemen, driving, waved to a man
> he knew on the sidewalk, and the man waved back with a smile. It was
> like a salute. ("Prologue" 2-3)

This passage features a kind of interspersing technique that Gardner uses in several key

places throughout the novel, a sort of jump-cut or panning out to present a vignette

remote from the present setting but with some relevance to the represented action. Here,

its use implies that the male nurse is all-seeing and omniscient, not just invisible like

Stephen's conception of the artist, but omnipresent like the actual God of creation. This

link is further underscored through a Biblical allusion. After we learn that the Judge has

had a nightmare in which the male nurse has "shot him in the back," the Judge exclaims

to him: "I like you, […] You're like a son to me!" (Prologue 3). The Judge's estimation

of himself as the creator of order suggests that he regards himself as a God-the-father

figure with the male nurse as his son. However, the nurse subverts this dynamic through

his ambiguous response to the Judge's declaration of affection: "'As to that,' the

attendant said, 'I'm what I am'" (Prologue 3). Though not an exact match, this

formulation echoes the passage in Exodus in which God tells Moses His name is "I am that I am." However, while the passage in Exodus marks the beginning of God's relation with the Jews, in Gardner's novel it represents the waning of the omniscient God-like narrative voice. Unlike the omniscient narrators of the nineteenth century, Gardner's narrator appears to abdicate its moral obligations, to cede the field.

Following the "Prologue," the omniscient narrator as authorial teller largely disappears, only to turn up intermittently in a few short passages, and in these he assiduously withholds pronouncing any explicit morally evaluative statements. Gardner's later use of this narrative voice further underscores the idea that while we may find an intrusive narrator irritating, this figure's disappearance represents a kind of loss, especially as most of Gardner's characters appear misguided, in need of direction as they struggle to make sense of the growing lawlessness that is enveloping them and their society. Further, the inclusion of these brief passages of described violence serves to belie the postmodern idea that a text need not engage with topical issues. These passages appear at the end of their respective chapters, suggesting that they also serve as intrusions of grim everyday reality in a sometimes fabulous-seeming text. What I am describing is particularly noticeable in three specific passages, all of which deal with reports of senseless violence. Emphasizing the random nature of this violence, the narrator achieves the effect of underlining both his omniscience and objectivity, possibly even his apparent indifference. In the first passage, only the narrator (and now we) is aware of these various, disconnected acts of violence and lawlessness:

> Unbeknownst to Clumly or anyone else, three boys in the alley by the post office were letting the air out of people's tires with an ice pick. Elsewhere---beside the Tonawanda---a woman was digging a grave for her

> illegitimate child three hours old. Jim Hume was chasing his cows back through the fence some hunter had cut. (bk. 1, ch. 5, 58).

The narrator reports these acts objectively: his only evaluative term is describing the child as "illegitimate," and this is not a particularly harsh term of disapprobation. The narrator does not tell us what to think but leaves us on our own to grapple with these events and try to make sense of them. What tenuously connects them is the idea of inconvenience. The boys letting the air out of the tires want to inconvenience the owners of the cars, the woman digging the grave regards her child, who is presumably though not definitely still living, as an inconvenience, and the hunter who cut the fence regarded it as an inconvenience to him. Clearly, the woman's digging the grave is the worst transgression here. However, the placement of its description in the middle creates an impression of moral relativity, as does the dispassionate, objective tone. Obviously, burying a newborn is far worse than letting the air out of someone's tires or cutting a fence to have access to a hunting ground. But the narrator relinquishes his prerogative to signal his disapprobation clearly.

While the second passage further reinforces the impression of a moral void, it also suggests that these disconnected acts of violence are encroaching on us, becoming less remote from our experience, and also becoming more severe. Even here the narrator still refrains from rendering explicit condemnation.

> At the hospital, just then, a boy was being admitted through Emergency with multiple lacerations. He'd been drinking with his friends and had been pushed through a glass door during a fight. Later an old woman named Robin poisoned a neighbor's dog. (bk. 2, ch. 4, 95)

This notion of proximity, the way in which we live side-by-side with lawless cruelty, is emphasized by the increasing closeness of the relationships, that even our closest

relationships can be perilous. For example, it is unclear whether the boy's friends pushed him through the glass door or if someone else did it. The second crime is clearer: "Robin" intentionally tries to kill her neighbor's dog, and has probably succeeded at it. Obviously, as is true of the first passage, while the narrator does not signal his disapproval, we readers recognize these actions as objectionable, some extremely so. What we come to miss is an explanation, a motive for these crimes. This is true especially of the last item: why did Robin poison the dog? This seems senselessly cruel, and the narrator, having abdicated his function as a sort of moral guide, gives us few if any clues to go on.

The final act of this random violence is the most severe, and its treatment suggests that the random, disconnected events of the earlier passages are now intruding directly into the present action, and also that, like the narrator, the characters renounce their responsibilities: they seek to avoid getting involved. In the short chapter in which the passage appears, two of the novel's secondary characters, officers Figlow and Sangirgonio, are offhandedly discussing a traffic accident involving a truck carrying a number of expensive show dogs. Describing the carnage, Figlow says: "Dead dogs all over the fuckin [sic] street, or draggin [sic] themselves around with broken legs and heads tore open. I went past it [the scene of the accident]. I wasn't on duty yet" (bk. 15, ch. 2, 527). Figlow, who, in a panic, is eventually responsible for killing the Sunlight Man, is used to call attention to one of the novel's main themes: the shirking of responsibility, usually through disingenuously exploiting this sort of loophole. Not unlike the narrator in the earlier passages we discussed, Figlow refuses to get involved, even in events that are the responsibility of a police officer. As the brief chapter continues, Figlow tries to find out if the boys at the high school find his daughter attractive, and, in

response to a joke about killing all the prisoners in the cells, beams with "mock pleasure, grabbing for his gun" (bk. 15, ch. 2, 528). The text critiques this scene of callous humor by describing the aftermath of a crime.

> A heavy Negro woman with gray hair was coming up the walk, alone, moving slowly, like a burned-out star. She stared straight ahead of her but did not seem to see them. When she came into the light thrown from the office they saw blood on her arms and all over the front of her dress. […] Her forehead was torn open.

> She took a deep breath. "I killed a gentleman," she said.

This passage's dispassionate, objective style, its subject matter, and its placement at the end of its chapter link it with the previous passages. As with the other acts, we never learn anything more about this crime, or if indeed it is crime. These passages serve to contextualize the events in Gardner's novel, to situate the narrative in relation to the larger society in which crimes such as these take place. They suggest that while the novel represents a closed world of its own, it has points of contact with the one inhabited by us. Unlike the postmodernist novels I described earlier as representing a closed system or word game, Gardner's novel uses these brief authorial intrusions not to assert the artifice of his text or to parody the idea of an omniscient narrator but to remind us that there are real issues at stake in what the novel is dealing with: though playful, self-referential, even Carnivalesque, the novel is more than a hermetically sealed word game. It sometimes invites laughter, and sometimes laughs at itself, but there is also an underlying seriousness to the novel, reflected in these brief authorial intrusions.

The Sunlight Man and Fred Clumly: the Narrator's Monstrous Moral Avatars

While Gardner stages this disappearing act for his narrator, his aim is not to create the illusion of a non-mediated narrative or to represent the internal workings of his

characters' consciousnesses. While the novel focalizes through Clumly and the Sunlight Man, seeing through them, and sometimes represents their thoughts in free indirect discourse and interior monologue, the narrator's self-erasure does not set Clumly and the Sunlight Man up as reflector-characters, used as devices for showing how everyday observable reality is mirrored (and distorted) in their consciousnesses. Rather, the narrator's disappearance, this absence of an authorial teller's distinctive moral perspective, creates a moral vacuum in the narrative. In this moral void, Clumly and the Sunlight Man loom large as monstrous, outsized enormities, allegorizing their respective philosophical outlooks: they are used as devices to enact the conflict and confrontation between their opposing perspectives. To rephrase this, in lieu of a distinctive, opinionated narrative persona, an omniscient, extradiegetic, authorial teller, we encounter his stand-ins, substitutes, or, as I prefer to designate them, his "avatars." Usually referred to as "moral-artists" by Gardner scholars, these avatars are, in this case, monstrous manifestations or embodiments that perform (or try to perform) the moral functions formerly associated with the authorial teller in the virtual reality of a fictive work's storyworld. As I have been stressing, this type of figure is central to a text's constitution as moral fiction. It is an analogue used to represent and critique how writers discharge (or fail to discharge) their two-fold moral responsibilities, to their craft and to their community, self-consciously with the narrative itself. As devices, they facilitate an examination of this thematic concern without the use of an intrusive narrator, didactically spelling all this out for us.

While Clumly and the Sunlight Man, as the "avatars" of an absent, authorial teller, are used to embody conflicting moral-philosophical views regarding their larger

society, our interest as literary critics is primarily in how they and their conflicting

thought systems relate specifically to the concept of the literary. One of my arguments in

this section (and the next) is that they exemplify, by implication, divergent

conceptualizations of the moral-artist figure's obligations to his or her society, that they

represent opposing artistic archetypes, and are thus used to examine the writer's literary

responsibility specified in my methodology. In particular, they thematize, personify, and

"monstrify" the literary-critical debate regarding art's perceived "*hermetic* and *secular*

powers" (Begiebing 1). On the "*secular*" view, insofar as a text engages with its social

world and its problems, it represents a possible "moral force in the world," not through

the production of moralizing platitudes," but through a process of seeking out and

discovering "elusive but significant truths" (Begiebing 1, 4). This is the view exemplified

by Clumly, a police officer who is charged with the responsibility of dealing with the

growing lawlessness of his town, and is emphasized by the process undergone by him

due to direct contact, dialogue, with his moral opposite. In contrast, on the "*hermetic*"

view, since a text is regarded as self-contained, as a "closed system or word game," it is

exempt from the morality of its social world (Begiebing 1-2). This is the ethos embodied

by the Sunlight Man. This character is not used to register a process himself; while he

acts as the catalyst for Clumly's process, problematizing and critiquing his secular ethos,

the Sunlight Man is used to represent imperviousness to the kind of process that

underpins our definition of moral fiction and its devices. In other words, while the

Sunlight Man is associated with lawlessness and chaos, both his philosophy and he

himself qua device exude a peculiarly static quality, and my claim is that he, like

Gardner's "Grendel," is used to represent a type of postmodern artist-figure: an often

amusing, zanily madcap artist prone to cynicism, moral evasiveness, and sometimes

mean-spiritedness.[9] As we shall discover, the problem with this character's philosophy is

not that it invites him to regard existence as meaningless and to believe that the universe

is indifferent to our strivings, but that his responses to this apparent meaninglessness and

indifference are not very productive. Thus, in *The Sunlight Dialogues*, as in *Grendel*, the

monstrous is not so much embodying the actual terrors of a morally indifferent, random,

chaotic world as it is doing nothing about it, or worse, as is true of the Sunlight Man,

washing one's hands of it all, doing nothing, wallowing in it, adopting it even as a

program for viewing the world.

As I have been suggesting, Gardner's examination of the moral is intertwined

with the concept of the monstrous. Gardner reinvents and reinterprets the concept of the

monstrous as one means for rehabilitating and rebooting the moral as a serious literary

category. We can perceive this in the idea that the moral functions we once ascribed to

the device of an authorial teller are taken up by a pair of misshapen, grotesque,

monstrified freaks. What is the purpose or function of this monstrifying? To begin with, it

isolates them, focusing our attention squarely on them. While their monstrousness may

initially repulse us, because it calls attention, paradoxically, to human frailties, it also

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[9] My point here draws on Joyce Quiring Erickson's argument in her "Portrait of the (Bad) Artist as a Monster: *On Moral Fiction* as a Gloss on *Grendel*" (1983). For Erickson, "Grendel" represents a Sartrean, existential, and postmodern, "alienated anti-hero," a solipsistic artist whose mocking response to the "horrors of existence" shows that he "misunderstands the function and importance of art" as a device for dealing with the "forces of death and chaos" (77-8). Further, while "Grendel" seems similar to the eponymous protagonist of John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*, Gardner uses him as a device for critiquing the morally evasive and cynical worldview he exemplifies, not as a model for it.

invites us to respond sympathetically to the Sunlight Man and Clumly.[10] My argument,

however, is that this monstrifying allegorizes a sense of discomfort, disconnect, and

distaste we sometimes experience when we take up the question of the moral in relation

to the literary.[11] To see this, that is, to appreciate more fully how the novel's emphasis on

the monstrous facilitates its examination of the moral, we also need to consider the

novel's historical context, the rhetorical situation to which the text is responding. As we

have noted, Gardner launched his moral-literary project in the late 1960s and early 1970s,

the zenith of high literary theory, postmodernism, literary game-playing, and the antihero.

In this era, "moral" and "ethics" were discredited terms. They were evacuated of their

serious denotative meanings, and were regarded connotatively as bywords for sexual

prudery, hypocrisy, if not bigotry, and oppression: they were the monsters. Further, in

this age of the antihero, the "hero" was considered monstrous, not the adversary he

struggled against, and the hero's code, his morality, was equally monstrous, a hegemonic

discourse that marginalized the alien, the unpredictable, the misunderstood. Indeed, if the

monster often symbolizes the misunderstood, then during this period, "ethics" and

"morality" were perhaps the two most monstrous words in the English language.

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[10] Similarly, Judy Smith Murr claims that Gardner's use of "deformity," and also magic, is designed to "shock us out of our complacency" regarding literature's role in examining moral questions, to foster our involvement in the characters lives in the narrative (97).

[11] Gardner's use of the "monstrous" is clearly linked to the southern tradition of the grotesque, associated with several writers Gardner regarded as kindred artists, such as William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. Indeed, my claim that Gardner's use of the monstrous allegorizes our feelings of disconnect about discussing the moral is in line with O'Connor's writing on the grotesque. For example, O'Connor argues that the use of "freaks" and "grotesques" is necessary if writers are to communicate with tired readers whose "sense of evil," for example, "is diluted" (48). A second point to be made here is that Gardner does not embark on his literary project in a vacuum; no writer does. I have selected him for analysis not only because his literary project attempted to rehabilitate the moral as a serious literary category but also because his critical writings sparked a much larger debate about literature's morality, as I discussed in Chapter 2, "What is 'Moral Fiction'?".

Gardner's treatment of the Sunlight Man and Clumly draws upon his contemporaries' conventional thinking, not subverting it in order to reassert a reactionary, unexamined rehabilitation of the hero or the moral, but manipulating it to introduce ambiguity and complexity into a discourse that had become a little too pat, self-serving, and sanctimonious: the moral is bad, the hero is bad. Gardner's use of these monstrous figures is not designed to offer simplistic affirmations of the heroic in the face of the monstrous: his use of them achieves effects of moral ambiguity, not of moral certainty, for after all both Clumly, the protagonist, and the Sunlight Man, the antagonist, are disfigured, deformed grotesques. Thus, Gardner's novel intertwines his understanding of the moral with his contemporaries' revisionist esteem for the monstrous, thus obliquely drawing attention to how the moral had become the monster for us, our boogeyman or scapegoat, and then seeking to reverse this development through the use of monstrified characters exemplifying particular moral outlooks. That is, while Gardner's monstrous characters enable an exploration of particular, morally-tinged social issues, especially regarding the conflict between law and freedom, more interestingly, they are not used to wholeheartedly endorse a specific code of ethics but to explore our need for one. Most significantly, the use of these monstrous figures facilitates our reflection on the larger question of the moral itself, as it allegorizes the ironic disconnect or discomfort we experience when we grapple with the question of the moral: despite the fragmentation and disintegration of many moral concepts, we still endeavor to be moral, but we usually feel sheepish about actually discussing the moral, specifying what counts as the moral, especially in relation to the literary. Gardner's grotesque police chief and hideous magician are used to initiate this conversation.

Given its long literary pedigree, the monstrous, or the monster, hardly represents a startlingly original device as a choice on Gardner's part. Neither Clumly nor the Sunlight Man is a vampire, ghoul, or a Frankenstein's monster. Sixty-four years old, Clumly is Batavia's chief of police, an enforcer of law and order, an apparent exemplar of small-town, mainstream values. The middle-aged Sunlight Man, who has been arrested for painting the word "love" across two lanes of a street, invites comparisons with 1960s flower-children, hippies, college drop-outs, social radicals, and anti-war activists. Given this, one might expect Gardner to monstrify the police chief and romanticize and idealize the Sunlight Man. Indeed, his moniker itself suggests idealization, though this is explicitly denied by the Sunlight Man himself in a transcript of an early interrogation.[12] The monstrous descriptions of both of these characters resonate with a wide audience as they do not suggest an overt siding with mainstream society or the counterculture. Rather, as their characterization draws on cultural stereotypes of the time, they invoke opposing views of what counts as the monstrous, a concept that is as historically mutable as are many monsters. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen agues, no monstrous figure appears out of nowhere but is "born only at [a] metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment---of a time, a feeling, and a place" (4). While they may symbolize chaos or the random, monstrous figures such as the Sunlight Man or Clumly do not appear or emerge in a culture at random, accidentally, or by odd coincidence. Reflecting the

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[12] See bk. 1, ch. 3, 36. In response to Officer Miller's leading question, "You spread sunlight in the world, [is] that it," the Sunlight Man replies tersely in the negative. One of the novel's dominant motifs, "sunlight" is often used to represent a sort of pure and so sometimes disorienting freedom, as in the Sunlight Man's reworking of Plato's Allegory of the Cave as his parable of the cellar. In this story told to Clumly, the Sunlight Man claims that he once ran down a thief who was black and then kept him prisoner in his cellar, lying to him, telling him that the Sun had been destroyed by a rocket. When, in the story, the Sunlight Man releases him, the man returns to the cellar, unable to withstand the sunlight. He has been made incapable of functioning outside, as a free individual (bk. 7, ch. 3, 327-332).

particular anxieties or unresolved tensions of their time and place, Gardner's moral

counterparts offer an x-ray of that which their culture fears or tries to repress. They give a

shape and a form to abstractions, the other, the unpredictable, the incomprehensible, not

personifying but "monstrifying" them. On one hand, Clumly is used to represent law and

order, on the other, police brutality, and the Sunlight Man, as we discover, eventually

evokes the image of Charles Manson: he does not actually kill anyone, apart possibly

from his father-in-law, but the indifferent ethos he embodies is a contributing factor in an

escalation of violence that begins with an accidental shooting death and culminates in

cold-blooded, premeditated murders.

This is to say that Gardner's monstrification of his two main characters takes into

account the anxieties of both the mainstream and the counterculture, breaking down the

simplistic dynamic that equates physical hideousness with moral repulsiveness, and the

facile dichotomy of the good, heroic protagonist versus the bad protagonist, or, for that

matter, a villain who inverts the heroic. Gardner's treatment of both protagonist and

antagonist fosters a sense of moral ambiguity and confusion, as neither character is

marked out for our approbation, and the same goes for the philosophical ethos embodied

by him. The descriptions serve to externalize what is wrong with these characters'

conflicting views, suggesting what happens to us if we adhere overmuch to a particular,

necessarily limited, thought system: it makes monsters of us. The lengthy novel

emphasizes the crucial idea that their respective disfigurements are emblematic of

respective moral-philosophical positions, emphasizing the degree to which Clumly and

the Sunlight Man inhabit them, and are encased in them bodily, virtually at the outset,

allusively echoing motifs from Plato's Allegory of the Cave. For example, the sixty-four-

year-old Clumly is described as having skin that is "strikingly white," "creased and […] virtually hairless"; his eyes are squinty, and his large nose looks "like a mole's": his overall effect is that of a "grublike, virtually hairless monster" (bk. 1, ch. 1, 6, 11). Clumly's unsightliness is emblematic of his "morality," i.e., the angle of vision that informs his standards of behavior. Clumly is used to represent an excessive adherence to the rules, an unreflective, complacent, legalistic morality similar to that of Chief Inspector Heat in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*: his is a foundation-less, "departmental morality," a professional but arbitrary set of ethics. As Roland Grant Nutter contends in a slightly different context, this is symbolic of a lack of moral dynamism, keeping up of appearances, "maintaining the outer forms of orderliness and kindliness" without much feeling for their function or meaning (141). Clumly's example has an effect on the townspeople, who obey rules and laws as long as they are not an inconvenience: their "underlying commitment to [the] set of values," which should underwrite their adherence to these rules, is "decaying" (Nutter 135).

Clumly's reported speech further reinforces the sense that Clumly's sense of the moral is relativistic. He enforces laws without necessarily believing in them. For instance, after a raid on a brothel, Clumly reprimands Kozlowski, the junior police officer who has made guarantees to the madam that the police would not interfere with her work, belaboring the point that their "job is Law and Order," that if "there's a law on the books, it's [their] job to see it's enforced" (bk. 1, ch.1, 22). For Clumly, a particular action is "wrong" because it is illegal, not illegal because it is wrong, and Clumly's quoted speech on this topic is used to implicate US society as a whole. "This is a democracy," Clumly tells Kozlowski: "you know how democracy works, son. Bunch a people get together and

they decide how they want things, and they pass a law and they have 'em that way till they're sick of it, and they pass some other law that's maybe wrong some other way" (bk. 1, ch.1, 22). This is a kind of process, but one that derives from self-interest, not from a concern with justice. As Clumly concludes, cops can have no opinions about the laws on the books; but their job is only to enforce them. Clumly is used to exemplify a form of moral blindness, an incomplete morality. While Clumly is also used to dramatize the theme of personal and professional responsibility, his morality is initially overly reductive, as it shrinks complex moral questions to "shallow formulae": if a person breaks the law, he goes to jail, regardless of any extenuating circumstances (Cowart 73). As we discuss later, Clumly only emerges from this moral blindness through the process of interacting with his moral opposite, the Sunlight Man, through engaging him in dialogue.

In contrast to Clumly, the Sunlight Man is used in the novel to represent a quasi-Babylonian yearning for a total freedom that is untrammeled by petty "Jewish" moral concepts, such as guilt and responsibility. Like the cosmos, he claims to be above the insignificant strivings of human society, wholly indifferent, not unlike Gardner's abdicating narrator. While Clumly concerns himself with human-made laws, the Sunlight Man claims he stands for a kind of quasi-divine justice, and the contrast set up between these two characters more explicitly draws on elements from Plato's Allegory of the Cave, especially the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon that deals with the difficulty humans have in trying to envisage divine justice because we are hindered by our severely circumscribed perceptive and cognitive capabilities. In Gardner's novel, Clumly's description suggests he not only dwells in a cave but actually lives underground, pale and

grub-like, in the soil itself. However, the text's description of the Sunlight Man suggests that he has spent too much time outside Plato's cave, staring at the sun, and this has scorched his mind as well as his face, driving him half insane. As a result of a fire, the Sunlight man's "forehead [is] high and domelike, scarred, [and] wrinkled," and "above the arc of his balding [sic], his hair explode[s] like chaotic sunbeams around an Eastern tomb" (bk. 2, ch. 1, 59). His face is described as "fire-blasted," scarred in patches, and where not scarred, his skin is "like a baby's, though dirty," and he has a "tangled and untrimmed" beard that covers "most of his face like a bush" (bk. 2, ch. 1, 60). While the Sunlight Man's appearance suggests a kind of divine madness, his body odor hints at the ghoulish: when he is first arrested, "He reeked as if he'd been feeding on the dead," and the whole time he is in jail he stinks "like a sewer" (bk. 2, ch. 1, 60). The Sunlight Man's indifference to his unpleasant odor and appearance mirrors the fatalistic philosophy he embraces. This indifferent philosophy regards the individual person as unimportant, adrift in an incomprehensible universe, and values religion merely as a "dim divination, careless of doctrine," that is used to discover which direction the universe is moving so that humans can move in concert with it (Casper 43). Thus, this character's anarchic antics and Babylonian philosophical moorings are used to exemplify an indifferent, nihilistic, but whimsical perspective that serves as a distinct rival to Clumly's legalistic, unreflective, conventionally moral perspective, and also to his firm belief in personal and professional responsibilities.

Gardner's use of this monstrification technique makes for a kind of cartoonish camouflage for the serious dialogues that take place between Clumly and the Sunlight Man. The treatment of these characters as monstrous grotesques, so reminiscent of the

southern grotesque tradition, separates them, sets them apart, and suggests that in the moral void left by an abdicating storyteller-figure to guide us, characters are liable to become deformed by the kinds of incomplete moral philosophies they adopt to compensate for the loss of this figure. This technique also takes into account the 1960s zeitgeist, a time of ironic literary play, an era when straight-faced, serious literary texts were out of fashion. The use of these monstrous, even clownish figures distracts us from the seriousness of the issues we note in their dialogues, which are discussed next. However, while Gardner uses these figures as disputants in the dialogues, as a means for testing out actual precepts to live by, for theorizing and speculating on the moral, their monstrification serves first to achieve an effect on us readers, as they are used to allegorize the vaguely contemptuous disconnect or self-conscious discomfort we experience when we try to discuss the moral seriously, especially when it relates to the literary and the aesthetic.

Transcribing the Moral, Taping Clumly's Process

Gardner's monstrous representation of Clumly and the Sunlight Man isolates them in the text, setting the stage for their confrontation in the four main dialogues of the novel's title. These dialogues, which contrast Jewish or Judeo-Christian moral codes with a looser, more freewheeling, even whimsical Babylonian metaphysics, are used to thematize the rehabilitation of the moral through dramatically embedding a discussion of moral concepts in the narrative itself.[13] To restate this, one crucial way that Gardner's novel enacts the goal of rebooting the moral is through dramatizing a discussion of moral

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[13] Of course, some critics find them less embedded than do I. For example, Leonard Casper regards them as interruptions of the narrative, as "circuit breakers of the flow of narrative energy" (42). My argument is that while they are set apart from the narrative stylistically and textually, their content, the topics the Sunlight Man and Clumly discuss, are integral to the themes the novel explores as a whole.

systems in the narrative, and emphasizing the need for dialogue. On this view, the two

disputants represent contrasting metaphysical frameworks, and also exemplify opposing

conceptualizations of the moral artist; or, to be more precise, both Clumly and the

Sunlight Man embody certain ideals of the moral artist but do so only partially: Clumly,

for example, has a strong sense of social responsibility, while the Sunlight Man possesses

a larger notion of the concept of process we have been stressing as key to my definition

of moral fiction. Thus, while the Sunlight Man is used to shake up Clumly's rather staid

moral code, his speeches are not designed to convert us, to make Babylonians of us. In

the context of my definition of moral fiction, the goal is to synthesize process *and*

responsibility. Clumly is used as a device to chart this synthesis, as he is shown to

develop a more flexible, magnanimous morality through the process of his interaction

with the Sunlight Man, and then to extend this process through engaging his community

in dialogue, a namely, a speech dealing with what he has learned.

The first thing we note about the dialogues is their peculiar form. As simulations

of tape-recorded speech, they approximate a transmission of discourse that is enabled by

technology, making for a kind of multimedia experience, with a literal device used as a

literary device. However, given the many serious moral issues taken up by the Sunlight

Man in his dialogues, this tape-recording device might initially seem gimmicky, leading

us to wonder what the inclusion of this heterogeneous textual material adds to the

narrative. The question is: what effects does Gardner achieve through using this device?

Is it really necessary? The answer to this is that the tape recording device is absolutely

central in the larger discussion enacted in the novel. The specific form of the dialogues as

taped speeches represents a textual monstrification that is abstractly analogous to

Gardner's descriptions of Clumly and the Sunlight Man: the dialogues are not so much

isolated as set apart and emphasized without an intrusive, omniscient authorial teller's

asserting their importance, their centrality to the novel. This is slightly paradoxical

because they interrupt the narrative's mechanics, the plot in which Clumly, as a police

officer, is seeking to apprehend the Sunlight Man and take him back to jail. As their

exchanges make clear, i.e., as the evidence on the tape clearly shows, Clumly is the

character who is taping the conversations, and the Sunlight Man is aware of this.

Clumly's plan to tape what the Sunlight Man says is used to further characterize him as

an upholder of the law, a stickler intent on gathering evidence, so he can connect the dots

for an eventual case against the Sunlight Man. However, due to his skills as a magician,

the Sunlight Man is able to effect a dramatic entrance and disarm Clumly, who is as

inept, bumbling, and clumsy as his name suggests. While Clumly scarcely speaks during

the first dialogue,---in fact, he falls asleep, and his snoring is recorded, entered into the

evidence,---he comes to speak more, to engage the Sunlight Man in dialogue, as he tries

not just to arrest the Sunlight Man but to understand him and the reasons for his actions.

This is suggested by my second epigraph, quoted speech which appears towards the end

of the first dialogue. After having listened to the Sunlight Man describe and analyze the

manifold problems of contemporary US society, problems which, he claims, are due to

the nation's Judeo-Christian moral code, Clumly says, "I can't understand you. You seem

such a *moral* person and yet---":

> SUNLIGHT: I make murder possible. Yes! I watch a man I have talked with
> shot down, and afterward I don't show a sign of remorse. Not a sign! Am I
> twitching? wringing my hands? I watch an old woman shot dead for
> merely entering a room, and I don't even say to you, 'excuse me.' It
> baffles you. (bk. 7, ch. 3, 332)

This part of the dialogue registers the shift in Clumly's pursuit of the Sunlight Man as a person to his seeking after his ideas and philosophy. It is not that he understands him but that he is intrigued, and wants to understand him.

The tape recording device also serves to characterize the Sunlight Man. While we are told that Clumly listens to the dialogues over and over again, rewinding the tape many times, we "hear" them in a sort of "real-time," "live," so to speak, without a narrator's framing them. The tape recording device is meant to be objective, as dispassionate as the Sunlight Man's quasi-Babylonian metaphysics. The narrator's only traces are the briefest of parenthetical comments, usually relating objective information, noting Clumly's snoring or the sound of the explosion caused by the Sunlight Man's pyrotechnics. Gardner's use of this form invites us to believe that we are getting the Sunlight Man's speech-performances direct from his mouth. During these dialogues, the authorial teller vanishes, and the Sunlight Man becomes something like a first-person, homodiegetic narrator, who is lecturing us as much as he is Clumly. The tape recording device allows the Sunlight Man to hijack the narrative, emphasizing his role as the kind of narrative avatar we discussed earlier. However, while the Sunlight Man's speeches demonstrate his considerable and expansive learning, his depth of thought, they are still problematic, sometimes disconcerting, even rambling, digressive, and incoherent. For example, he claims that while the universe is largely inscrutable, it moves in patterns, and his goal is to remain free, to take on no responsibility, in order that when the universe tells him to act, he will be able to act with it. So, on one hand he suggests that the Babylonians placed no value on the individual, and on the other he endeavors to assert his individuality by

remaining aloof from the kinds of social responsibilities and concerns that Clumly must take into account. Thus, as a device, the Sunlight Man, in these passages, marks the great paradox of an attempt to represent unselfconsciously the self-conscious dialogue of a self-conscious storyteller-figure. Instead of telling us explicitly that the Sunlight Man, like the quintessential postmodern artist, is skeptical of his culture's metanarratives, its values, and morality, Gardner dramatizes the point, embedding it in these scenes. And as we stressed earlier, it is not just that The Sunlight Man is skeptical or even cynical but that apart from engaging Clumly in dialogue, he does little to ameliorate the lawlessness and moral confusion of his society. In fact, his trusting social progress to cosmic process, his reluctance to intervene, is a factor in the number of deaths that take place in the novel.

Now that we have addressed the form of the dialogues, we are ready to tackle their content, to briefly review the Sunlight Man's complaints against modern US society in particular and Western Civilization in general. These begin in the first dialogue, titled "The Dialogue of Wood and Stone," which takes place in a church on Sunday at midnight. Standing at the pulpit, the Sunlight Man tells the sleepy Clumly that the problem with US society, and their problem, too, is traceable back to the "conflict of the Old Testament Jews and the Babylonians": Clumly is "Jewish" or Judeo-Christian, while the Sunlight Man is a modern-day Babylonian (bk. 7, ch. 3, 318). As has already been suggested, the Sunlight Man espouses an "ideal of absolute, anarchistic freedom" (Cowart 63). This ideal is based on the Babylonian's acceptance of body and spirit as equally important but ultimately separate concerns, not unlike the manner in which morality and aesthetics came to be regarded as distinct. They believed that the universe's aims, what God or the gods want, were largely unknowable, and so they did not seek to

formulate strict laws reflective of a specific moral code. This, the Sunlight Man claims,

the Jews of the Old Testament did, in an effort to "codify man's relation with the spiritual

world" (Cowart 64). It is a one-size-fits-all approach whose laws flatten out individual

differences and extenuating circumstances. In contrast, the Babylonians were pragmatic,

and their laws practical and flexible. Marriages, for example, are business partnerships:

as long as their estate remains joined, what a husband or wife does in bed with others is

irrelevant: there is no such thing as adultery. Further, while the Jews worship an abstract

spirit whose name they are forbidden to pronounce, the Babylonians venerate human-

sized, wooden statues that are meant to represent certain "human ideals—the dignity of

old age, the innocence of youth, the technical struggles of the craftsman" (Gardner bk. 7,

ch. 3, 319). The Babylonians believed that their deities actually existed in these statues,

and if the statues somehow failed them, they destroyed them and carved out new ones,

making up new gods in the process. Interestingly, this information suggests a link

between Clumly's and the Sunlight man's views: the Babylonians destroy the wooden

gods that fail them; Americans enact new laws to fix old laws, as Clumly notes in his talk

with Kozlowski, discussed earlier.

For the Sunlight Man, our notions of guilt, commitment, responsibility, property,

laws, our whole Western, rational system of thought are by-products of the Jewish

mindset, and the Sunlight Man denounces them as "irrelevant, stupid, inhuman," not "in

tune with, keyed to, reality" (bk. 7, ch. 3, 331). He describes the Babylonian approach in

his second exchange with Clumly, "The Dialogue of Houses," on the Monday afternoon

following Sunday night's talk at the church. As if to emphasize both the precarious nature

of his enterprise and the idea that the universe moves in patterns that are not always

readily comprehensible, the Sunlight Man holds this dialogue in a tent covered in

astrological symbols suspended over a railway in the path of a freight train due to arrive

shortly after his talk begins. Clumly of course has brought his tape-recorder, but the

"tape" reveals that this time around he not only stays awake during the dialogue but

becomes a more active participant in their discussion, even correcting the Sunlight Man,

or rather, getting the discussion back on track. We can observe this give-and-take in the

opening of the second dialogue.

> SUNLIGHT: You find our tent curious?
> CLUMLY (*coughing*): The tent-flap … if you would …some air!
> SUNLIGHT: Ah, yes. One forgets. It's a bit of a trial to be cooped up this way with a man who carries my curse. Air then. Better.
> CLUMLY: Thank you.
> SUNLIGHT: Haven't you wondered about that smell? Have you tried to identify it?
> CLUMLY: At times. I've wondered about how it comes and goes. You take it off and put it on like a coat.
> SUNLIGHT: That's interesting, yes. Fascinating! But we must hurry along. You were asking about the tent.
> CLUMLY: No, *you* were.

While the Sunlight Man threatens to shoot Clumly right after this exchange, these lines

suggest that Clumly, even with his trusty tape-recorder, is acting more flexibly and

thinking more nimbly already. He refuses to answer any questions until the Sunlight Man

lets some air in. He shows that he has been wondering about the man's smell, but not

according to the precepts of criminal science: he does not wonder what the smell is so

much as why it affects the Sunlight Man in the way that it does. Finally, he corrects the

Sunlight Man, redirecting the course of the dialogue.

In this second, shorter dialogue, the Sunlight Man takes up the theme of acting in

accordance with the patterns of the universe. This is a continuation of an idea thrown out

in his longer, more digressive first speech. While he discourses on the civil rights

movement of the 1960s, the Sunlight Man accepts no social responsibility, at least none

that is part of any specific program: "I cover by whim," he insists, "whatever cases fall

into my lap---the Indian boy [who kills a guard during the escape the Sunlight Man helps

with], the Negro thief, for instance---and I leave the rest to process" (bk. 7, ch. 3, 332).

This "process" refers workings of the universe. Like the Babylonians, his aim is to

"attempt to find out what the universe is doing," and go with that:

> Following divination one acts *with* the gods. You discover which way
> things are flowing, and you swim in that direction. You allow yourself to
> be possessed. Soldiers understand it. The so-called heroes of our modern
> wars especially. A man runs up a hill with a machine-gun, gives up his
> will to live, his desire to escape: he has a sudden, overwhelming and
> mysterious sense that he has become the hill, the night sky, the pillbox
> he's attacking. The machine-gun fires of its own volition---he ducks,
> spins, turns as the gods reach down to duck him, spin him, turn him. (bk.
> 10, ch. 4, 426)

Obviously, what the Sunlight Man is describing here we would probably refer to as

entering a flow-state, in which things we have learned have become so habitual and

internalized that they are as reflexive, instinctual, or involuntary as breathing. The

Sunlight Man emphasizes the role of one's intuition in trying to identify the processes of

the universe, and downplaying the use of reason and critiquing it for its limitations. As

we all have probably experienced, if we think too much about what we are doing while in

these flow-states, we frequently stop being able to do whatever it is we are doing, such as

when we are writing or teaching and are not always sure where what we are writing or

what we are saying is actually coming from, as we sometimes surprise ourselves with

what we know. Thus, this idea of leaving things to process is linked to the concept of

process I have stressed in the framework of my definition of moral fiction. As I noted

earlier, texts of moral fiction enact processes through the deployment of specific narrative methods. These methods are designed to facilitate examination of moral issues without preaching or moralizing about them. In fact, the process sometimes seems a negative one, as in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* or Joyce's *Dubliners*: in these, a more inclusive set of moral concepts is implied obliquely or indirectly through the critiquing of the moral concepts currently in practice. But the Sunlight Man's talk of divining the universe's process, the directions it seems to be moving, raises an important question for my methodology and for the moral as a literary category: his sense of process here is not pacifistic but "passivistic," as he lets things play out as they will instead of taking an active part in shaping the way they unfold. For the Sunlight Man, the universe is fatalistic, unchangeable, and incomprehensible---that is its "process": he is thus not required to place any "value whatever on individual life" (bk. 7, ch. 3, 325). The most active role the Sunlight Man assumes is that of the kind of "pedagogical voice" we noted in our discussion of Joyce's *Portrait*, and we see this in his targeting of Clumly over the course of the four dialogues.

The novel's dialogues are thus used to suggest that an exclusive emphasis on process alone, i.e., just "going with the flow," absent the sense of responsibility exemplified by Clumly, is a recipe for quietism, for doing nothing in the face of a rising tide of lawlessness and disorder. Many Gardner scholars note that Clumly's process of moral development culminates in his own rambling speech before the Dairymen's league at the end of the novel, following the shooting-death of the Sunlight Man. There, he laments the loss of this friend who has taught him something about the limitations of his system of values. Comparing his society to the "Einstein universe," Clumly tells his

community that the danger inherent in the way their society is "reaching outwards and outwards at terrific speed" is that "it can get cold," and they "must all be vigilant against growing indifferent to people less fortunate …" (bk. 24, 686). However, while Gardner's description of the scene emphasizes a moment of triumph for Clumly, a subtler sign of Clumly's process is suggested at the end of the final dialogue, "The Dialogue of the Towers." By now, we have grown accustomed to the peculiar form of the dialogues, their resemblance to tape-recorded conversations. These dialogues, in conjunction with the Sunlight Man's magic tricks, have been used to interrupt the narrative, to call specific attention to the dialogues themselves and set them off from the rest of the narrative. We discover that the final dialogue inverts this process: it reconnects the characters to the rest of the novel's narrative, reintegrating them by switching off the tape-recorder, so to speak, and rendering their dialogue as conventional, novelistic dialogue, bounded by quotation marks and flanking inquit-tags. This dialogue begins in the same style as the previous three, but in the middle of the Sunlight Man's discoursing on the eventual ruin of all civilizations, Clumly, "full of a confused sense of pity and anger," interrupts the Sunlight man: "I saw your wife today" (bk. 21, ch. 3, 646). This simple statement suggests that Clumly, a police officer, who has been intent on gathering evidence as part of his job, who has viewed the Sunlight Man as another criminal to be apprehended and jailed, now sees him in his complex humanity. This statement signals that Clumly has learned the Sunlight man's identity, and now they can dispense with their role-playing, stop playing at "cops and robbers."

Of course, we readers have long known the Sunlight Man's not-so-secret identity, and have come to appreciate the sequence of reversals that have brought him to his

current condition. The Sunlight Man is actually Taggert "Tag" Hodge, the youngest son

of Batavia's most respectable family. This clan of patriarchs is used to represent the

region's bygone but short-lived era of moral and civic harmony, exemplified by the

Honorable Arthur Hodge Sr., Tag's grandfather, who was a US Congressman and the

builder of the edenic Stony Hill farm (it is lost to the Hodges, is tenanted by a poor black

family, and is finally destroyed, burned down by the Sunlight Man). The Hodge family's

degeneration functions as a moral backdrop to the confrontations that take place between

the Sunlight Man and Clumly. The text suggests that their decline, including the collapse

of their system of moral values, is symptomatic of the larger moral confusion and chaos

of their community. In fact, the novel suggests that the family's downfall results not so

much from moral corruption or laxity but from their slipping into the kind of mechanical,

unreflective morality exemplified initially by Clumly, a morality sapped of meaning and

purpose. Through the use of flashbacks, we learn that "Tag," due to a succession of

serious misfortunes and reversals has come to question the validity of all the moral values

his family was supposed to stand for. Most specifically, he feels that his love for his wife

Kathleen Paxton imprisoned him, forced him to do anything to care of her after she is

"driven first into paranoia, and then into a permanent catatonic state, presumably by the

possessiveness of her father" (Casper 42). She goes insane and burns down their house,

killing their two sons and disfiguring Tag. Tag's intense feelings of guilt, his sense that

he has failed in his responsibilities, due to bad luck, leads him to renounce his Judeo-

Christian heritage and to adopt the "fatalistic philosophy" of the ancient Babylonians

(Casper 43).

The novel finally signals Clumly's development, the culmination of the process he has been undergoing through his interactions with Taggert, the Sunlight Man, in its inconclusive dénouement of their confrontation. Clumly, whom the Sunlight Man always manages to disarm somehow, magically, now manages himself to get his weapon back. However, instead of arresting the Sunlight Man, who has rigged the Stony Hill building with explosives, and is detonating them as their conversation winds down, Clumly releases him. His wording suggests that he has synthesized his and the Sunlight Man's views: "You're free," Clumly says, then adds "I'm outside my jurisdiction in any case" (bk. 21. ch. 3, 648). This synthesis or merger of these two moral-artist figures, these two avatars, appears complete when Clumly later asks his back-up, Kozlowski, why he never intervened, never interfered: "Interfere with which of you," he replies (bk. 21, ch. 3, 649).

The Sunlight Man's anarchic antics and Babylonian philosophical moorings are used to exemplify an indifferent, nihilistic, but individualistic perspective that serves as a distinctive rival to Clumly's legalistic, unreflective, conventionally moral, but ultimately responsible perspective. As devices, these two characters represent two different incomplete thought-systems in need of each other for completion. Most importantly, they and their dialogues are used to simulate---and stimulate---a multidimensional, multilayered, literary dialogue on the question of moral responsibilities in an age of disorder and confusion. They thematize the aim I identified, the goal of rebooting or rehabilitating the moral as a serious literary category, not by illustrating its characters' morally exemplary behavior, but through modeling the process by which they develop a larger, more comprehensive morality. This is most readily observable in the process undergone by Fred Clumly: as one example of a "moral-artist" or storyteller-figure

embedded in the narrative. Not unlike Stephen Dedalus, Clumly functions initially as a pedagogical target for the Sunlight Man, until, gradually through interacting with this philosophical opposite, Clumly is shown to synthesize his perspectives with the Sunlight Man's views. Through this process Clumly develops into a pedagogical voice himself.

Mapping Sunlight: Structure without Closure

The Sunlight Dialogues address the serious issue of cultural entropy. Its devices are used to explore the likelihood that our civilization is doomed, that we are lost in a moral vacuum, and are on the brink of total societal breakdown. While it deals with pervasive lawlessness and debilitating moral confusion, the novel nonetheless hints at the possibility of order through art, which itself both embodies and dramatizes the process of dialogue. Absent a consistent, omniscient, authorial voice, dominated by the monstrous avatars we have been discussing, the novel's elaborate narrative structuring and allusive echoing serve to counter the impressions of impending chaos and entropy, but not completely. The process of dialoguing that is dramatized by Clumly's and the Sunlight Man's interactions is reflected on a more abstract plane, almost subliminally, by the novel's peritext, including its internal book titles, epigraphs, and thirteen, original, full-page illustrations.[14] These imply an order outside the text, an ongoing process or dialogue with historical, philosophical, and literary traditions. They reflect on the textual level the kind of dialoguing I have been insisting is central to the novel's constitution as moral fiction.

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[14] Unfortunately, the 2006 New Directions reprint does not include any of the original full-page illustrations by Napper. However, the text still includes the facsimile of the Sunlight Man's death certificate, the reproduction of the Sunlight man's sketch of an astrological plan, as well as quoted poetry, memoranda, and an article in a journal as read by Clumly.

Following the work of Jean Genette, most of us are familiar with the term "peritext." As succinctly defined by Rainier Grutman, peritext refers to the "many fringes of a text," its "titles, dedications, prefaces, footnotes, mottoes," epigraphs, and illustrations: the "textual periphery" (141n2). Gardner's use of epigraphs or mottoes and chapter titles, and quotations *as* chapter titles, achieves many of the effects described by Grutman. First, in McWilliams's phraseology, the scope and diversity of Gardner's quoting act together as an "implicit denunciation" of the Sunlight Man's "monological style" (43). This is a style that "refuses to entertain any perspective but its own, a tendency we have observed in the Sunlight Man's sometimes abrasive, one-sided talks targeting Clumly (43). These titles and epigraphs also hint at order, structure, and tradition. As carry-overs from inscriptions in stone, they partake of that which is permanent or at least long-enduring. In Gardner's handling, chapter titles and epigraphs serve as gnomic mottoes: their impact is connotative and suggestive: they do not nail a chapter down by offering a synopsis of it, but evoke subtle links or patterns between the quotation and the citing text's content. As Grutman argues, this process is multiplex, a two-way circuit. An epigraph is a "trace of another text," one "with which the quoting text enters into a dialogue, a debate" perhaps even "parodying or critiquing its source" (141). Each epigraph shapes (or troubles) our response to Gardner's chapters, which themselves comment on the source from which the epigraph is taken.

Epic in form as well as scope, *The Sunlight Dialogues* is made up of twenty-four books, further divided into chapters. Each book is introduced with a title and an epigraph, many of which are frustratingly cryptic. However, when we discover that these are drawn from A. Leo Oppenheim's historical text, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, intriguing links become

apparent. For example, Book III's title, "Lion Emerging from Cage," is taken from the caption given to a photographic plate of an Assyrian palace relief (Oppenheim plate 12, following page 290). Since Book III deals with the Sunlight Man's escape from police custody, and also with the first of the murders that he sets in motion through his anarchic influence, the title serves a terse synoptic function, obliquely alerting us to the dangers posed by the Sunlight Man, a figure who till this point has appeared clownish, maybe freakish, harmless, a threat more to himself than to anyone else. However, in Oppenheim's book, the photo of the relief appears in a chapter on medicine, and its significance is not discussed. Its placement in this chapter on medicine suggests a link between healing and curative powers and releasing this powerful creature. Applying this insight to Gardner's novel, we might conclude that while the Sunlight Man is loosed on the society, in a sense, bleeding it like ancient Assyrian surgeons, he is an ambiguous force, a cure that is possibly as painful as the disease.

Gardner's use of illustrations in the original 1972 edition of *The Sunlight Dialogues* bears this point out further. Often crudely drawn, the illustrations do not redundantly recapitulate dramatized scenes from the narrative but shape our response to them and to the novel as a whole. We can see this in a comparison of the novel's frontispiece and its last full-page illustration. These illustrations resonate ambiguously with elements or motifs from other texts, with passages from Gardner's novel itself, and even with other illustrations featured in the novel. For example, the novel's frontispiece is linked to the Prologue, which functions as an epilogue, showing us a scene that happens long after the events depicted in the novel's final pages. This illustration shows the Judge sitting in an armchair with an empty speech bubble over his head. His black

clothes merge with the black chair, such that he seems part of the chair. This solid black

shape rests on a white floor, which looks like empty space or mid-air. This depiction

underscores the Judge's embodying the idea of arbitrary, foundation-less order. The black

shape of him and his chair suggests solidity, a foundation, albeit one with no foundation

beneath it. Further, we observe that Clumly is drawn in outline, in partial profile. He is

smoking a cigar and conversing, albeit with empty speech bubbles, with the Judge. As we

noted earlier, we regard the Judge as exemplifying the artist-figure who believes all order

is merely arbitrary. He is emblematic of entropy and breakdown; however, in this
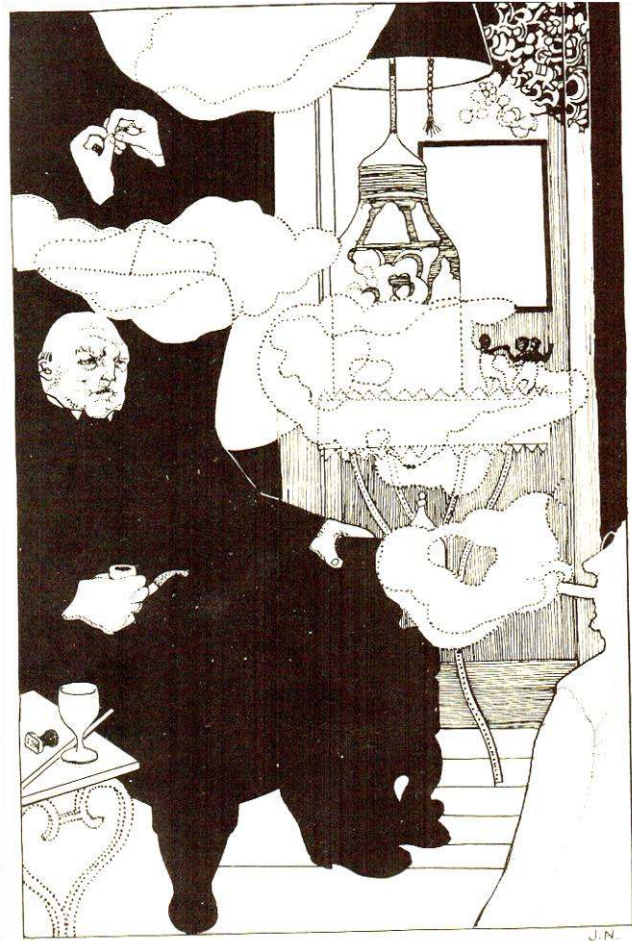

Figure 1: "Frontispiece" (Napper v)

illustration, he appears indistinct as if to emphasize the idea that Clumly has not somehow beaten entropy. If anything, the illustration suggests that Clumly is fading out, and the Judge, as the emblem of entropy, now holds the floor.

The final illustration reverses the balance of black and white we note in the frontispiece and recycles ideas taken up in the "Prologue." Its subject matter is much grimmer, it depicts the shooting death of the Sunlight Man. He lies diagonally across the frame, crumpled and frail looking. Figlow's hand is holding his still-smoking revolver. Drawn to exaggerate its size, this pistol is almost as large as the Sunlight Man. The illustration's use of triangular shapes instead of quadrilaterals suggesting a skewing of justice, a kind of ironic commentary on the Sunlight Man's concern with justice in his dialogues. Appearing in the novel's final pages, it links up with my first epigraph about the ways Ben Hodge's storytelling, in Clumly's estimation, makes the moral stand out like a "pearl-handled nickel-plated pistol on a stump," and it also undercuts the positive tone of Clumly's speech before the Dairymen's League, the speech in which he synthesizes his and the Sunlight man's views (bk. 1, ch. 3, 30). Taken together, these elements suggest that there is a moral here, that the moral, while not exactly standing on a stump, should be as clear as if it were. But there is no clear moral here, only a senseless death: the jumpy Figlow shoots the Sunlight Man after he plays a trick on him, sneaking up and appearing suddenly behind him. If there is a moral, it is a very ambiguous one, and this effect becomes more apparent if we analyze this image in relation to the Prologue as well as the frontispiece. In the opening, the Judge describes the creation of order through the firing of a weapon, and this tends to taint the very idea of order, suggesting that didactically pointing up a moral is somehow akin to pointing a gun and

firing it at someone: the same kinds of impulse are at work, namely, a sort of "Point

Blank Moralizing."

Figure 2: "Figlow Had Shot Him through the Heart" (Napper 664)

This image also asks us to refocus our attention one last time on the novel's "Prologue."

Read again after the conclusion of Clumly's seemingly triumphant speech, the

"Prologue" now strikes an even more doubtful, doleful note, especially as it tells us that

the Sunlight Man is dead. However, the placement of what is really the epilogue and not

a prologue at the beginning suggests that the various processes, the dialoguing, enacted

over the course of the following twenty-four books of the novel can serve to counteract

the entropy and decline described in this epilogue-as-prologue. The process of

counteracting disorder, entropy, and dissolution, it is implied, is endless, positive results

are never guaranteed, and those that are obtained usually come at considerable cost, and are sometimes soon forgotten.

Borrowing a trope from computer terminology, my overarching argument in this chapter has been that Gardner's inquiry into the moral in *The Sunlight Dialogues* aims to reboot the moral in relation to the literary, to rehabilitate it as a serious literary and critical category, redefining it in such a way as to exclude the overtly didactic or socially programmatic, in an era in which moral concepts have been factored out of much literary-critical discourse. It emphasizes the need for dialogue negatively through its use of abdicating authorial voice that relinquishes many of the moral functions we associate with this type of narrative device the novel's monstrous, morally isolated freaks, which are used paradoxically to focus our attention on their uniquely human qualities and frailties. Their dialogues are also monstrified, textually, in that they are designed to approximate a transmission of discourse enabled by a piece of electronic technology, the tape recorder. Their dialoguing is reflected abstractly on a larger scale in the ongoing and perhaps ceaseless dialoguing process enabled by the novel's peritext, which lends structure to the narrative but withholds definitive closure. The novel thus represents an open system, inviting us to join in the discussion it enables, to interact with it and, if possible, enlarge this system. This is the novel's ongoing process, a process that not only affords an exploration of specific moral issues relevant to mid-twentieth-century US society, but also fosters a discussion of the moral itself, and the moral's relation to the literary.

CHAPTER 5:

THE MORAL IS HISTORY:

ZADIE SMITH'S *WHITE TEETH* AND JUNOT DÍAZ'S

THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO

"No sense of tradition, no fucking morality, is the problem." (Smith 160)

[…] to put it in modern parlance, this is a rerun. We have been here before. This is like watching TV in Bombay or Kingston or Dhaka, watching the same old British sitcoms spewed out to the old colonies in one tedious, eternal loop. (Smith 135)

Even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain't a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell. (Díaz 7)

What is it with Dictators and Writers, anyway? Since before the infamous Caesar-Ovid war they've had beef. […] Rushdie claims that tyrants and scribblers are natural antagonists, but I think that's too simple; it lets writers off pretty easy. Dictators, in my opinion, just know competition when they see it. Same with writers. *Like, after all, recognizes like*. (Díaz 96-7n11)

    Although my definition of moral fiction is meant to be inclusive, and my method is designed to be applicable to a wide range of literary texts, the novels I have focused on in my analyses, taken together, possibly seem at variance with these aspirations. In each chapter so far, I have dwelled solely upon novels that are canonical, such as *The Secret Agent*, *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses*, or on a novel that aspires to canonicity, as is true of *The Sunlight Dialogues*. The reasoning behind my choices is that the canonical status of these novels derives in part from the ways in

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which critics have valued them for their relations to the concept of the moral. While

Conrad's canonicity owes much to what critics regard as the implicit moral vision

manifested in his fiction, Joyce's reputation as the modernist author par excellence rests

chiefly on the perception that his literary texts liberate the literary from the moral.

Gardner is famous (or infamous) for his attempt to rehabilitate the moral as a serious

literary category during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period that was not just

postmodern but post-moral: its ethics involved foregrounding aesthetic artifice and

linguistic play, not examining specific moral concepts per se or taking up particular moral

positions.

In this final chapter, I turn to Zadie Smith's 2000 *White Teeth* (*WT*) and Junot

Díaz's 2007 *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (*BW*) to investigate how these two

popular contemporary novels take up (and shake up) moral concepts at the end of the

twentieth century, a "post-postmodern" era dominated by globalization (Saldívar 596).

While these novels examine numerous topical social concerns that have become salient in

this phenomenon's wake, such as the lingering after-effects of colonialism, racism in a

multicultural society, resurgent religious fundamentalism, and the oppressive weight of

past history, my objective is neither to explicate these problems nor to moralize about

them. I reemphasize that my critical method is meant to avoid moralizing, and this

includes politicizing the moral and moralizing the political. My method focuses on a

literary text's process, and its objective is to analyze how, through what aesthetic, formal,

and rhetorical devices and techniques, texts carry this process out. However, in the case

of Smith's and Díaz's novels, accomplishing this goal is made slightly challenging

because part of these novels' process *does* involve a degree of moralizing social and political issues. As Ramón Saldívar argues, novels such as *White Teeth* and *Oscar Wao* aim, thematically and stylistically, to "invent a new 'imaginary' for thinking about the nature of a just society" (574). In the context of my definition of moral fiction, these novels invite us to rethink social questions, to reconceptualize them as current, relevant examples of the moral paradoxes I have been concentrating on throughout this study, and have been arguing are the hallmark of twentieth-century moral fiction.

A prime example of what I am describing is evident in the ways in which the novels engage the problem of past history, investigating whether modern globalization facilitates what are tantamount to reruns, reenactments, or replays of the oppression of western colonialism. More specifically, Smith and Díaz examine how the weight of past history restricts their characters' sense of agency and their understanding of themselves as moral beings. As in my preceding analyses, I focus on these novels' distinctive use of particular literary devices and formal approaches, such as television and film motifs, the fukú story, and "indigenized" or "contaminated" authorial voices. My argument is that Smith's and Díaz's handling of these narrative devices and techniques is strongly linked to their moral critique of the ongoing effects of colonialism under the auspices of modern globalization, modeling ways of resisting and undoing them on stylistic and diegetic levels.

Conflicting Narratives about Globalization: Historical Rerun or Pilot Episode?

Part of this chapter's focus is on how Smith's and Díaz's novels reconceptualize historical legacies or burdens as types of moral problems in an age in which the forces of

globalization are accelerating. They raise the questions of whether modern globalization alleviates the burdens of the past, makes them feel heavier, or is itself a manifestation of these past legacies in new trappings, a rerun, not a pilot episode. These novels' concern about repeating, replaying, or reenacting the past parallels critical narratives about the role history plays (or no longer plays) in this age of modern globalization. Indeed, while neither Smith's nor Díaz's novel adheres to the letter of these critical narratives, or, for that matter, categorically refutes them, they *do* broadly reflect many of the same fault lines, divisions, and the tensions as do the critical narratives: emphasizing the idea that history is riddled with chance occurrences, *White Teeth* offers a more optimistic, upbeat picture of the effects of modern globalization than does *Oscar Wao*, which conceptualizes oppressive historical forces as virtually inexorable, relentless, and inescapable, not just a nightmarish rerun but a regular series that never goes away.

While few cultural critics and literary theorists explicitly invoke television tropes to describe how the effects of past histories of oppression manifest themselves nowadays under the banners of globalization, both *White Teeth* and *Oscar Wao* use TV metaphors as a way of conceptualizing and visualizing the pervasive influence of the past on the present. In this section, I adopt Smith's and Díaz's highly suggestive and evocative TV metaphor, using it as a medium or lens for reviewing the main critical narratives about globalization: indeed, we note that these novels often seem suspended between these two predominant lines of thinking. In effect, the critics and theorists who criticize the phenomenon of modern globalization worry that it represents a continuation of colonialism and imperialism, a rerun or reenactment that precludes developing moral

agency, whereas the critics and theorists who celebrate the development of globalization, value it for how it frees us from past histories, or at least diminishes their influence, thus fostering the development of moral agency. On this view, globalization represents not a rerun or repeat of particular historical developments, but a pilot episode for a new series whose "fate" or "run" is still undetermined.

How we regard globalization, the moral stance we adopt towards it, whether we criticize it for reenacting past oppressive histories, or value it as a pilot episode, clearly depends on how we define globalization. By now, most of us probably have a stock of images, words, and narratives that we associate with globalization. We may not hear it as such every day on the evening news or see it spelled out in online news articles, but globalization and its manifestations absorb much of the oxygen in our moral atmosphere, leading us to debate a range of complex issues directly related to globalization: outsourcing, immigration, global economy, diversity, multiculturalism. In literary theory, "globalization," not unlike "ethics" in the 1990s, has perhaps become the most highly charged of critical terms of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. As Paul Jay argues, how we define globalization depends on how we historicize it, how far back we trace its development (33, 35, passim). This is important to my argument because how we historicize globalization determines the moral position we take towards it, whether we regard it as representing a positive development, a new episode in human history, or whether we deplore it as a crisis, a negative, tragic rerun, replay, or reenactment of past histories of colonial malfeasance, brutality, injustice, and inequality,

masked by a dazzling proliferation of western-style consumer goods circulated in a global economy.

This schematic distinction between the critical narratives about globalization is explicitly noted and examined by Simon Gikandi in a 2002 article dealing with the relationship between globalization and postcolonialism. For Gikandi, "the discourse of globalization seems to be caught between two competing narratives, one of celebration, the other of crisis" (629). First, while Gikandi offers a more pessimistic assessment of globalization, he recognizes and acknowledges its allure for critics. He argues that "globalization appeals to advocates of hybridity […] because it seems to harmonize the universal and the particular and, in the process, it seems to open up a multiplicity of cultural relationships unheard of in the age of empire" (629).[1] But as Gikandi goes on to state, this upbeat narrative is "constantly haunted by another form of globalization," a much gloomier, "dystopic" version that persists alongside the celebratory narrative of cultural hybridity and diversity, not just clinging to it but entangled with it (630-1). He takes the story of two Guinean boys as emblematic of these two versions or narratives of globalization: bearing a letter entreating the Europeans to intervene in Africa, the boys stowed away on an airplane bound for Belgium, dying en route. It is a powerful story, suggesting that African efforts to emulate European modernity are inevitably doomed to replaying such heartbreaking, tragic failures. As Gikandi contends, these boys "were neither seeking cultural hybridity nor ontological difference"; what they desired was a

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[1] Katina Rogers makes a similar point about the appeal of and problem with "cosmopolitanism": because "different histories divide peoples, and reminders of history call up opposing sides, […] war, betrayals, oppression and cruelty as often as cultural richness" this philosophy often downplays the importance of history, and holds up tolerance as the supreme virtue (50).

"modern life in the European sense of the world" [sic] (630-1). Gikandi regards this as troublingly ironic because the boys were looking to the same Europe that "only two generations earlier" was deplored as the "major threat to the prosperity and well-being of Africa" (631).

However, Gikandi is not necessarily arguing that the pessimistic narrative is more accurate than the optimistic one, but that both of these narratives exist side-by-side, and he faults critics for not paying enough attention to material conditions that are possibly exacerbated by modern globalization: "the brutal realities of poverty," "failed nationalism," and "death and decay" (639). His critique is aimed at the literary critics and theorists who privilege the work of the imagination, such as Arjun Appadurai. Because his argument is based on the influence of modern technology and mass migrations, Appadurai regards globalization as a contemporary phenomenon, almost a by-product of the postmodern era, a "rupture," a "general break from all sorts of pasts," including those lamented by Gikandi (2-3). I say more about Appadurai's thinking later, but for now I want to note that many cultural critics and literary theorists challenge his claim that globalization represents a recent development for many of the same reasons as does Gikandi. For example, Jay argues that while Appadurai's focus on the imagination takes into account the rapid movement of cultural artifacts, such as TV shows, movies, and consumer goods, it "fails to account for how the unevenness of economic development under globalization limits opportunities for the kind of reformation of subjectivity that Appadurai describes" (Jay 35). In other words, a certain level of material comfort is necessary if the imagination is going to be able to perform the work Appadurai talks

about. For Gikandi, these critics and theorists concentrate overmuch on postcolonial

theoretical tropes such as "globalization, transgression, and hybridity," and this leads

them to overlook "narratives and images," such as the story of the two African

stowaways who die during their flight to Europe, that "do not exactly fit into a theoretical

apparatus bent on difference and hybridity" (639). As Gikandi tells in a powerful

understatement, "since stories of dead African boys in cargo holds of European planes

cannot be read as stories of hybridity, diaspora, or métissage, they demand a rethinking of

the tropes of that have dominated the discourse of postcolonial theory in relation to global

culture and nationalism" (640). In sum, Gikandi criticizes a critical blind spot regarding

globalization, namely, the wishful thinking that globalization offers solutions to

longstanding, depressing counter-narratives of poverty and death that "will simply not go

away" (639).

While Gikandi seems to fault globalization for setting up expectations but then

failing to deliver on them, there is another critical narrative that simplistically regards

globalization as an insidious, malign phenomenon that threatens to erase cultural

differences and homogenize the world's diverse peoples. Drawing on the *Star Trek*

franchise, I call this the "Borg" narrative of globalization. In this account, globalization,

as manifested by multinational corporations, resembles the "Borg" of the science fiction

series. Not a "they" but an "it," this collective of cyborgs assimilates to itself every

human being it touches, emptying each person of his (or her) previous identity, history,

and memories, and rendering him (or her) an automaton, a cultural, historical blank.

However, my slightly whimsical description is not to trivialize the real concerns many

critics have about globalization. As Jay points out in his 2001 article, "Beyond

Discipline," many critics of globalization regard the "emergence" of a "global culture,

characterized by the rapid circulation of cultural commodities such as books, films, works

in electronic media, clothing, and food" with considerable dismay, because it "seems to

overwhelm local cultural forms and practices" (32). On this view (which Jay disputes),

globalization is regarded as an "essentially Westernizing and homogenizing forces that

threatens to wipe out local cultures" (33-4). I say more about the critics who argue

against this view, but I want to touch briefly on how it shows up in some literary

criticism. Simon During, for example, appears to define globalization in much the same,

negative way. He reconceptualizes globalization and postcolonialism, respectively, as

"reconciliatory" and "critical" postcolonialisms (385). During claims he originally

defined the term "postcolonialism" as "the self-determining will of decolonized peoples

to protect their cultures from Western encroachment" (385). However, for During, once

the term caught on in the academy, it lost its "critical and agonistic" edge, and became

"reconciliatory": instead of focusing on recuperating local or native traditions and

narratives, on resisting western encroachments, this kind of postcolonialism aimed at

reconciling colonized people to present conditions, to modernity (386). As During

suggests, this is itself a type of colonialism, since it downplays the "colonized people's

agency," i.e., the role played by their active resistance to "white invasions" in the forming

"(post)colonialist societies" (386).

　　　As my "Borg" reference is meant to suggest, my thinking on this topic is at

variance with During's ideas, and is more in line with the views espoused by Appadurai

and Kwame Anthony Appiah. Like Jay, these critics refute the charge that globalization

is a one-way exchange that flattens out cultural differences, threatening pure, authentic,

local, colorful cultures and their rich histories, religions, and traditions with assimilation

to a drab, global conformity that serves the cultural and economic interests of Western

capitalistic societies, especially the US.[2] For example, they challenge the belief that

American or western cultural products function as instruments of propaganda, as a means

for promoting the interests of European and US "multinational corporations," or as a

medium used to "encourage consumption not just of films, television, and magazines but

of the other non-media products of multinational capitalism," such as baseball caps,

Coca-Cola, and hip-hop (Appiah 108, 102). For Appadurai and Appiah, while

globalization clearly has the potential of leveling cultural differences, it more plausibly

represents a tremendous "threat to homogeneity" (Appiah 101). To cite a specific

instance, Appiah argues that "Cultural consumers are not dupes": how "people [whether

in KwaZulu-Natal or the Netherlands] respond to American products" or cultural imports

from Europe "depends on their existing cultural context" (109-10). This cultural context I

further define as a people's understanding of their own history, memory, existing social

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[2] Both Appadurai and especially Appiah challenge this narrow focus on cultural purity. Appiah argues that globalization, a term he disapproves of, is not just a long-term development, but is something that has always been with us: supposedly pure cultures are and have always been hybrids, amalgams of other cultures. In lieu of the term globalization and its offshoots, Appiah recommends the ideal of the cosmopolitan or "cosmopolitanism." This ideal is posited as an antidote to the narrowness of many cultural narratives, such as nationalism, because it is predicated on the idea of "contamination," the notion that all cultures are ipso facto heterogeneous, impure, contaminated: "Cultural purity is an oxymoron" (Appiah 111-3). Thus, Appiah's concern is not that the forces of globalization threaten pure, supposedly "authentic" local cultures, but that local cultures, due to a reaction against globalization, may seek to artificially maintain what they shortsightedly perceive as local, pure, and authentic customs. This often shades into a kind of nationalism or cultural chauvinism for its own sake, whether it benefits the local populace or not.

and cultural schemata, and moral frameworks. Indeed, for Appiah and Appadurai, rather than being "assimilated" by the cultural products brought to them through a globalized economy, cultural consumers often assimilate the products to themselves, selectively appropriating from them. As evidence, Appiah cites a study in which a Zulu man, Sipho, describes the lessons he has drawn from watching the soap opera, *Days of Our Lives*: while he approves of the idea that a son should be able to speak freely and frankly with his father on more or less equal terms, he resists the ideas regarding the ways the elderly are treated, as well as the expectation that a girl, for example, should enter into a relationship in her early teens (110). As Appiah wryly concludes, it is doubtful that either of these lessons "was the intended message of multinational capitalism's ruling sector" (110). If this is cultural imperialism, he suggests, then this is clearly a "case in which the empire has struck back," dealing a blow to the empire's heart, head, and center.

Like Appiah, Appadurai explicitly challenges the critical narrative that sees globalization simply as the "story" of "cultural homogenization" (11). Instead, he claims precisely the opposite is taking place: as a result of globalization, cultures are becoming increasingly heterogeneous, hybridized, and mixed, for the better. Similar to Appiah, he claims that cultural goods become "indigenized": they do not swamp a particular local culture but are absorbed by it (32). For his part, Appadurai emphasizes the "*work of the imagination*," the active role consumers play in fitting these cultural commodities into existing frameworks, in a process which frequently leads to the creation of new frameworks (3, original italicized). As Appadurai stresses, cultural products, whose transmission is enabled by the new electronic media, offer "resources for experiments

with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of people" (3). He regards cultural

products as potentially liberating because they "allow scripts for possible lives to be

imbricated with the glamour of film stars and fantastic plots and to be tied to the

plausibility of the news shows, documentaries, and other black-and-white forms of

telemediation and printed text" (3-4). What these new media, together with the "story of

mass migrations," *do* explicitly threaten, in Appadurai's argument, is the dominance of

the modern nation-state in determining identity. That is, they threaten the homogeneous

"passport" identity we associate with the nation-state. Indeed, Appadurai goes so far as to

claim, optimistically but unconvincingly, that the nation-state, as a complex modern

political form, is on its last legs" (19).

In what follows, I am less interested in arguing that Smith and Díaz set out with

the specific intent of dealing with these narratives in a programmatic way than I am in

emphasizing a specific point about these critical narratives regarding modern

globalization: while this phenomenon is divisive and polarizing, it is also tremendously

complex, replete with the sorts of moral paradoxes I have been claiming are moral

fiction's primary concerns, its recurring thematic focuses. As we have seen, modern

globalization is celebrated, on one hand, for its libratory effects on the imagination, for

how it represents a break from histories of past oppression, disrupting cultural narratives

that might restrict one's sense of human agency and the role morality plays in it. On the

other hand, globalization is condemned as a continuation of colonialism, a rerun,

reenactment, or replay of past history, an immoral or amoral development that limits the

development of human agency. One argument I make in the following sections is that

what is essential to valuing Smith's and Díaz's novels as moral fiction is that they

examine the complex legacy of history in the lives of their characters in ways that avoid

heavy-handed didacticism or simplistic moralizing. This is especially important for my

definition of moral fiction, because these novels deal with issues in which the moral

stakes are extremely high, for all of us.

Channeling History: Moral Critique through Television Motifs

An overarching argument in this chapter is that Smith's *White Teeth* and Díaz's

Oscar Wao represent prime specimens of contemporary moral fiction because they apply

its concept of process to dealing with the ways in which history dominates the present,

much like a rerun on TV, a trope I have drawn from *White Teeth* and adapted for use in

this chapter. As my second epigraph suggests, my focus in this two-part section is on how

the novels themselves employ this trope as a means for carrying out their moral critique

of the problem of history, i.e., construed as an endless looping rerun. In its original

context, the quoted passage sets up the parallel journeys of Samad's assignation with

Poppy Burt-Jones and Irie's, Millat's, and Magid's visit to J.P. Hamilton. Smith's

narrator explicitly labels these journeys "reruns," insisting they are akin to the "British

sitcoms" frequently shown in Britain's former colonial possessions. The journeys

undertaken by Smith's characters have a pronounced moral significance, as they are

journeys into the past, into past encounters between the colonized and the colonizer.

Smith makes this most explicit in the children's meeting with J. P. Hamilton, a former

soldier of the British Empire. In his telling about wartime violence, this character reprises

his role as a soldier, wounding the children psychically with his words instead of

physically with bullets: "When I was in the Congo," he says, "the only way I could identify the nigger was by the whiteness of his teeth […] See a flash of white and bang!": the "poor fools," he goes on to explain, "didn't even know why they were there, what people they were fighting for, who they were shooting at" (144). What Mr. Hamilton is describing is the work of empire viewed up close in all its nastiness, and this gives rise to noteworthy irony: as I mentioned earlier in my chapter on Conrad, European imperialists often justified their invasions of Africa, for example, as a part of a moral duty to civilize the savage. Smith's treatment of Mr. Hamilton reverses this idea: he is the savage, mindlessly cruel to children who mean him no harm. At the same time, what Mr. Hamilton says about the Congolese soldiers offers insight into the children's present predicament there in Mr. Hamilton's sitting room: it is not that they do not know why they are there, but rather that they are unaware they are caught up in a "rerun," a "repetition," a "tedious eternal loop" (135).

To identify this kind of historical rerun requires awareness, memory: the ability to recollect and remember, to gather specific sense-memories and put them together in a coherent fashion. Indeed, in the context of my definition of moral fiction, memory, i.e., being able to remember responsibly, not simplistically, represents a kind of intellectual virtue, a dianoetic areté. Part of Smith's and Díaz's process of exploration in *White Teeth* and *Oscar Wao*, respectively, involves developing the capability for remembering as I am defining it, despite substantial obstacles such as the self-inflicted historical and cultural amnesia we note in Archie Jones in Smith's novel. Both novels reconceptualize the difficulty of remembering as a moral problem, investigating it through television tropes

and motifs, and using this device to chart several characters' development of a larger, more comprehensive sense of moral agency. The use of television symbolism is of course ironic, not only because we associate television with a shortened attention span, with egregiously flawed, ahistorical, even anti-historical thinking and perspectives, but also because we chastise TV for being morally frivolous if not deleterious, a danger precisely because it encourages us to regard grave social and moral issues as trivial matters (and vice versa).

However, my argument is that both of these novels employ television symbolism seriously, in distinctive ways that are part of the novels' larger moral critique of the problem of history. My claim is that both Smith and Díaz use television as a metaphor for talking about the moral dimensions of history and historiography, as a means of dramatizing the morally debilitating effects of forgetting, the sometimes morally ambiguous aspects of remembering, and the potentially morally liberating outcomes of imagining alternate endings to historical reruns. Smith uses TV motifs, metaphors, and simulated broadcasts to dramatize how both historical amnesia and an excessive reverence of the past can become morally crippling, in that, just as TV's moral frivolousness is linked to a kind of forgetfulness, its often predictable format reflects some characters' tendency to mistakenly conceptualize history as a TV show, to regard it as Millat does fate, as an "unstoppable narrative, written, produced, and directed by somebody else" (Smith 436). In contrast, Díaz laces his narrative about Oscar and the fukú with allusions to popular television shows and cartoons, not to trivialize the effects of historical forces, but as a way to be able to acknowledge and come to grips with them

in the first place. In other words, while Smith uses television motifs to register how her

characters' stunted historical imaginations restrict their understanding of human agency,

with its crucial moral implications, Díaz's incorporation of television allusions and

references in part enables his moral critique of the impact of history on himself and the

Cabral-de León family: his TV references are not just mnemonic devices, used to date or

situate his narrative in relation to the historical context of the late twentieth century, but

as the vocabulary and conceptual medium necessary for simply recognizing the effects of

appalling historical oppression on a conscious level.[3]

White Teeth: Televising Archie's Development of Moral Agency

Early in *White Teeth*, in the scene depicting Archie Jones's attempt to commit

suicide by gassing himself to death in his car, Smith evokes a link between Archie's

personal history and television, suggesting that his understanding of agency and his life

as a moral being have been decisively shaped by watching television. At first glance, this

treatment seems predictable, a cliché about how TV makes people dumb, morally

incompetent, with no sense of moral concepts. But in Smith's treatment, the TV motif is

used to initiate the book's examination of history and historiography conceived as

morally debilitating, determinative forces. Invoking tropes of television-viewing, Smith's

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[3] Here, I am drawing again on MacIntyre's thinking regarding the key role stories play in moral self-understanding. As I discussed earlier in my Introduction and Chapter 2, MacIntyre values stories as a "stock" of "dramatic resources," without which we are "unscripted, anxious stutterers" in our speech as well as in our actions (216). Elaborating on MacIntyre's notion, D. Carr explains that we develop our understanding of "moral self and agency" through imagining ourselves in the roles of literary characters, as well as film and television characters (319-20). Interestingly, MacIntyre's notions about narrative anticipate Appadurai's theory of "mediascapes": "image-centered, narrative-based accounts of reality,' which "offer to those who experience and transform them [..] a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places" (35). My claim in this section is that Díaz's and Smith's novels treat TV shows as a stock of dramatic resources, as mediascapes, hence the moral dimension I am ascribing to their use of this motif.

description of Archie's "obligatory flashback of his life to date" implies that Archie's

sense of his own personal history has been deadened by the medium of TV, that he has

absorbed and internalized its format, its ethics, and thinks of his own life in terms of a

framework established by television programs (12). In Smith's phraseology, Archie's

flashback resembles a "year-in review" program typically shown in late December or

early January. This is the precise time of year when Archie is trying to kill himself, a

point established by the detail of the "Queen's Speech," a Christmas-day custom in

Britain:

> It turned out to be a short, unedifying viewing experience, low on
> entertainment value, the metaphysical equivalent of the Queen's speech. A
> dull childhood, a bad marriage, a dead-end job---that classic triumvirate---
> they all flicked by silently, with little dialogue, feeling pretty much as they
> did the first time around. (12)

 This passage underlines the predictable run of Archie's life so far, how it has proceeded

as if by design, and is easily encapsulated as a series of episodes or events such as is

shown on television to mark the end of the year---an often predictable and empty

tradition, with no moral purpose other than to fill airtime. Interestingly, however, the

passage also connects Archie's personal, moral shortcomings with a larger cultural, moral

malaise that is specifically British, and it implicitly criticizes a life characterized by

diminished expectations and excessive social structuring, a life with no moral framework.

The failures of Archie's life become symptomatic of something expressly British: the

moral bankruptcy Samad imputes to England (166, passim). In this way, the novel

underscores Archie's historical amnesia and cultural forgetfulness, which is contrasted

with Samad's excessive and obsessive adherence to his Bengali cultural, historical, and

Muslim religious traditions and moral code. As we discover, Archie embodies an ethos predicated on an arguably liberating but morally ambiguous embrace of the random and the chance, as exemplified by his peculiar habit of flipping a coin as a method for making decisions: this is a paradoxical moral code that rejects codology and design but still represents a kind of code, a method or strategy for regulating one's existence. Thus, even though Archie represents a cultural, historical, and moral blank, Smith's treatment of this character is not wholly critical: of all the characters, Archie, who embodies an ethos of chance, holds least with deterministic discourses, whether it is his own past, fate, or his society's history.

So, our first encounter with Archie reveals that he regards his life as a boring television program, his memories mere reruns. His sense of agency and of himself as a moral being, with choices, is thus significantly limited. We see how this lack of agency and inadequate moral sense play out in Archie's career following the war. Although Smith does not explicitly invoke the television motif, Archie's professional life, the job he takes after the war, is in effect a rerun of his job or duty in the war. Following World War II, Archie takes the unimpressive, uninspiring job of "designing the way all kinds of things should be *folded*---envelopes, direct mail, brochures, leaflets" (12). This job is a repeat of Archie's past experiences in three key ways. First, Archie serves the same basic function after the war as in the war. His (and Samad's) duty involved "recovering damaged equipment, laying bridges, creating passages for battle, creating routes where routes had been destroyed"; as the narrative voice tells us, Archie's "job was not so much to fight the war as to make sure it ran smoothly," a morally dubious enterprise that

enables the fighting and destruction (74). Similarly, Archie's job at Morgan Hero is not to produce the content that goes on the envelopes, brochures, or leaflets, but to make sure that these printed materials can be easily sent and delivered. This is not exactly morally questionable, but it is hardly a morally uplifting coda to the war itself. Second, Archie takes this job precisely because the war, along with his mediocre education, has rendered him unfit for most other employment. His war experience is in fact an obstacle to getting work even as a "war correspondent" with a paper on "Fleet Street": his interviewer tells him, "*We could require something other than merely having fought in a war, Mr. Jones. War experience isn't really relevant*" (12).[4] Finally, Archie's service in the military is shown to morally isolate him, to negatively affect his dealings with people at large. Given the reaction to his war tales, Archie's type of morally debilitating historical amnesia comes to seem self-inflicted: it is a self-wounding designed paradoxically to serve as a mechanism to help Archie deal with the indifference of his fellow nationals:

> No one wanted to talk about [his war wound] anymore. It was like a clubfoot, or a disfiguring mole. It was like nose hair. People looked away. If someone said to Archie, *What have you done in life, then*? or *What's your biggest memory*? well, God help him if he mentioned the war; eyes glazed over, fingers tapped, everybody offered to buy the next round. No one really wanted to *know*. (12)

Archie's disconnect from his personal history, and how this qualifies his agency as a moral being, is taken up again later in the novel and expanded, becoming a kind of collective historical amnesia, passed down to Archie's child and Samad's children,

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[4] The italics appear in Smith's original text, as are all the other instances of italics in the material quoted from her novel, unless explicitly noted otherwise. As we note, Smith uses italics quite often, usually for reporting speech verbatim in undramatized scenes or for ironic emphasis, as we discover in the passages cited in this chapter.

interfering with their understanding of agency and the moral. This is especially clear in a passage that simulates a televised news broadcast showing the tearing down of the Berlin wall, as viewed by Archie's and Samad's families, the Joneses and Iqbals. However, while my first passage suggests that Archie has internalized a TV-format for regarding the moral crossroads of his life, this passage emphasizes almost the opposite idea, that a knowledge and awareness of history, especially how it affects one directly, is necessary for understanding the moral ramifications of events depicted on television. In other words, the children's reaction to the broadcast is largely a result of the individual historical amnesia exemplified by Archie and the larger collective historical amnesia of those who do not want to hear or know anything else about World War II. The matter-of-fact style of the passage itself contributes to a sense of dissociation with the moral significance of this pivotal event in late twentieth-century history:

> A wall was coming down. It was something to do with history. It was *an historic occasion*. No one really knew quite who had put it up or who was tearing it down or whether this was good or bad, or something else; no one knew how tall it was, how long it was, or why people had died trying to cross it, or whether they would stop dying in the future, but it was educational all the same; as good an excuse for a get-together as any. It was Thursday night, Alsana and Clara had cooked, and everybody was watching history on the TV. (197)

I say more about Smith's narrator and her use of authorial voice in the next section, but we note how this usually garrulous figure is restrained in this passage, only hinting at the larger historical context. Obviously, this event publicly marked the beginning of the end for the Soviet bloc, the Soviet Union, and an end to the kind of Cold war paradigm that had dominated world affairs since the end of World War II. Yet here it is just a scene on

television, and the short, choppy, disjointed sentences convey the sense of moral disconnect the viewers are subject to as they view this event: "history" no longer seems lived, with important moral implications, but is only viewed from afar, like a movie. Only Archie and Samad are shown to demonstrate a greater historical and moral awareness, due to their wartime experiences, and their reactions, the umbrage they take, unsettle the others. Archie, for example, is "not so sure that it's such a good thing": "there's good reason to have it split in two" (198). Samad is of the same mind: "Not all of us think fondly upon a united Germany" (199). For Millat, watching this event unfold on TV is boring; his father's historical perspective means nothing to him, and he sees it only as an interruption of his time: "Same. Same. Same. Dancing on the wall, smashing it with a hammer. Whatever. I wanna see what else is on, yeah?" (197).

In contrast with Millat, who wants to be entertained now, here, in the present, Irie is interested in the news broadcast. After chastising Millat for having "no interest in the outside world," Irie becomes expansive:

> "I think this is *amazing*. They're all free! After all this time, don't you think that's *amazing*? That after years under the dark cloud of Eastern communism they're coming into the light of Western democracy, united," she said, quoting *Newsnight* faithfully. "I just think democracy is man's *greatest* invention." (198)

However, her perspective is also criticized as simplistic, naïve, slightly "pompous" moralizing, as if a people who have lived under a totalitarian, immoral system can be transformed overnight, can become human agents with an understanding of themselves as

moral beings, or as if Western democracy is not without failings, but is a "light" (198).[5]

Indeed, Irie's breathless account is deflated by Alsana, who claims that man's greatest

invention is either the "Potato-peeler" or the "Poop-a-Scoop," a practical item rather an

abstract political or moral ideal (198). Given the ending of the chapter, we might add the

television or O'Connell's poolroom to Alsana's two selections: after zapping channels on

the TV, Archie and Samad decide to go to O'Connell's, a sanctuary from the morally

significant developments they have just witnessed on the news. Nothing changes at

O'Connell's; its ethics involve imperviousness to alteration.

Archie is used in the narrative to embody cultural and historical amnesia and to

examine how this condition interferes with his understanding of agency and the moral

self, and this predisposes him to repeating and reenacting the same kinds of events and

experiences. However, Smith's handling of Archie in the novel's closing chapter

significantly complicates our impression of him: while Archie reenacts a morally

ambiguous episode from his past, saving the geneticist Dr. Marc-Pierre Perret a second

time and, in the process, getting shot and wounded a second time, Smith's treatment

suggests that Archie's actions foster conditions for a future that is not dominated by the

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[5] This is one of the many passages in which Smith responds to Francis Fukuyama's political treatise, *The End of History and the Last Man*. In his "By Way of an Introduction," Fukuyama claims, in words that now sound naïve, that at the end of the twentieth century, it seems sensible "for us once again to speak of a coherent and directional History that will lead the greater part of humanity to liberal democracy." Fukuyama regards liberal democracy as the result of several trends working together. First, modern natural science emerges, fostering technological advancements, and these breakthroughs help to bring about increased "material prosperity." This development leads societies to insist on liberal democracy, a system based on the "principle of popular sovereignty and the guarantee of basic rights under a rule of law." However, while liberal democracy, for Fukuyama, is "arguably free from [the] fundamental internal contradictions" that characterize other systems, it paradoxically leads to a kind of societal and individual staidness. As it marks the acme of man's ideological development, it spells the end of striving and ambition, and ushers in "the last man": the problematic figure who eschews "prideful belief in his or her own superior worth in favour of a comfortable self-preservation." One of my arguments in the next section is that Smith's authorial voice is used to critique the idea that history moves in discernible patterns.

past. Archie's embrace of chance, his strategic use of the random, creates some moral

"wiggle room," altering what seems like a mere rerun of the past. The scene in question

not only brings all the principal characters together, but puts them on television in the

process. In this reenactment, Archie plays the starring role, is filmed playing it, in fact:

> And it's a messy business, this saving people lark. Everybody in the room watches in horror as he takes it in the thigh, right in the femur, spins round with some melodrama and falls right through the mouse's glass box. Shards of glass all over the gaff. What a performance. If it were TV you would hear the saxophone around now; the credits would be rolling (447).

It is a passage suggestive of many reruns and their reversals. For example, initially, the

television motif is connected to the genetic project of FutureMouse, a mouse genetically

engineered to live disease-free for seven years, then decline rapidly, and finally die

shortly thereafter. This project is of course morally suspicious, since it is linked to the

eugenics of the Nazi-era through the reappearance of Dr. Sick, Marc-Pierre Perret, as

well as to Dr. Marcus Chalfen's eugenic desire to "eliminate the random" and "rule the

world" through the FutureMouse experiment (283).

The text's focus on Archie drives home the reversals of what might otherwise

seem mere reruns of events that have already taken place in the novel. The studio set is

described as "like TV but better" because it is so "*modern*" and "well designed," so much

so "you wouldn't want to *breathe* in it, no matter fart in it" (431). For Archie, the whole

scene is also better because the focus is on a "plain mouse, brown, and not with any other

mice," instead of on a "foreign-orphan scenario, weeping child, missing parents," and this

mouse is "very active, scurrying around in this glass box that's about as big as a

television with airholes" (432). So, while it is TV, it is not the usual, morally

manipulative programming, calculated to achieve a predetermined rhetorical effect. The details about breathing and airholes recall Archie's attempt to kill himself at the beginning of the novel, stuck in his car with his windows rolled up and a vacuum hose hooked to the exhaust pipe.

However, there are small suggestions that much is different this time, and that we are not in for a straight rerun of Archie's historical amnesia, another demonstration of his lack of agency. One way this difference is emphasized is through the interruption of the chapter by what is the novel's last "root canal." In this, we come to learn that Archie, characteristically on the basis of a coin-toss, earlier decided to release Dr. Perret, AKA "Dr. Sick," a Nazi collaborator, instead of summarily executing him, as Samad urged him to do, for the future of their then-unborn children. While the scene is not focalized through Archie, it suggests that his historical amnesia is a choice, a method or moral code for getting through life. Both the "root canal," which clears up the mystery of what happened when Archie took Dr. Sick off in the woods to shoot him, and the dramatized scene taking place in the narrative present, demonstrate that while Archie exemplifies historical amnesia and the "contingent and chaotic stuff of social life," these are connected to and are part of a "tacit [but moral] conviction in common humanity" (Head 115). Indeed, when Archie recognizes the doctor's name, his first concern is that if Samad divines the truth about the incident, this will jeopardize their now decades-long friendship. It does not end it, of course, as Samad thinks: "*This incident alone will keep us two old boys going for the next forty years*. It is the story to end all stories. It is a gift that keeps on giving" (441).

Most interesting, however, in this hectic, final scene are several evocative details. Obviously, Archie has repeated his moral action of saving Dr. Perret and has been shot once more into the bargain for his troubles. What is significantly different this time, however, is that his reaction, his decision to intercept the bullet, comes about virtually instinctively: Archie does not have time to flip a coin in order to decide what he should do. So, this is not, strictly speaking, a rerun. Archie's second encounter with Dr. Sick suggests that he is not doomed to simple, mechanical repetition as a bit-player in an "unstoppable narrative." What the book's climactic scene implies is that while this rerun or narrative is not completely stoppable, it is subject to revision and alteration, and that even introducing small changes can, possibly, for there is no way of knowing for sure, have pronounced moral effects. On one level, Archie's actions may signal the end of one story, but as Smith's authorial voice makes clear, such an "end is simply the beginning of an even longer story," whose ending(s) is only suggested: just as the "small brown rebel mouse" escapes through the hands of the spectators who "wished to pin it down," so too are future stories of Samad, Archie, Clara, Magid, Millat, and Irie left undetermined, unmapped.

Oscar Wao: TV as Moral Resource for Self-Understanding

In the first part of this section, we saw that Smith invokes the motif of television first to comment on how the characters in *White Teeth* conceptualize history as a rerun and then to signal the possibility of developing a sense of human agency and reversing such reruns. In *Oscar Wao*, Díaz engages television programming in a sustained manner, weaving allusions and references to specific TV shows and movies into his narrative in

ways that extend and complicate it, paradoxically using morally simplistic TV shows to

underscore a crucial moral dimension of his narrative, of dealing with the fukú through a

counterspell or "zafa." Indeed, the narrator introduces the concept of the counterspell

through an allusion to *The Wizard of Oz*: "one final final note, Toto, before Kansas goes

bye-bye" (6).[6] Accordingly, my aim is to focus on how Díaz's characters, including the

narrator, actually seem to "think in TV," how they use TV, especially sci-fi programs, as

a medium for approaching painful historical experiences, whether on the individual or

collective level. Thus, these programs serve an important moral function, much like what

MacIntyre ascribes to literary stories or tales told orally: they are the "stock of stories

which constitute" Díaz's characters' "initial dramatic resources" for understanding

themselves "qua selves," i.e., as moral beings, as they adopt and play out roles in their

societies (MacIntyre 216; Carr 320).

While the allusion to *The Wizard of Oz* sets up a morally ambiguous relationship

between Díaz's as-yet unnamed narrator and his narratees, as if they are his dog,

following the prefatory chapter in which it appears, the narrator weaves television

references into the texture of the narrative in ways that encourage us to sympathize with

Oscar but not sentimentalize him. That is, the references to TV programs are integral to

the narrator's attempt, flawed though it may be, to do justice to Oscar in the narrator's

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[6] This short quotation also raises the idea of the reruns through its doublings and double-entrendres: "final final" suggests that something can always follow what we regard as final, and sets up the effect of the final lines of the penultimate chapter, lines which are quoted from *Watchmen*, a graphic novel: "In the end? Nothing ends, Adrian. Nothing ever ends" (331). "Toto," on one level, refers to Dorothy's trusty dog, and the narrator thus invites readers to think of themselves as his travelling companions; on another level, "Toto" is veiled insult, as is true of the word, fukú, i.e., "fuck you: "toto" is Spanish slang for "pussy" (Mahler 123, 128). In other words, readers are the "toto" the narrator is going to "fukú."

description of him.[7] For example, the narrator humorously references a number of

Saturday-morning programs, sci-fi movies, and prime-time shows, such as *Star Trek*, *The*

Planet of the Apes, *The Land of the Lost*, *Shazam!,* and *The Secrets of Isis*, to depict the

period in which Oscar's life, specifically, his love-life, first "started going down the

tubes" (15-6). Except for *Star Trek*, each of these shows involves varieties of

transformation or time-travel, and my focus is on how the last three that I mention

function together to offer a glimpse of a chapter in Oscar's moral history. That is, Oscar

uses these programs as a stock of dramatic resources to get his moral bearings in relation

to his social surroundings, and he does this in much the same way as the young Stephen

Dedalus does through his early forays into reading literary texts. The narrator tells us that

the seven-year-old Oscar regards himself as "Shazam" (Captain Marvel), from the

Saturday-morning show of the same name, in his flirtatious episode with Maritza and

Olga: "At first he pretended that it was his number-one hero, Shazam, who wanted to

date them. But after they agreed he dropped all pretense. It wasn't Shazam---it was

Oscar" (14). In the show, the mild-mannered, teenaged Billy Batson utters the word

Shazam, and is struck by Zeus's thunderbolt and transformed into the superhero, Captain

Marvel, who, like Superman, can fly, and possesses superhuman strength. The narrator

uses "Shazam" to mark Oscar's sad transformation from being a "typical," i.e.,

cartoonishly macho, Dominican male to becoming an increasingly fat, pimply, "self-

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[7] I am basing this claim on Díaz's spirited defense of Oscar's love of sci-fi and fantasy genres. For example, in his 2008 interview with Jay, Díaz argues that when critics dismiss the book's "genre claims" as so many "bells and whistles," as "ornamentation," they are "basically doing to the narrative what Oscar suffered from": dismissing Oscar's genre interests as "illegitimate, as unimportant, as make-believe." Accordingly, Díaz challenges us as readers to "take not only Oscar seriously but his interests seriously," too (Jay, "Interview with Junot Díaz"). Part of my argument in this section is that we need to take these silly Saturday morning cartoons seriously as they are used in the narrative.

conscious" nerd with an outsized interest in sci-fi (12, 16). While Olga becomes as overweight as Oscar, Maritza, Oscar's other young girlfriend develops seemingly overnight into an astonishing beauty, and her sudden transformation is linked with another Saturday morning show, *The Secrets of Isis*, through a reference to the utterance the main character uses to be transformed into the embodiment of this Egyptian goddess: "And the lovely Maritza Chacón? The hypotenuse of our triangle, how had she fared? Well, before you could say *Oh Mighty Isis*, Maritza blew up into the flyest guapa in Paterson, one of the Queens of New Peru" (17).[8] However, the narrator undercuts this development by his (earlier) reference to *Land of the Lost*, a Saturday morning show in which a family is transported to the time of the dinosaurs. Maritza is seen "holding hands with butt-ugly Nelson Pardo. Nelson Pardo who looked like Chaka from *Land of the Lost*!" (16). In the show, Chaka is an ape-like creature, a missing link or throwback, who acts as a guide to the marooned family. This reference suggests that Maritza's beauty throws her into her own land of the lost, in which she is prey to males who are far worse than the harmless Chaka-lookalike, Nelson Pardo: "dating men two, three times her age," "Maritza was a girl who seemed to delight in getting slapped around by her boyfriends. Since it happened to her *all the time*" (18). In fact, Maritza is in many ways a rerun of Beli, Oscar's mother: Beli, after all, falls in love with three men, who use her sexually, and then abandon her. Beli's relationship with the second of these men, the "gangster,"

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[8] What is more, these two programs eventually became merged into one: *The Shazam/Isis Hour*. How do I know this? I would like to plead, as does Díaz's narrator, "Please don't ask me how I know this. Please" (172). But the truth is pretty mundane: I remember them from my childhood. More importantly, this is not the last time we note this reference, either. Lola names her daughter "Isis," and Yunior tell readers that she is "Neither Captain Marvel nor Billy Batson, but the lightning" (329). This suggests that Isis will not role-play but will become a kind of transformative power herself.

ends with a beating so bad that Beli loses her first unborn child and nearly dies as a result of her gruesome injuries. She is Maritza before Maritza is Maritza.

Following this point in the narrative, the narrator underlines how Oscar later uses such TV programs as a means of escaping the unpleasantness of his existence, as a coping mechanism. Readers are told, for example, Oscar can barely be pulled "away from any movie or TV show or cartoon where there were monsters or spaceships or mutants or doomsday devices or destinies or magic or evil villains" (21). The narrator then suggests that the idiom of these TV programs profoundly influences how Oscar interacts with his surroundings and community, in ways that make for a rerun of his earlier experience with Maritza. The narrator seems to mimic Oscar's thinking, how he uses the kinds of scripts and language he has absorbed from watching TV and reading sci-fi to help him deal with girls' rejection through envisaging fantasy revenge scenarios. For example, Oscar entertains "apocalyptic daydreams," imagining that "when the nuclear bombs fell (or the plague broke out or the Tripods invaded) and civilization was wiped out he would end up saving [Maritza] from a pack of irradiated ghouls and together they'd set out across a ravaged America in search of a better tomorrow" (27).

While these shows provide Oscar with a world to inhabit, a world in which he functions, and though they encourage him to develop his imagination, this development comes at a high cost. Most obviously, his daydreaming is never very productive, leading to dead-ends. In fact, paradoxically, this thing that saves Oscar, his ability to imagine and inhabit alternate scenarios, contributes to his death, as if to suggest that his imaginative habits are ineffectual against the fukú and may possibly represent a manifestation of it.

Oscar, like his mother, keeps reprising the same role with the women he falls for. For

instance, years after the break-up with Maritza, Oscar repeats his doomsday-dreaming

after his falling-out with Ana Obregón. She is another young woman semi-involved with

the abusive "ex-boyfriend," "Manny" (40). Oscar learns, for example, that Manny "used

to smack the shit out of [Ana], which was a problem, she confessed, because she liked it

when guys were a little rough with her in bed" (40). Hearing from Ana that Manny has

returned and that they are sleeping together again, Oscar goes

> back to dreaming about nuclear annihilation, how through some
> miraculous accident he'd heard about the attack first and without pausing
> he'd steal his tío's car, drive it to the stores, stock it full of supplies
> (maybe shoot a couple looters en route), and then fetch Ana. What about
> Manny? She'd wail. There's no time! he'd insist, peeling out, shoot a
> couple more looters (now slightly mutated), and then repair to the sweaty
> love den where Ana would quickly succumb to his take-charge genius and
> his by-then ectomorphic physique. When he was in a better mood he let
> Ana find Manny hanging from a light fixture in his apartment, his tongue a
> swollen purple bladder in his mouth, his pants around his ankles. The
> news of the imminent attack on the TV, a half-literate note pinned to his
> chest. *I koona taek it*. And then Oscar would comfort Ana with the terse
> insight, He was too weak for this Hard New World. (42-3)

What is interesting here is that there are two endings, and that Oscar imagines a

more gruesome ending when he is in a "better mood." The description of Manny, with his

pants down and swollen tongue, is suggestive of auto-erotic asphyxiation and castration.

So, while Oscar is shown to develop his imagination through his involvement with sci-fi

and fantasy TV shows and cartoons, and later his interest in sci-fi and fantasy literature,

his imagination is not exactly moral but capable of cruelty. Finally, this passage offers an

implicit critique of Oscar while extolling his imaginativeness: Manny might be "too

weak" for the "Hard New World" of the future of Oscar's imagination, but he is doing

fine in the world as it is now: he may beat Ana and cheat on her, but she cannot leave

him: she loves him (44). Oscar, in contrast, might do fine in the future of his imagining;

for him, it is the present that is the problem, the way it keeps repeating the past,

practically without deviation or variation. While these shows represent Oscar's stock of

dramatic resources, the narrative challenges the perhaps overly optimistic view that such

media resources, scripts, and roles foster one's development of agency and moral self-

understanding in any kind of straightforward way, readily applicable to one's life. In fact,

in Díaz's treatment, Oscar's use of TV programs, as well as sci-fi and fantasy genres,

underscores a disjunction between such programs and genres and hard historical realities.

In this two-part section, we have seen that in *White Teeth* Smith uses TV motifs as

a means for conceptualizing historical amnesia as a problem with significant moral

dimensions, in that, this type of forgetting interferes with developing human agency, with

developing the ability to avoid merely repeating history. Indeed, preventing reruns of

negative historical events clearly necessitates human agency. The use of TV motifs in

White Teeth represents one manner in which Smith's novel models getting away from

conceptualizing history as Millat does fate: as an "unstoppable narrative, written,

produced, and directed by somebody else" (Smith 436). Conversely, the treatment of TV

motifs in *Oscar Wao* initially seems upbeat and liberating, as it is used as a medium for

understanding the past, for acknowledging the lingering effects of oppression on the

conscious level, but it does not hold much hope that developing a moral imaginary based

on sci-fi and fantasy TV shows, films, and books will do much to prevent the replay of

the kinds of reruns that Oscar and his family seem trapped in---except for one small

detail. We noted that early on the novel compares Oscar to Shazam or Captain Marvel, Maritza, one of his first crushes, to Isis. The novel's ending recycles motifs from *Shazam!* and *The Secrets of Isis* shows, and implies that Lola's daughter, Isis, might possibly "put an end to [the fukú]" (331). The narrator hints at this possibility through several small but significant details. First, most obviously, Yunior tells his readers that Isis is "Neither Captain Marvel nor Billy Batson, but the lightning" (329). Yunior's description suggests that Isis will not role-play as Oscar did: she will act out neither the part of the hero nor that of his mild-mannered alter-ego. Rather, Isis will become a morally transformative power herself. What is different is that Yunior's account here emphasizes the idea that defeating the fukú requires a collective effort, Yunior's, Oscar's, Lola's, and Isis's. Yunior's description emphasizes that Isis not only has "her uncle's eyes" (and "her mother's legs"), but she will have access to Oscar's books, manuscript, comic books, and papers, which Yunior, doing his part, has stored in refrigerators in his basement (330). As Yunior claims, "maybe, just maybe, if [Isis is] as smart and brave as I'm expecting she'll be, she'll take all we've done and all we've learned and add her own insights and she'll put an end to it" (330). This part of the novel makes for a kind of twist on the idea that stories represent a stock of dramatic resources for a moral education. In Yunior's description, these characters have become themselves their own stock of stories, their own moral resources, and they have achieved a degree of agency not through the escapism of sci-fi and fantasy shows but by confronting the past together, by remembering together.

White Teeth: Undoing the Moral Certainty of the Authorial Voice

I have been dwelling on how *White Teeth* and *Oscar Wao* use television and filmic tropes and motifs to chart their characters' development of a sense of themselves as moral agents, who are capable of resisting the idea that they are stuck in a rerun of the past, with no control. In both novels, the characters are shown to use TV programs initially as a dramatic resource for fostering moral agency and envisaging a future that is not merely a rerun of the past. In the two sections that follow, I turn to the diegetic level to concentrate on these novels' narrators, both of which represent departures from the types of narrators we have seen in the novels I have examined up to this point. In contrast with most of the storytellers we have encountered so far in my analyses, Smith's "storyteller" is not dramatically embedded *in* the narrative but is glaringly foregrounded as the mediator *of* the narrative: she is an overt, dramatized, extradiegetic, and highly opinionated (but not moralistic) narrator. Indeed, a great stylistic riddle of *White Teeth* is that while the novel deals with Britain's multicultural society at the end of the twentieth century, a period distinguished by accelerating globalization, its narrator resembles the overt, dramatized, omniscient narrators and authorial tellers that were so characteristic of British fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: is this device not just a rerun, replay, or reenactment of authorial voice? My claim is that Smith recycles authorial voice, but undermines and possibly undoes the sort of moral certainty we associate with this type of narrative device through the novel's sustained focus on the chance and random elements of existence. Indeed, what we discover is that while Smith's authorial

voice does not exemplify moral certainty, she asserts her authority, her superior

knowledge, on the random, haphazard, the chance, and morally uncertain.

Before I go into *how* Smith undoes the moral certainty of authorial voice, I should

say *why* I believe that she does this, *why* she chooses this particular type of narrator to

focus our attention on, and *what* effect she achieves by doing so. As I mentioned earlier,

this device is associated with the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a

period that saw the rise of the British Empire. Thus, it is linked to a particular moment in

Britain's history, a threshold or "liminal point" as Jay phrases it in a slightly different

context (160).[9] While World War II, for example, functions as one of these liminal points

for Samad within the narrative, we can regard the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as

liminal points for the historical forces, i.e., European colonialism, that eventually lead to

the conquest of India, the clash between the imperialistic modern nation-states in World

War I, which itself leads to World War II. It is partly for this reason, I argue, that Smith

foregoes the use of techniques and devices associated with modernism, such as interior

monologue, psycho-narration, reflector-characters, or an abdicating narrator, such as we

discovered in Gardner. She reaches farther back. Smith's use of an omniscient narrator

connects the stories Smith is telling not so much to the fiction of the eighteenth and

nineteenth century but links it to this general point in the history of the British Empire,

the era in which imperial colonization got seriously underway. Further, Smith's choice of

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[9] Jay is discussing Smith's use of specific historical events as "liminal point[s] for the forces in her story" (160). For example, Jay argues that for Samad World War II "marks […] the transition between a history marked by colonialism and a postcolonial future inaugurated by independence and [further] partition" (160). Similarly, on the diegetic level, World War II helps structure the novel: the "narrative of Samad at war becomes a narrative of Samad at war with himself, and the divisions he experiences on the Russian front persist and deepen as he tries to assimilate to life in London after settling there in 1973 with his wife Alsana" (Jay 161).

narrator gives us the impression of a "palpable presence within the fictional world,"

pervading the narrative much like historical memories do in the narrative as well

(Dawson 143). Thus, on one hand, this type of device serves as a literary and formal

reminder of how the forces of history are often still felt in the present; on the other, it

posits a kind of model of resistance, of appropriating and re-purposing a narrative device

that is frequently implicated as complicit with the historical forces of colonization and

imperialism.

However, while the use of this narrator acts as a formal reminder of the long,

complicated, and ongoing history of colonization and imperialism, how its shadows seep

into the present in distinctive and demonstrable ways, we are mistaken to regard Smith's

authorial, dramatized narrator as a voice of or for history, i.e., history conceptualized as

teleological, moving in patterns, with a sense of direction in order to culminate in some

kind of perfect future. Throughout the novel, Smith uses her narrator, paradoxically, to

criticize the propensity many of us have to impute or ascribe patterns to the flux of

existence.[10] In Smith's treatment, this tendency to think of history in these terms is akin

to spinning narratives, to distorting and falsifying accounts of events that are probably the

products of random, one-off confluences of events. This emphasis cuts against the idea of

narratives, as these depend precisely on seeing patterns and making connections. As we

discover, Smith's narrator is a kind of authority on the random, the chance, and the

haphazard. The narrator's overt commentary, especially her humorous embellishments

regarding the role of chance in the histories of the characters, often seems designed

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[10] This kind of narrator is subject to a similar critique in Díaz through his treatment of voice, especially as laid out in interviews. See my next section for my discussion of Díaz's narrator(s).

precisely to put pressure on the notion of plausibility, and this strain or pressure gives rise to concomitant critique of causality, of seeing patterns in the flux of our existence, of regarding history, for example, as a kind of overarching, coherent force moving steadily in a particular line or direction.

Of course, the stress Smith's narrator keeps placing on chance and the random might seem a recycling of a postmodern, western perspective rather than an attempt to undo the moral certainty that we associate with the device of the classical authorial voice. However, in Smith's treatment, the idea of random uncertainty is linked not to the collapse of religious belief or to the erosion of conventional moral codes in the west but to the specific histories of peoples living or originating *outside* the west. This link is reflected in the way the narrator takes on a persona that exemplifies a non-western perspective regarding the nature of existence, embodying the sober fatalism of the east rather than the cheerful nihilism of the west. We note this in the narrator's extended commentary regarding Alsana's division of the world's peoples into two types: those of temperate, hospitable climes, and those that are prone and subject to great natural catastrophes. As representative samples, the narrator contrasts the English with the Bangladeshis, citing how the geographies of their lands have shaped them in particular ways. Because "Born of a green and pleasant land, a temperate land, the English have a basic inability to conceive of disaster, even when it is man-made" (176). This sense is reflected in the ways the English believe that they are masters of their fate, not mastered by fate. In contrast, the Bangladeshi

> live under the invisible finger of random disaster, of flood and cyclone, hurricane and mudslide. Half the time half their country lies under water; generations wiped out regularly as clockwork; individual life expectancy an optimistic fifty-two, and they are coolly aware that when you talk about apocalypse, when you talk about random death en mass, well, they are leading the leading the way in that particular field […] it is the most ridiculous country in the world, Bangladesh. The facts of disasters are the facts of their lives. Between Alsana's sweet-sixteenth birthday (1971), for example, and the year she stopped speaking directly to her husband (1985), more people died in Bangladesh, more people perished in the winds and the rain, than in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Dresden put together. A million people lost lives that they had learned to hold lightly in the first place. (176).

Smith's narrator attributes a tendency to try to assert control to the west, especially England. But she also suggests that this is a product of their geographical circumstances, a factor outside their control. This directs our attention to how the characters are shaped by external factors, in this case meteorological ones, instead of, say, criticizing the characters directly. As for what this passage reveals about Smith's authorial voice, it further suggests a rationale for her emphasis on chance and the random: it is not the product of nineteenth- or twentieth-century European intellectuals, but represents a philosophy for psychologically managing the chaotic, random elements of existence.

What I am proposing is that Smith's narrator operates in ways that are broadly analogous to the key claims made by cultural critics and literary theorists about some of the effects of globalization. For example, we have noted that Appadurai and Appiah both argue that cultural and consumer goods distributed in a global economy do not simply erase a given local culture's nexus of moral values and cultural traditions, but are absorbed and worked into it. In *White Teeth*, the device of the classic authorial voice is indigenized, contaminated, made contemporary, reflecting an ethos frequently at odds

with its literary antecedents. In this respect, Smith's use of a contemporary authorial voice mirrors Jay's argument regarding Smith's use of London as a setting for her novel. Jay claims that because the novel takes place in London, instead of Jamaica or Bangladesh, as we might expect in most postcolonial novels, it challenges the belief that globalization is in essence a rerun of colonialism, only with different mechanisms of control and domination. In Jay's argument, globalization is a not so much a rerun as a remake or do-over, with the roles reversed. For example, Jay claims that in *White Teeth* "the mobility of the colonizer has become the mobility of the colonized, and [..] is used [by the colonized] to retrace the journey of those who conquered their ancestors" (155). Further, for Jay, this kind of mobility throws the "imperial machinery of colonization […] into reverse": since the descendants of the formerly colonized "have [now] relocated to the very center of colonial power" in Smith's novel, it is not "indigenity" that is "at stake," but Englishness (155). Similarly, in *White Teeth*, the ethos or credibility of the classic authorial teller has become the authority of Smith's contemporary authorial voice, speaking on behalf of the formerly colonized. That is, if we reconceptualize the mobility Jay mentions as the affordances, capabilities, or properties of the classic authorial voice, then my point here is that these have been appropriated by Smith's contemporary authorial voice, and that Smith uses this voice frequently for throwing a narrative convention associated with the period colonization got underway itself into reverse. To paraphrase Jay, Smith's indigenization of the overt, dramatized, authorial voice does not jeopardize the "indigenity" of the novel's subject matter, but imperils the kind of morally

and intellectually superior attitude often exemplified by the use of this literary device throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

I mentioned earlier some of the modernist narrative devices and techniques that Smith seemingly takes pains *not* to use, such as reflector-characters, free indirect discourse, and impersonal narrators, the very devices I have mainly been examining in this study. Instead of the classic authorial teller who is always "explaining and psychologizing about [his or her] characters," the novels I analyzed were usually focalized through the "minds and eyes of the characters themselves," much as we discovered in Conrad, Joyce especially, and also to a degree in Gardner (O'Connor 74). It is for this reason, i.e., because of this shift from overt authorial telling to covert narration, that I have been paying special attention to the storyteller-figures embedded in the narratives: this is why my methodology values the storyteller-figure as a device peculiar to texts of moral fiction (and spends so much time analyzing it).

Smith's reasserting authorial voice reverses the tendency I have been charting in this study, in effect leapfrogging or bypassing one of the major technical developments of twentieth-century fiction: Smith does not just replay the reflector-character, for example, but revives authorial voice, to assert its authority but to undo its moral certainty, to undermine its moral confidence. This is a key point, worth stressing. Smith might be replaying authorial voice, but she is not just repeating the techniques of twentieth-century writers. In this way, the opening of *White Teeth* in effect replays but reverses what I argued earlier about the opening of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, which I discussed in Chapter Two. My argument there was that while Conrad's narrator initially seems much

like a classic authorial voice, a dependable guide to the narrative, his narrator soon

becomes an unstable, chaotic element that forces us to remain alert to sudden but subtle

shifts in perspective, voice, and tone. In contrast, the opening of Smith's novel seems

focalized through a specific character, but then cedes to the broader but more distinctive

perspective of the authorial voice. For example, the detailed description of Archie's

posture and represented thought in the car during his suicide attempt can be read as

though it is focalized through Archie himself.[11]

> He lay in a prostrate cross, jaw slack, arms splayed on either side like
> some fallen angel; scrunched up in each first he held his service medals
> (left) and his marriage license (right), for he had decided to take his
> mistakes with him. A little green light flashed in his eye, signaling a right
> turn he had resolved never to make. He was resigned to it. He was
> prepared for it. He had flipped a coin and stood staunchly by the results.
> This was a decided upon suicide. In fact, it was a New Year's resolution.

However, Archie is gassing himself in his car, and by the time he begins to "slip[] in and

out of consciousness," the narrator has established her voice and perspective as an

authoritative, but not morally certain, mediating presence. While it is suggested that

Archie regards himself as one of the "Unlucky," the narrator tells us that although Archie

does not "know it, and despite the Hoover tube that lay on the passenger seat pumping

from the exhaust pipe into his lungs, luck was with him that morning" (4). So, whereas

Conrad blurs the line between his narrator's perspective and that of his characters, Smith

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[11] Still, the authorial voice is frequently shown to adopt a character's idiom. After telling us about Mad
Mary's "schizophrenic talent for seeing connections in the random (for discerning the whole world in a
grain of sand, for deriving narrative from nothing)," the narrator takes on the same kind of hostile,
antagonistic tone she ascribes to the mad: "But as a city we are not appreciative of these people. Our gut
instinct is that they intend to embarrass us, that they're out to *shame* us somehow as they lurch down the
train aisle, bulbous-eyed and with carbuncled nose, preparing to ask us, inevitably, *what we are looking at*.
What the *fuck* we are looking at" (146).

makes a point to reestablish it. In the context of my definition of moral fiction, this is important because while my overarching argument is that Smith undoes the moral certainty of the classical authorial voice of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British realism, the novel's opening aims first to reassert the authorial voice as a viable and credible narrative device, before assimilating it to the specific needs of the story: she is an authority, but not an embodiment of moral certainty.

Given what I have been arguing so far, Smith's use of authorial voice should not be regarded as anachronistic or aesthetically retrograde, a criticism Morton P. Levitt levels at contemporary authors who have "misapplied" the example of the classic authorial teller (7, 19). Citing the novels of Margaret Drabble in particular, Levitt claims that the problem is that these novelists, whom he calls "the New Victorians," use this type of narrator in ways that are "deadly serious," not ironic, comical, or self-reflexive (126). Smith's authorial voice, on the other hand, hits all these registers: her narrator is ironic, humorous, self-reflexive, and serious. For example, the narrator tells us that Archie's luck is changing, that he will not die, because, well, she does not know precisely why:

> While he [Archie] slipped in and out of consciousness, the position of the planets, the music of the spheres, the flap of a tiger moth's diaphanous wings in Central Africa, and a whole bunch of other stuff that Makes Shit Happen had decided that it was second-chance time for Archie. Somewhere, somehow, by somebody, it had been decided that he would live. (4).

This is hardly the sort of moral commentary we expect from a classic authorial voice. This device, used so productively by Fielding, Thackeray, Austen, Trollope, Dickens, and

George Eliot, usually demonstrates a "superior knowledge to the characters in terms of his or her moral sagacity, intellectual breadth and psychological and social insight" (Dawson 149). Rather than the moral or intellectual superiority of the classic authorial voice, Smith's narrator flaunts a sardonic, sarcastic sense of humor: this authorial voice offers no profound insights but strikes a tone of pseudo-profundity by loading her account here with "satirical references to various popular theories of universal cause and effect" (Dawson 154).

These references represent an early instance of one of the novel's main themes: the idea of chance versus design, the idea that history itself is not an "unstoppable narrative," is not fixed or predetermined, but is and has always been "permeated by chance events" (Richardson 111). Further, as Paul Dawson argues, passages such as this one undermine Smith's overt, dramatized narrator, "relativising the authority of her commentary," by revealing limitations in her knowledge. Smith's authorial voice, in other words, strikes a pose of omniscience, sounds all-knowing, but what she is omniscient about is that she does not know how or why exactly Archie is spared (Dawson 154). As Dawson claims, the "passage seems deliberately designed to prevent us from reading Archie's escape from suicide as some sort of profound statement about the fragility of human existence" (154). Indeed, the full context of the passage suggests that Archie gets his second chance because he has parked his car in the delivery area of a halal butcher's shop, and even then he is only noticed because a flock of pigeons flying over his car draw attention to him and his car. It is this "gang of local flying vermin" that

is literally what "Makes Shit Happen" in Smith's novel, a chance event, not a part of some grand design (4).

Smith develops this idea further in her narrator's account of how Archie comes to marry Clara Bowden. The treatment of the train of events that leads up to their first meeting and subsequent marriage seems intentionally designed to resist a summary, to defy our efforts to ascribe a simple reason for Clara's decision to wed Archie: she is nineteen, Jamaican, a soon-to-be ex-Jehovah's Witness, whereas he is forty seven, English, with no religion to speak of. We observe them as they meet on the morning after the "end of the World Party, 1975," where Archie shows up after having flipped a coin, presumably to decide whether he should invite himself in or not (16). But this is not the beginning for Clara, any more than it is for Archie, who has just survived his suicide attempt, has "unhooked the old life," and is now "walking into unknown territory," armed only with his "ten-pence" coin (21). After telling us that Archie and Clara get married six weeks after meeting, the narrator then interrupts the progression of this unfolding story to perform the novel's first full-blown "root canal," i.e., a historical inquiry into a character's background and cultural heritage (Jay 158).[12]

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[12] Many critics draw attention to what Jays calls the novel's "curious reliance on dental symbolism" (158). For example, Jay claims that Smith's punning use of "root canal" is meant to suggest that "identity is a product of roots *and* routes," of cultural traditions and movement across continents (158). In contrast, Laura Moss regards the teeth as symbolic of stories, which are "pulled, cleaned, and re-presented" (16n25). Interestingly, Moss claims that because Irie "decides to become a dentist," she is the narrator, and *White Teeth* thus represents a kind of *Künstlerroman*, charting her development as a teller of truthful narratives (16n25). This is intriguing as speculation. The novel does continually underline connections between "truth" and "tooth," such as we discover in the scene in which Irie, Magid, and Millat take a donation of food to the elderly pensioner, J. P. Hamilton, a toothless, racist, old queen (144). After hearing Millat tell of Samad's wartime experiences, the old man scolds him for lying, warning him that such "Fibs will rot your teeth" (145). However, it seems that Moss is trying to make the novel's narrative situation square with those we see in most modernist texts, which downplay the presence of a distinctive, extradiegetic,

A full chapter is devoted to outlining the series of unconnected accidents in Clara

Bowden's background that eventually lead to her chance meeting with Archie Jones and

subsequent marriage to him. This chapter, "Teething Troubles," first centers on the

development of Clara's relationship with Ryan Topps: they are brought together not

because are meant for each other, but because they are not meant for anybody else, as

both are outcasts at their high school, St. Jude's. Ryan is described as "very thin and very

tall, redheaded, flat-footed, and freckled to such a degree that his skin was rarer than his

freckles" (23). The joke among the girls at school is that nobody would even think of

sleeping with him, not even "if he was the *last* man on earth" (24). His "unpopularity" is

"equaled only by Clara's": that she is a Jehovah's Witness trying to "convert six hundred

Catholics" makes for the equivalent of "social leprosy" (25). Converted by Clara's

mother, Hortense, Ryan soon becomes a fervent Jehovah's Witness, while Clara begins to

feel dissatisfaction with her church, especially since her mother delights in the idea that

the apocalypse will soon be upon them, and only "144,000 of the Witnesses [will] sit in

the court of the Lord on Judgment Day" (26). This belief functions as a guiding or

explanatory principle in mother's life; it is a way of dealing with chance events, seeing

them as part of a pattern.

Brought together by a haphazard confluence of factors, Clara and Ryan are in turn

separated by a chance occurrence. They do not just part ways, but are literally thrown

apart in a scooter accident. This humorous scene is used to critique belief in design on

two levels, one ironic, the other open and explicit, and the aim here is to suggest that

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dramatized narrator. My argument is that Smith bypasses the impersonal modernist narrative voice and
remakes the classic authorial teller as a contemporary, and often personal, authorial voice.

Clara and Ryan are diverging in their views already before the accident takes place. This is shown by the ways these characters use the word "watch": while Ryan chastises Clara for impiety, telling her God "watches over us," Clara rebukes Ryan for not keeping his eye on the road, telling him, "Watch over where you goin,'" and "Watch de path!," after Ryan has "sent a cluster of Hasidic Jews running in all directions" (36). Despite this suggestion that Ryan is a mediocre or at least distracted scooter-rider, the brief description of the actual collision downplays his agency, his role in causing the accident. Although Ryan is described as offering "enlightening biblical exegesis," the passage indicates that he is not really in control, since it is not he but "his former false idol, the Vespa GS, [that] crack[s] right into a four-hundred-year-old oak tree" (36-7). Ryan is used to represent a belief in a patterned universe, whereas the scooter is emblematic of random factors or variables, the collision the kind of chance event that permeates existence. As for the tree, however, it is used perhaps to imply that there is no disregarding the relative permanence of roots, especially when they belong to a four-hundred-year-oak. Roots, in other words, may represent a means for dealing with chance.

This accident is designed, ironically, to offer the authorial voice an opportunity to insert a lengthy moral critique of deterministic belief-systems, conventional, religious moral codes. This is an important passage, not so much because it provides us with crucial insights into the characters, but more for what it suggests to us about Smith's authorial voice, the kind of paradox it gives rise to. First, the narrator implicitly argues that there is no "defining force in the universe," no such thing as good luck or "bad luck." The universe is amoral, and there is only our interpretation of events. This interpretation,

our tendency to try to make sense of random occurrences, usually through fitting the

events into some kind of schema or narrative, leads to making distorted, simplistic, and

frequently self-serving explanations.[13] For example, equating the "principles of

Christianity" with "Sod's Law (also known as Murphy's Law)," the narrator derides

Ryan for thinking that "God had chosen [him] as one of the saved and Clara as one of the

unsaved," because he is able to walk away uninjured, while Clara knocks the "teeth out

of the top of her mouth" (Smith 37). All this gives rise to a couple of interrelated

paradoxes. Like Conrad, whose *The Secret Agent* enacts moral chaos through meticulous

narrative structuring, Smith carefully stages such haphazard occurrences, and she does

this to critique the ways in which the characters and also the authorial voice seek to

ascribe meaning to accidental occurrences, misinterpreting them and putting together a

distorted narrative to explain them. Not surprisingly, the narrator underlines the

superficiality of Ryan's beliefs: "had it happened the other way around, had gravity

reclaimed Ryan's teeth and sent them rolling down Primrose Hill like tiny enamel

snowballs, well … you can bet your life that God, in Ryan's mind, would have done a

vanishing act" (Smith 37). Naturally, while the narrator is overtly criticizing Ryan's

deterministic but skin-deep moral religiosity, Smith's authorial voice also implicitly

targets Clara and the way her specific background has led her to Archie. This path

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[13] My focus is not on Smith's use of dental symbolism; however, given the earlier connection I made
between "truth" and "tooth," one could pursue this line of inquiry further and argue that the propensity to
spin narratives leads to an accumulation of falsehoods and misunderstandings, sort of like how bacteria
colonize the roots of a tooth and rot the tooth from inside out. However, while I acknowledge that Smith is
using the "root canal" because it emphasizes "roots" and "routes," if we think of the actual dental
procedure, the phrase loses some of its effectiveness. After all, a root canal is an invasive, destructive
process, effectively killing the tooth: all its nerves are removed, and the tooth itself is usually crowned.
However, Smith's dental metaphor is suggestive of the ways history can in effect become impacted in our
heads, leading to a debilitating pain that is very hard to deal with through reason.

includes her being brought up as a Jehovah's Witness, steeped in doomsday and apocalyptic rhetoric, and this makes her an outcast at her school, St. Jude's. She pairs up with the school's "last man," the last man any girl would considering sleeping with. These two elements combine in the party where she meets Archie: the party's end-of-the-world theme is derived, albeit sardonically, from Clara's religious upbringing, while Archie, showing up at the party "quite by accident," after flipping a coin, takes Ryan's place as the "bloke in the joke: the last man on earth" (38).

I have been arguing that Smith bypasses the kinds of impersonal narration associated with the modernists and adopts and assimilates a device associated with British fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, frequently addressing us readers directly. However, while Smith's narrator formally resembles a classic authorial teller, this device is more telepathic than omniscient: like many popular novels, the narrator seems polyvocal, speaking with multiple voices and adopting a number of different points of view. These techniques are used to tell the same story from different perspectives, underlining how there is no single story, no single interpretation of events, especially insofar as they are permeated with chance and the random. The narrator's use of multiple voices and her focus on chance and the random undo the moral certainty we usually ascribe to this figure. Given the context of my definition of moral fiction, this undoing of moral certainty gives rise to the conundrum of how a novel can be regarded as moral fiction when its focus on chance seems to suggest that we should not regard the novel as moral fiction but regard the category of the moral as a fiction. After all, when *White Teeth* does examine specific moral codes, usually religious ones, it is usually to

ridicule them as hypocritical, as we note in the narrator's handling of Ryan's scooter accident. But undermining and undoing a sense of moral certitude is not at variance with the aims of moral fiction. Indeed, in the context of my definition of moral fiction, what is especially significant about the narrator in *White Teeth* is that Smith uses this device to critique a type of narrator's tendency to moralize. As I have been stressing throughout this study, moral fiction confronts moral problems but resists moralizing about them through the use of various literary devices and techniques. While *White Teeth* undoes the moral certainty of classical authorial voices through its focus on chance and the random, it suggests that there is a kind of morality to embracing chance, to accepting the idea that the existence is permeated with chance events, since this sort of perspective, at least in Smith's novel, may do more to counteract merely reenacting episodes from an oppressive past history. And it is the narrator's aim of undoing moral certainty as a form of determinative discourse that distinguishes *White Teeth* as an example of moral fiction, within the framework I have been developing in this study. Of course, it is ironic that the narrator's eschewing of moral certainty is what enhances her moral ethos as a narrator: she speaks authoritatively about how chance permeates history rather than establishing moral positions that seek to explain why certain events take and have taken place in history.

Oscar Wao: the Morality of Narrative

While Smith reuses the authorial voice common to fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, she undoes this device's moral certainty, disrupting its authority, through the novel's recurring emphasis on chance. This technique invites us to think

about how narrative devices can themselves operate as mechanisms of control. In this

final section, I turn from Smith's use of authorial voice to Díaz's deployment of what

Ben Railton terms a "novelist-narrator": these are storyteller-figures that "engage meta-

textually with the book they are in the process of writing about their title characters"

(133-4). In contrast with Smith's near-omniscient, third-person, extradiegetic narrator,

who is not directly involved in the story she is narrating, Díaz's narrator is a

homodiegetic, first-person narrator. Though he is telling the story many years after it has

taken place, this narrator is still involved in the events he is going to depict. Despite this

formal difference, we discover that Díaz's focus on his storyteller-figure aims to pose

many of the same questions about the moral authority of narrative, or, to phrase it more

concisely, about the morality of narrative as does Smith's novel. My argument is that

while Díaz's novel underscores the relationship between storytelling and the exercise of

power, especially an outlandish masculine kind of power, it also, like Smith's novel,

undoes or undermines its own exercise of power through the deployment of its devices

and techniques of narration, i.e., the ways in which it "troubles" its own telling. While

Smith recycles the device of authorial voice, but undoes its moral certainty through a

focus on chance and the random, Díaz's narrator reenacts or reprises aspects of the

dictator, but disrupts its power and authority by giving voice to stories squelched by

dictatorial power. So, while Yunior is a morally ambiguous narrator, his reason for

relating his narrative has a significant moral dimension. Yunior aims to confront the curse

or fukú that haunts three generations of the Cabral-de León family, dooming them to

reliving the same horrors and violence. Paradoxically, while Yunior's story is about how

the curse operates like a rerun, he exposes how its operation depends on his and people's

reluctance, refusal, to hear about it or acknowledge it, an invisibility or amnesia.

Although Yunior's story may be pessimistic and heartbreaking, not morally uplifting, the

important thing is that he is telling it, speaking into the silence the curse depends on. That

Yunior has recognized the possibility the curse is real represents a first step towards

dealing with the curse more effectively.

Though of medium length, *Oscar Wao* is of course a complex text, and in what

follows, I am staging a brief intervention, focusing specifically on some of the ways the

novel incorporates the motif of the historical rerun and explores its moral implications---

my main concentration in this chapter. One of the most significant ways that Díaz's novel

connects with the idea of history repeating itself as an endlessly looping rerun, replay or

reenactment is through its "troubled" (and troubling) narrator, the text's self-professed

"Watcher," the "I" (or "Eye"): "Yunior."[14] As his character's nickname suggests, Díaz

uses Yunior to call attention to the idea of reenacting history through a kind of doubling

technique. Yunior's nickname reinforces the sense that Yunior is a hyper-masculine,

sexually predatory, potentially violent young Dominican male, not too far removed from

the "Gangster," Beli's second lover. For example, in his narrative, Yunior describes

himself as a "guy who could bench 340 pounds, who used to call Demarest [at Rutgers]

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[14] Throughout the novel, Yunior regards himself as the "Watcher" or "Uatu," inviting us to compare him to the character from the comic book series, *The Fantastic Four*. This character possesses superhuman abilities, such as telepathy, flight, and the ability to cast illusions. Assigned to watch over the earth in the hopes that what he observes may be of use to future generations, "Uatu" the Watcher is under orders from the Watcher council not to interfere in the planet's affairs, but he still frequently risks punishment to warn the Fantastic Four of impending dangers ("Uatu"). In my reading, Yunior's adoption of the role of the Watcher obliquely suggests that he has developed or grown into this role as a result of putting together his narrative.

Homo Hall […] Who never met a little white artist freak he didn't want to smack around"; a guy who was "fucking with not one, not two, but three fine-ass bitches at the same time and that wasn't even counting the side-sluts [he] scooped at the parties and the clubs; [..] who had pussy coming out [his] ears" (170, 185). In this respect, Yunior is similar to Trujillo, the Dominican dictator, reenacting his tendencies: he has a voracious sexual appetite that is a side-effect or a manifestation of his desire to maintain and exercise power. The most interesting doubling, however, is that of Yunior himself, for, after all, we are dealing with two versions of Yunior: Yunior the narrator, the older version, who seeks to acknowledge and deal with the fukú, the historical curse of the new world, through his narrative, and Yunior the character, who embodies the curse, blindly, acting out a "thoroughly trite form of Latin machismo" (Jay 182).

My argument is that while Yunior recycles certain dictatorial tendencies as a character, as a narrator, he takes important steps to work against them, undo, and reverse them. Certainly, there is not much of the moral in Yunior's actions as a character; his morality is in his narrative, or, rather, it inheres in how and why he tells his story. One way Yunior-as-narrator does this is by commenting directly on his younger self. For example, after telling his readers that a weightlifter like himself could easily handle the 300-pound Oscar, this older Yunior writes: "You can start the laugh track anytime you want" (171). However, before I say more about how Yunior's telling his story underlines the morality of his narrative, I need to deal with several statements Díaz has made that run somewhat counter to what I am claiming. Provocatively, Díaz claims that the writer, the storyteller-figure, is every bit as morally shady as a dictator; in fact, for Díaz, writers

are dictators, too, and he claims that Yunior as a narrator exemplifies dictatorial tendencies. Díaz asserts that dictators, who are "superb storytellers," seize and maintain control over a people by discovering their "blind spot," and exploiting it through their powers to construct simple, "pure" narratives, which pretend to authoritativeness, to shape the people's sense of themselves ("Interview with Matthew Rothschild," qtd. in Jay 190). According to Díaz, writers resemble dictators in that they also construct simple, pure narratives by rooting out and excluding elements that unduly complicate the "authoritative narrative" they are trying to put together (Jay, "Junot Díaz"). For Díaz, one manifestation of this exclusion is that the narrator's existence, and the author's, by extension, is predicated on his "being the only voice speaking" (Jay, "Junot Díaz"). In *Oscar Wao*, for example, Yunior is the only voice speaking: Even the chapters "ostensibly told in Lola's voice" can be regarded as "mediated through him as well, albeit in a different way," such as using "second-person" narration (Miller 102).

Díaz suggests that Yunior is especially dangerous, almost worse than Trujillo, the Dominican dictator, because he pretends to a kind of "polyvocality," seeking to conceal his dictatorial tendencies while acting as if he is revealing them. In fact, this is one of the novel's many paradoxes: Díaz is writing a novel designed to reveal, subtly, how this narrator seeks to conceal his dictatorial tendencies. For Díaz, these tendencies are linked to a thuggishly macho, Dominican model of masculinity, a model he implies Yunior is not serious about actually challenging. For example, in a 2008 interview with Jay, Díaz claims that "Yunior is trying to unlearn" this predatory hyper-sexualized masculinity, to "repent in some way, do penance": he calls attention to himself, confessing as it were

"look, guys, I'm trying to lay out a map of how fucked up I am and how fucked up this is," but the "very map [his narrative] is a product of [the] power" that has messed him up: the yearning for "that authoritative narrative," the easy answer or solution to the riddle. This is a plausible explanation of Yunior's aims in his narrative, but only up to a point. On this view, it is possible to read Yunior's regarding a dictator such as Trujillo as a super-villain as a ploy to shift attention away from how he replicates dictatorial tendencies himself; it is a kind of selective moral outrage. As Díaz, summing up, tells Katherine Miranda, the great irony is that "Trujillo is the horror in this book, but the readers don't even recognize that the person [Yunior] telling the story is Trujillo with a different mask," in effect using his portrayal of Trujillo as a mask to conceal himself (qtd. in Sáez 522). As Elena Machado Sáez argues, this concealment (and exposure) is reinforced on the diegetic level as well, in the way that Díaz structures the narrative, in how he begins with a narrator that seems heterodiegetic and omniscient, but then pulls back the "veil of [this] omniscient voice," to reveal Yunior as the narrator (527). Sáez claims that Díaz thus "establishes a link between storytelling and dictatorship" through the use of a narrator designed to underline "the dangers involved in accepting the authenticity of any historical narrative, even the fiction that he himself writes" (527).

Given the points Díaz raises, Yunior would seem to represent a negative case, a storyteller as immoral artist, a negative example or model used to illustrate how a storyteller-figure can fail to carry out the moral obligations my methodology ascribes to writers. While it is necessary to acknowledge the ways in which Yunior does in fact resemble the dictator, my aim in this final section is to dispute Díaz's assessment of

Yunior, to examine how Yunior *differs* from the dictator-figure. This is not to say that Yunior's process is tantamount to a complete reversal of the sorts of chauvinistic dictatorial tendencies he has grown up surrounded by, but neither does he represent a simple rerun, replay, or reenactment of them. While his is a process that is in progress, Yunior undergoes significant changes by the end of the novel: he dramatizes the writing of his novel, casting it as the weaving of a counterspell against this dictatorial power. In other words, my aim is to dispute a consensus that has arisen regarding Díaz's Yunior, a goal I derive from the way this narrator has been used to complicate and challenge the simplistic, dichotomous narrative that invites us to value writers as the good guys fighting the bad guys, whether dictators, totalitarians, or religious fanatics.

Díaz himself clarifies his rather categorical claims about the analogous relationship between writers and dictators. In a 2007 interview with the novelist Edwidge Danticat, Díaz tells us that when he compares writers to dictators, he is really talking about two different kinds of writing: writing in words or in ink, which works on the psyche, and writing with actions or in blood, which marks the body and the psyche. "Trujillo's real writing," Díaz insists in this interview, "was done on the flesh and psyches of the Dominican people": this is the "writing that the Trujillos of the world are truly invested in, and it's the kind of writing that lasts far longer and resonates far deeper than many of its victims would care to admit." Accordingly, what Díaz faults writers for is that their "narrative puissance" is no match for the kind "Trujillo marshaled." As Díaz sums up, what he pens about the Haitians, for example, "moves maybe three people"; what Trujillo "wrote" (with machetes) "still moves the fucking pueblo." So, part of the

problem is that writers are not as effectual as they or we would like to believe, especially in comparison with the world's Trujillos. More important, however, is Díaz's clarification about the nature of the relationship between writers and dictators. The antagonism we note in this relationship stems from the writer's and the dictator's ability to see into each other: the dictator's ability to "recognize the power of word magicians" and his attempts to "control, negate, or exterminate his narrative competition" paradoxically constitute his weak point, a gap in his armor that the writer is able to discern, target, and draw attention to. Díaz concludes that the "more [dictators] silence, the more powerful the voice that speaks into that silence becomes." However, writers must acknowledge "how powerful and tenacious [the dictator's] form of writing is, if they are ever to be "able to counter it." What this means is that writers are not dictators per se, but rather that both of these figures exist in a kind of symbiosis that is not unlike the ambiguous relationship between the "figure of the superhero and the villain" (Mahler 120). Each needs the other in order to have something or someone to define himself in opposition to.

As my fourth epigraph shows, it is the as-yet unnamed Yunior who underlines the parallel between the dictator and the writer in the novel itself, albeit in a footnote, regarding them as counterparts or duplicates, each partaking of the other's qualities. While the argument I am developing runs counter to this line of thinking, Yunior's observation can be read in several different ways. On one hand, Yunior asserts that writers and dictators are quite similar; on the other, that he is mentioning this, that he is acknowledging this, sets Yunior as a writer apart from dictators, as Yunior is

demystifying himself, questioning his own authority by linking it with a figure that is despised. Further, Yunior sometimes identifies a gap, blind spot, or blank, but refuses to exploit or fill it in. For example, dealing with the paucity of details regarding Abelard's imprisonment and death, Yunior acknowledges his own limitations: "if you're looking for a full story, I don't have it": "We are trawling in silences here" (243). Indeed, near the end of the novel, Yunior undercuts his optimism that Isis will end the fukú by telling us: "That is what, on my best days, I hope. What I dream" (331).

While Yunior complicates his story with these kinds of deflating comments, his crude treatment of sex, particularly in his unnecessarily graphic digressions on the sexual experiences that Oscar *never* had, invites clear comparisons with Trujillo, the dictator. For example, describing Oscar's dates with Ana Obregón, Yunior reports that "they got close all right, but did they ever kiss in the car? Did he ever put his hands up her skirt? Did he ever thumb her clit? Did she ever push up against him and say his name in a throaty voice? Did he ever stroke her hair while she sucked him off? Did they ever fuck?" (40-1). Of course, the answer is no, and Yunior, in these descriptions, seems to positively delight in teasing readers with stories that detail Oscar's sexual frustrations, while "confessing" his own in vulgar, boastful terms. As I have suggested, what we discover here is doubly ironic, because in these passages we are dealing with the two versions of Yunior noted earlier: the younger one that experienced these events and the older Yunior, the "novelist-narrator," who is writing about Oscar and his family, ten years or so after Oscar's death. There are two ways to read this. On one hand, the suggestion is that Yunior has not changed much despite what he has read in Oscar's final letter, which

arrives after Oscar's murder. According to Yunior's paraphrase of it, the last letter tells of how Oscar finally loses his virginity, and while that is wonderful for him, what "really got him was not the bam-bam-bam of sex---it was the little intimacies that he'd never in his whole life anticipated, like combing [Ybón's] hair or getting her underwear off a line or watching her walk naked to the bathroom or the way she would suddenly sit on his lap and put her face into his neck" (334). On the other hand, Yunior no longer traffics in the same kinds of crude descriptions of sex by the end of the novel. This suggests that it is not Yunior's having read Oscar's letter that changes him; it is writing the narrative about Oscar and his family that does so, making him much less crude and chauvinistic. Returning to the present, Yunior tells us: "I have a wife I adore and who adores me, a negrita from Salcedo whom I do not deserve, and sometimes we even make vague noises about having children. […] I'm a new man, you see, a new man, a new man" (326).

A major change we do note in Yunior is that the process of shaping Oscar's and his family's narrative leads him to consider the possibility that the fukú or curse is real. This motif of the fukú gives rises to a number of paradoxes in relation to Yunior and storytelling. First, the very story he is telling, the fukú story, can be regarded as a simplistic narrative with pretensions of authoritativeness: whenever something goes wrong, whether minor or grave, fukú is the explanation, the reason, or the cause. Fukú killed JFK, and is the source of the "Curse of the Kennedys" (4). It mired the U.S. in the disastrous Vietnam conflict, "a small repayment" for LBJ's "illegal invasion of the Dominican Republic" in 1965 (4). It is for this reason the narrator's "twelve-daughter uncle" believes he never had any "male children": "he'd been cursed by an old lover" (5).

Finally, one of the narrator's aunts "believed she'd been denied happiness because she'd laughed at a rival's funeral. Fukú." (5). As we discover is also true of Yunior, these relatives use fukú as a way of evading responsibility for their own actions. They regard their bad luck not as something they may have brought upon themselves, but as something largely outside their control that has just happened to them. The sense of this is reinforced by the use of the passive voice: "he'd been cursed" and "she'd been denied" (5).[15]

Yunior displays a similar habit as well, even towards the end of Oscar's life, following Oscar's recovery from his near-fatal beating by "Solomon Grundy and Gorilla Grod" (294, passim). Shortly before Oscar's return to the Dominican Republic, he talks with Yunior about Yunior's failed relationship with Lola, Oscar's sister, a break-up that is due to Yunior's serial infidelity. Interestingly, Yunior reports the exchange in quoted speech, albeit sans quotation marks, rather than in the reported speech he usually integrates into his narrative.

> She loves you. [Oscar says]
> I know that. [Yunior replies]
> Why do you cheat on her, then?
> If I knew that, it wouldn't be a problem.
> Maybe you should try to find out.

What the staccato form suggests is that the normally garrulous Yunior cannot express what Oscar is saying except by quoting him. More important, while Yunior is claiming

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[15] In the 2008 interview with Jay I have been citing, Díaz claims he is using the fukú as a literary device to call attention to this sort of evasion. He insists that the fukú is not meant to "rob" his characters of their agency, but to treble the consequences of their poor choices, to make the choices his characters make "far more fraught." As Diaz sums up in this interview, "What curses do is punish certain choices severely," but they do not take away the ability to make choices (qtd. in Jay 196).

that he does not know why he does what he does, in slight contrast with the relatives he mentions in the prefatory chapter, he is closer to acknowledging his culpability. But his use of the counter-factual present conditional, "If I knew that," suggests that he is not there yet: the phrase "it wouldn't be a problem" implies that Yunior still regards his compulsive infidelity as an "it" that is external to him, rather than as "his problem," as he should do. Indeed, it implies he cannot even name this problem yet.

This kind of avoidance or silence, this reluctance on Yunior's part to face up to his role in creating such circumstances, his inability to even name his problem, is linked to fukú throughout the novel, how it depends on silence, mysteriousness, and mystification for its particular effectiveness. In fact, one of my arguments is that if Yunior is to be regarded as a dictator-figure, like Trujillo, then what Yunior says about Trujillo's relation to fukú applies in some way to Yunior as well: "No one knows whether Trujillo was the Curse's servant or its master, its agent or its principal, but it was clear he and it had an understanding; that them two was *tight*" (3). In other words, Yunior is also both agent and victim of the fukú, losing Lola due to his infidelity to her. Despite this, the text implies that Yunior does undergo an admittedly incomplete process of recognizing and acknowledge fukú and how it has affected his life. He recognizes the fact that in being its agent he is also its victim, and with this awareness he begins to change things. For example, following Oscar's suicide attempt, Oscar tells Yunior "It was the curse that made me do it, you know" (194). Yunior replies: "I don't believe in that shit, Oscar. That's our parents' shit" (194). Oscar disagrees, saying "It's ours, too" (194).

In this scene, the early Yunior, participating directly in the narrative, in essence laughs off the curse. However, the "novelist-narrator" Yunior, reflecting on events in the novels, describes moments in which he begins to recognize manifestations of fukú, even though he avoids naming it as such. We see this in his description of the events leading up to Oscar's first, nearly fatal beating at the hands of Solomon Grundy and Gorilla Grod in the sugarcane fields. As we know, Oscar's mother only barely survived a beating in the same place, and Yunior underlines the parallel in two key passages, both of which address readers directly: "Where did they take him? Where else. The canefields. How's that for eternal return?" (296). Interestingly, the form of this first passage displays an almost dictatorial use of hypophora, the rhetorical figure: Yunior poses questions but answers them himself immediately, in effect silencing his fictive interlocutors. The second passage deals with what Oscar's mother, Beli, does or rather does not do in the aftermath of Oscar's beating: "If [she and La Inca] noticed the similarities between Past and Present, they did not speak of it" (301).

Yunior, however, draws attention to the parallels in an understated way, which is itself a kind of avoidance or silence, through cataloguing Beli's and Oscar's respective injuries, through reporting "the damage inflicted": Beli's "clavicle, chickenboned; her right humerus, a triple fracture (she would never again have much strength in that arm); five ribs, broken; left kidney, bruised; liver, bruised; right lung, collapsed; front teeth, blown out" (147). Oscar comes away with a "Broken nose, shattered zygomatic arch, crushed cranial nerve, three of his teeth snapped off at the gum, concussion" (301). Further, Yunior links Beli's and La Inca's silence, their reluctance to verbally draw a

parallel between Beli's beating and Oscar's to the after effects of the first beating: "Was there time for a rape or two? I suspect there was, but we shall never know because it's not something she talked about. All that can be said is that it was the end of language, the end of hope" (147). In fact, following Oscar's beating, Beli is shown to enforce silence regarding the fukú. We note this after Oscar comes to believe "that the family curse he'd heard about his whole life might actually be *true*" (303). He speaks the word itself, and then challenges it: "Fuku. He rolled the word experimentally in his mouth. *Fuck you*. His mother raised her fist in a fury but La Inca intercepted it, their flesh slapping. Are you mad? La Inca said, and Oscar couldn't tell if she was talking to his mother or him" (304).

That Yunior has come to fully acknowledge the possibility fukú is real is suggested by a dream he shares (or claims to share) with Oscar. This dream involves the faceless man. Throughout the novel, the faceless man appears in some form as a harbinger of a visitation of the fukú. For example, when "Elvis One" tries to force her into a police car, Beli notes that "there was one more cop sitting in the car, and when he turned toward her she saw that he *didn't have a face*" 141). Shortly before Abelard, Oscar's grandfather, is arrested, the neighbor in whom he is confiding about his dislike of Trujillo is described as follows: "his face was an absence, a pool of shadow" (220). Finally, when Oscar is about to be beaten, he looks around "hoping that there would be some U.S. Marines out for a stroll, but there was only a lone man sitting in his rocking chair in front of his ruined house and for a moment Oscar could have sworn the dude had no face" (298). A version of this no-face man then appears in Oscar's dream, during his recovery, with the important variation of the blank book:

> An old man was standing before him in a ruined bailey, holding up a book for him to read. The old man was wearing a mask. It took a while for Oscar's eyes to focus, but then he saw that the book was blank.
> The book is blank. Those were the words La Inca's servant heard him say just before he broke through the plane of unconsciousness and into the universe of the Real. (302)

The blank book or "página en blanco," is a recurring motif. On one hand, it seems to suggest that the future is unwritten, as in this passage: it is a blank book. On the other hand, the blank book or página en blanco is used in other contexts to refer to a silence, a gap in the record, willful forgetting or withholding of information. For example, Beli's lost years as a slave-child are referred to as a "página en blanco": a "dark period of her life that neither she nor her madre ever referenced" (78).

The more sinister suggestion regarding the blank book or página en blanco is reinforced by the added detail of the masked man. Thus, what Oscar is described as getting at is not so much that the future is unwritten, but that the silence about the past is in some way already determining the future, dooming them to repeat it, that they have to acknowledge the blank book and the silence. It is an ambiguous passage, but what is crucial is that Oscar's process of coming to grips with the blank book is transferred to Yunior, who takes over for Oscar. This is signaled by Yunior's having the same dream as Oscar does, over and over, on a steady basis. In his dream, Yunior sees himself in the same "ruined bailey," only it is "filled to the rim with dusty old books" (325). Oscar, or "someone who looks like him," is wearing a mask and holding up a book whose pages are blank. On some days, Yunior interprets this as zafa, a word or action that serves as a counterspell to fukú; on other days, he "looks up at [the Oscar in the dream] and [sees] he

has no face and [he] wake[s] up screaming" (325). The recurring nature of this dream,

and the way it ambiguously suggests both that Oscar beat the fukú and is the fukú, hints

that the fukú is protean, ever shifting, mutable, and unending.

Yunior's dream implies that he acknowledges the dangers of the fukú,

recognizing the way it infiltrates, overturns, and wrecks one's life. However, given what

he writes in his prefatory or introductory chapter, which is really an epilogue, it seems

evident that this silence is impossible to avoid completely, despite what Yunior has seen

and experienced: he is no superhero that can vanquish the fukú outright. We note this in

the novel's opening paragraph, when Yunior poses as a heterodiegetic narrator and

attempts to trace the obscure origins of the curse. The language of this paragraph tiptoes

around the topic of the curse through the use of impersonal narration:

> They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved;
> that is was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished
> and another began; that it was the demon drawn into Creation through the
> nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or
> more colloquially, fukú---generally a curse or a doom of some kind,
> specifically the Curse or Doom of the New World. (1)

Looking back at this after having read the whole novel is chilling in some respects,

because now we detect a silence on Yunior's part, an evasion. This silence inheres in the

style of the language itself. For example, as Monica Hanna argues, the opening phrase,

"They say," "signals the injection of doubt," marking an effort to avoid making a bold

assertion about the origins of fukú: instead of the narrator saying it, instead of an "I"

saying it, and going on the record, it is some vague "they" who say it (502). This kind of

evasiveness is reinforced by the use of an impersonal narrative style: instead of Yunior,

we encounter a disembodied textual or narrative voice, a blank narrator. This blank narrator avoids naming the fukú for most of this first paragraph, and when he does identify the curse, he still approaches this topic obliquely through the use of a pseudo-Latin nomenclature: "*fukú americanus*."

Similarly, the first-person "I" only inserts himself in a gradated manner: the impersonal narration cedes to a collective first-person "we," which is used for several paragraphs before the narration adopts a personal style, first signaled by the narrator's reference to "my parents" (2). This first-person presence becomes more pronounced through the interjection, "I mean, Negro, *please*" (4). What this suggests is that although Yunior does undergo a process, in which he settles down after living life as a "player," a kind of Trujillo knock-off or "mini-me," a process in which he comes to acknowledge the fukú, the way it depends on gaps, evasions, and silence, still marks Yunior's attempts to speak openly about it, repeating or reenacting itself in the way he talks about it. While what I am arguing here makes Yunior's writing sound ineffectual in preventing reruns of the curse, there is one way to read Yunior's attempt to deal with the fukú in a slightly more positive light. Yunior avoids constructing a simple, pure narrative in this opening by acknowledging the power of the curse and also the limitations of the counterspell. He does not tell us that acknowledging the fukú can make it go away: "no matter how many turns and digressions this shit might take, it always---and I mean always---gets its man" (4-5). Rather, he implies that acknowledging it is a first step in devising a "zafa," i.e., a "counterspell" that does not end the fukú outright but can only ward it off temporarily:

"Twenty-four-hour zafa in the hope that the bad luck will not have had time to cohere"

(7).

This kind of "troubling" a narrative is largely in synch with my definition of moral fiction and its emphasis on process. It is through process, in Gardner's and my phraseology, or "troubling" in Díaz's, that texts of moral fiction engage vexatious topical issues but resist overt didacticism or heavy-handed moralizing. What is essential to my valuing Díaz's novel as twentieth-century, or rather twenty-*first*-century, moral fiction is that Diaz locates the kind of moral impasse that is the thematic focus of moral fiction in the storyteller-figure himself, rather than in the topical issues his novel deals with, and Díaz deploys his techniques as part of a process of "troubling" this figure as the mediator of a narrative. The example of Díaz's novel reminds us that this process should act as a counterweight used to forestall putting together a simple, "pure" narrative. In this way, it adds a new dimension to my treatment of the story-teller figure embedded in the narrative of a literary text. This is not to say that Díaz or Smith picks up where Gardner left off in his attempt to reboot the moral, or that a clear line connects the aims of Gardner's fiction to those of Smith's and Díaz's novels. It is also not to suggest that the way these novels examine moral concepts means writers have finally got moral fiction right. Rather, *White Teeth* and *Oscar Wao* both underscore how much work there is always still left for moral fiction to do.

CONCLUSION:

THE MORALITY OF LITERATURE

> Moral fiction communicates meanings discovered by the process of the fiction's creation. (Gardner, *OMF* 108)

In the last chapter, I argued that Smith's and Díaz's treatment of the problems of history and modern globalization and of the relation these have to storytelling is in synch with moral fiction's emphasis on process. This is a key point because, as I discussed earlier, Gardner and I value process as the locus for literature's engagement with the moral; for us, the process of exploration and discovery enabled by a literary text's rhetorical and literary devices, narrative structures, and formal approaches provides the context for literature's moral dimension. Morality in literature is not a lesson deducible from thematic content (Gardner, *OMF* 14, 108).While *White Teeth* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* tackle a range of vexatious moral, social, and political problems that persist in the era of modern globalization, such as how reenacting past history can circumscribe moral agency in the present, I argued that their novels' process, their "morality," was located more in their handling of their thematic content than in the material itself. As per the definition I developed in this study, Smith's and Díaz's novels are "moral" not because they illustrate particular moral concepts, questions, or problems, but are "moral" because their deployment of distinctive and innovative literary devices and techniques enables a nuanced, sophisticated examination of moral concepts, questions, and problems, relevant at this juncture in our age of accelerating globalization.

Accordingly, my sustained focus on process and narrative, on literary technique, style, and formal approaches is central to articulating what is distinctive about my overarching aim in this project---to rehabilitate the moral as a serious literary and critical category. In what follows, I briefly sum up my major points to offer indications of how other literary critics might find the method of inquiry I have demonstrated in this study useful for their projects, too. As I asserted in my Introduction, I have conceived this project as an intervention in several scholarly debates. For example, my project addresses questions regarding what constitutes a genre, whether texts should be grouped by similar thematic content or by shared literary techniques and devices. One reason this is important is because we literary critics are moving away from categorizing fiction by geographical location or by period. Although I focused mainly on British and US novel-length narratives, my approach can be applied to a considerable range of literary texts, from virtually any geographical location or historical period, including much poetry and drama. Though I would not term it "moral poetry," I identify similar kinds of processes in the work of many modernist poets: instead of confronting particular moral paradoxes per se, modernist poets often manifest significant moral impulses in their efforts to revitalize slack language and to represent the overlooked, the commonplace, and the everyday (Olson 22).

More importantly, my dissertation intervenes in the "ethical turn" that literary criticism has taken in recent decades. One of my key points was that although the impasse I identified between new ethical critics who locate ethics or morality in a text's thematic content and other new ethical critics who locate it in a text's deployment of

form sounds arcane or purely academic, I linked this to the plight of the humanities in general and to literary studies in particular. In this regard, my argument was that the kind of ethical criticism I am espousing, that is, approaching texts as moral fiction, might help literary critics make a more convincing case for the value of studying the humanities and literary texts, especially with our students. They might find the argument that the study of fiction sharpens their moral thinking more compelling than other arguments, such as the value of the literary is that it offers an encounter with the irreducible otherness of the text. I am not trying to belittle this approach; in fact, my focus on process is in tune with it, as I do not seek to impose a Levinasian or Aristotelian grid over the texts I have selected. I identify central concerns around which to cluster the texts, but these concerns emerge out of my engagement with the texts themselves. I am responding responsibly, I hope, not so much to their otherness as to the processes they stage through their deployment of form.

Echoing the first part of my dissertation's title, my final epigraph reemphasizes the ways in which my focus is on process as a means of exploration, examination, and discovery. While this phrase refers to how texts of moral fiction communicate their meaning, it also describes my method of engaging literary texts, regarding them as less an object to be studied than as a complex process to be analyzed. In other words, moral fiction is "discovered by the process," including the process we enact when we read it. This phrase also refers to my process of shaping the contours of this study. I noted how my dissertation emerged out of my readings of work on new ethical criticism, and I linked the critical stalemate between "literary ethicists' and "ethical textualists" I mentioned earlier to my own predicament as a literary critic and individual reader.

Naturally, I regard literary texts as highly effective media for examining particular moral concepts, but as a literary critic, I am deeply invested in the complexity, ambiguity, and self-reflexivity of literary language. So, my goal has been to devise a method for discussing the kinds of moral questions writers pose in their literary texts intelligently, with a firm textual basis, and to model this approach in a series of analyses covering a cross-section of twentieth-century literary texts. One of the problems I noted in much new ethical criticism is that new ethical critics, whether Levinasian deconstructionists or Aristotelian neo-humanists, tend to carry out thematic readings of the texts they analyze, reading them, for example, for how they embody Levinasian or Aristotelian philosophical precepts. While I favor the latter over the former, I have less interest in reading my texts for how they examine Aristotelian moral and intellectual virtues than in letting the moral questions and concepts arise out of the texts themselves. I am not reading for theory themes but investigating the operation of literary devices.

The key point of departure for the approach to moral fiction I have taken in this study, then, is to formulate a definition of "moral fiction" as fiction that confronts and engages significant moral questions but that resists or undercuts overt didacticism or heavy-handed moralizing through the use of distinctive narrative strategies, formal approaches, and literary and linguistic devices. We encountered a range of these in this study, including composite, unstable narrators, objective narrators, reflector-characters, interior monologue, abdicating narrators, generic hybridization, paratextual matter---chapter titles, epigraphs, and illustrations,---TV tropes and the manipulation of authorial voices. However, my definition of moral fiction also raised the larger question of whether

"moral fiction" is a genre, an analytical model, or both. While my intent is not to establish a genre or corpus of texts called moral fiction, but rather to model a method of inquiry, I needed some criteria for selecting texts for analysis. Certainly, most literary texts deal with moral concepts in some way, and my cross-section of texts represents only a small sample of possible moral fiction.

So what sets the texts I have analyzed apart, why them? First, given my focus on process, I looked for texts that deal with moral paradoxes, or rather, whose treatment of moral or social issues invites us to reconceptualize them as moral paradoxes. I noted numerous possibilities in Chapter 1, such as wide-spread anomie, the accelerating pace of technological developments, the erosion, collapse, or abandonment of traditional and conventional moral codes, doubts about human rationality, as well as several recent issues, such as immigration, multiculturalism, religious fundamentalism, globalization, and the lingering effects of colonialism. My reason for this is that these kinds of problems represent complex legacies, suited to the process of exploration I have been stressing is a hallmark of moral fiction.

With this general focus on moral paradoxes in mind, I refined my principles of selection by identifying three central but overlapping concerns around which to cluster texts. Moral fiction proceeds with the assumption that writers have moral obligations to their society or community, and so I devoted a lot of attention to storyteller-figures embedded in the narratives, as well as to narrators, whether dramatized or impersonal. One reason for focusing on the storyteller, narrator, and authorial voice is that many twentieth-century writers took pains to deemphasize the presence of the kind of overt,

dramatized authorial narrator that used to feature so prominently in the fiction of the

nineteenth and eighteenth centuries. One of my arguments was that some of the moral

functions we associate with the device of the authorial teller were diffused among the

characters, especially the storyteller-figures in a text. Of course, as we discovered, some

of my texts point up how various storyteller-figures represent problematic examples, such

as Gardner's abdicating narrator, who relinquishes moral functions to his monstrous

characters, whose freakish appearance allegorizes their moral isolation and disconnect.

My second concern or criterion is that moral fiction calls for confronting and

engaging significant moral questions. This sounds obvious, but as we discovered in my

analysis of Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, part of Yunior's problem was

that he sought to avoid acknowledging that he, like the dictator Trujillo, was both an

agent and victim of the fukú. Indeed, we can go further and say that in this respect Díaz's

novel dramatizes this second major concern in the ways it charts Yunior's process of

coming to terms with the possibility that the curse is real. Third, moral fiction maintains a

balance between its topics or themes and the ways it handles them. That is, moral fiction

stages a specifically literary examination of moral issues, designed to forestall simplistic,

"prime-time," moralizing about them, let alone promulgating or defending specific moral

positions or social programs. For example, we noted this in Smith's handling of Archie

Jones's suicide attempt and her treatment of the confluence of random events that led him

to meet Clara Bowden and marry her. In both instances, Smith's use of a contemporary

authorial voice undoes the moral certainty we associate with this device and deflates our

attempts to value these passages for making profound philosophical statements on the nature of human existence.

Of course, my intention is not to imply that moral fiction is moral in a purely literary sense, that it has little to do with morality as such, other than to critique gauche embodiments of it. In my analyses, I stressed that each novel took on a significant moral problem, usually particular to the era in which it saw publication. Further, many of these texts' canonical status is due to the ways in which critics have regarded their relation to the category of the moral. Thus, while my definition of moral fiction is meant to be inclusive, and my method is designed to be replicable, applicable to an array of literary texts, I did not choose the texts I included for analysis at random. As we remember, my first analysis focuses on the moral chaos of Conrad's fin-de-siècle London in the late-Victorian, proto-modernist text, *The Secret Agent*. While its 1907 date of publication places it in the Edwardian era, my reason for inaugurating my study with this text is that it is set precisely during the period in which concepts of the moral were fragmenting. My claim was that the novel reflects this fragmentation on its lexical, diegetic, and generic levels, thus staging an encounter with moral chaos for readers. In addition, I emphasized the idea that for many scholars Conrad's monumental stature as an author owes as much to his reputation as a master stylist as to the moral vision that is manifested, indirectly or obliquely, in his fiction. Thus, in the context of this study, my focus on *The Secret Agent* was crucial for setting up the analyses that followed. It charts the breakdown of moral concepts that, paradoxically, gives rise to the kinds of conditions that call for moral fiction: fiction that engages moral problems but does not moralize about them. Indeed,

given the disparate and often self-serving ways in which Conrad's characters conceptualize the moral, it is not surprising that moral concepts came to be regarded with a degree of suspicion.

In the literary-historical background I laid out, the erosion of moral concepts such as *The Secret Agent* deals with is emblematic of a wariness of texts that seem didactic, even a weariness or exasperation with them, and my next analysis examined Joyce's response to this set of circumstances. In what I called his "moralogue," I argued that Joyce's work attempts to deal with the moral chaos of the early twentieth century in a three-step process manifested in his first three major works to critique, redefine, and expand the concept of the moral. In his "moralogue," Joyce conceptualizes conventional, public morality as tantamount to paralysis, and his "moral" aim is to expose Dublin's and Ireland's general "moral paralysis." Joyce then charts Stephen Dedalus' efforts to resist this moral paralysis though developing an artistic imagination as a replacement for conventional morality. However, a problem with Stephen's repurposing moral concepts in terms of art and aesthetics is that it subsumes moral vision under the aesthetic: his is a rarefied, disengaged, artistic morality. In *Ulysses*, Joyce critiques this kind of morality through his techniques of characterizing Leopold Bloom, who, in my argument, embodies the moral infrastructure of *Ulysses*. In my reading, Joyce's treatment of Bloom makes for a narrative of moral resistance: just as Bloom as character is resistant to the cultural narratives of his social world, Bloom as synthetic, literary construct is resistant to Joyce's increasingly experimental narrative techniques.

My next chapter dealt with some of the after-effects of Joyce's literary career. Following the modernist era, many literary artists and critics grew less interested in examining moral concepts than in experimenting with matters of literary style and narrative structure. While a number of authors, such as Graham Greene, Flannery O'Connor, and William Golding continued to explore moral concepts in their fiction, as indeed so too did many socially engaged writers of the 1930s, such as John Steinbeck, in the postmodern era that prevailed in the several decades following Joyce's death in 1941, many literary texts were designed to represent ingenious games, puzzles, or riddles. While their focus on play is not without a moral dimension, these texts seldom took up and examined specific moral concepts or questions directly, as does Conrad's fiction, for example. During this period, Gardner, whose literary and critical writings anticipate the resurgence of ethical criticism, attempted to reboot the concept of the moral in relation to the literary. As demonstrated by my analysis of his 1972 masterpiece, *The Sunlight Dialogues*, the aim of Gardner's project was not to illustrate or promote a specific moral code, but to stage a process of exploration and discovery through the deployment of particular literary devices and techniques. For example, I argued that Gardner allegorizes the death of the author through his use of an abdicating or morally evasive narrator, but emphasizes the ambiguous effect this relinquishment of moral responsibilities has on a society by casting his main characters as monstrous freaks adrift in a moral void.

My final chapter brought us up to the present to wrap and round out this study. My argument was not that Smith and Díaz pick up where Gardner left off, but that their treatment of how the complex legacy of history affects the development of moral agency

in a contemporary, multicultural society made up of numerous multiracial persons is in tune with Gardner's and my insistence on process as the locus of literature's engagement with the moral. I emphasize that while I chose Smith and Díaz's novels because they confront and engage particular moral and social problems, my focus was on how they carry out a specifically literary treatment of such problems: their use of TV metaphors, for example, and authorial voices, taken together with their narrative structuring and formal approaches, encourage us to reconceptualize modern globalization, colonial history, and their relationship to storytelling as representing a contemporary instance of the moral paradoxes I have been identifying in each of my analyses in this study. In my reading, these novels elicit a more nuanced assessment of globalization's relationship to the problem of past history globalization, suggesting that while it is imprudent, hasty, and naïve to think that modern globalization has spelled the end of many of the old, horror-show narratives associated with colonialism, it is unduly pessimistic to regard globalization as itself a rerun, replay, or reenactment of past colonial oppression. Indeed, I emphasized that Smith's and Díaz's deployment of TV tropes and their critique of authorial voice, taken together, not only enable their moral critique of the persistent effects of colonialism under the auspices of modern globalization but also model ways of dealing with, neutralizing, and possibly reversing these effects on their novels' stylistic and narrative levels by "indigenizing" or "contaminating" literary devices and techniques linked with the west and, by extension, with the rise of western colonialism.

In this study, I have been attending to the processes enacted by a text's deployment of form, and have linked this deployment to the text's examination of

particular moral questions. While I have chiefly focused on the processes staged by texts

in isolation or by a single author's texts in isolation, I have noted, usually in passing, how

the texts I have included in this study can be seen to enact larger processes when they are

put into relation with each other: they not only critique, challenge, and sometimes rebut

each other but also productively complicate my definition of moral fiction. Indeed, as I

have stressed, while moral fiction deliberately foregrounds specific moral issues in

distinctive and verifiable ways, the goal of this study is to model a method that is offered

as one solution to the quandary I stated in the outset: how to take into account the

complexity, ambiguity, and self-reflexivity of literary language of a given text but still

attend to the moral issues taken up by that text. My overarching claim has always been

that the most interesting texts of moral fiction integrate aesthetic complexity with moral

responsibility, and confront moral complexity with aesthetic responsibility, and each of

the examinations I have carried out in this study has been designed to demonstrate a

method of critical inquiry that values literary texts as examples of moral fiction. This

method of inquiry allows us to discuss the moral questions authors pose in their texts

intelligently with a firm textual basis, by attending to the distinctive literary techniques,

rhetorical devices, and narrative strategies authors choose, and then carrying out

meticulous formal and stylistic analyses of them.

However, my goal has not been to establish a taxonomy of literary devices and

techniques particular to moral fiction, to define a genre or corpus of literary texts called

moral fiction, or to claim that my list of the moral problems examined by the texts I

analyzed is exhaustive. The twentieth century experienced a bewildering array of moral

problems, exacerbated by the erosion, collapse, or abandonment not just of moral codes but also by a loss of faith in the powers of art as a means for grappling with these problems; and, if the problems we see around us today at home and abroad---economic crises, civil wars, human trafficking---are an indication, the twenty-first century's prospects do not look a whole lot better. My study attended to these particular problems because they lent themselves to the kind of treatment or process I claimed was constitutive of moral fiction. As I have stressed, what sets most texts of moral fiction apart from, say, didactic, socially programmatic literature is that they take up morally ambiguous developments, rather than moral dilemmas or quandaries per se. These phenomena represent moral paradoxes and impasses, and this material is especially suited to the process-oriented method of inquiry I have been modeling in my analyses of the literary texts included in this study. My hope is that others may find my method useful and replicable, and apply it to the moral concerns they identify in literary texts by these or other authors, poets, or dramatists. Most literary texts deal with moral concepts in some way, and my method is designed to get at this multifaceted morality by paying as much attention to the moral and ethical questions that animate literary texts as to the complexity, ambiguity, and self-reflexivity of literary techniques, devices, formal approaches that enable a literary examination of such moral concepts in the first place.

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