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LESSONING FICTION:
MODERNIST CRISIS AND THE PEDAGOGY OF FORM

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
English

May 2018

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For my mother,
Elizabeth Webb Cheney

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NOTE ON PUNCTUATION AND EDITIONS CITED

Ellipses, Italics, and Titles

Because both Virginia Woolf and Samuel R. Delany employ ellipses frequently, throughout this dissertation I use brackets around ellipses to indicate when I have cut any text. This prevents a preponderance of “ellipsis in original” notes, but still maintains accuracy.

Italics should be considered original unless otherwise noted. Delany is especially fond of italics, and having to note every “emphasis in original” would be distracting for the reader and tedious for the writer. The occasional added emphasis is explicitly noted.

Regardless of length, where a work has been published on its own as a book or pamphlet, I have italicized the title; if it was published as part of another book, I have put the title in quotation marks. However, if a writer’s own usage differs from my own, I have kept the formatting of the original writer in quotations rather than change it. This leads to occasional discrepancies — for instance, Samuel Delany typically italicizes the titles of “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” and “Atlantis: Model 1924”, while I do not, since neither has been published separately as a book of its own.

Texts and Editions Cited

I have benefitted from working with Samuel Delany’s archives at Boston University’s Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center and have occasionally referred here to unpublished material. My citations are to box and file numbers prefixed by BU. Thus, “(BU 82: 15)” points to Box 82, File 15 in the archives. As of this writing, the archives are being moved to Yale

University's Beinecke Library, and they have not yet been catalogued; for that reason, I have provided as much contextual information as seemed reasonable for locating the material.

In the cases of Virginia Woolf and Samuel R. Delany especially, a plethora of published versions for some texts makes it important to explain the choice of editions for citation. Most of Coetzee's works are remarkably consistent, sometimes even to the extent that the same page plates are used not only through all editions within one country, but even transnationally, particularly with U.S. and U.K. editions (which explains the use of British spelling and punctuation in some U.S. editions), though notably *not* with South African and Australian editions.

My general rule for all references has been, wherever possible, to cite the most accurate and authoritative U.S. edition that is also generally available to everyday readers. For Woolf, this means choosing the Harcourt/Harvest annotated paperback editions over the Cambridge editions. Though the Cambridge editions are the most authoritative, they are also priced well beyond the means of most common readers, thus likely only to be found in large academic libraries. In the case of every novel except *Between the Acts*, the textual differences between the Cambridge editions and the Harcourt/Harvest annotated editions are of no consequence for my purposes; it is worth noting, however, that the editor of the Cambridge *Between the Acts*, Mark Hussey, made a significant decision to base his text on Woolf's own last typescript and not the revision Leonard Woolf made for publication of the book. This seems to me very much the right decision, particularly in its removal of the italics that Leonard added, but so far Hussey's is the only edition to do so. Nonetheless, I cite the paperback because presence or absence of the italics does not substantially affect my argument.

Samuel R. Delany's books pose the greatest challenge for citation. Many of his early novels have almost countless U.S. editions, and some books such as *Dhalgren* not only have multiple editions with textual differences, but also have textual differences between individual printings. Generally, I have favored the most recent print editions that Delany himself considers the most accurate, as determined by his public statements and communication with me. (For print errata, see Kevin Donaker-Ring's official Delany errata website at www.oneringcircus.com/delany_main.html.) My one deviation from using the print editions is *The Mad Man*, for which I cite the ebook in its Kindle version published by Open Road Media. Though the novel appeared in various (textually different) hardcover and paperback editions throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, all editions of *The Mad Man* were published by small presses, are currently out of print, are not included in many libraries, and sell now as collectors' items. It makes most sense, then, to cite the ebook, which is readily available at an affordable price and is the writer's own preferred text. Though MLA 8th edition guidelines argue against listing Kindle location numbers for in-text citations, I have chosen to do so, because the book does not have small chapters or other section indicators; it is broken into five large sections (plus a beginning "Proem" and an appendix), the ebook edition does not include page numbers, and citing quotations by section would be practically useless. Since Kindle is the most popular ebook format and Kindle location numbers are (for now) consistent from user to user, this seems like the best solution. For clarity, I add the letter K before the location. Thus, a citation of "(*Mad Man* K1718-1721)" points to Kindle locations 1718-1721.

As I stated above, Coetzee's editions mostly pose no problems, given the uniformity of U.S. and U.K. editions (though it is important to note that the Australian edition of *Diary of a Bad Year* is differently paginated, a fact that has an effect on the text, given the importance of

page layout to that novel). There is one exception that has bearing on this dissertation:

Summertime, which has been published both as a book on its own and in the omnibus collection *Scenes from Provincial Life*. I have chosen to cite the latter in its U.S. paperback edition, as it is the most recent and includes a slightly revised text.

ABSTRACT

LESSONING FICTION:
MODERNIST CRISIS AND THE PEDAGOGY OF FORM

by Matthew Cheney

University of New Hampshire

May 2018

Writers committed to Modernist ideas of artistic autonomy may find that commitment challenged during times of socio-political crisis. This dissertation explores three writers who developed a similar literary strategy at such times: they pushed fictionality toward and beyond its limits, but ultimately preserved that fictionality, revealing new value in fiction after challenging it. Virginia Woolf, Samuel R. Delany, and J. M. Coetzee shaped their writings at these moments to provide readers with an experience that I argue is congruent with the goals of critical pedagogy as espoused by Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and others. Such a reading experience avoids an authoritarian mode of communication (a writer dictating a message to a passive audience) by requiring any successful reader of the work to be an active interpreter of the texts' forms, contents, and contexts. The pedagogies Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee infuse into such works as *The Years*, *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals*, *The Mad Man*, *Elizabeth Costello*, *Diary of a Bad Year*, and *Summertime* free those works from being either narrowly aestheticist or quotidian social realism; instead, each asks for an active interpretation, one that supports certain habits of reading that may develop into habits of thinking, and those habits of thinking may then affect

habits of being. By pushing against fiction's fictionality, these writers of very different backgrounds, geographies, privileges, situations, tastes, and styles created texts that do the pedagogic work of liberating the reader toward a critical, ethical thinking that less Modernist, less polyphonic, and more traditionally fictional texts do not — even if those texts are more explicitly committed to particular socio-political visions. Monologic, preaching, propagandistic texts may *present* ethical thought, but they are less likely to *stimulate* it than the polyphonic pedagogies practiced by Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee in their fiction.

1. INTRODUCTION

What puzzles me is that people who had infinitely greater gifts than any of us had — I mean Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge and so on — were unable to influence society. They didn't have anything like the influence they should have had upon 19th century politics. And so we drifted into imperialism and all the other horrors that led to 1914. Would they have had more influence if they had taken an active part in politics? Or would they only have written worse poetry?

—Virginia Woolf, letter to Benedict Nicolson, 24 August 1940

“I do not need to consult novels,” says her sister, “to know what pettiness, what baseness, what cruelty human beings are capable of.”

—J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

Today we are all formalists, there's no way you can't be a formalist.

—Samuel R. Delany interviewed by Adam Fitzgerald, *Literary Hub*, December 2017

In the middle of August 1931, while correcting the proofs for *The Waves*, her most ethereal novel, Virginia Woolf felt unsettled, unsure of herself and her writing. The world and its events pressed in on her. She read newspapers regularly, she was kept up to date on the international financial crisis by her friend John Maynard Keynes, and she and her husband Leonard had long been involved with policy committees of the Labour Party, which for the

moment was in power, though Leonard was as aware as anyone that internal and external pressures threatened the party's ability to govern. By the end of August, Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald had resigned and formed a coalition government to circumvent Labour's leftists, who adamantly refused to support a 10% cut in unemployment benefits. Woolf wrote in her diary that "the country is in the throes of a crisis. Great events are brewing."

What was a writer to do? Woolf wondered: "Are we living through a crisis; & am I fiddling?" (*Diaries* 4: 39).

The fear that creative work is little more than playing a fiddle while the world burns around you is one that has haunted artists at many times and in many places. One strategy for making art in times of crisis is for that art to take a stand, to become committed, proselytizing, didactic: in the 20th century, the novels of Upton Sinclair are one particularly obvious example, but committed art is not always so inelegant. For writers committed to an idea of artistic autonomy, though, adding a political commitment may challenge the freedom of the writing. Woolf felt the peril deeply and expressed it most clearly in an essay she wrote for the Communist Party's *Daily Worker*, "Why Art Today Follows Politics". It is not one of Woolf's best essays, but it clearly illustrates her struggles and frustrations at the time. Woolf first tries (unconvincingly) to equate writers and visual artists and to say that the art of the past tells us nothing about history and material conditions. She then moves to a discussion of the artist's relationship to the audience in times of crisis, and her position becomes both more personal and more clear.

Artists, she says, need two things from an audience: money and attention. But neither can be provided under dictatorial circumstances — the artists must be free to create in whatever way their sensitivities lead them. Woolf separates artists out from other people because "it is a fact

that the practice of art, far from making the artist out of touch with his kind, rather increases his sensibility. ...Perhaps, indeed, he suffers more than the active citizen because he has no obvious duty to discharge.” Here and throughout the final third of “Why Art Today Follows Politics”, Woolf seems to be speaking of her own situation as she struggles to figure out her place in the contemporary era, to reconcile her anxiety (and even terror) at the state of the world with her work as a novelist. She says that the artist’s studio, which used to be a place of peace and refuge, is now “besieged by voices, all disturbing, some for one reason, some for another.” The voice of the audience declares it can no longer afford to pay for frivolous things like art; the audience is “so tortured and distracted” that it can no longer find pleasure in art; and meanwhile there is the ceaseless voice pleading for help, time, money, something: “Come down from your ivory tower, leave your studio, it cries, and use your gifts as doctor, as teacher, not as artist.” A voice tries to get the artist to be useful to the state or else to shoot guns and fly airplanes. And one last voice “proclaims that the artist is the servant to the politician,” — Woolf portrays this voice as especially malevolent: “You shall only practise your art, it says, at our bidding. Paint us pictures, carve us statues that glorify our gospels. Celebrate Fascism; celebrate Communism. Preach what we bid you preach. On no other terms shall you exist” (*Essays* 6: 77).

The cacophony of all these voices paralyzes the artist, Woolf says. How can anyone remain at peace in such circumstances? “He is forced to take part in politics: he must form himself into societies like the Artists’ International Association.” Woolf clearly sees this as a last resort, unfortunate, even destructive, but existential: “Two causes of supreme importance to him are in peril. The first is his own survival: the other is the survival of his art” (*Essays* 6: 77).

This dissertation will explore how three novelists who are committed to Modernist ideas of art for its own sake (the survival of art) developed one particular strategy when faced with

socio-political crisis that created personal crisis: they pushed fictionality toward and beyond its limits, but did so without their work becoming propagandistic and without themselves assuming the role of the preacher. They shaped their novels to provide readers with an experience congruent with the goals of critical pedagogy, an experience that avoids an authoritarian mode of communication — one that sees the writer's job as communicating a message to a passive reader — by requiring any successful reader of the novel to be an active interpreter of the texts' forms, contents, and contexts. Such active interpretation is a familiar feature of Modernist experimentation, but at these moments of crisis, the pedagogies Virginia Woolf, Samuel R. Delany, and J.M. Coetzee infused into their novels were not merely aesthetic or psychological, not limited to the quotidian (vital as it is), but also aimed toward an engagement with the world beyond the text.

Questions of art and politics are not academic for writers during moments of crisis. For writers who believe to some extent or another in the autonomy of art from socio-political determinism, the immediate question becomes: If they are not to abandon art and become pamphleteers or activists (as did the Modernist poet George Oppen), how — and why — are they to write? In this dissertation, I will look at Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee in different relationships to moments of crisis: before, during, and after. For Virginia Woolf, the crisis of European fascism brought new thinking about how facts and fictions work together, and what a novelist might offer the world. For Samuel Delany, the beginnings of the AIDS crisis brought an immediate threat to his life as a sexually active gay man in New York City, and in the midst of the crisis he grappled with the role of fantasy in fiction. J.M. Coetzee lived through the crisis of the apartheid era in South Africa, an era that shaped much of his life and career. His later work reflects on both the life and career (and necessarily the crises he lived through) while opening up

new relationships to fictionality, relationships that circumvent conventional, received ethical stances in favor of making ethical thought unavoidably active for the reader.

MODERNISM

Questions of the artist's role in society have bothered both artists and society at least since Plato banished poets from his Republic. Where Romantic poets may have thought of themselves as the "legislators of society", and Realist novelists may have sought to tell stories that would change society's views on such issues as women's rights and child labor, canonical Modernism inherited many of the assumptions of late-19th-century aestheticism — assumptions of the art object's autonomy from the grubby cares of the world, its value and purpose being only its own beauty, for its own sake.¹ Further, even if Modernist writers didn't associate themselves with a puritanical aestheticism, their interest in subjectivity and psychology could make their work seem remote from the world. This was a particular peril for novelists, because the serious novel in English had, by the early decades of the 20th century, grown to be associated with a sense of social purpose, and psychology, sensations, and "moments of being" seemed, to many readers

¹ Andrew Goldstone's *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* is an important study for any consideration of the relationship between Modernism and ideas of autonomy, and one of Goldstone's key insights is that "autonomy" has not only had many meanings throughout philosophical and literary history, but that it had numerous meanings for Modernists, because the term is transitive, its meaning dependent on what its user is claiming autonomy *from*. Benjamin Kohlmann's exploration, in *Committed Styles*, of autonomy as conceived by writers in the 1930s is also useful, particularly via his discussion of the way writers used the word "integrity" and of what he calls, with an homage to Fredric Jameson, the era's "apolitical unconscious". In contrast to Goldstone and Kohlmann's complex, nuanced explorations of the word "autonomy" (and related concepts), my use of "autonomy" throughout this dissertation is narrow and pragmatic, keeping the idea of an autonomous work of art synonymous with the (admittedly vague) idea of art having value for its own sake. That this definition can be unpacked and proved inadequate is obvious from Goldstone's and Kohlmann's works, but its packed form is adequate to my purposes.

and critics, trivial in comparison.²

In a 1971 issue of *New Literary History*, Lillian S. Robinson and Lise Vogel denounced Modernist art, literature, and criticism as unengaged with socio-political concerns and divorced from history: “Modernism ... seeks to intensify isolation. It forces the work of art, the artist, the critic, and the audience outside of history. Modernism denies us the possibility of understanding ourselves as agents in the material world, for all has been removed to an abstract world of ideas, where interactions can be minimized or emptied of meaning and real consequences. Less than ever are we able to interpret the world — much less change it” (198). A year later, in *The James Joyce Quarterly*, Maurice Beebe declared: “Modernist writers refuse to take sides; they would rather straddle a fence than mount a soap-box” (180).

The idea that Modernism is apolitical, ambiguously political, or reactionary in its politics is one that has been stated by some of its practitioners and acolytes, and by almost all of its detractors. Yet while the idea itself has (some) basis in (some) statements by (some) inescapably Modernist writers, scholarship since at least the 1990s has complicated and contradicted the assumption that Modernism’s fragments, streams of consciousness, and aestheticism were ever primarily autonomous from historical, political, or social concerns.³ This scholarship has shown that the idea of an unworldly, ahistorical Modernism is an idea constructed to suit specific ideological desires, for instance among the Marxist followers of Lukács or (more influentially)

² This assumption is common in negative reviews of Modernist novels when they were first published, for instance in W.L. George’s 1920 review of books by “Neo-Georgians” (Woolf, Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Romer Wilson, Dorothy Richardson, and May Sinclair), in which he said these writers were able only to “abandon illumination, and prove themselves unfit to fulfil the high function of the novel, which it took up a hundred years ago: to dispel error by exhibiting the period in which it flourishes, to use the battleaxe of understanding upon the thickets of prejudice and folly, to cut a trail through the foolish forests of the present, along which to drive the chariot of the future” (Majumdar and McLaurin 84).

³ Mao and Walkowitz trace the official beginning of the New Modernist Studies to 1999 and the founding of the Modernist Studies Association, along with its annual conference and journal *Modernism/Modernity*.

among the New Critics. The New Modernist Studies has not only expanded the idea of what “Modernism” means (and who gets to be a “Modernist”), but has also demonstrated that canonical Modernists sought ways to square the circle of autonomous art and socio-political commitment.⁴ Aesthetic attention and commitment are undeniably central to Modernism, but a commitment to aesthetics and a belief in the art object’s having an inherent value of its own do not require a disengagement from politics or history, nor did writers such as Woolf believe they did. What Woolf and many artists (Modernist or not) feared was not political engagement, but the reduction of art to propaganda.

A central claim of this study is that certain assumptions of Modernist aesthetics are shared by Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee, who each see questions of form as vital to their work, and who are strongly suspicious of propagandistic tendencies within fiction. My approach builds from New Modernist perspectives on political commitment, but starts from a foundation in aesthetics, looking less at the *what* of the engagement and prioritizing the *how*. (In practice, the two are, like form and content, often inseparable.) Before the advent of the New Modernist Studies, Toril Moi called for a critical approach to Woolf that would “refuse to accept this binary opposition of aesthetics on the one hand and politics on the other” and would instead locate “the politics of Woolf’s writing *precisely in the textual practice*” (16). Such an approach is a productive one not only for Woolf, but for many writers, including Delany and Coetzee.

A brief note on terminology: For nearly as long as it has been in use, the word *modernism* as a descriptive label has been contested and denounced, often by the people using it. Malcolm

⁴ The history of Woolf studies demonstrates the peril of seeing all historicist, materialist, and political reading of Modernist writers as dating from the arrival of the New Modernist Studies. Feminist scholars historicized and politicized Woolf from the early 1970s onward, and it was their intervention that saved Woolf from being viewed as a marginal figure within Modernist studies. The New Modernist studies certainly opened up new ways of conceptualizing various modernisms, but historical and political analysis of Woolf predates its arrival by decades.

Bradbury and James McFarlane's influential 1976 anthology begins with a chapter expressing regret that the very word of their title, *Modernism*, is now settled in critical use despite its vagueness and ambiguity. In his massive 2005 anthology, Lawrence Rainey devotes most of his introduction to a genealogy of the term, concluding only, "Whatever literary modernism was, it was impatient with or overtly hostile to received conventions of fiction" (xxv) and even in a "Note on the Selection, Texts, and Order of Presentation" he evades defining his terms. In 2015, Bloomsbury launched their New Modernisms series with Sean Latham and Gayle Rogers' *Modernism: Evolution of an Idea*, a book that begins,

What is modernism? This question has now beset, driven, and often befuddled generations of students and scholars alike. It is not, however, the question this book will answer. That's because there is no such thing as modernism — no singular definition capable of bringing order to the diverse multitude of creators, manifestos, practices, and politics that have been variously constellated around this enigmatic term. (1)

This is true. And yet, if we are to have an object of study, we must be able to set some boundaries and find a way to describe not only what the object of study is, but what it is not. It seems to me irrefutable that there are many modernisms. It also seems necessary for this dissertation to choose a Modernism.

I capitalize *Modernism* to distinguish my approach (which sees Modernism as bounded in history and geography) first from critics of modernity generally, and second from the more free-floating ideas of ahistorical, global modernisms popular with many New Modernists (frequently argued for by Susan Stanford Friedman, most recently in *Planetary Modernisms*). A critique of

modernity is simply beyond the scope of my project. As for global/planetary modernisms, there are, I think, valid and exciting approaches to that topic, but I strongly believe they need to be informed by the methodologies of postcolonial studies and comparative literature, or else, for all their best intentions, they end up replicating imperial power structures via a colonizing gaze. I am more inclined toward advocating for a Spivakian aesthetic education that, in Ben Conisbee Baer's words, helps us "think the universalizable as not the universal" (488). Such work must be multilingual, however, and where I am here limiting myself to English-language writers, I cannot see *this* project as participating in *that* project, even though the writers I discuss are from multiple countries and continents.⁵

Rather than an amorphous Friedmanesque "planetary modernism", my approach is centered on a Modernism that began to cohere in Europe and Britain in the late 19th century (developing from Aestheticism and Symbolism), spread to the Americas, reached an apex of influence in the 1920s, metamorphosed into various tendencies afterward, and then came to an end with the conclusion of World War II. It is a Modernism of "make it new!", of cubisms and collages, of radically free indirect discourse, internal monologues, and streams of consciousness. It recognizes the canon-expanding moves of the New Modernist Studies but depends on demonstrable lines (not anxieties) of influence and communication. It maps easily to the year Woolf and Joyce were born (1882) and the year they died (1941).

My insistence on a Modernism bounded (however fuzzily) in time and place allows us to talk about what Andre Furlani and David James & Urmila Seshagiri have separately come to call

⁵ My project could be said to fall under the label of "Global Anglophone", though I am wary of that label because rather than being what its name implies (an exploration of how English works and gets re-worked around the world), "Global Anglophone" is too often a term for a kind of de-politicized, neoliberal-friendly multiculturalism (which isn't really very multicultural). There was significant conversation about this at the 2016 MLA conference in Austin, but papers do not yet seem to have been published, and many people seem unwilling to publicly critique a term that has very quickly become common in job descriptions and is the name for an MLA Forum (formerly Division 33).

metamodernism: the modernism-after-Modernism (as opposed to postmodernism) that learns from, responds to, challenges, and multiplies Modernist moves.⁶ My approach also allows such fields as postcolonialism and queer studies to offer their own perspectives, as they need to do for Delany and Coetzee, neither of whom can be understood only as metamodernists. While Woolf can, of course, be discussed primarily as a Modernist (who became a metamodernist), queer and postcolonial approaches to her texts have proved to be some of the most insightful of recent decades.

Establishing a set of clear influences and positions for each of these writers is a straightforward task, as all three published dozens of essays on literature (in Woolf's case, hundreds of essays), and there is significant scholarly work on Woolf and Coetzee especially, including biographies. Woolf's letters and diaries have been published, and Coetzee's manuscripts have been well studied by David Attwell in his recent book *J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face to Face with Time* and Jan Wilm in *The Slow Philosophy of J.M. Coetzee*. I have done my own work in Delany's archives at Boston University, and have also talked with him about his literary opinions and sense of influence. While Coetzee has been reluctant to give interviews about his personal life, his interviews with David Attwell in *Doubling the Point* are comprehensive; similarly, Samuel Delany (who is not reluctant to talk and write about his personal life) has given significant interviews, many collected in *Silent Interviews, About Writing*, and *Conversations with Samuel R. Delany*. Such material allows us to establish a foundation of productive influences; we don't need to resort to biographical speculations about the texts or Bloomian anxiety-of-influence psychoanalysis, but it is important, I think, to say,

⁶ For the sake of consistency with Furlani and James & Seshagiri, I have chosen to refer to *metamodernism* rather than *meta-Modernism* or *Metamodernism*. This makes some sense beyond simply indicating my debt to previous scholars, as metamodernism is more of a stance than a movement, more a technique than a title.

“Here is the tradition the writers themselves find meaningful, the ideas and texts they say they are responding to.” In *Modernist Futures*, David James proposes that “The key issue is not whether modernist continuities exist, but how far, and at what price, modernism’s extension into the procedures of contemporary literary or visual art has been obscured by critics who take the bygone vivacity of modernism for granted” (5-6). We need such an approach not for the sake of creating ever more baroque taxonomies, but rather because it can show “how modernist aesthetics resurface in contemporary fiction”, a task that is “of no less importance [than] why writers today extend such approaches to form in the first place — and what that might entail for our evolving critical practices” (6).

Starting with these three writers, then, we can make some discoveries about Modernism itself — one of which is confirmation of the longstanding insight that there is no one Modernism, but rather various related modernisms. Even within the limits I am setting on period and geography, it is clear Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee draw from different Modernist strands. Woolf was a participant in and icon of Modernism, one of the writers without whom any definition of Modernism has been incomplete for the last few decades (the history of her place within that definition could fill a dissertation of its own).⁷ By the 1930s, she was able to look back on what she had participated in and to evaluate some of her own sympathies and influences, as well as to

⁷ Hugh Kenner, who could never forgive Woolf for disliking *Ulysses*, sneered as late as 1984 that Woolf is “not part of International Modernism; she is an English novelist of manners, writing village gossip from a village called Bloomsbury for her English readers (though cultivated readers; that distinction had become operative between Dickens’s time and hers, and Bloomsbury was a village with a good library.) She and they share shrewd awarenesses difficult to specify; that is always the provincial writer’s strength” (57). This was a distinctly contrarian opinion by 1984, however. As early as 1936, Winifred Holtby, in the first book-length study of Woolf, took it for granted that Woolf should be compared with Proust and Joyce, as did David Daiches in 1942 (his study of Woolf was part of New Directions Books’ “Makers of Modern Literature” series), and Bradbury and McFarlane included discussion of Woolf in their influential 1976 study of Modernism. Woolf’s *centrality* to the field, though, is a development since the 1970s, largely the result of the efforts of feminist scholars, and Kenner’s comments could be seen as a backlash against the early success of those scholars in making Woolf more important to conceptions of Modernism. For more on Woolf’s reception, see Caws & Luckhurst, Goldman, McNees, and Silver.

plan for future work. She struggled to understand her own writing in relationship to younger writers' aesthetics, for instance remarking in September 1933 about Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*: "A very good book of its sort. The new sort, the hard anguished sort, that the young write; that I could never write" (*Diary 4*: 177). It seems to me that *The Years* bears traces of this diary entry, particularly in its close attention to details of material and bodily life.⁸ Similarly, Woolf had a conflicted relationship to the works of D.H. Lawrence, but was reading books by and about him throughout the 1930s, and many elements in the form and substance of *The Years* could be read as a response to Lawrence.⁹ Similarly, her essays, diaries, and letters show her frequently thinking about Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce in relationship to her own work, and her partnership in the Hogarth Press helped her think not only about her contemporaries, but about the generation of writers who came after hers. By the 1930s, the Modernist archive was rich and settled enough for a writer like Woolf to become a metamodernist.

Just as Woolf in the 1930s was writing partly in response to an earlier moment of Modernism, so, too, are Delany and Coetzee's works written, to varying extents, in response to certain Modernist writers and ideas. Coetzee's primary Modernist influences are many, but most consistently Kafka and Beckett, as well as Ford Madox Ford, about whom he wrote his master's

⁸ Sara Crangle has insightfully shown that Woolf's approach to bodies changes in the 1930s, becoming more focused on abjection and human waste, where previously Woolf had used bodily functions to poke fun at Victorian conventions. Crangle's essay on "Woolf's Cesspoolage" is key to my connecting Woolf to Brittain, a significantly different, and more politically didactic, writer.

⁹ Anna Snaith writes that as Woolf "embarked on *The Pargiters*, she was reading D.H. Lawrence's *Letters*...considering and discounting his views on incorporating social critique into fiction" (Woolf, *The Years* liv). In May of 1935, Woolf noted in her diary that she was "nibbling at Aaron's Rod" (*Diary 4*: 310), a reference to Lawrence's 1921 novel of that title, which Bridget Chalk interestingly reads as a failed attempt at an aesthetic/moral project that would come to fruition in "*Sea and Sardinia*, Lawrence's witty travel book written in the same year *Aaron's Rod* was completed, in which thematic and stylistic solutions to the dilemmas of convention and generalization are proposed," which suggests "that Lawrence found that only another, more loosely conceived genre could achieve what he hoped for with the novel" (57).

thesis (which David James analyzes in *Modernist Futures*). He has published significant essays on all of them, as well as on Robert Musil, D.H. Lawrence, Walter Benjamin, and others. Delany is as affected by Modernism as Coetzee, but by different Modernists — in his public writings, at least, he has shown no sustained interest in Kafka or Beckett, preferring poets (especially Hart Crane), Djuna Barnes (with *Nightwood* being the book he claims to have read more than any other in his life), and others.¹⁰ Delany's interest is, then, not so much in Modernism generally as in a notably queer Modernism, although "Atlantis: Model 1924" also shows that his Modernism is inextricable from the Harlem Renaissance, and particularly Jean Toomer. ("Atlantis: Model 1924" is, further, an explicit work of metamodernism: Delany has said he wrote it "to see what it felt like to have the experience of writing such a work" as *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, or the *Cantos* [*About Writing* 225].) Delany's own commitments as a writer of fiction are at least as much to the European novel of social realism embodied by the works of Flaubert and Balzac, which he has consistently referenced throughout his life, as to the experiments of the Modernists. This makes his metamodernism particularly interesting, as his own aesthetic melds a queer black Modernist poetics to the representational and materialist commitments that many Modernists set themselves in opposition to. (It is no surprise that Delany has had a sustained engagement with Woolf's *The Waves*, which seeks to meld the poetic advances of *The Waves* with the social details of earlier modes.) Additionally, since at least the early 1980s, Delany has considered Guy Davenport a master, repeatedly saying he "is among the most elegant writers at the sentence level to work in American prose" (*Shorter Views* 113).¹¹ It is with regard to Davenport that

¹⁰ Including Woolf — he has used *The Waves* in his classes a number of times, and references to Woolf begin to appear in his published essays by 1979.

¹¹ In 1983, Delany went so far as to send Davenport what he called (in a May 23 letter to Joanna Russ) "a fan letter". References to Davenport are scattered throughout Delany's essays and interviews, but for a particularly interesting discussion of him, see "The 'Gay Writer' / 'Gay Writing' ...?" in *Shorter Views*.

Andre Furlani coined the term “metamodernism”: “The metamodernists develop an aesthetic *after yet by means of* modernism. ... The metamodernists seek with the help of modernism to get over and beyond it. ... *Meta-* also implies a self-conscious but not slavish sense of descent” (“Postmodern” 713).¹²

The concept of metamodernism is useful for discussing both Delany and Coetzee (Derek Attridge has written of Coetzee’s work as “modernism after modernism” [*J.M. Coetzee* 5]). David James and Urmila Seshagiri seem to have come to the term separately from Furlani, and their explication of it fits many of my own purposes:

The metamodernist novelists we group together extend, reanimate, and repudiate twentieth-century modernist literature. In turn, their stylistic affiliations and derivations, as well as their reimagined tableaux of modernism’s origins, demand a critical practice balanced between an attention to the textures of narrative form and an alertness to the contingencies of historical reception. And if modernist studies has in recent years partly marginalized formalism while privileging historicism, the advent of metamodernist fiction offers a welcome opportunity to revisit the field’s current methodological preoccupations. (89)

James and Seshagiri offer a periodization of Modernism that stands in contrast to the influential proposals of Susan Stanford Friedman to overcome the Eurocentrism of canonical definitions of Modernism and instead embrace a rhizomatic “planetary modernism”. While I appreciate

¹² In a *Paris Review* interview, John Jeremiah Sullivan asked Davenport about this designation, and Davenport replied: “If postmodernism means, Let’s break everything off and start over in a new direction, then I am a ‘meta-modernist.’ But can’t I be just a plain modernist? I mean, aren’t I old enough?”

Friedman's desire to shift the definitional power of Modernism within literary and cultural studies, and I certainly feel the force of her critique of Eurocentrism, I differ with her in not seeing the need to collect so much within the realm of Modernism. At a definitional level, it's unwieldy, imprecise, and not especially useful — I fail to see how Friedman's proposals don't make all of 20th and 21st Century literature (if not all literature since Gutenberg) into Modernism — but there's a further problem of intellectual imperialism. As a concept, at least, Modernism is a Western idea, and to speak, for instance, of "African Modernism" would be to apply concepts that indisputably arise outside of Africa to African texts.¹³ I am skeptical that the European term *modernism* can ever be purged of Eurocentrism; a truly decolonizing approach would eliminate the word altogether, replacing it with terms and genealogies from beyond Europe and the United States. Further, I am wary of extending Modernism too far beyond the Atlantic world not because I want to encourage Eurocentrism, Anglophilia, or American exceptionalism, but because I fear the flattening power of the label will render other sorts of texts invisible.

James and Seshagiri defend their use of traditional dates (placing Modernism between the end of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th) because

we need to retain periodicity not to shore up a canonical sense of when modernism began, the moment from which it cast its influence, but to establish a literary-cultural basis for charting the myriad ways that much twenty-first-century

¹³ This is to ignore for the moment the productive encounters between Modernism and African writers, as Peter Kalliney has chronicled, and also to ignore the pre-postcolonial-studies tendency to describe and assess African writers according to limited, traditional ideas of Modernism (for an example, see M.M. Carlin's 1965 review of *Weep Not, Child* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o [James Ngugi], *Transition* no. 18, pp. 54-55). Both phenomena deserve attention, but they remain outside the scope of this study.

fiction consciously engages modernism through the inheritance of formal principles and ethicopolitical imperatives that are recalibrated in the context of new social or philosophical concerns. Contemporary literary fiction responds to modernism as an aesthetic venture that can certainly occur globally, in different cultures. For such writing, however, modernism also belongs in a temporally localizable moment that we should not overwrite in our eagerness—however politically well-intentioned—to impart a democratic sensibility to art long perceived as Eurocentric, metropolitan, and elite. (92-93)

Without such a view of Modernism, we can't sensibly speak of metamodernism. More importantly, it seems to me a mistake to try to obscure the literary-historical force of a body of work (however loosely collected) that has, for better and worse, until recently been conceived, discussed, analyzed, and responded to *as* a body of work. Finally, Friedman's atemporal, planetary modernism too easily obscures how power works between literary communities, and risks portraying a fanciful world of equal exchanges.¹⁴

¹⁴ Jeosoo Hong's review of *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes: Bloomsbury, Modernism and China* by Patricia Laurence quietly shows some of the pitfalls: "Laurence in many cases limits herself to eulogizing the Chinese and English intellectuals' attraction to the other's artistic vision. She admits at the end of the book that she has somewhat generalized each culture, particularly Chinese culture" (534-535). Laurence's ignorance of Chinese languages and her desire to show an equal cultural exchange leads her, in Hong's view, to replicate imperialist power structures in her interpretations: "I also find the author's reading of the letters in those archives too sympathetic. I can hardly agree that these materials, which I have also read in the course of my own research, buttress Laurence's argument that the artistic interchange between the Chinese and British intellectuals, unlike economic and political relations between the two nations, can be exempted from the imperialist model or that the intercultural practices between the two modernisms were reciprocal" (535). I cite these concerns not for what they say specifically about Laurence's book, but because they so clearly highlight some of the dangers in a planetary modernism that is not highly attuned to questions of power. This is not to discount, though, the productive insights gained from, for instance, applying Modernist reading protocols to works outside the traditional Modernist canon, as Berman does with Indian women's writing. Further, a truly informed study of global modernity and literary texts is of significant value, as Yao shows in advocating for "an approach to both canonical modernist Orientalism in particular and to transnational modernism more generally that takes into account the historical and cultural specificity of, as well as the interactions among, different sites within the part of the world now commonly referred to as the Pacific Rim" (7).

CRISIS AND PROPAGANDA

Crisis is a word commonly used in discussions of Modernism and modernity: crises of meaning, of representation, of form, of tradition, of reason, of consciousness, of imagination, of legitimation, of sovereignty, of epistemology, of metaphysics, of ontology...

Crisis is central to most definitions because of the idea of Modernism as a break or rupture, and numerous political, social, and economic events of the late 19th and early 20th centuries contributed to the sense of crisis. Michael Levinson puts it colorfully in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*:

Crisis is inevitably the central term of art in discussions of this turbulent cultural moment. Overused as it has been, it still glows with justification. War! Strike! Women! The Irish! Or (within the popular press), Nihilism! Relativism! Fakery! This century had scarcely grown used to its own name, before it learned the twentieth would be the epoch of crisis, real and manufactured, physical and metaphysical, material and symbolic. The catastrophe of the First World War, and before that, the labor struggles, the emergence of feminism, the race for empire, these inescapable forces of turbulent social modernization were not simply looming on the outside as the destabilizing context of cultural Modernism; they penetrated the interior of artistic invention. They gave subjects to writers and painters, and they also gave forms, forms suggested by industrial machinery, or by the chuffing of cars, or even, most horribly, the bodies broken in the war. (4)

I am drawing from this general sense of Modernism as inextricably associated with crisis,

but my primary concern is with a specific type of crisis within the conception of Modernism for metamodernist writers particularly: an assemblage of crises, really, in which a (fundamentally personal) aesthetic crisis arises in response to a socio-political crisis in the writer's world. It is this crisis that Woolf names in her diary and illustrates in her *Daily Worker* essay, a crisis of purpose that puts aesthetic ideals in conflict with lived realities. Julio Cortázar described such situations as creating a distinction between writers and readers "who opt for political literature and those who confine themselves to pure creation," a distinction that becomes acute when (as in Latin America in the 1970s) "this choice collides with a reality which rejects it" (30). For artists of any sort, such moments can make art feel trivial and irrelevant, as life itself is jeopardized. For Modernist artists who abjure didacticism, such a feeling may be especially sharp, and for writers working "by means of modernism" (to return to Furlani's definition of metamodernism), the means may feel inappropriate to the situation.

The idea that propaganda, preaching, and didacticism are anathema to art is an idea Modernists and metamodernists take as a given, and critical analysis of the idea has been hindered by what Mark Wollaeger identifies as "an intuitive sense that modernism and propaganda must be antithetical in ways that do not require much elaboration" (xii). That sense is as old as Modernism itself — perhaps not surprisingly, since propaganda and Modernism "emerged concurrently as interrelated languages of the new information age. Propaganda has always existed, but modern propaganda, operating through techniques of saturation and multiple media channels, developed contemporaneously with literary modernism" (xiii). In a 1933 article titled "Literature and Propaganda", Joseph Wood Krutch identified the propagandistic impulse of younger writers as one that returned to literary conventions the Modernists had pushed away: "young men are not, to be sure, on the side of the conventions, but they have taken up the

position once maintained only by the conventional. They do, that is to say, insist that it is the business of literature to teach and they have nothing but scorn for any art which professes to be detached or neutral” (793). While Krutch says that propaganda is “not incompatible with literature; but it imposes on the work of art a heavy handicap” (797-798) and “a good three-quarters of all the attempts to define the function of literature have resulted in the conclusion that it does teach” (795), his idea of how to evaluate a work of literature is staunchly aesthetic, saying that “the thing which has made all books great” is “a delight in the thing itself, a contemplation of the struggle for its own sake, a determination to pass on to the reader an aesthetic experience” (802). A few years later, writing from a position more in sympathy with younger writers of Marxist and Communist inclinations, L. Robert Lind asserts that “there is no real need for avowed propaganda in literature. While it is rightly conceived of by those of the left as an instrument of great power in the class struggle, it is doubtful whether the openly propagandist writer achieves his purpose as fully as he might by allowing an *implicit* expression of the views he holds and the side he has taken to become clear in his work” because “heated argument has always been a notoriously poor way to convince; yet avowed propaganda is not far from heated argument” (202, 203). For all the apparent differences in their assumptions and tastes, Lind’s position on the evaluation of literature, ends up not far from that of Krutch: “literature as propaganda cannot be criticized merely as propaganda and thus dismissed; on the other hand, literature which has at the same time a propagandist purpose must first be discussed on the basis of its merits as literature”, though he notes that the latter will be a task “difficult for critics to whom the slightest hint of propaganda is as a red rag to a bull” (199).

Both of these critics assume literature and propaganda to be separate modes of communication, and they then prioritize literature over propaganda, with their disagreement

being only the extent to which propaganda weakens literature, not whether it does so at all. How much they assume these modes of communication are separate becomes clear if we reverse the infiltration and imagine how, to a politically committed critic like Lind who is not hostile to the idea of propaganda itself, *literature* might weaken *propaganda*. For all his political commitment, Lind shows no desire for literature to infiltrate propaganda; he does not, for instance, advocate for Soviet ideas of socialist realism, with literature's ambiguities, complexities, and artistry being seen as anathema to the unambiguous exhortation that is propaganda. In these formulations of *literature/propaganda* and *propaganda/literature*, the two terms make each other possible. Hence, they must remain separate, and the artist, by definition, must always side with literature over propaganda while the political activist, by definition, must side with propaganda over literature. The opposition sets limitations, enforces roles, and creates impossibilities. If a third way is possible, it must exist outside this schema. While it is difficult to imagine that Woolf, Delany, or Coetzee would ever want their fiction to be called *propaganda*, even in praise, the ways they experiment with social commitment and didacticism reveal some impulse toward undoing the opposition of literature and propaganda — less to redeem either than to unsettle the assumptions that construct those categories in the first place.

We have plenty of evidence for what Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee think about propaganda. For Woolf, propaganda limits the writer's freedom and simplifies the text, thus reducing its artfulness. In one of her last essays, "The Leaning Tower", she says that the novelist who can "shift from his shoulders the burden of didacticism, of propaganda" might, through such efforts, allow readers to "look forward hopefully to a stronger, a more varied literature in the classless and towerless society of the future" (*Essays* 6: 275). A propagandistic, didactic literature is for Woolf one that is weak and lacking variety, one that we know (from her *Daily*

Worker essay) that she thinks is a limitation on the writer, a violation of the imagination's freedom. For Delany, propaganda is "the ultimate aesthetic no-no" (*Starboard Wine* 141), though the "argument for the social value of art over propaganda" is one that easily becomes "tedious" and "familiar" (*Jewel-Hinged Jaw* 32). "Propaganda" is not a word that occurs often in Coetzee's writings, fiction or nonfiction, with a clear exception: his first novel, *Dusklands*, where in "The Vietnam Project", Eugene Dawn is writing a report on propaganda methods for a boss named Coetzee.

Dawn's report in *Dusklands* points to another reason *propaganda* is a negative term for these writers: its association with the violence of war, a violence Woolf and Coetzee address (and condemn) repeatedly. As Wollaeger (6-7) notes, before World War I, "propaganda" and "information" were generally used interchangeably, but after 1917, neutral or positive references to propaganda became fewer and fewer. After the growing sophistication of both propaganda and advertising, after the rise of the Nazis (and especially Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda), and after the propaganda saturation of World War II, the word became, for the English-speaking public at least, inevitably linked to ideas of lying and manipulation. While it's not difficult to find essays published in the 1930s arguing about the need for propaganda in literature, after World War II, most discussions of aesthetics and politics include the word "propaganda" only as an insult, which is one reason why the word is more rare in Delany and Coetzee's writings than Woolf's.

Woolf tended to link the words "propaganda" and "didactic" (also "preaching"), and while a good case can be made for differences between the words, I will usually keep them linked in this dissertation (partly to preserve my particular use of the word "pedagogy", as discussed below). Didactic texts exhort the reader toward specific stances and actions beyond

reading. The writer's great hope for the reader of a didactic novel is that they will close the book and then go out and change the world for the better.¹⁵ The didactic text is an instruction manual for activism, and the propagandistic text seeks an audience that acquiesces to it. That's not what Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee seek to use their novels for, nor the relationship they desire with their readers. Instead, each uses the novel form for ethical and epistemological purposes that are revealed via rhetoric that is too ambiguous to be called propagandistic. The rhetoric guides and questions, but it does not insist on a single path forward, a single way of thinking. By framing rhetorical choices within the metaphor of pedagogy, we are able to see how these texts address themselves to social and historical crises (and, indeed, sometimes take clear sides on crucial issues of the day) without their falling into the monological, authoritarian, one-way communication of propaganda.

One of the important rhetorical moves common to these texts is that of destabilization. "Rhetoric," Wayne Booth claims, "is employed at every moment when one human being intends to produce, through the use of signs or symbols, some effect on another — by words, or facial expressions, or gestures, or any symbolic skill of any kind" (*Rhetoric of Rhetoric* xi). We must ask, though, what becomes of rhetoric when the effect that it seeks to produce is not only obscure but also dependent on significant choices made by the reader when reading? We will see this destabilizing effect in works by Woolf, Delany, and especially Coetzee, an effect that is significantly different from that of didactic/propagandistic rhetoric, which, as a necessarily *stable* text seeks to limit a reader's choices as fully as possible and to avoid whatever ambiguities are

¹⁵ The most famous example from the 20th century is Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which led to changes in food safety regulation in the United States. This example shows the difficulty of controlling the response to didacticism, though: Sinclair's goal was not primarily to change meat regulations but to expose injustice and inspire readers toward socialism.

avoidable, because the didactic text fears nothing so much as the reader missing the point or thinking wrong thoughts. The risk that Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee all allow their readers is the risk of being in conflict with the text itself.

It is my contention that Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee each created destabilizing texts first by strengthening the idea of Modernist pedagogy — the text teaching the reader how to read it — and then by pushing fictionality to (and sometimes beyond) its limits, thus creating texts that are pedagogical and often essayistic but not didactic in the sense of propagandistic. As I will show, the meaningful difference between *the pedagogical* and *the didactic* is a difference of power and authority, a difference that will be mapped onto a distinction between authentic and ersatz ethics.

THE LIMITS OF FICTION

As with *modernism*, even the most complicated and hedging definitions of *fiction* tend to fall apart in contradictions, while precise definitions prove vague when analyzed. In *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, J.A. Cuddon takes one of the most reasonable approaches, and doesn't even try to define the term, the entire entry reading:

fiction A vague and general term for an imaginative work, usually in prose. At any rate, it does not normally cover poetry and drama though both are a form of fiction in that they are moulded and contrived – or feigned. Fiction is now used in general of the novel, the short story, the *novella*, and related genres. (320)

The basic definition of fiction as *that which is not true* or *that which is imagined* doesn't

work as a description for a complete text of narrative prose (e.g. a novel) for reasons elaborated by Bakhtin at the latest and well explained by Richard Walsh in *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*: “Fictions are often not entirely fictional, and in principle may not be fictional at all. There are various circumstances in which nonfictional material, whether avowed (the historical novel), surreptitious (the roman à clef), or entirely adventitious, may inhabit a fictional narrative” (45). Alok Yadav points out that when reading a work of fiction “one often wonders whether a given feature of the narrative discourse is fictional or in some direct or oblique manner taken from the world of actuality. In fact, I might suggest that one constantly makes such judgments in the process of reading fiction” (192). Therefore, he says, “Any adequate account of fiction will need to recognize not only that fictional discourse is always a mixed discourse, a combination of fictional and nonfictional elements, but also that our reading of fiction engages many of the same protocols and considerations as our reading of nonfiction” (194).

Walsh and Yadav take a similar approach to fictionality, an approach that analyzes fictionality as a rhetorical act.¹⁶ This is useful because it relieves us of the need to determine which textual features produce and/or constitute fiction, and instead allows us to see fictionality as a consequence of expectations created in the relationship between text, reader, and context:

¹⁶ Walsh describes the differences between *fiction* and *fictionality* thus: “Fictionality (as a rhetorical rather than ontological quality) is almost inherently narrative, but it is not coextensive with narrativity, and still less with textuality in general. Not that fictionality should be equated simply with ‘fiction,’ as a category or genre of narrative: it is a communicative strategy, and as such it is apparent on some scale within many nonfictional narratives, in forms ranging from something like an ironic aside, through various forms of conjecture or imaginative supplementation, to full-blown counterfactual narrative examples. Conversely, much fiction serves communicative functions, of both non-narrative (essayistic) and narrative (documentary) kinds, which do not exclusively belong to the rhetoric of fictionality: think of the generalizing moral commentary of George Eliot, or the historical contextualizations of Scott. But the generic marker of all fictional narrative, literary or cinematic, is that the rhetoric of fictionality is the dominant framework for the communicative gesture being made, and therefore defines the terms in which it solicits interpretation” (7).

Even within terms of the familiar, modern fictional contract [...] fictionality has no determinate relation to features of the text itself. For example, fiction may very well do without the representation of thoughts; and nonfiction (a biography, say) may resort to it. The representation of mental discourse in a nonfictional narrative will probably strike contemporary readers as a liberty, but this does not make the text a fiction (in fact, it confirms their interpretative orientation towards it as nonfiction). For the same reason, the dissociation of fictionality, in principle, from any textual indicators may be extended to matters of reference. If a narrative offered as historical is shown to be inconsistent with documented evidence, even to the point of reference failure (if it had interpolated a nonexistent character into the narrative, for instance), then precisely because this error or subterfuge is held accountable to criteria of historical falsifiability, it confirms that the text in question is not fiction, but compromised historiography. (Walsh 45)

The contexts and paratexts that produce an idea of fictionality are ones that are often so obvious that most texts' status is unquestioned by readers: We assume a book is fictional because, for instance, we found it in the Fiction section of a bookstore and it says "A Novel" on the cover. Fictionality is not, Walsh maintains, an ontological category or a Platonic ideal existing outside the relationship between writer, text, and reader; rather, fictionality is a communicative relationship that produces a different kind of knowledge via fiction than nonfiction does: "The knowledge offered by fiction [...] is not primarily specific knowledge of what is (or was), but of how human affairs work, or, more strictly, of how to make sense of them—logically, evaluatively, emotionally. It is knowledge of the ways in which such matters may be brought within the compass of the imagination, and in that sense understood" (36). Thus, "The distinction

between fiction and nonfiction rests upon the rhetorical use to which a narrative is put, which is to say, the kind of interpretative response it invites in being presented as one or the other” (45).¹⁷

With such a frame, we can see why turning a work’s fictionality into a problem is valuable for nondidactic writers at moments of socio-political crisis, because such problematizing of fictionality changes the rhetorical use of the narrative and unsettles the easy interpretation of a text as fiction or a novel. When the immediacy of reality overwhelms the writer’s desire to bring matters “within the compass of the imagination”, the impulse toward didacticism becomes tempting: one wants to speak truth to power, not tell an imaginary story about an imaginary character speaking truth to power.¹⁸ For a text to have hope of being anything other than a bit of fiddling in a burning world, it must in some way activate the reader within the text/reader relationship. As decades of reader-response theory have shown us, all texts do this to some extent, but committed texts and texts responding to crisis do so with goals

¹⁷ For an example of the impossibility of locating fictionality within a text itself, see Jo Ann Beard’s “Werner”, which was reprinted in *Best American Essays 2007* edited by David Foster Wallace. Having read “Werner” numerous times, I have found nothing in its text that would indicate it is not a work of short fiction. We read it as an essay because it is published as an essay. Though “Werner” is an extreme case, any theory of fiction and fictionality must be able to account for such a text if it is to be valid. Walsh’s theory can; many others cannot.

¹⁸ Etymologically, *didactic* comes from either Greek (*διδασκτικός*) or Latin (*didactica, didacticus*) words relating to teaching, learning, or instruction, and thus *didactic* is nearly synonymous with *pedagogical*. I have chosen to ignore this etymological similarity and use the words for different tendencies, with *didactic* more or less synonymous with *propagandistic*, a use that is mostly supported by Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee’s own uses of the words. For my purposes, it is important to be able to distinguish between the propagandistic/didactic and the pedagogic. Nonetheless, there are inevitable, unavoidable slippages with these terms, and my hope is that specific examples keep my meaning clear in each case.

beyond entertainment or the contemplation of beauty.¹⁹

While for the purposes of this dissertation *the novel* as a form is secondary in my interests to *fictionality* as a concept, it is no coincidence that Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee are all primarily novelists. Claire de Obaldia has summarized well the many scholars who have shown that the novel is a form especially hospitable to essayistic discourse: “If essayism connotes self-reflection and open-endedness, then the novel is without a doubt the most essayistic of genres: the most heterogeneous — with a capacity to combine the narrative, the lyric, and the dramatic, and to include entire essays — the most open-ended, the most reflective or self-critical” (239). This capaciousness is attractive to writers seeking to encompass something of the world in their work, but it also opens opportunities for writers to work within the form to challenge readers’ ideas of what that form can and should be. By presenting such challenges, the writers teach the readers new ways of perceiving the novel genre, making it possible for the reader to develop new expectations and assumptions not only about this novel that they have read, but also about the next novel they pick up to read.

Many readers have no desire to perceive the novel differently. Coetzee’s career demonstrates this vividly. Though my concern in this study is with the books he published between *Disgrace* and *The Childhood of Jesus*, it is worth noting that his most recent novels

¹⁹ Though I will admit to finding many elements of reader-response theory useful, this dissertation is not a work of such theory except obliquely, however, because my concerns throughout are primarily with the text *before* it reaches the reader, even though, of course, readers are fundamental to any reading or interpretive process, and writers themselves may be said to be the first reader-interpreter of the text. Nonetheless, as we would begin to look at any pedagogy from the teacher’s aspirations, intentions, and authority before looking at the effect of the pedagogy on students, so, too, do I focus throughout this dissertation on the text before it reaches readers. That such an approach includes paradoxes is inevitable. For instance, when not quoting the writers themselves, I am either offering my own reading/interpretation or that of other people, which is all subsequent to the publication of the text and, thus, a reader’s response. My interpretive position, though, is one that prioritizes an idea of the text before it reaches the reader. This is a speculative position, but it is nonetheless one that is not quite the same as reader-response as I understand it.

have been perceived by some reviewers in ways that suggest these reviewers' expectations of Coetzee have been permanently affected by the shift in his writing after *Disgrace*, a shift away from careful scenic structures, rich descriptions of landscape and objects, and other elements of conventional realistic fiction at least since the 19th century. The two (so far) *Jesus* novels are strange and elliptical, with more dialogue than description of landscapes or actions, and Coetzee does not create psychologically rich portraits of his characters, instead preferring to let them remain mostly inscrutable. These books court allegory perhaps even more stubbornly than Coetzee's early works, which were often read as allegories even as he objected to the term. The *Jesus* novels are not allegories in any traditional sense because it is impossible to say what their figures symbolize. They are, in that way, deliberate failures of allegory; or if not failures, then incomplete allegories: they allow readers to come to their own conclusions about the symbolic implications, and it is unlikely that any two readers would agree about those implications. But the same could be said of many novels, and there is nothing in these books that makes fictionality itself a problem. Similarly, it's difficult to call these books *didactic* because it's hard to say exactly what they're trying to teach, even though their characters engage in philosophical conversations.

Nonetheless, Elizabeth Lowry, reviewing *The Schooldays of Jesus* in *The Guardian*, declared that "In his fidelity to ideas, to telling rather than showing, to instructing rather than seducing us, [Coetzee] does not actually write fiction any more." This is an extraordinary statement, one that suggests that philosophical material within a novel invalidates it as fiction, that the only real fiction is fiction that tells a good ol' story. (Woolf, I expect, would have some harsh words for Elizabeth Lowry.) Lowry's narrow conception of novelistic discourse is absurd and historically ignorant, but it is also a common one, and shows the sedimented conventions

that Coetzee's work must overcome if it is to have acceptance from readers. At *Vox*, Constance Grady offered a similar view to Lowry's: "*Schooldays* is not a realistic novel. I would hesitate to call it a novel at all: It's closer to a Socratic dialogue on the relationship between reason and passion that is structured around a small child for reasons that are frankly beyond me. It aggressively disdains the idea of *story* in favor of the idea of *thought*."

If fictionality is a type of rhetoric (a communicative act that sets up a relationship between a communicator and an audience), then we must admit that the limits of fiction cannot be determined by the text alone, and may not even be determined by writers of fiction who try to explore the borders, margins, and limit-points of fiction. The reception of Coetzee's later books vividly shows that some readers of fiction may disagree with the writer about where the border lies, and the distance between them may be unbridgeable. The limits of my fiction are the limits of my readers.

PEDAGOGY

Didacticism is not the only strategy for activating the text-reader relationship in a way that addresses crisis. Gayatri Spivak has proposed the idea that readers can learn to be "activists of the imagination" and that teachers can help their students liberate imagination "so that it can become something other than Narcissus waiting to see his own powerful image in the eyes of the other" (*Readings* 54). Such a liberatory approach is at the core of critical pedagogy (as developed by Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, and others), and inspires my own analysis of nondidactic Modernist and metamodernist writers' strategies as types of pedagogy. Within critical pedagogy, the teacher is not an omniscient bestower of knowledge, but rather a

coordinator for the production of knowledge and a facilitator of dialogue. The role of the writer and the role of the teacher are not exact analogues, nor are the roles of reader and student, but both teaching/learning and writing/reading are communicative events in which acts of language and imagination produce knowledge. A novel premised on a liberatory pedagogy is one that seeks to achieve within the writer-text-reader relationship what a liberatory pedagogy of education seeks to achieve within the teacher-classroom-student relationship. As such, the role of the reader must be heightened and cannot be passive. Freire writes: “In the learning process the only person who really *learns* is s/he who appropriates what is learned, who apprehends and thereby re-invents that learning; s/he who is able to apply the appropriated learning to concrete existential situations” (*Education* 93). Didacticism, as I use the term, is anathema to critical pedagogy, because such pedagogy is premised on dialogue. This makes the novel an especially useful form for a textual pedagogy, given the dialogism that Bakhtin famously located as the core of the genre.

There is nothing, though, that makes the novel form inherently pedagogic nor anything that makes any individual novel inherently liberatory in its pedagogy. Didacticism is not only not alien to the novel, but for many types of novels and many eras of literary history, didacticism was something of a requirement. In *Theory of the Novel*, Guido Mazzoni locates the move away from didactic expectations with Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*: “At the end of the eighteenth century [...] we witness a radical transformation: allegorism and moralism began to disappear from texts. This was not a sudden transition but a slow process that took many decades

to complete” (188).²⁰ While no one text demonstrates a decisive break from the didactic/moralistic expectation, Goethe’s preface to *Werther* is a useful marker “because it shows that new moral attitudes toward stories and people were emerging. Vice and virtue, or what the work ‘means’ in a conceptual form, stopped being crucial issues; novels no longer presented themselves as secondary texts that gave form to an *exemplum* of something already known, but rather as primary texts recounting experiences irreducible to a preexisting truth” (191).

Alongside its dialogic properties, if the post-*Werther* novel is one that is itself a primary text of representations that are “irreducible to a preexisting truth”, then the novel as a form is particularly powerful for engaged pedagogy, because such pedagogy “produces self-directed learners, teachers, and students who are able to participate fully in the production of ideas” (hooks *Critical Thinking* 43). Both the didactic novel and the novel that seeks a primarily passive reader are texts that *convey* ideas rather than *produce* them. The experiments of Modernist aesthetics with the novel form made the form itself less conventional, forcing readers into a more active relationship with texts, since generic expectations and assumptions were no longer necessarily useful. Not only did readers now have to learn anew how to read novels, but learning to read one Modernist work did not guarantee that they would now have the skills to understand and appreciate another, and so they either had to learn how to read each new novel they encountered separately or they had to develop reading strategies for common features of such

²⁰ For Mazzoni, the completion of the process of removing overt moralizing and didacticism from novels was inflected by class expectations: “Moreover, the bipartite structure of the modern narrative pace — divided between works created for specialists and those for a wider public — led to different escape velocities, because the novelists who wrote for middle- or lower-class readers never relinquished moral control” (188). The move toward a stance of art-for-art’s-sake in the second half of the 19th century could be seen as part of this process for texts aimed at the cultural elite, while certain tendencies in popular culture (the rise of noir fiction, for instance, in the 1920s and 1930s) could be seen as part of a similar process for mass audiences. Didacticism is usually aimed at the masses; it is rare to encounter didactic art that seeks to change the ruling classes that support and consume it. Less educated and less wealthy audiences are usually the ones who get lectured and preached to.

texts. One of the insights of metamodernism is that Modernism developed its own conventions, so the reader who became experienced with, for instance, interior monologue and parataxis would be able to navigate further Modernist novels with nearly as much ease as they could navigate more traditional writing. These conventions entered the toolboxes of metamodernists, who then deconstructed, subverted, and detoured them, returning the novel form to newness.

Newness is a key idea within Modernism (“Make it new!”), but also to liberatory pedagogy, because liberation cannot be predicated on pre-processed truths and common sense if the assumed truths and common sense are part of an oppressive system. Outside of utopia, all assumptions, and all conventional knowledge, must be open to question. What Freire calls the “banking concept of education” wherein “the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (*Pedagogy* 72) is also in some ways the model for the traditional relationship between text and reader. Indeed, Freire introduces Chapter 2 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by linking teaching and narration:

A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally *narrative* character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness. // The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. (71)

Freire’s complaint about the teacher’s narration of reality could easily fit within any number of

Woolf's essays about conventional fiction, and the model of the narrating teacher and receiving (passive) students is one that resembles many Modernists' low opinions of the relationship between conventional art and its audiences.

Newness, then, is not about faddishness, nor is it a fetishization of idiosyncrasy, but it is instead a key component for avoiding the kind of complacency that leads to oppression. If activists of the imagination are to produce new imaginings (a kind of new knowledge), then what is conventional, familiar, and common-sensical must be re-imagined, it must be made new. Within critical pedagogy, one of the crucial values of imagination is its ability to estrange the familiar. In one of the best manuals for English teachers seeking to practice critical pedagogy, Eleanor Kutz and Hephzibah Roskelly write that “‘Making the familiar strange’ can help any researcher or learner find new patterns of significance, new meanings in what had previously been taken for granted” (226). *Making it new* is a fundamental technique of teaching, learning, and imagining.

One pedagogy of liberation for the novel will seek to unsettle the passive traditional relationship between the depository (readers) and the depositor (writer or text) by unsettling the assumed fictionality of the novel. Catherine Gallagher has argued that the novel as we know it, and the English novel in particular, arose alongside — and, indeed, dependent upon — a discourse of fictionality:

In England, between the time when Defoe insisted that Robinson Crusoe was a real individual (1720) and the time when Henry Fielding urged just as strenuously that his characters were not representations of actual specific people (1742), a discourse of fictionality appeared in and around the novel, specifying new rules for its identification

and new modes of nonreference. And it is on the basis of this overt and articulated understanding that the novel may be said to have discovered fiction. What Fielding had that Defoe lacked was not an excuse for fictionality but a use for it as a special way of shaping knowledge through the fabrication of particulars. (355)

Gallagher goes on to argue that the development of the novel through the 19th century and later was, simultaneously, a development of an ever-more-subtle discourse of fictionality. For Modernist writers to render the novel new, they would also have to render fictionality new. As we have seen from Walsh, any valid definition of fictionality must attend to contexts and paratexts, which means attending to readers and reception. If we accept Gallagher's account of novels, we must then recognize that in teaching readers new strategies for reading novels, Modernist texts also, unavoidably, teach new strategies for understanding fictionality.

Learning new reading strategies requires the reader to be active, and the kinds of strategies that I identify Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee building their pedagogies to teach are ones that require the reader's attention to move toward the relationship between the text and the world beyond the text (the reader's own world, the world presented by the text, etc.). By unsettling fictionality in the specific ways that they do (and by heightening the reader's awareness that the fictionality of the text cannot be taken for granted), these novels put readers into a position where they must always assess for themselves what they take to be the text's distance or closeness to reality. In doing so, readers must also assess what their own sense of reality is.

VIRGINIA WOOLF, SAMUEL R. DELANY, AND J.M. COETZEE

Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee are not writers typically linked together, but it is my

contention that doing reveals significant insights about the writings of each while also providing insights about fiction, aesthetics, and artists' responses to crises in their worlds. Though drawing from different sources within Modernism, these three writers express, to varying degrees, a belief in art's autonomy from political determinism, and the work of each demonstrates a commitment to aesthetic experiment in the face of crisis, a commitment that links them to both Modernism's particular valuing of innovation and critical pedagogy's valuing of new perspectives.

Woolf wrote relatively traditional novels at the beginning of her career, then began overtly experimenting with the form in *Jacob's Room* (1922), and continued to experiment through *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), and *The Waves* (1931), before then turning to what she called the "essay-novel" with a manuscript titled *The Pargiters*, parts of which would serve as raw material for the novel *The Years* (1937) and the book-length essay *Three Guineas* (1938). What began as an experiment in unsettling fictionality ended up not doing so, but what remained was the pedagogy, as both *The Years* and *Three Guineas* require much activity from the reader, and activity of a particular sort. Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts* (left mostly finished at her death and published posthumously in July 1941), experiments again with narrative, mixing the form of drama into novelistic narrative (in a rather different way than Joyce did with *Ulysses*). Once again Woolf wrote a novel that does not problematize fictionality itself, but she also, and again, created a novel that so deviates from readers' expectations of what a novel is that it contains a pedagogy of reading — though not, it seems to me, a liberatory pedagogy on the scale of *The Years* and *Three Guineas*.

Delany began writing various sorts of novels as a teenager, and originally planned to have a career as a literary novelist, but he found he was able to sell science fiction when he was not able to sell his literary work, and his first novel, *The Jewels of Aptom*, was published when he

was twenty years old in 1962. He achieved success in the science fiction field in the 1960s, winning numerous awards for work that was often experimental, but not in a particularly overt way until 1975's *Dhalgren*, a behemoth that befuddled as many readers as it excited, yet also sold over a million copies within its first ten years.²¹ After *Dhalgren*, Delany began to experiment more and more with melding fiction and nonfiction, first with faux-nonfictional appendices, then, finally, bringing an overtly nonfictional form into dialogue with overtly fictional narrative in "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" (which, though a section of *Flight from Nevèryon* [1985], is the length of a novel). From the first, the *Nevèryon* books teased readers' interpretive strategies with epigraphs from such writers as Ernst Bloch, Edward Said, Susan Sontag, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, and others that the average reader of a paperback book of sword & sorcery stories is unlikely ever to have heard of; further, the stories were framed with prefaces and appendices by fictional scholars who explained the derivation of the tales from "an archaic narrative text of some nine hundred or so words (depending on the ancient language in which you found it), sometimes called the Culhar' Fragment and, more recently, the Missolonghi Codex" (*Tales* 12). Prefacing the stories, novellas, and novels of the Return to Nevèryon series with epigraphs from literary and cultural critics may have jostled some readers' expectations for the texts and how they might be read, but there is nothing in the books that requires the reader to pay attention to the epigraphs; they're just as easy to skip as to read. While the prefaces and appendices to the books are complex and sometimes bewildering, the framing of texts as some sort of long-lost manuscript is a common technique to fiction generally, and to adventure and fantasy fiction in particular (e.g. the appendices to popular books such as *Dune*

²¹ For information on the sales of *Dhalgren* in its early years, see Delany's essay "Of Sex, Objects, Signs, Systems, Sales, SF, and Other Things" in *The Straits of Messina*.

and the Lord of the Rings trilogy). “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”, itself first positioned as an appendix (a designation changed in later editions of *Flight from Nevèryon*), is a significant departure because it is the first and only Nevèryon tale to undermine its own fictionality within the text itself by interspersing apparently nonfictional diaristic writing about New York City in 1983/84 alongside a more typical Nevèryon story — one the diaries, amidst other subjects, chronicle being written.

After “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”, the Nevèryon stories return to their previous forms and modes. After the final Nevèryon book (*Return to Nevèryon* [1987]), Delany struggled to write fiction for a few years, publishing only nonfiction until his major novel of the 1990s, *The Mad Man*, a pornographic academic novel that is also an exploration of the transmission patterns of HIV. While *The Mad Man* ends with an appendix reprinting an actual article from the British medical journal *The Lancet*, for the most part its overall fictionality and novel form are never in question. Much like *The Years*, though, *The Mad Man* does offer a pedagogy of subversion/liberation to its reader, a pedagogy deeply connected to the development of the AIDS crisis after “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”, and in many ways *The Mad Man* can be read as a sequel to Delany’s 1980s fiction (not just the Return to Nevèryon series, but also *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*).²²

Much of Delany’s fiction before and after *The Mad Man* could be discussed as unsettling fictionality and/or offering a pedagogy of subversion and liberation, and works such as “Atlantis: Model 1924” are highly metamodernist, but I am concerned in this study only with the fiction that most directly responds to the AIDS crisis. The 2007 novel *Dark Reflections* may be seen as a

²² The idea of *The Mad Man* as the true sequel to *Stars in My Pocket* (the official sequel to which Delany never finished writing) is Damien Broderick’s and is an idea Delany has shown some approval of (Delany to Broderick, 20 April 1997, BU 71: 1).

coda to “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” and *The Mad Man* in that it tells the story of a black, gay male poet’s life in the second half of the 20th century, a man whose experience of the AIDS crisis is very much that of an outsider and observer because, unlike Delany’s other characters, he is mostly celibate and not at all involved with any sort of gay community. This allows the book a view of the crisis as *not* a crisis for the lead character, and goes some way toward making that novel one of Delany’s least subversively pedagogical and most accessible texts. (This is not a negative criticism, simply an observation. Indeed, for me *Dark Reflections* is among Delany’s most satisfying novels.)²³ In a certain sense, *Dark Reflections* is an inverse of *The Mad Man*, and the two could be read productively together. That, though, is a task for another time.

J.M. Coetzee’s first book, *Dusklands* (1974), is a fragmentary mix of genres, but best described as two linked novellas that sometimes employ nonfictional techniques. After that book, his fiction and nonfiction stay separate until *Boyhood* (1997), first in his ever-more-fictionalized trilogy of memoirs (followed by *Youth* [2002], which is similar in technique, and *Summertime* [2009], which is more overtly fictional, and will be discussed in this study). With *Elizabeth Costello* (2003; partially published 1999 as *The Lives of Animals*) he brings the fictional status overtly into question by posing much of the novel as narratives of lectures given by the title character. He soon followed that with the metafictional *Slow Man* (2005), in which Elizabeth Costello appears as a character who might be writing the novel she is a part of, and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), which puts fictional frames around — or, literally, beneath — essayistic

²³ It would be a mistake to say *Dark Reflections* is not pedagogical — it is heavily so, but its dominant pedagogy is not aimed at a general audience, and is not designed for a Freirean liberation; instead, it is a novel that Delany has explicitly said he hoped would be informative to aspiring writers. In that sense, it is highly pedagogical, using the protagonist’s life to illustrate and dramatize various principles Delany articulated in his 2005 essay collection *About Writing*. For more on this, and *Dark Reflections* generally, see my 2016 *Los Angeles Review of Books* essay on it.

chapters. Since *Summertime*, Coetzee's novels have returned to a mode that doesn't unsettle their fictionality, but in their titles and content *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013) and *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016) court allegorical readings, a type of fiction that has often been associated with Coetzee, and which Mazzoni identifies as a pre-19th century form of culturally acceptable didacticism.²⁴ This has led some critics to see Coetzee as becoming more didactic and less fictional, but it seems to me that if we can say that the recent novels evoke a feeling of allegory, it is nonetheless impossible to say with any certainty what they are allegories of or for. Such impossibility makes them much more novelistic than didactic.

Depending on what a critic wants to emphasize, various breaks can be shown in Coetzee's career. Many such breaks adhere around *Disgrace*, which is perhaps his most formally conventional novel. While Coetzee's fiction has always been experimental to some extent or another, after *Disgrace* it becomes so experimental that to label it *experimental* feels obvious, even redundant. However, after *Disgrace*, Coetzee's utter lack of interest in scene setting and character development leaves many critics without a vocabulary with which to assess and analyze his work. For many readers, even well-read and highly skilled ones, novels either follow traditional conventions or they fail as novels.

AESTHETICS AND ETHICS

While each of these three writers wrestles with fictionality in different ways and for different reasons, the effect on the status of each text's fictionality is similar, making ethics, in particular, more obviously primary within the novel's remit and encouraging the reader not only

²⁴ The question of Coetzee and allegory is a complex and controversial one within Coetzee studies. See the chapter herein for references.

to consider narrative, but to consider questions of how to live and what to believe. What links these texts is not their level of fictionality, but the way they turn fictionality and the novel form itself into a tool for a certain pedagogy. These are works that avoid didacticism by foregrounding the reader's role in learning how to navigate the discourses each text puts into play, and they do so with a clear goal of inspiring readers to think about the relationship between writer and reader, text and world, politics and ethics. Each seeks to avoid what Jonathan Lear, in discussing Coetzee, has called "ersatz ethics": preconceived ideas and opinions that the text would simply reaffirm. Ersatz ethics are a particular danger for fiction writers, who may benefit from an aura of intellectual authority. In notes for a lecture on Olive Schreiner, Coetzee said, "Generally, it is not important that writers have good ideas. Rather, it is a matter of seeing a mimesis of intellectual engagement" (qtd. in Attwell "Mastering Authority" 219). Such mimesis is anathema to authentic ethics, but at the same time, the rhetorical tools that produce such mimesis may be useful in provoking authentic ethical thought for the reader.

For many philosophers and writers, ethics and politics are separate realms. Jessica Berman notes that G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* was a significant book for many members of the Bloomsbury group, and that in it Moore "distinguishes the matter of ethics from that of politics (and from other metaphysical questions) by claiming that ethics is a science concerned with the question of defining the 'good' and distinguished from inquiry into the more complex notion of 'good conduct'." Such an approach, she says, removes philosophy from "our practical understanding of conduct in society or for politics" (13). Berman writes that feminist philosophy makes a "rapprochement" between ethics and politics, and her discussion of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* suggests the same for anti-colonialism (and, by extension, postcolonialism). Queer philosophy obviously belongs with this mix, too, as another ethico-political philosophy of the

personal-as-political (and the political-as-personal), and Delany's writings often have an ethical concern. He is fond of quoting Wittgenstein's statement that "Ethics and aesthetics are one" ("Ethik und Ästhetik sind Eins", *Tractatus* 6.421; see Collinson for discussion), as well as a statement he attributes to Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, but which I have not been able to verify: "The novel is the only art form where ethics is the aesthetic problem" (qtd. in *About Writing* 175). Much work in Coetzee studies focuses on questions of ethics, and his work has been nearly as interesting to scholars of philosophy as of literature. Though ethics as a discipline has not been as common a topic for analysts of Woolf and Delany, their work nonetheless frequently links ethics and politics, making some of the ethical discussions around Coetzee valuable for Woolf and Delany as well.

Ethics is never separate from form and genre in the texts I discuss, but this is not to suggest that these writers' ethics or forms remain static. The differences between each of the writers are important, but those differences are often clear; the differences *within* their own oeuvres are less obvious and more important for my claims about the texts' relationships to specific crises. In addition to exploring how Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee approach fictionality, it is important to look at how their approaches differ from previous forms they each employed. The "essayism" of Woolf's work in general has been a topic for a number of scholars (Randi Saloman in particular), but Woolf's conception of *The Pargiters* as an essay-novel from the beginning stands in clear contrast to the more integrated essayistic elements of her earlier fiction (and fictional elements of her earlier essays). Samuel Delany had previously been attracted to science fiction and fantasy as tools for exploring ideas in ways he didn't feel other sorts of fiction-writing allowed, and he had used nonfictional elements briefly in previous novels, but "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" is a significant break from his earlier writing in the way the

novelistic narrative breaks into outright diaristic and essayistic material to such an extent that the reader is forced to consider whether they are reading fiction at all. Coetzee's *Dusklands* adds essayistic elements to its fictional form, but it remains primarily fictional rather than essayistic (and a good case can be made that the book is not a novel, but two related novellas). All of his novels are in dialogue with Modernist and post-structuralist criticism, but it is not until *Elizabeth Costello* that he pushes the novel form to such a degree that many reviewers (including the Woolf biographer Hermione Lee) declared the book not to be a novel at all. With *Slow Man*, Coetzee returned to a more obviously novelistic form, but then upset that form by bringing Elizabeth Costello in as a character (she immediately quotes the novel's first lines to its protagonist). Because *Slow Man* inserts Elizabeth Costello into a less complexly fictional novel, and her presence there fits comfortably within the parameters of metafiction, my attention will mostly be toward the other two post-*Elizabeth Costello* books that put fictionality into play: *Diary of a Bad Year* and *Summertime*. With *Diary of a Bad Year*, Coetzee mixes novelistic and essayistic elements in a way similar to that dreamed of by Woolf when she began *The Pargiters*²⁵, while *Summertime* unsettles both fictionality and nonfictionality.

After they wrote these texts that push fiction to its limits, Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee

²⁵ Woolf's plan for *The Pargiters*, and the drafts she managed to write, alternate essays with novel chapters. The two inform each other, however, as Anna Snaith points out: "In a metafictional move, the narrator, moving from essay to novel and back again, not only animates and particularises the historical material, but also enacts the transformation of data into fictional prose" (Woolf, *The Years* lv), with the later essay chapters incorporating more and more fictional discourse. *Diary of a Bad Year* includes essays ostensibly written by the protagonist, whose neighbors refer to him as Señor C, but as James Wood described in *The New Yorker*, the book "takes a daring form: Señor C's essays occupy the bulk of each page, more or less, but running beneath them, like the news crawl on a TV screen, are what read like short diary entries by Señor C and by Anya, which offer a running commentary on the developing relationship of employer and employee, and which convey the plot of the novel, such as it is. So a typical page is segmented like the back of a scarab beetle, and the reader must choose to read either one narrative strand at a time or one page at a time and thus two or three strands simultaneously. In practice, one does a bit of both—a gulp of essay, a snatch of diary—and the broken form usefully, but relatively painlessly, corrupts any easy relation to innocent continuity." Coetzee's approach is more visually ostentatious than Woolf's, positioning the essay and novel sections on the same page, but the spirit is generally the same, forcing the reader to speculate on the connections between the different modes.

each then returned to writing novels in which the fictionality is less problematized. Their work was no less bold or innovative, but having discovered and tested certain limits, they were then able to pull back and move in other directions (toward, perhaps, other types of limits, other borders and margins). In each case, though, their later work demonstrates significant difference from what they wrote before their fictionality-testing texts.

My goal is for this study not to be simply about three writers, important as they are to world literature. The New Modernist Studies of the last two decades has conclusively demonstrated that Modernism was never separate from the political sphere, but the scholarship has done so via one primary tactic: an insistence on the politics within what was seen previously as primarily aesthetic. I believe that case is on solid ground, and now it is time that we re-examine the aesthetic choices affected by artists' social and political commitments. If we are to be able to talk about how and why art matters, we must be able to talk about how and why artists shape their art, and how that shape affects our interpretation of the work.

2. APPROACHING CRISIS: VIRGINIA WOOLF

Writers who believe that art is fundamentally apolitical often produce extraordinarily socially sensitive works. And it is an endless embarrassment to us who believe in the fundamentally political nature of all human productions that, simply from the plot reductions of their stories, or even from the expressed sentiments of their poems, measured against whatever notion of “political correctness” they believe in (and, like the rest of us, I believe in mine), writers who express the most “correct” political sentiments can produce the most politically appalling work.

If we are ever to solve our problems, I believe the opposition between the two—the belief in the fundamentally apolitical nature of the best art and the belief in the fundamentally political nature of all art—needs to be carefully undone. Personally I suspect that more important than which of these positions a particular writer adopts is whether that writer sees his or her own position as opposing the majority opinion around, or whether the writer sees his or her position as merely an extension of what most other intelligent people think.

—Samuel R. Delany, “The ‘Gay Writer’ / ‘Gay Writing’ . . . ?”, *Shorter Views*

In a 1936 letter to her nephew Julian Bell, Virginia Woolf cautioned him against writing a novel (“such a long gradual cold handed business”) and said that she wished he would “invent some medium that’s half poetry half play half novel. (Three halves, I see; well, you must correct my arithmetic.) I think there ought to be a scrambling together of mediums now” (Woolf, *Congenial Spirits* 374). During the time she wrote this letter, Woolf was working on final revisions of *The Years* and had begun to formulate ideas for *Three Guineas*.

Woolf's desire for "a scrambling together of mediums now" was in keeping with her aesthetic goals from at least the time when she wrote "The Mark on the Wall" in 1917. When Clive Bell praised that story, Woolf replied: "its [*sic*] high time we found some new shapes, don't you think so?" (*Letters* 2: 167). Such a desire fit with Ezra Pound's famous Modernist command to "Make it new!"²⁶ By the 1930s, though, Woolf and other Modernist writers had created many new shapes, and the most canonical Modernist works had all been in print long enough for their writers to seem less like the avant-garde and more like the old guard. "In the eyes of many young left-wing writers," Benjamin Kohlmann writes, "the high modernism of the 1920s came to embody the kind of writing they were reacting against" (*Committed* 2). Further, with the rise of Fascism in Italy, the stock market crash in the U.S., the growing threat of Nazism in Germany, and political and economic instability in England, writers of various ages and aesthetics felt at least some pressure to shape their writing toward the crises of the day. That pressure came from their own sense of the world's peril as well as from the younger generation of writers who considered the aestheticism of Woolf's literary generation, particularly as associated with the Bloomsbury group, to be not only undesirable, but anachronistic. As Kohlmann concisely framed it, much of the writing in the 1930s, particularly politically committed writing, was "writing against modernism, rather than simply after it" (12).

By the 1930s, Woolf was keenly aware of her own reputation. She had published her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, in 1915, had received much attention for *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and hit the bestseller lists with *Orlando* in 1928. She had been publishing reviews and essays since before the First World War, and 1929's *A Room of One's Own* sold

²⁶ The historical accuracy of the statement being Pound's motto is explored (exhaustively) by Michael North in "The Making of 'Make It New'". I use it here, and add the exclamation point Pound himself did not use, because for metamodernists it is has come to be such an accepted slogan for Modernist imperatives.

over 12,000 copies in England in the first six months of publication (Willis 154). As the founders, owners, and editors of the Hogarth Press, she and Leonard were at the center of the British literary community. She had established herself as a serious writer and a public intellectual, and by the 1930s she was no longer a member of the younger generation of literary innovators. Like it or not, she was now part of the establishment that newer writers would rebel against. By 1931, it was clear that the literary priorities of the era would not be sympathetic to the highly psychological and interiorized fiction she had mastered, despite the subtle and often complex socio-political inclinations within what she wrote. Subtlety is not much of a defense against a world in crisis, and Woolf feared the younger generation of writers could be right that her aesthetic would prove irrelevant.

In October 1931, she wrote a letter to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (the Cambridge philosopher who had first imagined the League of Nations), thanking him for his praise of *The Waves* and adding: “Perhaps for me, with my limitations—I mean lack of reasoning power and so on—all I can do is to make an artistic whole; and leave it at that. But then I’m annoyed to be told that I am nothing but a stringer together of words and words and words. I begin to doubt beautiful words. How one longs sometimes to have done something in the world” (*Letters* 4: 397-398).

The doubt of beautiful words and the longing “to have done something in the world” would continue to haunt Woolf as she measured herself against the younger generation and against the demands of a world growing ever more chaotic. She had tested the limits of fiction ever since “The Mark on the Wall”, and after finishing *Night and Day* (1919) — which Katherine Mansfield called “a novel in the tradition of the English novel” (Majumdar 82) — Woolf moved away from “the novel of fact” until, after *The Waves*, that form began to attract her

again: “What has happened of course is that after abstaining from the novel of fact all these years — since 1919 — & N.&D. indeed I find myself infinitely delighting in facts for a change, & in possession of quantities beyond counting: though I feel now and then the tug of vision, but resist it” (*Diary* 4: 129). When she decided that her new manuscript would be a novel of fact more than vision, she was doing so not only as the novelist who had written *Night and Day*, but as the novelist who had gone on to write *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*. It was with *The Years* that Woolf clearly became something of a metamodernist: the new generation of writers was now established, and unlike when she wrote *Jacob’s Room*, she was now an internationally prominent, bestselling writer. She and Leonard knew many writers of the new generation, and it was the arrival of one of them, John Lehmann, to the Press that moved Woolf toward enunciating her view of her relationship to newer writers, a view that would be expressed through various essays and reviews, particularly “A Letter to a Young Poet” (1932) and “The Leaning Tower” (1940). Where her earlier essays about art and fiction were written from the position of someone innovating against an established order (exemplified, in her opinion, by H.G. Wells, John Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennett), a position from which she presented herself as a contemporary of (and even a competitor to) James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson, now she wrote from the position of someone well established, able to look back not only on more than a decade of successful work of her own, but on the entire aesthetic movement that would come to be called Modernism. After *The Waves*, which took Woolf’s experiments with interiority and impressionism to an extreme of expression and comprehensibility, her challenge was not simply to extend the corpus of Modernism, but to write with an acknowledgment of how settled that corpus was becoming. Her Modernism was in crisis because it risked becoming repetitive, sedimented into a conventionalized genre of its own.

“Modernism” as a label was already becoming anachronistic; the type of writing it labeled was no longer new. After finishing *Night and Day* in 1919, Woolf could declare “...I can’t help thinking that, English fiction being what it is, I compare for originality & sincerity rather well with most of the moderns” (*Diary 1*: 259), whereas in 1933, reading Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth*, she had a distinct sense that not only was she not part of the younger generation of writers, but that that generation was the one writing the “new sort” of book “that I could never write” (*Diary 4*: 177). If she was not able to write the new sort of book, then what was she to write?

Woolf’s solution was to return to the novel form she had so conspicuously set herself against when she began her experimental work — to return, in some way, to the moment after she finished *Night and Day* and brought her aesthetic forward with the stories “The Mark on the Wall” and “An Unwritten Novel” — a moment she remembered in a letter to Ethel Smyth in 1930:

I shall never forget the day I wrote *The Mark on the Wall* — all in a flash, as if flying, after being kept stone breaking for months. *The Unwritten Novel* was the great discovery however. That — again in one second — showed me how I could embody all my deposit of experience in a shape that fitted it — not that I have ever reached that end; but anyhow I saw, branching out of the tunnel I made, when I discovered that method of approach, *Jacob’s Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, etc — How I trembled with excitement; and then Leonard came in, and I drank my milk, and concealed my excitement, and wrote I suppose another page of that interminable *Night and Day* (which some say is my best book). (*Letters 4*: 231)

As she remembered it, that moment was the product of personal crisis. She explained the conventional form of *Night and Day* as a bulwark against insanity: “I wrote it, lying in bed, allowed to write only for one half hour a day. And I made myself copy from plaster casts, partly to tranquillise [*sic*], partly to learn anatomy” (*Letters* 4: 231). Whether this was, in fact, the actual development²⁷, it was how Woolf remembered the development more than a decade later, and the artistic metaphor she uses to describe her process shows that she saw the novel as both an apprentice work and something with which to stave off anxiety and madness. In this recounting, Woolf’s Modernist form becomes her artistically mature way to capture the visionary experience that had previously threatened to annihilate her. By the 1930s, she was an accomplished artist, she had (to use the terms of her own metaphor) learned anatomy, she had no need to copy from plaster casts, but now she again needed to find a new way forward, to push against both her own limits and the limits of fiction, while also staying sane in a world itself moving toward what she perceived as a kind of global madness and chaos.

GENESIS OF AN ESSAY-NOVEL

John Lehmann was twenty-three years old when he was hired by the Woolfs as manager of the Hogarth Press in January 1931. He was a friend of Virginia’s nephew Julian Bell, who had suggested Lehmann send a collection of his poems to the Woolfs. He did, and they not only offered to publish him, but to give to him a job. Lehmann only ended up staying until September

²⁷ Woolf did not write a lot about *Night and Day* while she was at work on it, so its origins and development are somewhat murkier than for many of her later books. It was published in 1919. “The Mark on the Wall” was first published in 1917, then in a slightly revised form again in 1919; “An Unwritten Novel” was published in 1920. Woolf links the two sketches to the development of her next novel after *Night and Day* in her diary entry of 26 January 1920, where she says she has “arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel” (*D2* 13).

1932, when wanderlust and frustration with Leonard led him to flee to Europe, but he returned in 1938 as a partner, buying out Virginia's share, and stayed till the beginning of 1946. Within a year of his hiring, Lehmann began to influence the Press by bringing in younger writers such as his friend Christopher Isherwood. Lehmann was instrumental in the publication of the anthology *New Signatures* in February 1932, the first book to collect work by some of the foremost members of "the Auden Generation" (W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis, Julian Bell, William Empson, and Lehmann himself).²⁸

Lehmann and Virginia Woolf talked frequently of poetry and new writers. Her 1927 essay "Poetry, Fiction, and the Future" had portrayed poetry as inadequate to the present moment and called for a new type of novel "written in prose, but which has many of the characteristics of poetry" (*Essays* 4: 435). She and Lehmann discussed these ideas, and he encouraged her to contribute to the new series of Hogarth pamphlets in which various intellectuals and writers penned essays in the form of letters. She said she would do so, and would use his name, and "then I'll pour forth all I can think of about you young, and we old, and novels — how damned they are — and poetry, how dead. But I must take a look into the subject, and you must reply, 'To an old novelist'..." (*Letters* 4: 381).

Woolf's "Letter to a Young Poet" was published in July 1932 and succeeded in annoying Lehmann and his friends, especially as Woolf quoted what she considered weak passages from their work and declared no-one should publish anything before they were thirty years old. Her central complaint was that poetry was inadequate to the reality of the day and that the young poets were too obsessed with themselves, seemingly uninterested in other people. "That is your

²⁸ Lehmann wrote about this period of his life in *Thrown to the Woolfs*, and John Willis chronicles Lehmann thoroughly in *Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers*.

problem now,” she wrote, “if I may hazard a guess — to find the right relationship, now that you know yourself, between the self that you know and the world outside” (*Essays* 5: 315). She defended some of her positions in a private letter to Lehmann, saying that the young poet “doesn’t reach the unconscious automated state — hence the spasmodic, jerky, self conscious effect of his realistic language,” and then added, referencing a common charge against her own work: “But I may be transferring to him some of the ill effects of my own struggles the other way round — writes poetry in prose” (*Letters* 5: 383).

Even in the letter, Woolf seems to recognize that she is not an ideal reader of contemporary poetry, and her recognition that the “Letter to a Young Poet” may be mis-addressed is astute. It is not especially insightful about the younger generation of writers, but it is highly revealing if read as a “Letter to an Aging Virginia Woolf”.

Woolf began writing the “Letter to a Young Poet” just as *The Waves* was published and as she was reflecting more and more on the relationship of her writing to the world. For many years, she had thought about the connections between fact and vision — or, as she memorably put it in the 1927 essay “The New Biography”, between granite and rainbow (*Essays* 4: 478) — and felt that her novels after *Night and Day* had been rainbow “novels of vision” rather than granite “novels of fact”. After *The Waves*, fact called to her again. In November 1931, when she was in the midst of writing the “Letter to a Young Poet”, she said that one day while in London she “was thinking of another book — about shopkeepers & publicans, with low life scenes” (*Diary* 4: 53). Certainly, as a novelist, Woolf had written about many sorts of people, but there was still a lingering sense for her that by surrendering so much of her work to vision, she had skated perilously close to the brittle ice covering an abyss of personal, even hermetic, language. Now, with the world economy crumbling, with governments falling and civilization itself

seemingly in peril, it made no sense to her to continue along the lines she had followed for a decade.

The Years began as *The Pargiters*, the work that Woolf in November 1932 dubbed an “essay-novel” (*Diary* 4: 129). *The Pargiters*, though, began from a speech that in January 1931 Woolf conceived of as becoming a book that could be “a sequel to *A Room of One’s Own* — about the sexual life of women: to be called *Professions for Women* perhaps” (*Diary* 4: 6). The hybridity of the essay-novel was not a new concept for Woolf, for she had similarly first conceived of *The Waves* as a “play-poem” (*Diary* 3: 139), and few of her books after *Night and Day* lack generic mixing.

After Woolf’s death, scholars’ descriptions of *The Pargiters* manuscript suggested that Woolf kept the boundaries of the essay and novel forms clear: essay sections alternated with novel sections (and the revised novel sections became *The Years* while the revised essay sections became *Three Guineas*). This assumption affected the editing of the manuscript for publication. Editor Mitchell Leaska added genre-descriptive section headings (*First Essay, First Chapter, Second Essay, Second Chapter...*) where Woolf usually only placed a doodle.²⁹ Grace Radin, in an influential study of the writing and revising of *The Years*, described the structure of *The Pargiters* thus: “After each scene of the novel, Woolf inserts an interpretive essay in which she analyzes the events she has just portrayed and relates them to their historical background, using facts and quotations gleaned from biographies and other documents” (14-15). This description is both accurate and too simple, because what is clear when reading *The Pargiters* is just how much trouble Woolf had keeping the genres separate. While Woolf certainly thought of the sections as

²⁹ For instance, what Leaska titles “First Chapter” was titled by Woolf “Chapter Fifty-Six” to show that what she offered was only a small excerpt from the (imaginary) novel.

distinct from each other, Anna Snaith notes what is obvious from an unbiased reading of the text: that the “[e]ssay sections in *The Pargiters* often lapse into fictional dialogue and vice versa” (“Introduction” lxiii). Molly Hite has recently examined the genre status of *The Pargiters* at some length, concluding that it “is less a ‘hybrid’ of two genres than a new sort of experimental novel, which responds with thematic and formal innovation to the political and historical contingencies of the more and more ominous developments of the 1930s” (168).

Critics have traditionally seen *The Years* as the novel rescued from the essay and *Three Guineas* as the essay rescued from the novel, but James Haule, Alice Wood, and Anna Snaith have shown that when the manuscripts, galleys, and proofs of *The Years* are examined in order, without thinking of *Three Guineas* as a foregone conclusion, the story of Woolf’s process is much more complex. Pamela Transue described Woolf’s original goal to use “fictional sketches to illustrate points made in the essays” so she could show “how the woman novelist observes certain facts around her, forms opinions, and then transforms those opinions into the entirely different domain of art” (147). But the novel passages were not “sketches”; instead, Woolf positioned them as excerpts from an imagined book or series of books. A careful reading of *The Pargiters* shows that these novel extracts were intended as exemplary parts from which the reader could extrapolate the whole and from which the narrator of the essay sections could expound ideas. Randi Solomon describes the effect, and the problems it posed for Woolf, thus:

Readers are necessarily implicated in the narrator’s self-conscious pretence that the gaps that are evident in her selections from the novel under consideration will be immediately erased when one turns to the actual work. They are thereby forced into complicity with the narrator’s representation of the novel as a utilitarian genre. That is, if you believe that

the full meaning of a novel can be garnered from detailed examinations of brief extracts, without so much as a skimming over of the main body of the text, you cannot possibly be invested in the aesthetic value of the given work taken as a whole, especially considering that, in this case, the work is fictional not only in the sense that it is “made up”, but also in that it does not exist *at all* outside the imagination of the speaker and her audience.

(144)

What such a structure creates is not an “essay-novel”, but rather an essay. Hite writes that “the sections of commentary are no more detachable from the whole work than the ‘chapters’ are” (171), but this is only true in the sense that the essayistic passages refer back to the novel passages for evidence. The ideas within the essayistic passages are transferable and could be attached to other evidence. While the novel pieces could not exist, except as fragments, outside of the essay structure, the essays’ ideas could certainly have been conveyed without the novel itself — as, indeed, many of those ideas were in various essays and *Three Guineas*.

Whatever her reasons for abandoning the essay-novel concept, the strategy Woolf chose in her revisions is quite clear: she assiduously removed narrative commentary and heightened the ambiguity in characters’ motivations. As Evelyn T. Chan demonstrates particularly well, Woolf’s move away from her original structure was motivated by a fear of didacticism: Chan notes that “a week before deciding to remove the novel-essay division,” Woolf wrote in her diary, “I’m afraid of the didactic” (*Diary 5*: 145), but “Woolf may in the end have been fearful of not just the didactic, but also the wrong didactic in a form of writing that she wanted to convey an unimpaired truth” (612). Chan’s idea of *the wrong didactic* helps show that the shift from *The Pargiters* to *The Years* was a shift in the effect Woolf sought to have on readers. Where her

initial impulse had been to put readers into a position of needing to extrapolate missing chapters of a novel from information in essays and commentary that explain (at length) the meaning of social structures, psychologies, and behaviors, her final structure does exactly the opposite, providing a complete novel (if one filled with gaps) and conspicuously refusing to explain much of anything. What Chan calls “the pregnant emptiness of the published version” (613) is a text that demands a reader imagine much more than any dreaded “preachy” text does. The result of the revisions brings *The Years* more in line with Woolf’s earlier novels, which Erich Auerbach described as having an effect “that we might call a synthesized cosmic view or at least a challenge to the reader’s will to interpretive synthesis” (549). The strategy of *The Years* was to activate that will to interpretive synthesis, to put it to work.

The overall effect of the pattern Woolf originally established subordinates the novel passages to the essay passages, with the extracts from the (otherwise unwritten) novel as illustrations for ideas within the essay (rather than the essay passages as items within the novel), but from the beginning the text unsettles its nonfictional status. As early as what Leaska labels the “Second Essay”, Woolf writes not as if the Pargiters are characters in a novel, but as if they are real people, and the narrative slips out of the expository mode she had established for the essay portions and into the narrative mode of the novel sections, for instance:

The sight of the baby had stirred in each quite a different emotion. Milly had felt a curious, though quite unanalyzed, desire to look at the baby, to hold it, to feel its body, to press her lips to the nape of its neck; whereas Delia had felt, also without being fully conscious of it, a vague uneasiness, as if some emotion were expected of her which, for some reason, some vaguely discreditable reason, she did not feel; and then, instead of

following the perambulator, as her sister did, with her eyes, she turned and came back abruptly into the room, to exclaim a moment later, “O my God,” as the thought struck her that she would never be allowed to go to Germany and study music. (*Pargiters* 36)

Woolf later revised that passage for the first chapter of *The Years*, expanding the moment significantly and replacing most of the description of feelings with more concrete details. Radin writes that the descriptions of feelings are interpretive comments of a sort common to the essay sections of *The Pargiters*, allowing Woolf “to integrate both explication and expansion of her text into the structure of the novel” (19). What’s particularly notable is that when Woolf revised the material into a novel, she didn’t simply polish it, but instead changed the kind of information the passage provided and withheld. Radin notes that Delia’s cry of “O my God” becomes, in *The Years*, unattached to any obvious motivation, and the girls’ interest in the perambulator is unexplained, which to Radin means that the girls “seem to share a longing to marry” (19), but other readers could imagine different motivations. The key point is that readers can — must, if meaning is to be made — come up with their own interpretations of the characters’ behavior and thoughts.

Woolf enjoyed *The Pargiters*’ form at first, mostly because it was a change from the type of work she had done on *The Waves*. She plunged into significant research (originally for her 1931 speech for the London and National Society for Women’s Service, eventually leading to *Three Guineas*), and continued with that research for many months. Though the writing and revision process continued on laboriously into 1937, with the manuscript changing its shape and focus many times, as early as April 1933 Woolf had imagined what *The Years* would ultimately turn out to be: a melding of her early “novel of fact” (*Night and Day*) with her recent “novel of

vision” (*The Waves*). “I want to give the whole of the present society — nothing less: facts, as well as the vision,” she wrote in her diary. “And to combine them both. I mean, *The Waves* going on simultaneously with *Night & Day*. Is this possible?” (*Diary 4*: 151-152).

In the middle of February 1932, Woolf began the process of removing the explicitly essayistic sections from *The Pargiters*, setting the manuscript on the long course toward becoming *The Years*. Why she decided her original plan would not work has been a subject of speculation for everyone who has written on *The Pargiters*, but it remains speculation, for though she chronicled the writing of *The Years* quite fully in her diary, she did not record her reasons for that particular decision.³⁰ Whatever the reasons, once she had decided on a new structure, one of her tasks when revising became to remove all traces of a didactic narrator and to cut down on the characters’ own statements of social and political opinion, increasing what more and more became one of the novel’s dominant themes: the failure of words to communicate thoughts accurately and efficiently. After *The Years* was published, Woolf herself wondered if she had gone too far in cutting, for instance, what have come to be known as the “two enormous chunks”: a section of the 1914 chapter and a complete episode based in 1921, both of which develop Eleanor’s thoughts more fully.³¹

³⁰ Following Leaska, Radin, and Christine Froula, Hite speculates that “Woolf reached back to some of her most painful memories from childhood and early adulthood, and the persistence of the threats contained in these memories eventually prompted her to drop the sections of direct commentary in favor of a narrative riddled with gaps, which became *The Years*” (169). This is plausible, but the question of why Woolf abandoned the form of *The Pargiters* is unanswerable with current evidence. I am less neutral on Hite’s later conclusion — indeed, the conclusion to her whole book — that Woolf’s abandonment of *The Pargiters* was a failure of nerve, a fear of public criticism or ridicule. In the absence of evidence for why Woolf changed her approach, this speculation seems to me to say more about the idea of Woolf that Hite has imagined in her own mind than it does about the woman who went on to write *Three Guineas*. A question that deserves more analysis (or self-analysis) is why critics such as Radin and Hite feel the need to imagine such a Woolf, and what it is within *The Years* that so upsets them.

³¹ See Radin Chapter V (80-89) for some discussion of the effect of these deletions on the novel. The cut passages are included as appendices in most editions of *The Years* now, including the Cambridge edition, the Oxford World’s Classics paperback, and the annotated Harcourt paperback.

Though Woolf quite deliberately scraped any whiff of didacticism from the pages of *The Years*, her long work assembling the novel led to some of the concepts and conclusions in *Three Guineas*, for *The Years* required her not only to reflect on her own life and situation, but to research the lives and situations of many other people, particularly women, and to develop scrapbooks of relevant material.³² That work, and the effort to bring it to life within her fiction, seems to have affected how she viewed the world outside her windows. With terrifying political and social crises filling the newspapers, and with her scrapbooks overflowing with material about patriarchy and fascism, she could not turn away from her terrors. As she edited *The Years* in preparation for publication, her emotions, imagination, and intellect found a new home in *Three Guineas*. *The Years* was the result of her work on the essay-novel; *Three Guineas* was the result of her work on *The Years*.

It is important to note, too, that *The Years* is not simply *The Pargiters* without the essayistic material. As Hite affirms, the genre mixing in *The Pargiters* is more mixed than has generally been recognized. “To subtract the commentary sections from the whole is not to produce *The Years*: it took Woolf years of difficult labor to write that novel” (Hite 171). In *Virginia Woolf’s Late Cultural Criticism*, Alice Wood looks carefully at each step of Woolf’s laborious refashioning of the text, finding that in January 1933, when Woolf moved away from the essay-novel structure she originally planned, she “modernized her family saga by composing each chapter through a series of interlinking and resonant scenes in a manner typical of her experimental fiction” (44). Though she would continue to refine the form as she revised almost

³² For information on Woolf’s research for *Three Guineas*, see Marcus’s edition of the book, which reprints some pages from the scrapbooks; Chapter 3 of Naomi Black’s *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* (“The Evolution of *Three Guineas*” pp. 51-72); and Merry Pawlowski’s “Exposing Masculine Spectacle”. Also of interest are Rebecca Wisor’s articles “Versioning Virginia Woolf” and “About Face”.

to the moment of publication in 1937, Woolf's goal of compacting her ideas and arguments into the text remained primary. In *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*, Anna Snaith shows how an examination of the manuscripts "clarifies that the idea of conflict between fact and fiction, in which fiction eventually triumphs, is a radically inaccurate version of Woolf's own conception of the process. The text is layered and palimpsestic rather than generically antagonistic" (94). Seeing *The Years* as "layered and palimpsestic" rather than a novel at war with itself is a key insight for understanding the reading strategies it requires.

Unlike some of Woolf's other writings, and unlike texts I discuss in later chapters, *The Years* does not overtly unsettle fictionality; it is not *Orlando*, nor is it, for that matter, *A Room of One's Own* or *Three Guineas*, both of which, though basically nonfictional, employ fictional voices, characters, and scenes throughout.³³ Much of Woolf's writing from *Orlando* through *Between the Acts* demonstrates the "scrambling together of mediums" that Woolf told Julian Bell she considered the most appropriate form for writers of the era, but this is less overtly true of *The Years* than any other novel she published after *To the Lighthouse*: *Orlando* is a mock biography, *The Waves* radically explodes novelistic conventions, *Flush* might be called a novel though it is at least equally a biography, and *Between the Acts* melds novel and drama. *The Years* in its final form has all the trappings of a conventional novel, and it uses those trappings for specific purposes of invoking certain reading protocols (which it will often frustrate and subvert). *The Years* is not an essay, nor is it an essay-novel; it is a novel that uses its genre and form to invoke readers' expectations about what a novel is and should be, and then to frustrate those expectations for particular (and, I will argue, pedagogical) purposes. The essayistic portions were

³³ For a particularly insightful discussion of the voices in *Room*, see Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* 39-44; for *Three Guineas*, see Jane Marcus's introduction to the edition she edited.

removed early in the writing process, but *The Years* encourages us as readers to think essayistically about its form and subject matter. The novel creates a kind of imaginary shadow, and that shadow is an essay about novels, fiction, history, families, violence, class, and patriarchy. Though Woolf removed the sections of commentary, the spirit of those commentaries remains present within the novel's form (its genre conventions, juxtapositions, and gaps), and the reading strategies that find the most sense and coherence in *The Years* are strategies that provoke the reader toward thinking about the novel as the narrator of the commentaries might have.

The Years is in dialogue with its readers, and it truly *is* a dialogue, not Woolf's dreaded "preaching". What the reader brings to the text matters, and the text does not offer any clear answers to the questions it raises about time, society, history, or the novel form. We might say, then, that its dialogue is Socratic; in "On Not Knowing Greek", Woolf described the effect of one of Plato's dialogues: "as the argument mounts from step to step, Protagoras yielding, Socrates pushing on, what matters is not so much the end we reach as our manner of reaching it" (*Essays* 4: 46). With *The Years*, the "manner of reaching" was the novel form and the traditional expectations that form called forth from the reader.

EXPLOSION FROM WITHIN

The finished novel comprises eleven chapters: ten given specific years for their titles, starting in 1880, and then the final, long chapter is titled "Present Day". These chapter titles alert us to the possible sub-genre of the book. Generational novels about families had been popular at least from the time of Zola's Rougon-Macquart novels; after the first decades of the 20th century, though, they came to be seen as a rather dusty genre. Woolf herself contributed to that sense in various essays attacking John Galsworthy, H.G. Wells, and Arnold Bennett in the early

1920s (“such stories seem to me the most dreary, irrelevant, and humbugging affairs in the world” [*Essays* 3: 432]), but as a writer obsessed with time and memory, she must have felt an inescapable attraction to the form’s possibilities. Woolf was not the first or only modernist writer to attempt this — Gertrude Stein’s *Making of Americans*, for instance, is subtitled “Being a History of a Family’s Progress”³⁴ — but her approach was very much her own.³⁵

Woolf was determined to distinguish her own project from the project of a family chronicle, however, and in changing the working title from *The Pargiters* to *Here and Now*, she commented, “It shows what I’m after & does not compete with the Herries Saga, the Forsyte Saga & so on” (*Diary* 4: 176). What Woolf was after was, in part, as Liisa Saariluoma has demonstrated, to write a book that “deconstructs the family novel mode from within” (290). To do so, it had to *be* a family novel (at least superficially), and thus invite the reading protocols of that subgenre so that it could then challenge and retrofit them, training the reader toward a new way of reading and, with luck, of seeing the world.

While it’s a cliché now to say that a novel subverts this, that, or another convention, I know of no better way to describe what Woolf achieves in using the family novel genre. Conventions regulate readers’ expectations, and the subversive writer invokes those conventions, then shapes them either to guide the reading experience toward new effects or to surprise (or frustrate) the reader into some new awareness. Readers may expect, for instance, that a novel of generations will make note of important historical events, and *The Years* does (British colonialism, the death of Charles Stewart Parnell, the women’s suffrage movement, the death of

³⁴ The Woolfs rejected *The Making of Americans* for the Hogarth Press in 1925, though they did publish Stein’s important lecture “Composition as Explanation”. See Willis 125-127.

³⁵ See also Emily Blair, *Virginia Woolf and the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (SUNY Press, 2007), which does not discuss *The Years*, but does provide useful background.

King Edward VII, World War I), but these events are often noticed only in passing, or their drama is muted, and many major events are skipped over altogether. Woolf's focus is on the everyday details of life, the steady changes of technology that affect how people communicate with each other and get around in the world, how money gets made and accounted for, who gets to go to school and who gets to go to work, and what sort of schools and what sort of work they go to. The private, quotidian world is emphasized, the public world radically de-emphasized, shifting what is assumed to be important in historical writing.³⁶ Woolf builds a complex structure within the exhausted form. Early reviewers saw *The Years* as poetic, and this was not simply a lazy critical hangover from *The Waves*. Woolf pays close attention to the repetition of particular phrases, colors, sounds, and objects through the book, making *The Years* into something like a novelistic pantoum. (In *Virginia Woolf: Dramatic Novelist*, Jane Wheare chronicles many of the repetitions, and what is little more than a list with brief explanations requires twenty pages. For more discussion of the nature and purpose of the repetitions, see my "The Reader Awakes: Pedagogical Form and Utopian Impulse in *The Years*".)

The danger of Woolf's strategy was that many readers would simply interpret *The Years* as a failed family novel, even if they recognized its subversive intent. Thus Transue is able to acknowledge many of the anti-family-novel features of *The Years*, but still judge it a failure as a novel: "As the book rambles on through a period of about fifty years, the reader becomes increasingly lost. It is nearly impossible to keep track of all the characters, to remember who did what and when, or even to maintain a sense of distinct personalities" (164). Transue approvingly quotes Phyllis Rose's complaint that the book fails to provide a central characters, fails to give

³⁶ For a reading of *The Years* as a historical novel, see Thomas S. Davis, "The Historical Novel at History's End: Virginia Woolf's *The Years*".

shape to its narrative, and fails to sort through all the details it provides. These are the complaints of readers who expect a particular form for the novel as a genre, and perhaps who even expect *The Years* to be a family novel and are disappointed that it does not adhere more closely to those conventions. The novel's pedagogy failed to affect these readers because their preconceptions about what a "Woolf novel" is and should be overwhelmed their ability to learn from the text itself. (We will see Samuel Delany deal with similarly calcified readerly expectations when he moves away from writing science fiction and J.M. Coetzee when he does not repeat the form and style of *Disgrace*. Indeed, it is exactly this sort of calcification-by-reputation that Coetzee combats via radical experiments with self-destructing authorial authority.)

The reception of *The Years* shows the hegemony of the discourse Clifford Siskin calls *novelism*, "the now habitual subordination of writing to the novel" so that "even when we want to separate the two ... we have trouble pulling them apart" (423). Novelism doesn't simply subordinate all unmarked prose writing to the novel — it promotes and polices a very specific idea of what a novel is and should be. (What that idea is depends on the era and literary culture, particularly the interpretive communities that evaluate and promote certain novels as successful models and others as failures.) From the complaints of Transue and others, we can see what a "good Woolf novel" must be — Woolf's better-approved books of the mid-1920s (*Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*), for all their innovations, still have trackable characters with distinct personalities and voices, narratives with easily-noticed organizing principles, and details which clearly serve those principles. Perhaps more importantly, Woolf's "good novels" are overtly, even ostentatiously experimental — Transue calls *The Waves* "a unique literary creation, daringly experimental in style, structure, and theme" (127) and writes that "On almost every level ... *The Waves* is in part a comment on the limitations of the novel in its classic form" (144).

For Transue, *The Waves* is successful in all the ways *The Years* is not. Such an evaluation fails, though, to read the books on their own terms. The specific reading strategies that lead to an appreciation of *The Waves* are not the specific reading strategies that will lead to an appreciation of *The Years*, as the two novels are — and were from the moment Woolf conceived *The Years* — almost exactly opposite in their experimental approach to the idea of the novel as a form and genre.

No-one would ever mistake *The Waves* for a conventional novel, and the position it puts the reader in is that of someone who must discover how to make sense of the text while reading, rather than being able to benefit from knowledge of novelistic conventions. From the first pages, the reader of *The Waves* knows that this is not a novel that follows the traditional conventions of the form. That is one type of experimental writing (the *sui generis* text), but another is the text that unsettles conventions from within. The innovations of *The Years* are embedded within the reader's perception of the book as a novel. It becomes a new kind of "comment on the limitations of the novel in its classic form" for Woolf, and something more than a comment, because readerly experience is central to the effect. The critique of the novel form woven through *The Years* is activated via the expectations the reader brings to it. The text of *The Years* may not be (to use Snaith's term) generically antagonistic, but there is a generic antagonism between the reader and the text. Where *The Waves* stretches toward being an anti-novel in the way it excludes so much of what is conventional within novels generally, *The Years* teases familiar novelistic conventions to then reshape them, making *The Years* a *detournement* of the novel. In a pedagogical sense, *The Waves* requires the reader to learn how to read it from scratch, because from the first pages it is clear that few of our assumptions about how a novel works will be applicable with this text, whereas *The Years* teaches the reader to see the inadequacy of

received ideas about how a novel makes meaning and what within a novel is most meaningful.³⁷ For the critique of patriarchy and family that was so important to Woolf's project in the 1930s, the novel form itself needed to be pulled apart from the inside. She had gathered, she said, "enough powder to blow up St Pauls" (*Diary 4*: 77), but for the most effective demolition, she needed to place that powder inside the structure itself.

These innovations suit Woolf's political aims, as becomes clear when we compare *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. Both require an active, aware reader if the text is to have meaning, and this requirement undermines the passivity-inducing effect of the conventional novel and of propaganda, and it strengthens the reader's skepticism of received forms and received knowledge. Rod C. Taylor sees *Three Guineas* as promoting a critical pedagogy similar to that of Paulo Freire, particularly in the book's arguments about learning and knowledge: "At its core, Woolf's pedagogy anticipates Freire's in that both systems inquire into knowledge and how the production of knowledge is constituted, but Woolf's orientation toward knowledge is that of ambivalence toward new understanding — even that which resists oppressive systems — rather than political absolutism on one side or another" (57-58). This is accurate, but Taylor limits his study of Woolf's critical pedagogy to *what* her writings say rather than *how* they say it, which is equally important, particularly if we are to recognize the way form, for Woolf, becomes not only an extension of content but an extension of ethics. "Though Woolf is highly critical of the educational institutions of her time," Rachel Hollander notes, "she is also deeply invested in

³⁷ The relationship of *The Years* to the family novel genre is similar to the relationship Marcus points to between *The Waves* and the elegy genre: she reads *The Waves* as "deconstruct[ing] the politics of the elegy as an instrument of social control" (64). Stevens Amidon has also studied *The Years* as a subversion of the family novel genre, arguing that it "is an experimental novel that works by creating tension between the reader's generic expectations of the family chronicle with its focus on chronological narrative, and the texts she delivers which subverts the convention by disrupting time and foregrounding space in the novel" (86-87). Amidon's purpose is to show that *The Years* is "best viewed as an examination of the tension between time and space" (87), and thus quite different from my own purpose here.

questions of pedagogy and ethics” (55) — questions that find expression both in the ideas she explores and in the textual structures she shapes: “The issue of education in the text has crucial implications for the question of whether or how the novel might be said to ‘teach’ its readers. And while the charge of didacticism is most often deployed to condemn a work of literature as heavy-handed or formulaic [...] Woolf, like George Eliot before her, demonstrates a wide-ranging and subtle understanding of the many ways the relationship between reader and text is steeped in ethics and pedagogy” (Hollander 60).

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf builds her argument slowly and carefully through various voices, historical and fictional, creating a collage effect. The reader must pay close attention to the voices Woolf uses, for here as elsewhere she creates a choral structure to undermine the power of a single, authoritative voice — a move even more radical in nonfiction, where the narrator’s authority is often taken for granted, than in fiction. (It is rare to find an intentionally unreliable narrator in nonfiction, while they are common in fiction.) The form supports Woolf’s political analysis, as Teresa Winterhalter astutely notes: “If, for Woolf, war is the product of assuming the infallibility of one particular viewpoint, then narration inevitably participates in this dynamic of power. By subverting expository tradition, she hopes to perform a significant act of engaged rebellion against linguistic practices that align with totalitarianism” (239). Such rebellion is not Woolf’s alone; to make sense of the text, readers must also themselves rebel against the reading protocols of the expository tradition and find new linguistic practices with which to create meaning.

In addition to having to listen for the various voices woven through the main text, we must also move back and forth between that text and footnotes, which sometimes present information to complicate the statements that are footnoted. Such polyphony promotes active

reading and thinking. Passivity, Woolf knows, renders us vulnerable to authoritarians who are more than willing to provide us with meanings so we don't have to think for ourselves. To combat authoritarianism, Woolf knows, we cannot sit and let a predetermined message wash over us; we must participate, must think and doubt, must find our own voice among the voices that we meet. Like Coetzee later, she is wary even of her own authority. *Three Guineas* is not propaganda, for "although she hopes for social consensus on the 'simple truth' of pacifism, she does not impose it on her readers through a totalitarian voicing" (Winterhalter 250).

Within *Three Guineas*' analysis of war and patriarchy sit blistering attacks on traditional ideas of families and family structures, attacks that reflected Woolf's always-developing philosophy of the interrelations of oppression and social institutions.³⁸ In their force, these analyses are quite different from *The Years*, but they are not different in substance. The family saga sub-genre especially supports a normalizing discourse of *the family*, a discourse Woolf knew to be highly compatible with traditional novel form. Further, Siskin argues that the novel form itself brings together specific practices of publishing and reading, ones that construct "national identity no longer as self versus others but as whole embracing parts" (436). The idea of Englishness, for instance, finds a fertile, totalizing home in novelistic discourse. "What emerged [by the early 19th century] was an Englishness that did not resolve but regulated difference ... under the shared rubric of writing the regular: 'things as they are,' 'bits' of the 'ordinary.'" The growing popularity and respect for novels in the 19th century "enabled the portrayal of Great Britain as a land that was itself united and rising. [...] Under the rubric of the newly triumphant novel, writing was domesticated at the same time as the society that depended

³⁸ For a thoughtful exploration of Woolf and concepts of family, see Zwerdling, particularly chapters 6 and 7. For more recent scholarship, see Amidon, Saariluoma, and Suh.

on it” (437). As *Three Guineas* vividly shows, domestication and Englishness were a few of Woolf’s primary targets, and those targets are present throughout *The Years* as well.

Instead of rejecting traditional novelistic discourse for *The Years*, Woolf overloads it, exploding the family novel (and more general novelistic discourse) from within and reconstructing it into writing that cannot ultimately be assimilated into British novelism. The reader who begins reading *The Years* expecting to be able to put the reading protocols of the conventional novel to use soon becomes frustrated, and that frustration is the first step in the reader beginning to understand Woolf’s project. The regulation of difference within the 19th century novel and the unifying nationalism the form served are undermined by Woolf’s inclusion of family novel elements that do not cohere in the traditional novelistic unity, a unity of which she was sharply critical throughout her writing career.

PROPAGANDA AND PEDAGOGY

Woolf was torn by a yearning to address the social and political issues that concerned her but also to avoid didacticism; in the speech that was an initial impetus for *The Pargiters*, she opposed the profession of *the writer* to that of *the preacher*, saying that the move from writer to preacher is “extremely unpleasant for you, poor imagination” (*Essays* 5: 644). She had famously condemned Arnold Bennett’s novels for their facts at the expense of insight and further criticized novels of the Edwardian era for their social activism. “Woolf’s generation,” Julia Briggs writes, “had despised the teaching and preaching so characteristic of Victorian literature, suspecting any writing that had manifest designs upon its readers” (283). As Woolf’s comments on Plato show, in her mind, argument does not require manifest (clear and obvious) designs. Indeed, for any

argument (whether conveyed via essay or novel) to be artful, Woolf and her contemporaries believed the design must *not* be obvious, for it is obviousness that is didacticism's primary failing, its lack of art.

Woolf was able to bring social and political ideas more explicitly into her work by shifting toward what John Whittier-Ferguson has described as her late style, where "the guiding and shaping presence of the visionary author" is replaced with "the heteroglossic, multigeneric assemblage that is best exemplified by *Between the Acts* but may also be found on the disheveled pages of *The Years*, particularly in its conclusion" (243).³⁹ Whittier-Ferguson is quite wrong to describe *The Years* as a novel of "disheveled pages": Radin, Haule, Wood, and Snaith have all in their various ways shown that Woolf put great care into the structure of the novel and its pieces, and critics such as Kelley, Michael Rosenthal, and Julia Briggs have delineated the pattern of echoes and repetitions that produce the book's meanings, even if, as with Briggs, they find the results "ultimately less consistent than earlier novels" (295). Nonetheless, Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia is a useful term to apply to *The Years*, and not just in the "Present Day" section at the end. The entire novel employs numerous points of view and it moves fluidly between its characters' consciousnesses in a free indirect style that Woolf had perfected through the 1920s, but which she now used within a more traditional narrative structure. Given her stated purposes in writing *The Years*, it makes sense that she would choose a fairly traditional and not

³⁹ "Late style" has been a topic among many Coetzee scholars as well, though in Coetzee's case it was not toward a new heteroglossia or dethroning of authority — those were present in his earliest publications — so much as a withering away of fictional conventions and an even greater austerity of prose. In *Here and Now*, Coetzee writes: "In the case of literature, late style, to me, starts with an ideal of a simple, subdued, unornamented language and a concentration on questions of real import, even questions of life and death" (97). We could certainly apply such an idea to Woolf's writing after *The Waves*, though questions of life and death are present in her work from the beginning, and the "simple, subdued, unornamented language" of, particularly, *The Years* and *Three Guineas* is entirely relative to her own previous work rather than to other writers — Woolf at her most simple, subdued, and unornamented is positively baroque in comparison to, for instance, Hemingway.

ostentatious sort of heteroglossia, one at home within Bakhtin's descriptions (see, for instance, his discussion of hidden polemic in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* [195-196]). Once Woolf jettisoned the essayistic passages from *The Pargiters*, her choices were suddenly limited, because now instead of keeping the reader moving between the reading protocols of essays and novels, she would be invoking only one set of readerly expectations and reading strategies.

The critical history of *The Years* shows, however, that Woolf's decisions consistently raise two problems for readers; the first from the moment of the book's publication, the second a result of archival work on *The Pargiters*. Both are problems of context that readers bring to their reading.

First is the problem mentioned previously: the challenge of an apparently traditional novel issued from the pen of a writer renowned for her experimentalism. In a review Woolf liked, Basil de Selincourt said "*The Years* is rather nearer the norm of the novel than *The Waves* was" and proclaimed it "a much easier book to read", while Edwin Muir flat-out declared "after *The Waves* this is a disappointing book" (Majumdar 371, 388). Though readings of the novel grew more detailed in the following decades, evaluations of its worth and place within Woolf's oeuvre mostly followed the trajectory laid out by the initial press reviews, though esteem for the novel generally was higher at the time of publication than later, with only a few critics such as James Hafley regarding the novel highly and most others agreeing more with Muir.

The second problem is that of what might have been. Since the publication of *The Pargiters* in 1978 and Grace Radin's study in 1981, there has persisted a general sense that

Woolf failed to solve the problem of the essay-novel-that-became-a-novel.⁴⁰ In his introduction to *The Pargiters*, Mitchell Leaska asserts that “*The Years* as a finished product is a remarkable specimen in fiction where fact and feeling are in deadly conflict” (xv) and that “with the disappearance of the explanatory Essays, and with the novel itself so severely cut and edited, we as readers are thrown perhaps too much upon the fertility of our own imaginations to deduce some meaning from the book’s seemingly endless ambiguities” (xix). Radin is even more dismissive of the finished volume, writing that “the continual shifts from representational narrative to fragmented speech, from static detached description to dramatic scenes caught *in medias res*, from one center of consciousness to another can easily confuse the reader” (152). Radin suggests that the incoherence she reads in the book may have been intentional, but she seems more to believe that it was a failure of ability, for “given her experiences during these years, it is questionable whether Woolf could have created the synthesis she had been struggling to achieve,” and Radin wonders “whether in fact the novel’s stubborn refusal to cohere came from a deep division within herself and within the society she was trying to come to terms with” (158). More recently, Molly Hite has followed in Radin’s footsteps, demonstrating great disappointment that Woolf did not continue along the path she set with *The Pargiters*, stating, “this change in form was not ‘a good idea’ aesthetically, although the step back into a less experimental structure may have been necessary for Woolf herself because of her own psychological involvement in the materials she had collected” (166).

⁴⁰ The neglect persists in the scholarship, with *The Years* treated as expendable in a way *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* never are. Though some scholars have certainly given excellent attention to *The Years*, it remains possible, for instance, for Jane De Gay in *Virginia Woolf’s Novels and the Literary Past* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006) not only to analyze each of the novels except *The Years*, but to never explain this omission — the book’s title doesn’t appear anywhere in De Gay’s text. Similarly, *The Years* makes no appearance in Emily Blair’s *Virginia Woolf and the Nineteenth Century Domestic Novel* (SUNY Press, 2007), where it might be expected to be found, given its close relationship to domestic novels (*The Pargiters* is mentioned in passing, and at least Blair makes no pretense of covering all of Woolf’s novels — *The Waves* is also absent except for a couple of footnotes).

However, the perception of *The Years* as a failure has never been universal. The winter 1977 issue of the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* that brought a newly charged attention to *The Years* and its history includes, in addition to work by Leaska and Radin, insightful explorations of the novel's implications and aesthetic.⁴¹ In an introduction to the issue, Jane Marcus says the book's "true place" is "as the pride of British literature of the nineteen-thirties" (Erdman 137). In her own contribution to that issue, "*The Years* as *Götterdämmerung*, Greek Play, and Domestic Novel", Marcus declares, "Aesthetically *The Years* is a success" (Erdman 299) and compares it favorably to *Ulysses* and "The Waste Land".⁴²

Despite Marcus's forceful advocacy, the focus on the writing process of *The Years* for a long time haunted the published version of the novel and contributed to its marginalization by positioning the finished novel as a failed experiment or de-radicalization of a radical project. Even Marcus seemed to prefer the study of the various drafts to the novel itself, wondering, "Did Woolf imagine when she left these masses of manuscript behind her, that her readers would become patchers, patching up and plastering together the fictional and factual parts of the text? Since Woolf deconstructed and disemboweled the novel herself, she puts the reader into the position of re-constructor" (*Languages* 53). A view of the finished novel as a casualty of self-censorship, repression, or even cowardice quickly entered the discourse, and remains today (e.g.

⁴¹ Though the *Bulletin's* editor was David V. Erdman, ascribing editorship to this issue is not so simple. The brief, uncredited introduction (titled "Room for Virginia Woolf" and presumably written by Erdman) says that much of the content originated at a December 1975 MLA conference session on *The Years* and *Three Guineas* that Jane Marcus and Margaret Comstock co-chaired. In the preface to *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*, Marcus says that Erdman invited her "to serve as guest editor" of the Woolf issue of the *Bulletin* (xiii), though this is not stated in the issue itself. Bibliographically, I have chosen to credit Erdman as editor, since that is what the issue itself states, but it is important to note that no matter the stated credits, the issue was a collaborative work between Erdman, Marcus, and others.

⁴² Marcus agreed that Woolf had censored some of the most radical ideas in revising *The Years*, but when she included the essay in her book *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*, she expanded the sentence about aesthetic success so that it responds to critics such as Leaska and Radin: "Despite the deletions, aesthetically *The Years* is a success" (54).

Hite) even after the work of Haule, Snaith, and Wood to show a more complex view of the finished text through re-examinations of Woolf's writing and revision process not based on the presumption of the finished version as a failure.

We do not need to go to the manuscripts to become re-constructors of the novel, however; the finished version itself foregrounds such a position for the reader, which was exactly Leaska's complaint. The novel does, indeed, rely "upon the fertility of our own imaginations to deduce some meaning" from the gaps, ambiguities, and repetitions, but if we read the text's purpose to be, at least partly, the education of imagination, then this is not a failure, but a strategy, and it is a strategy that is aligned with Woolf's previous novels.⁴³ Rachel Hollander, for instance, describes *Jacob's Room* with words that could easily be applied to *The Years*, saying the novel

represents the inaccessibility of the truth of individual experience in the city, but without implying some alternative community where relations with others are transparent or communication complete. Importantly, full knowledge is impossible not only for the novel's characters but also for its readers. [...] Woolf implies that every reader of the novel is also a divided subject lacking full access to others and to the self. The problem of knowledge and thus communication does not emerge as an interruption within an

⁴³ In an insightful historical/materialist reading of *The Years*, Linden Peach writes that "In *The Years*, despite its apparent concessions to social realism, Woolf was still working within the parameters of the approach that she first employed in *Jacob's Room* and *Orlando*. Indeed, the novel can be seen in terms of her quarrel with realism in her essay 'Modern Fiction' (1919) and her argument that novels should be less concerned with 'realism' and 'materialism' and more with the inner experience of 'reality'. [...] In *The Years*, her subject continues to be that of *Jacob's Room*, the codified nature of social 'reality' and of the historical *a priori*" (169). Echoing some of my analysis, Peach also asserts that "Like *Jacob's Room* and *Orlando*, *The Years* revises a traditional genre" (171).

otherwise realist narrative; rather, it is both the subject and the underlying condition of the novel itself. (50)

Readers of *Jacob's Room* are better able to recognize such an “underlying condition” because of that novel’s overtly experimental form. *The Years* makes the task more difficult for the reader by requiring it of a text that seems like it ought to be an easier, more familiar sort of book to read.

Radin and Leaska are correct to note that *The Years* is potentially confusing to readers; decades of Woolf scholarship confirm how easy it is for readers to miss the social and political implications of the novel, at least partly because of an expectation that socially and politically committed texts need to be explicit in their commitments (even, to use Woolf’s dreaded term, *preachy*) and uncomplicated in their presentation of whatever idea the critic considers acceptable, because what such critics fear most is that the message might be misread. Such a view valorizes the authoritarian rhetoric of propaganda and prefers ersatz ethics to thoughtful inquiry.

Clearly, *The Years* is not propaganda, and its pedagogy has often proved too subtle to resist the overwhelming power of other discourses, but today there is no excuse to ignore the link between the novel’s form and Woolf’s commitments. In the 1970s, feminist scholarship insisted on the connections between aesthetic choices and socio-political analysis, making earlier writing about Woolf seem obviously inadequate in its narrow, compartmentalizing view of politics. Jean Guiguet, for instance (one of the best of the early critics), used *A Writer's Diary* to piece together the entwined conception of *The Years* and *Three Guineas*, yet despite all that work did not make

much of this connection.⁴⁴ Guiguet declares of *Three Guineas*, “whatever may be the faults of the book, [it] entitles one to include Virginia Woolf in the great line of Humanists — and also among ‘committed’ writers, paradoxical as this epithet may appear when we consider the dominant aspect of her work” (186). In his separation of the fiction and nonfiction, Guiguet represents a consensus common among even the most attentive readers before the 1970s, seeing in *The Years* only a “kaleidoscope” of images of social situations that left the committed side of Woolf unsatisfied: “...at the point to which the world had come, with German rearmament, the arrogance of Italian Fascism, the Spanish revolution, these images by themselves, with their impassivity, the remoteness conferred on them by art, provided deliverance to the novelist in her but not the simple human being. For that, something more explicit, more direct, was needed” (191).

The *remoteness* and *impassivity* that Guiguet reads as pushing Woolf toward the more explicit approach of *Three Guineas* is in some ways accurate — *Three Guineas*, for all its polyphony, is written in a more expository mode than a novel — but I take the frequent negative evaluations of *The Years* by readers who ought to be at least vaguely open to its pedagogy as a lesson for us as readers rather than a lesson about the book. To enter into a transactional relationship with a text that produces not only narrative meaning but meaning beyond the pages of the text itself, readers of literature must train their imaginations toward what Gayatri Spivak calls “a flexible epistemology that can, perhaps, keep saving our world” (*Readings* 23). In “How Should One Read a Book?” Woolf argued that to read a novel “You must be capable not only of

⁴⁴ Before the rise of feminist scholarship, critics who were sensitive to *The Years* recognized many of the features we still value in its structure (Harvena Richter is probably the best of the early critics on this), but Guiguet is one of the few who bothers even to note any socio-political implications. It was the pioneering feminist readers who demonstrated that “committed” was not, as Guiguet claims, a paradoxical epithet for Woolf.

great fineness of perception, but of great boldness of imagination if you are going to make use of all that the novelist — the great artist — gives you” (*Essays* 5: 575). From early on, Woolf, too, saw imagination as a tool for epistemology, as a 1918 entry in her diary shows: “The reason why it is easy to kill another person,” she writes, “must be that one's imagination is too sluggish to conceive what his life means to him — the infinite possibilities of a succession of days which are furlled in him, & have already been spent” (*Diary* 1, 186). An imagination that is *not* sluggish would, then, be one capable of imagining other people’s conceptions of their lives, and such knowledge would make killing much more difficult. The training of the mind toward such imagination would be a training against war and toward peace, a training toward community, shared humanity, and, perhaps, saving the world.

TESTAMENTS OF COMMITMENT

To better highlight Woolf’s unique strategies, we can compare *The Years* and another generational novel written in the 1930s by a writer who was not a Modernist or metamodernist and who did not have any fear of didacticism: *Honourable Estate* by Vera Brittain.

I’ve already noted that a month before *Flush* was published in 1933, Woolf read Brittain’s memoir of the First World War, *Testament of Youth*, and declared it a good book of the new type, “the hard anguished sort, that the young write; that I could never write” (*Diary* 4: 177). Woolf had previously been aware of Brittain, who had praised *A Room of One’s Own* in her “Woman’s Notebook” column for the *Nation and Athenaeum*, and who attended the January 1931 lecture by Woolf that led to *The Pargiters*. As Woolf’s comment about *Testament of Youth* makes clear, the two writers were significantly different from each other, and Woolf, at least, knew it.

During some of the time that Woolf was working on *The Years*, Brittain was working on an ambitious, multi-generational novel of her own. She struggled terribly with the manuscript, partly because of its scope, but also because after *Testament of Youth's* success, she felt the pressure of being a well-known writer, a writer whose next book would inevitably be highly anticipated and scrutinized. There were other obstacles, too: at the beginning of August 1935, Brittain's father, who had never really recovered from the death of Vera's brother Edward in the First World War, drowned himself in the Thames; and then in September, Brittain's greatest friend and confidante, Winifred Holtby, finally succumbed to Bright's disease. After these catastrophes, writing the novel became drudgery, but she pulled through it, bringing it in some ways in dialogue with Holtby's final novel, *South Riding*.⁴⁵

Victor Gollancz published *Honourable Estate* in November 1936. The response of the public and press was less enthusiastic than it had been for *Testament of Youth*, but not openly hostile as it would be for some of her later pacifist writings. The consensus seemed to be that the book was rather dull and awkward. *Honourable Estate* included a foreword from Brittain that began with an epigraph from the poet Geoffrey Dearmer (a World War veteran whose brother died at Gallipoli): "Overproduction is due largely to the fact that so many authors have never asked themselves the all-important question: 'Why do I write?' But if all authors had a creative philosophy as well as a creative faculty, critics would be interested in their apologies and explanations, for who can know half so much about a book as its author?" (1). Brittain was happy to take on this encouragement to explain herself, telling readers that the novel "purports to show how the women's revolution — one of the greatest in all history — united with the struggle

⁴⁵ This biographical information on Brittain is drawn from Berry & Bostridge. It is also worth noting that Holtby wrote one of the first books about Woolf, published in the fall of 1932.

for other democratic ideals and the cataclysm of the War to alter the private destinies of individuals” (2).

Brittain anticipated criticism for her didacticism:

I make no apology for dealing in a novel with social theories and political beliefs, nor for the extent to which these are discussed by some of the characters. I cannot share the outlook of that school of literary criticism which seeks to limit the novelist’s “legitimate” topics to personal relationships. Personal relationships have no more significance than the instinctive associations of the sub-human world when those who conduct them are devoid of ideas. If large areas of human experience — political, economic, social, religious — are to be labelled inadmissible as subjects for fiction, then fiction is doomed as an organic art. (3)

Honourable Estate begins in 1894 and ends in 1930. Brittain says in her foreword that she has “purposely ended it in the year when the women’s movement for equality and the workers’ contest for freedom and power had come nearer to the realisation of their ideals in England and elsewhere than at any time since their beginnings in the French Revolution.” After 1930, women’s rights, workers’ rights, and democracy as a governing ideal suffered setbacks. “But the fact that we are now living in a period of reaction makes it the more important to contemplate that which was gained during the four decades which ended in 1930” (3).

No-one who read the novel could possibly have missed its messages, but Brittain’s decision to write the foreword suggests her distrust of fiction as a vehicle for her ideas. Certainly, it was a vehicle she was less skilled at maneuvering than nonfiction, and even her generally

sympathetic biographers Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge admit that “all too often in *Honourable Estate* the tracing of the course of actual history is accomplished at the expense of the development of the characters who appear much of the time to exist merely as mouthpieces for the novelist’s personal philosophies — and rather talkative ones at that” (346-347). The pontificating (both of the characters and the narrator) dulls a novel that has moments of real emotional power, a raw force common to Brittain’s best work.

One way to describe *Honourable Estate* would be as an essayistic novel that aspires to an aesthetic able to incorporate the virtues of the 19th century realistic novel with 20th century radical ideals and analysis. We might even say that *Honourable Estate* displays some of the features Woolf was trying to figure out as she worked on *The Pargiters*. It takes no stretch of the imagination to read Brittain’s foreword (and some of the more didactic passages of the narrative) as a cousin to the essayistic portions of Woolf’s essay-novel. There is no evidence, to my knowledge, that Woolf ever read *Honourable Estate*, and given her feelings about Brittain’s writing generally there’s no reason to assume she would have had any desire to read it. But there is a good chance Woolf glanced at one or two reviews of the book, and, as she began writing her *Daily Worker* essay and finished final revisions on the proofs of *The Years*, those reviews would have affirmed her fears about the proselytizing novel of granite fact.

Nonetheless, as we have seen, staunchly ideological readers of various sorts have often seemed disappointed that *The Years* does not more closely resemble, for instance, Brittain’s *Honourable Estate* (but with better prose), or perhaps a novel published in the same year: Phyllis Bottome’s *The Mortal Storm*, a melodrama about a German family torn apart by Nazism. Bottome had been trained in propaganda during the First World War by John Buchan (writer of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, among other novels), and she saw *The Mortal Storm* as at least partially a

work of propaganda: a book that would not only offer a logical argument against fascism, but which would also enlist emotions in the battle by presenting sympathetic characters facing hardship and injustice, sometimes with tragic results, but ultimately with the effect of helping readers feel their way toward the stance Bottome supported.⁴⁶ *The Mortal Storm* is one of the few works of the 1930s that, like Woolf's own, saw the centrality of anti-feminism to fascism (and clearly understood the place of anti-Semitism within Nazi ideology), and it is less frequently dull than *Honourable Estate*, but like most politically determined novels, it's not an artful book, not a book offering much of interest now beyond its historical context, and most certainly not a book Virginia Woolf could ever have written, even if she had wanted to. Propaganda was anathema to her aesthetic.

AESTHETIC EDUCATION, ETHICAL IMAGINATION

With *The Years*, Woolf discovered a pedagogy different from that of her previous novels: instead of requiring readers to learn a new way of reading for a new form of novel, she could create a text that invited readers to encounter it as a conventional novel, and then frustrate their ability to read it as such. Readers would need, then, to discover new reading strategies for a novel that seems conventional — a novel that presents specific characters who are “beings subject to time and located in a space, identified by a proper name, a body, a character, and manners; restless beings, because they are vulnerable to becoming and to desire; beings whose lives intersect with the lives of others, acting, speaking, and formulating thoughts, experiencing

⁴⁶ For biographical background and full discussion, see Hirsch, “Authorship and Propaganda: Phyllis Bottome and the Making of *The Mortal Storm* (1940)”. For discussion of Bottome within the literary milieu, see Suh, *Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Twentieth-Century British Fiction*.

passions, living in a social system” (Mazzoni 47-48), and that presents such beings via straightforward, descriptive prose and represented dialogue, all of which together seems to create situations that feel accurate when read through the lens of a reader’s assumptions about human behavior, cause and effect, historical reality, etc. (Of course, readers’ assumptions differ, but the effect of convention is to control and even mandate such assumptions.) Through an encounter with an apparently-conventional-but-actually-unconventional novel, readers would not only learn the limits of their assumptions, but those assumptions, which so often go unnoticed or unremarked upon, would be made plain to them. The reader would not be able to remain passive, but would have to use strategies similar to those used with radically innovative texts.

Certainly, for her novels from *Jacob’s Room* through *The Waves*, Woolf needed a reader receptive to innovation, but what sort of reader does *The Years* invite? There is no evidence that she thought of *The Years* as a potboiler written to provide nothing more than entertainment; quite the opposite. The turn I see Woolf making from *The Waves* to *The Years* is a turn toward a reader who is not only active, but who is also potentially able to become socially and politically engaged. Woolf had mastered her craft, and could now strike out for new effects.

If we look at Woolf’s writing after *The Years*, her concerns and ideals become clear. Jane Marcus makes a convincing argument that *Three Guineas* creates an authoritative voice that it then wants the reader to question and dismantle. In the introduction to her annotated edition, Marcus writes:

Much noisy page turning is required to read this book, as one moves from the page to Virginia Woolf’s own notes, to this editor’s notes, and then to the bookshelves or the Internet to chase an undocumented allusion or a puzzling

phrase. Woolf's genius lies in her commitment to experimental writing: *Three Guineas* is an interactive text. ...Part of Woolf's advanced project in experimental writing was to involve the reader in both the reading and the "writing" of the script for her books. ...Here, in *Three Guineas*, she asks us to join her in researching questions about the relation of women to "facts," and unsettles us by turning to sources in biography, autobiography, letters, and the daily newspaper, all notoriously excluded from the realms of academic, political, or historical factual reality. These unauthorized sources, we are being taught, are where we must search for the "truth" of women's experience. (xlvi-xlviii)

For Marcus, the experimental form of Woolf's book is an inextricable expression of its political purpose: "Virginia Woolf's political commitment to undermining authority is enacted in the structure and voice of her writing. Her style and her politics are equally antiestablishment" (xlix). Readers must learn a way of reading to make sense of the book, and learning that way of reading trains them not only to read this particular text, but to read beyond this text.

While less "noisy page turning" is required of *The Years*, the style and the politics of the novel are no less antiestablishment than those of *Three Guineas*, no less demanding that the reader stay aware, active, skeptical. *The Years* is less openly in dialogue with the reader (who is not directly addressed), but even a reader who has never heard the name Bakhtin will likely wonder which voices, utterances, and details to pay most attention to in the novel's rich tapestry. The reader seeking narrative authority is endlessly frustrated, just as the reader seeking slogans from *Three Guineas* is going to have to do some real violence not only to the book, but to its polyphony. The frustrations that *The Years* elicits are central to its pedagogy: a project of

teaching the reader to take an active role with the text rather than to assume a passive, unquestioning stance toward novelistic conventions.

Writing about Woolf's ideas for radical new schools, Taylor notes the importance of the reading experience itself to *Three Guineas*: "The experience that Woolf offers her readers gives them a chance to test out the benefits of her pedagogy, which in turn puts them in direct dialogue with the author" (74). Taylor links the pedagogy that Woolf advocates in the book to Freire, but if the reading experience is one key to Woolf's pedagogy, then how Woolf elicits, organizes, controls, and liberates that experience must also be key. Woolf's pedagogy was not simply about creating better education, important as that was to her.⁴⁷ Her larger project was to give people the tools with which to change how they read texts and how they read the world — with the hope, ultimately, of remaking that world.

The attentive reading practice novels such as *The Years* elicit is part of what Spivak has advocated as an aesthetic education for ethical imagination. We must, she says, read the literary text for its literariness, we must pay close attention to its textual moves, and "We cannot read if we do not make a serious linguistic effort to enter the epistemic structures presupposed by a text" (*Aesthetic* 452). The epistemic structures presupposed by *The Years* are ones that reject all totalizing ideology, whether the ideology of dominant literary practice, the ideology of patriarchy, or the ideology of fascism. They are also structures that question epistemology itself, and so, if we agree with Spivak, then to read this text means to enter into an attitude of skepticism, to be receptive to resonance, to tolerate contradictory judgments of characters and events, and to accept — or even, ideally, enjoy — the lack of an authoritative narrative voice.

⁴⁷ Taylor cites numerous works on Woolf and education, and Natasha Periyar has recently looked at Woolf's interest in education and how that interest flows through her writing of the 1930s, particularly *The Years* and "The Leaning Tower".

(We could say the same of Coetzee, and it is no surprise that Spivak is an insightful reader of some of his most difficult texts.) The polyphony of both *The Years* and *Three Guineas* is vital not only to their critique of society, but to their utopian vision of a better, more peaceful future. Their pedagogy is to present readers with some form of polyphonic multiplicity within which flows a yearning for unity, but to leave the unifying to each reader's imaginative work. It's a utopian move, and Woolf knows it.⁴⁸

A CRISIS OF FICTIONALITY

If, as Radin, Hite, and others would have us believe, *The Years* represents a failure of vision when compared to *The Pargiters*, it seems to me that the failure is in Woolf's stepping back from unsettling the fictionality of the novel. There were predecessors for the essay-novel form — Robert Musil and Herman Broch, especially — but Woolf could not see her way to making the hybrid form fit her creative desires.⁴⁹ Thus, of all the novels I discuss, *The Years* is the least essayistic, its fictionality unproblematic. Nonetheless, as I have tried to show, its pedagogy invites the reader into an essayistic way of reading the novel, a way of reading that evokes the amputated essay sections of *The Pargiters*.

The Years is not a novel amidst a definite crisis, though it depicts many crises throughout its narrative. Instead, it is a novel in anticipation of crisis, and that anticipation shapes all of its elements. During the time when Woolf wrote *The Pargiters* and then *The Years*, events in Europe became more and more disturbing as fascism gained momentum, and a sense of the

⁴⁸ See my "The Reader Awakes: Pedagogical Form and Utopian Impulse in *The Years*" for discussion of Woolf and utopian impulses.

⁴⁹ See Stefano Ercolino's *The Novel-Essay, 1884–1947* for a fine overview.

future being perilous, uncertain, and dark fills the novel's imagery, particularly as the weight of past years pushes up against the present. Each of the chapters has a specific date until the long final one, which is only "Present Day", an unspecific now. The effect (and affect) is one familiar from Woolf's earlier novels, an effect Paul K. Saint-Amour calls that of the "apprehensive subject". Saint-Amour shows how Woolf's apprehensive subject complicates the standard (Freudian) diagnoses of trauma studies, where "a disaster that cannot be registered in real time and falls into the unconscious has in a sense 'not yet' happened to the subject, making itself known only through encrypted symptoms". When Woolf's fiction depicts shocks and traumas, Saint-Amour maintains, those shocks and traumas may be in the past or they may be anticipated in the future. This is clearest in Woolf's frequent anticipation of a war that would be as destructive or more destructive than the First World War, a war that haunted her and, just as importantly, haunted her entire generation, a generation of soldiers and survivors, making the trauma, haunting, and apprehension communal. Saint-Amour connects the apprehension both to the effect of suspenseful fiction ("Like the reader of sensation fiction, the apprehensive subject is caught in a split or paradoxical relation to the imminent. She is prepared to be taken unawares.") and to an epistemological claim he finds in Woolf's work: "In Woolf's writing, this apprehensive subject, once taken hold of, often recovers and reaches back, arriving at a forceful if belated kind of recognition. We might even say that, for Woolf, anxiety about some imminent blow or shock is the necessary prologue to recognition; that there is no apprehending without apprehension" (93).

The anxiety and apprehension that lead to recognition (of trauma, but also of oppression and the need for a different world) are depicted within the events of Woolf's fiction but also conveyed via its structure, the choices Woolf makes of what to dramatize and what to leave out.

Hers is, as Saint-Amour discusses, narrative fiction that does not rely on suspense for its effects, unlike most popular fiction. *The Years*, for instance, is filled with anticipation, but that anticipation is rarely fulfilled in the moments the narrative dramatizes. The sense of anticipation and the apprehending of apprehension are what matters, because it is through such apprehension that knowledge and recognition form — even more than the characters, the readers must reflect on the sources of apprehension. Such reflection reveals traces of trauma and violence throughout the novel's past. Sarah Cole has shown how violence pervades *The Years* but goes “undernarrated” (258), its shocks moving through the text “in strange ripples” (259), the violence both “everywhere and nowhere, it impinges and retreats, it is absorbed and enfolded, it resides on the body and then hides itself, it juts out and is re-covered” (260). Yet the reader's attention is rarely drawn to the violence. A reader who does not pause to wonder about the details of injuries, scars, and deformities could, in fact, miss most of the violence entirely. (Even the air raid scene feels anticlimactic if you don't look to where it ripples out across the rest of the book.)

Just how extreme Woolf's technique proves to be becomes clear when we notice that Cole, who so effectively delineates the way violence works in the novel, seems at times puzzled by just how much Woolf has submerged dramatic events that almost any other novelist would have brought to the foreground. But Cole sticks with the text and comes to some valuable insights. Pointing to Peggy's question at the end of *The Years* about how a person can find happiness in a world of misery, Cole writes that the

question might stand for the text's own: what is the value or truth of focusing on one person, one family even, given the greater panorama of suffering and brutality engulfing the world? It is a question of and for the novel in general, the genre that has done the

most to lift the fates of “two people” out of the “millions,” insisting, at its very core, that the happiness of one pair does matter. Governed by this spirit of self-annihilation, *The Years* anticipates *Between the Acts* in suggesting that, with tyranny, brutality, and torture announcing themselves on every corner, the novel is resigning, unable any more to assert its fundamental, defining principles. (256)

Woolf’s impulse to mix essay and novel, fact and fiction, granite and rainbow was an impulse in preparation for the crisis to come. If we agree with Catherine Gallagher that the novel and fictionality arose together symbiotically, it should not surprise us that in the 1930s, Woolf’s work struggles both with the novel as a genre and fictionality as a technique. *The Years* may be read as Cole reads it: as a last moment of novelism, a last attempt at fictionality before the unknowable future brings its chaos. The traces of violence that shaped and scarred so much in past years were now threatening to obliterate the present. What would become of the novelist when the crisis arrived?

3. AMIDST CRISIS: SAMUEL R. DELANY

I get impatient with fiction that doesn't try something that hasn't been tried before, preferably with the medium itself.

—J. M. Coetzee in a letter to Paul Auster, *Here & Now*

For Samuel R. Delany, a sense of crisis provided a spur toward experimental form. In a 1998 interview he said, “Only two of my novels started out [...] as experimental per se. The first was *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals*, which began as a response to the AIDS situation, back in 1983. That is, it grew out of a sense of crisis” (*About Writing* 222).⁵⁰ For Modernists feeling a sense of crisis, the impulse toward nonfiction, polemic, and propaganda is easily understandable: crisis is immediate, demanding direct response and direct action. Wrestling with ideas of propaganda and literature in 1941, George Orwell said, “You cannot take a purely aesthetic interest in a disease you are dying from; you cannot feel dispassionately about a man who is about to cut your throat” (126). Crisis creates a sense of immediacy, and it would not be surprising to find a writer turning to nonfiction to address, analyze, and chronicle the crisis. A *Guardian* headline writer summed up the feeling well for a (rather muddled) 2011 column by Zoe Williams, asking: “Should we ditch fiction in times of crisis?”

⁵⁰ The second work Delany says began as experimental writing is the novella *Atlantis: Model 1924*, a work that is not only textually complex but also complex in its use and reconfiguration of biographical and autobiographical material. It is also highly metamodernist.

What does remaining with fiction during crisis allow that dispensing with fiction would not? We saw with Woolf that the move to meld the modes of fiction and nonfiction proved unstable, leading ultimately to her need to write *Three Guineas* to express overtly some of what *The Years* could not. But with “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”, Delany maintains the melding. As Woolf was playing with and critiquing the generational family novel genre, so Delany is, throughout the Return to Nevèryon series, playing with and critiquing the sword & sorcery genre (for which Robert Howard’s Conan the Barbarian stories are a classic example).⁵¹ As Woolf needed first to incite the reader’s expectations of a family saga to set her subversion in motion, so Delany works from readers’ expectations about sword & sorcery. Kathleen Spencer said of *Tales of Nevèryon*, “the knowledgeable reader is likely to come to this work with an unusually specific set of expectations; and Delany subtly but systematically undermines every single one of them” (64). By the time readers reach “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” (assuming they have read *Flight from Nevèryon* in order, if not the rest of the series), they know they are not reading standard sword & sorcery tales, but they do think (particularly with any of the later editions where “Plagues and Carnivals” is not presented as an appendix) that they are reading fiction — and, of course, they *are* reading fiction ... sometimes. Navigating between varieties of fiction and nonfiction, as well as varieties of fictionality, becomes one important task for any reader working through “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”.

The AIDS crisis pushed Delany to experiment, but the nature of the experiment depended on the assumptions and desires he held about texts and contexts. Those assumptions and desires

⁵¹ For Delany’s ideas on sword & sorcery, see “Sword & Sorcery, S/M, and the Economics of Inadequation: The *Camera Obscura* Interview” in *Silent Interviews* (127-163). For some of his early thoughts, see “*Alyx*, Joanna Russ” in *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* (57-76), which not only analyzes one of the important literary influences on the Return to Nevèryon series, but was completed less than a year before he completed “The Tale of Gorgik”.

were fundamentally metamodernist: though too late to be a Modernist proper, Delany read many of the most famous Modernist texts when he was remarkably young, and as he read more and more, he seems to have been especially drawn toward the queer modernism of Djuna Barnes, W.H. Auden, and others — many of them writers of the later Modernist period, writers of what Mia Spiro has called “‘crisis’ literature” (5). Queerness and crisis were linked in the Modernist texts Delany read so fervently, and Modernist forms provided the impetus to push fictional aesthetics beyond traditional conventions. That the reader should have to learn to read the text while reading it, rather than the text being entirely legible via well-worn reading strategies, was a central premise of Modernism, and one that the Modernists of the 1930s made particular use of as their world seemed to be falling apart, because a reader learning to read a poem or novel in a new way might also learn to read the world anew. Crisis, pedagogy, and Modernism were all intimately linked by the 1930s, but the text’s ability to offer some sort of resistance to the chaos depended on readers, for “while writing itself can be an act of rebellion when it questions meaning and demands new interpretations of social justice, it is only truly resistant if it is matched with a reader who can be enlightened and transformed by an understanding of the social plots we live by” (Spiro 246). After the crises of the 1930s had passed, Delany was still able to be a reader who was enlightened and transformed by what he read, and as a writer it was only natural that he should want to aim for the same in his own readers, particularly at a moment of crisis.

METAMODERNIST

A seventeen-year-old Samuel Delany wrote in his journal:

Great novels:

The Faulkner Pentology – (which I consider one book): *Sartoris, Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!, The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying*.

Proust: *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Joyce: *Finnegans Wake*. (Don't ask me why – but my God, what a book when it hits you.)

(*In Search of Silence* 28)

According to his autobiography *The Motion of Light in Water*, Delany and his friend (and future wife) Marilyn Hacker had decided at this point to become writers, and his writing was strongly influenced by both Faulkner and Joyce (96). A few years later, he and Hacker visited with W.H. Auden, and after writing about that encounter he declared in 1988, “Today Auden is certainly the modernist poet whose work I know best,” but added, “I don't think influence per se is there.” Clear influence may not be there, but allusion certainly *is* there, especially in Delany's early novels (*Motion* 170-171). In a 2017 interview, he said that reading Stewart Gilbert's *Ulysses: A Study* and then *Ulysses* itself was a key moment in his learning to write novels and in the development of his aesthetic (Fitzgerald “If You're Going to Write Anything”). Throughout his later career, Delany would cite Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* as the novel he has re-read most often (e.g. Miller, “Dangerous”; Fitzgerald, “If”) and in two April 2001 letters to Carl Freedman he said it was the novel that had influenced him more than any other, and “I'm afraid that once you read it, Delany will seem to you quite as unoriginal as your student's roommate found [William] Gibson after reading [Alfred] Bester” (BU 82: 15). In a July 2012 list of books that “if I hadn't

read and reread over the years, I wouldn't be myself", Delany put *Nightwood* in the #1 spot on a list that includes works by Auden, Beckett, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Joyce, Pater, Woolf ("For Big Other"). Additionally, Delany has written at length about Hart Crane, both in nonfiction ("Atlantis Rose..." in *Longer Views*) and fiction ("Atlantis: Model 1924"), and, as I discussed in the Introduction, his admiration of the quintessential metamodernist Guy Davenport is substantial.

The influences on Delany's novelistic and critical practices are not solely Modernist or metamodernist, even in a more expansive idea of modernism(s). Science fiction, of course, has been a significant influence, and not only the more Modernist-influenced works of what came to be called the New Wave of the 1960s (with which Delany has been associated, though his own feelings about such placement are skeptical [see *Silent Interviews* 208-209]) — the influence of such classical SF writers as Robert Heinlein, Alfred Bester, and Theodore Sturgeon on his fiction up through at least *Nova* (1968) is clear in countless ways. In a 1986 interview in *Diacritics*, Delany proposed that science fiction exists outside of and in opposition to the modernist discourse of High Art inherited from Wagner ("...Wagner's legacy is that which any modern or post-modern — at the gut level — recognizes as art itself..." [*Longer Views* 22]), and he has at numerous times discussed science fiction as a way of reading that prioritizes the object over the subject, while the progress of literary fiction over the last few centuries has been toward prioritizing the subject.⁵² Delany uses such a formulation to set science fiction, broadly speaking, as requiring reading strategies distinct from those of literary fiction, and the "progress of literary fiction" that he sees is inextricable from Modernist fiction's impulse to prioritize subjectivity

⁵² For a succinct discussion of this, see pages 146-147 of "Disch II" in *Starboard Wine*; for more complex elaboration, see *The American Shore*.

over, for instance, descriptions of furniture. (We find this priority explicit in Woolf's "Modern Fiction".) Delany's object/subject binary overlaid on a science fiction/literature binary seems to propose that science fiction is the way of reading that best approximates William Carlos Williams's famous (Modernist) statement of "No ideas but in things."⁵³ Woolf's *The Waves* offers a kind of melding of objects and subjects, the socially macroscopic and psychologically microscopic, that, in Delany's object/subject schema, might make it verge on being science fiction.

Throughout his career, and especially since 1975, Delany has embodied the idea of metamodernism proposed by both Furlani and James & Seshagiri. Born a year after the deaths of Joyce and Woolf, he had the proximity to canonical Modernists that Furlani sees as important to the definition of metamodernism (a proximity both temporal and physical, as Delany's encounter with Auden shows); he has written significant criticism on Wagner, Artaud, and Hart Crane; and it is clear from his interviews and the texts themselves that his novels often self-consciously "extend, reanimate, and repudiate twentieth-century modernist literature" (James & Seshagiri 89) — sometimes quite explicitly, as with "Atlantis: Model 1923", which he said was written "to see what it felt like to have the experience of writing such a work" as *Ulysses*, "The Waste Land", and *The Cantos*, three texts he considers to be "for better or worse, our waning century's paradigmatic literary works" (*About Writing* 225).

Attention to metamodernism is not merely a matter of taxonomy. Such attention helps make visible, as David James later said in describing "modernist futures", "how artistic

⁵³ My presentation of Delany's ideas here should not be taken as complete agreement. The object/subject binary he creates, along with the science fiction/literature binary he puts beside it, both seem to me too reductive to be useful. As for the Modernists, though it is indubitably the case that many Modernist fiction writers sought to increase the priority of the subject, it is also the case that many were fascinated by perceptions beyond the individual subject. For discussion of this, see, among others, Mao's *Solid Objects* and Olson's *Modernism and the Ordinary*.

precedents are regenerated, their initiatives redeployed, and their styles not simply mimed but reanimated for the markedly different characterological, descriptive, or political concerns of the appropriating artist” (31). Of course, the question of influence inevitably raises problems of the reliability of authors’ own statements about their work and the limits of authorial intention (if one believes that such intention can even be located — my own feelings are similar to ones William Empson expressed in a response to a “Questionnaire on Criticism” in 1976: “The deep intention may often be a thing the author himself is doubtful about, but this is no reason for forbidding us to recognize the more superficial layers” [623]), and James wrestles with these problems in *Modernist Futures* (31-33). For Delany himself as a critic, influence and intention are important even though, having devoured much post-structural theory, he fully recognizes how problematic and fictional they can be. In “Wagner/Artaud”, he declares both that “it is our critical duty to look at art that can still speak to us in, as far as possible, its historical context” and “If the work is not a manifestation of an intention (is not a representation in signs of a certain psychology), then [...] it can be anything and everything. Not only do all classical standards vanish, but there is no way to distinguish between art and anything else, from found objects and scenes in nature . . . to the maunderings of the mad — or of the bourgeois banal” (*Longer Views* 42, 30). In a 2001 interview he asserted that “Above all things, the story, the poem, the text is — and only is — what its words make happen in the reader’s mind. And all readers are not the same” (*Conversations* 100), but historical context, ideas of influence, and analyses of intention, however flawed all may be, allow us to account for at least some of the variety of readerly effects a text has produced and may yet produce.

For my purposes, the most important value to situating Delany and Coetzee as metamodernists rather than, for instance, postmodernists, is to keep clear their fundamental

opposition to propagandistic fiction, since such commitment poses specific challenges during times of social and political crisis. We have already seen how Woolf was torn by just such a commitment during her metamodernist final decade, and while Delany and Coetzee's understanding of language and representation are neither the same as Woolf's nor each other's (though there are significant overlaps, particularly between Delany and Coetzee), nonetheless they share a general sense that propaganda is anathema to art.

CRITICAL FICTIONS

We have seen how at a moment of personal and political crisis Woolf felt drawn to the essay-novel form and then how her attempt to write such a novel led to a particular narrative pedagogy in *The Years*. Like Woolf, Delany has often been drawn to a melding of nonfictional and fictional approaches within his novels even early in his career (e.g. the journal entries that serve as epigraphs in *The Einstein Intersection*: “while the ‘Author’s Journal’ entries describe real incidents, most were apparently written not on the immediate occasion of the events they recount, but shortly afterward and with their role in the novel already in mind” [*In Search of Silence* 631 note 364-367]). It was in *Trouble on Triton*, though, that fictional nonfiction would take a more central role, one that would be replicated in Delany's work through the 1980s and 1990s.

Completed in July 1974 and published (as *Triton*) in early 1976, *Trouble on Triton* includes the first two pieces of “Some Informal Remarks toward the Modular Calculus”: the novel *Trouble on Triton* and the second appendix, “Ashima Slade and the Harbin-Y Lectures”. (Appendix A is titled “From the *Triton* Journal” and is partly drawn from his essay “Shadows” [*Longer Views* 253-323], which was written concurrently [Peplow & Bravard 46]. “Shadows” is

then referred to in Appendix B as the name of a lecture given by Ashima Slade, who was born in the year 2051 [*Trouble on Triton* 301, 297. See also *Longer Views* xxiv-xxvi].) Delany has explained the “Modular Calculus” as “mostly doubletalk” (*Shorter Views* 332) and “an algorithm or set of algorithms (a set of fixed operations) that can be applied to any fitting grammar to adjust it into a guiding grammar” and poses the problem “How do we know when we have a model of a situation; and how do we tell what kind of model it is?” The “Informal Remarks” are not the Modular Calculus itself, but rather “a model of a system” (*Return* 285, 286, 290).

The later pieces of “Some Informal Remarks toward the Modular Calculus” appear within the Return to Nevèryon series:

The “Informal Remarks” do not include the first five tales in the Nevèryon series. The “Appendix” to the first five tales, however, forms Part Three of the “Informal Remarks.” The novel *Nevèryóna, or: the Tale of Signs and Cities* is Part Four of the “Informal Remarks.” From their position in that book it is undecidable whether or not “Appendix A: The Culhar’ Correspondence” or “Appendix B: Acknowledgments” is or is not part of Part Four. The first two tales of volume three are not part of the “Informal Remarks.” The third tale in *Flight from Nevèryon*, “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals,” constitutes Part Five of the “Informal Remarks.” But from their position, it is undecidable whether anything that follows, in volume four (up to and including these notes) is or is not a part. But it would seem that any rich system tends to function through an interchange between what is inside the system and what is outside the system (with what is outside frequently fueling the system proper): and there are always certain elements, such as this appendix,

which are undecidable as to whether they are inside or outside – often, though not always, those parts that encourage definition and revision. (*Return* 291)

Trouble on Triton's "Appendix B: Ashima Slade and the Harbin-Y Lectures", the second of the "Informal Remarks", includes the dedication/subtitle "A Critical Fiction for Carol Jacobs & Henry Sussman", and *critical fiction* is a useful term for so much of Delany's overall project. It is a phrase he has used in other contexts, as well, for instance the essay "Wagner/Artaud" is subtitled "A Play of 19th and 20th Century Critical Fictions", where the term does not refer to any formal element so much as an admission to the reader that this essay, like all essays, is a radical selection and arrangement of material, and that ultimately what it is doing is not conveying some sort of "unprocessed history" (a concept Delany scoffs at in an interview in *Silent Interviews* [145-146]) and proposing an argument so much as it is asking, "What if...?" (Thus, this critical fiction is a bit like science fiction.) Elsewhere, a "critical fiction" means for Delany an imperfect or even inaccurate concept used strategically, e.g.: "The division of content from form is a necessary (but only provisional) critical fiction. The reason it is only provisional is because, at a certain point in the discussion, form begins to function as content – and content often functions as a sign for the implied form with which that content is conventionally dealt" (*Shorter Views* 259). If we — perhaps indulging in our own critical fiction — attach some of the properties of this description to the larger critical fiction of the "Informal Remarks" and the *Return to Nevèryon* series generally, we can see a kind of planned obsolescence in them: they are highly provisional and self-consciously incomplete ("*Some Informal Remarks*"), and at a certain point they stop being useful and start blending in with whatever is their supposed opposite. Under such a deconstructive frame, once the critical fiction has done its work of rendering

visible what was previously hidden, then it may be dispensed with, or our analysis may shift toward what the critical fiction itself ignores or hides.⁵⁴

The fictionality of the critical fictions reaches its limit in the fifth of the “Informal Remarks”, the novel-length story “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”, where the obviously fictional and the obviously nonfictional compete for the reader’s attention in the text.

PLAGUES AND CARNIVALS

Archival evidence shows that around 1981 Delany began thinking of “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” as a story of Nevèryon partially inspired by Bakhtinian concepts⁵⁵, but in June 1983 he wrote in a letter to Robert Bravard that he had “started re-thinking about [it] in terms of ‘AIDS comes to Kolhari’” (BU66: 6). Notes and drafts of scenes fill notebooks throughout the second half of 1983. In January 1984, he wrote to his editor at Bantam, Lou Aronica, that he was close to finishing “The Mummer’s Tale” and was soon to begin work on “‘The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals,’ which exists in endless notes, and whose subtitle I think of, privately, as ‘AIDS Comes to Kolhari’” (BU68: 16).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ This is a rather different use of the term *critical fiction* than we might use with Woolf or Coetzee, where in *A Room of One’s Own*, *Three Guineas*, and *Elizabeth Costello* techniques mostly associated with fiction-writing are used for argumentative and analytical purposes. There is overlap, though, in works such as *Orlando*, *Flush*, *Elizabeth Costello*, *Slow Man*, *Summertime*, *Diary of a Bad Year*, etc. where the reader’s sense of fictionality is teased and frustrated. We might even suggest a lineage between the Marys (Beton, Seton, Carmichael) in *A Room of One’s Own*, Delany’s fictional academics K. Leslie Steiner and S.L. Kermit, and Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello. But that is a question for another time.

⁵⁵ In November 1982, Delany attended a “Post-Barthes/Post-Bakhtin” conference at Temple University, taking notes in his journal and pasting in the program from the event. In the January 1984 journal is an outline for “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” that includes some of the autobiographical incidents that would be described in the story, and then some draft material that would end up being included in the nonfiction sections (BU58: 11).

⁵⁶ Delany dated the letter to Aronica 16 January 1982, which is clearly a mistake, as none of the information matches anything else we know about his work in 1982. There are drafts of this letter in Delany’s journals, and those journals are dated December 1983 and January 1984, so I assume the letter was sent in January 1984. That fits with published material in *1984: Selected Letters*.

From this material, then, we can see that “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” was likely conceived in the fall of 1981 as a response to Bakhtinian ideas rather than AIDS and that it was around early-to-mid-1983 that Delany began thinking of it as an AIDS story. This places it very early in the history of AIDS literature, as what is generally considered the first “AIDS novel”, *Facing It* by Paul Reed, was published by Gay Sunshine Press in 1984 (Nelson 356), and before 1984, any mentions of the disease within literature were like those of Andrew Holleran’s 1983 novel *Nights in Aruba*, where, in conversation, it is said that people “of our sexual demimonde were dying of bizarre cancers” (232) and that this cancer “has everyone so frightened now that they won’t just sleep with anyone that moves” (233), but the disease remains offstage.⁵⁷

Though we can see that Delany added an AIDS focus to the story by the summer of 1983, it is harder to pin down the date when he began thinking of writing the story differently from the others in the series and adding in nonfictional elements. I am intrigued by a draft of a letter he wrote in his journals likely between the last week of November and the first week of December 1982 (based on contextual evidence and assuming he wrote the material in order): He describes reading Rilke’s novel *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* alongside a collection of Rilke’s letters, and he notes how much from the letters goes into the novel verbatim. “Well,” Delany writes, “don’t be surprised if you find paragraphs from some of my recent tales turning up in the last tales of Neveryon. Oh, not unaltered, but at least recognizable” (BU 58: 5). The next journal contains significant notes and drafts for “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”, but nothing yet proving he had settled on the ultimate form for the story. A later journal has an entry dated April 6, 1983 in which he says, “We are coming upon a time when I really must consider writing an

⁵⁷ The first official notice of what would come to be identified as HIV/AIDS was in June 1981. By the end of 1981, it had been labeled in some places GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency). The U.S. Centers for Disease Control first used the term “AIDS” in September 1982. See “A Timeline of HIV/AIDS”.

autobiographical work...” (BU 58: 7). He then seems to focus on other writing for a while. In an August 1983 journal, he is again speculating about how to write autobiographically: “What would you want an autobiographical piece to contain? // In my case, it really must/should contain a running sexual diary: and an artistic diary — both against a background of theoretical acquisitions: scientific, social, literary” (BU 58: 9). That note describes much of the nonfiction material that would appear in “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”, but he does not yet seem to have connected this idea to his story. Thus, we can say with some confidence that his decision to write the story in the form he did was made sometime between August 1983 and January 1984.

Though I have not found direct evidence, it seems to me a logical assumption that Delany decided on the form of the story as a response to the AIDS crisis rather than fitting the AIDS crisis into a form he had already settled on. Yet to say such is to indulge in our own critical fiction, because what is clear from the evidence is that AIDS was but one of the impulses affecting “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” — just as important was his growing desire to incorporate autobiography into his writing, his sense that his own experience and point of view were different enough from those of other writers that to write from an explicitly autobiographical standpoint could make a valuable literary and perhaps socio-political contribution. This is the importance of his discovery that Rilke incorporated passages from his letters into *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*: it provided him not only with inspiration but also with a certain permission both to write more autobiographically and to transpose writing from such genres as private letters into his public fiction. Such transposition would not make significant changes to the words or to the stories told, but would instead envelop the writing within the rhetoric of fictionality, providing it with a different epistemological, hermeneutical, and even ontological relationship to an audience.

Delany's desire to write autobiographically and his sense that the circumstances of his own life would be of interest to readers was not specifically caused by the AIDS crisis (in 1979 he had published his memoir of life as part of a commune, *Heavenly Breakfast*), but given his materialist philosophy and his sense of all personal life as inevitably inflected by political significance, the AIDS crisis could not but have increased his sense of his own life experience as being an important body of data. *Experience* for Delany, though, could not be a simple concept. He recognizes, as Joan W. Scott notes, that experience "is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted" (797). In the essay "Aversion/Perversion/Diversion", written in 1991, he said, "It is often hard for those of us who are historians of texts and documents to realize that there are many things that are directly important for understanding hard-edged events of history, that have simply never made it into texts or documents — not because of unconscious repression but because a great many people did not want them to be known. And this is particularly true about almost all areas of sex" (*Longer Views* 140). Before experience can be interpreted by history, it must be entered into history, it must be somehow recorded, or else it is invisible. Writing autobiographically for Delany means, in Georgia Johnston's analysis, "translating that invisibility so that the space between discourses allows both discourses, and then exchanging that space of the subject with the reader. The 'I' moves from the individual to the social, through a margin to articulated discourse" (234). Hence the value Delany sees around the summer of 1983 in beginning an autobiographical project, a project that must not only include a record of his artistic ideas, but also "a running sexual diary".

As *The Motion of Light in Water* shows, and later autobiographical writing expands upon (including his recent essay "Ash Wednesday"), Delany throughout his adult life has sought

sexual encounters in public spaces such as restrooms and movie theatres, leading him to estimate in a 1993 appendix to *Flight from Nevèrjōn* that up to 1990 he'd had annually between 150 and 300 encounters each year in New York City, though by 1993 circumstances had reduced the average to about 50 (*Flight* 366). (This is in addition to sex with his regular partners.) In a September 1984 letter, he said, "Every once in a while, the unusualness of my sexual situation vis-à-vis the standard bourgeois world does, I'm afraid, strike me" (*1984* 249), and it is in the ways that Delany senses himself as being different from "the standard bourgeois world" (though not necessarily from the standard urban gay male) that his life experiences may be useful material for not only art, but argument. As a writer, he can be a guide, witness, and interpreter of experiences that sit outside not only the lives of many of his readers, but even of their imaginations. In the AIDS crisis, the inability of the majority to even be capable of imagining the experiences of the minority becomes a significant question (and obstacle) for scientific research.

Throughout his writings about AIDS, Delany points to the limitations of research conducted without awareness of how gay urban men live and, most importantly, how they have sex. In "The Gamble", written in 2004, he illustrates this vividly in describing a conversation he had with a heterosexual graduate student in English (Chuck) and an HIV-positive gay porn star and prostitute (B.J.) who had come to one of his readings. B.J. insists he got HIV through oral contact, a method of transmission Delany believed to be under-studied and even unlikely, though the lack of rigorous study of it made any conclusion impossible (this topic itself will be discussed later with regard to *The Mad Man*):

...I said to Chuck: "Oh, you know—I just thought what I really should have asked B.J.:

Was he ever in an orgy or orgy-like situation, around the time or in the months before he

seroconverted, either on a job or during a film shoot, where someone who had taken a load of cum in his mouth might have licked out his asshole within five, ten, or fifteen minutes. I think that would have to count for getting the virus anally—though he might have been unaware of it, or not even noted it—because no one stuck a dick up his ass. Of course that’s something that, if it happened to him, he might not even have remembered it. But I still think, from the kinds of things he was talking about in his general sex life, there’s a greater statistical chance that he picked the virus up that way than that he got it through sucking. The problem is, straight people—who, alas, are the ones doing most of the research—don’t think of questions like that.” (“The Gamble” 162-163)

The explicitness in this conversation is important (and Chuck responds, “Jesus Christ, Chip—I have *never* heard people talk about sex the way you guys were talking about it!”) because it shows exactly the sort of knowledge necessary to make the kinds of differentiations that are required for accurate science. Accuracy in such cases is literally a matter of life and death, and shows the necessity for conversations via both of what Delany calls in another essay “street talk” and “straight talk” (*Shorter Views* 41-57). Explicit discussion of the varieties of ways people live (and have sex) is more important than simply as scientific data, as Delany said in “The Rhetoric of Sex/ The Discourse of Desire” in 1993:

The material fact that has made it desperately important for people, when writing about sex, to write about what they have done and experienced and seen themselves, is, of course AIDS. This disease [...] is certainly the largest material factor in the

transformation of the discourse of desire and that transformation's manifestation in the rhetoric of sex. (*Shorter Views* 34)⁵⁸

It is no surprise, then, that Delany's work becomes much more explicitly autobiographical from the first years of the AIDS era onward. He had published autobiographical material before, including some autobiographical passages in "Shadows", an essay completed in 1974 and included in the original edition of his first essay collection, *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw*, but his life becomes much more of an overt topic for his nonfiction from the later 1980s on, beginning with *The Motion of Light in Water*, which is not only an autobiography but also a meditation on memory and textuality. After *Motion*, the late-'80s/early-'90s essays collected in *Longer Views* and *Shorter Views* contain more explicitly autobiographical content than his earlier essays and demonstrate what Kenneth James has noted as "a conscientious turn toward nonfiction reportage on gay life" ("Introduction" xiii). This turn traces directly back to "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals", a work that in its form embodies the dialectic tension between fictionality and autobiography, a tension given particular force by the crisis of AIDS.

The AIDS crisis itself, especially in its early days, seemed to prevent writers from fictionalizing, and also from writing novels. "The rapidity with which people died in the epidemic's early years discouraged many from undertaking large-scale projects, such as novels, in favor of more modest literary forms, such as stories, poems, memoirs, and diaries. The challenge for writers working in these forms lay in how to capture a life affected by illness,

⁵⁸ This view is similar to a more recent one given in 2015 in the *American Journal of Public Health* by Peter Aggleton and Richard Parker, who write that "Nowhere is the deeply political character of the response to HIV so clear as in the uncritical use of language deployed to talk about the epidemic. More than 25 years ago, Treichler described HIV and AIDS as 'an epidemic of signification.' Yet as time has passed, critical reflection on the problematic use of language has waned. Now more than ever, it is important to ask whether the language and the concepts we use to talk and think about HIV are up to the task" (1554).

without simply inscribing it in the stereotypical narrative arc of irreversible decline and death furnished by mainstream accounts of AIDS” (Dean & Ruszczycky 715). Poetry and short narratives dominated the early days of the epidemic’s literary writing, but there was an effect on ideas of language, form, and purpose that went beyond the length of the work. In 1998, Gregory Woods argued that “If the term ‘gay literature’ is to have any practical significance during the present epidemic, it must be defined in such a manner as to include documents relating to the health of gay men” (367) — documents not only including memoirs and research reports, but also pornography, which became a vehicle of both safer sex education and radical polemic. As Woods notes, the early works of AIDS literature were often not works of fiction: “many of the most effective narratives of the individual’s struggle within the AIDS universe have been factual [...] Collections of AIDS-related journalism have made some of the most persuasive contributions to the lasting literature of the epidemic without necessarily proving any more ephemeral than ‘creative’ writing on the same themes” (367). Also in 1998, Reed Woodhouse, in surveying “A Canon of Gay Fiction 1945-1995” (including Delany’s *The Mad Man*), after praising the many poems and memoirs that movingly chronicle the AIDS crisis, wrote, “For whatever reason, the number of AIDS novels, works that cause, as Nabokov said, ‘the sudden erection of your small dorsal hairs,’ is still tiny.”

It is undoubtably true that there were fewer novels focused on the AIDS crisis than there were other types of literature. However, this has sometimes provided an alibi for scholars to ignore what they might benefit from researching more fully. For instance, in Monica B. Pearl’s 2013 *AIDS Literature and Gay Identity*, Samuel R. Delany’s name never appears, and Pearl confidently justifies her decision to exclude early AIDS fiction because 1988 is

the year that noted gay novelists published their first works of AIDS literature. Paul Monette's *Borrowed Time* and Edmund White and Adam Mars-Jones's collection of AIDS short stories *The Darker Proof* [neither of them novels] were published in 1988, marking the beginning of a serious and lasting AIDS literature. It was also in 1988 that other previously known gay novelists published their first pieces of AIDS fiction, including Christopher Bram's *In Memory of Angel Clare*, Robert Ferro's *Second Son*, and Ethan Mordden's *Everybody Loves You*. (3)

Pearl's condemnation of earlier AIDS fiction is along the lines of condemnations of, for instance, "committed" novels of the 1930s: "The earliest AIDS fiction, books like Paul Reed's *Facing It*, the first AIDS novel, was desperate and often more invested in instruction than aesthetics" (4). Pearl's idea of literature opposes *aesthetics* and *instruction*, but her ignorance of Delany's work is telling: In 1984, he published a novel-length work of fiction that was invested in both aesthetics and instruction.

A PEDAGOGY OF MARGINS

The first edition of *Flight from Nevèryon* was published by Bantam Books as a paperback original with May 1985 listed as the publication date. This was the only edition to print "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" as "III. Appendix A", a liminal label that makes "Tale" both one of the main chapters and the first appendix; future editions gave "Plagues and Carnivals" the same textual status as "The Tale of Fog and Granite" and "The Mummer's Tale", but moved what in the original edition is an italicized, unlabeled final part to be "Appendix A: Postscript" — a significant change, given that this part begins, "I beg my readers not to misread fiction as

fact” (361), then provides AIDS statistics (updated through 1993 in subsequent editions) and contact information for the Gay Men’s Health Crisis. While the postscript is clearly separate from the main text of “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” because it does not have the sectional numbering of the rest, the two texts are united within “Appendix A”, whereas in later editions, “Plagues and Carnivals” is more united with the other tales, while the postscript is an item of its own, an ancillary text.

All of the books in the Return to Nevèryon series include appendices, though there is some discrepancy between editions.⁵⁹ Their relationship to the main text is important (as is the relationship of the many epigraphs to the main text). Discussing the faux academic essay placed as an appendix to *Tales of Nevèryon*, Kathleen Spencer writes:

The presence of a supplement to a text — a preface, an appendix, notes, and so on — creates a philosophical dilemma. On the one hand, we have traditionally assumed that the text itself is primary, and thus is complete and sufficient. However, supplements add something to the text, presumably something important and necessary: that means that the text is not complete after all, since it lacks something which the supplement is required to provide. Thus the supplement is both more and less than the text it supplements. (“Deconstructing” 86)

⁵⁹ The largest discrepancy is that the original edition of *Flight from Nevèryon* included “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” as Appendix A and “Closures and Openings” as Appendix B. The Wesleyan edition includes “Postscript” as Appendix A and “Buffon’s Needle” as Appendix B, with a revised version of “Closures and Openings” moved to the appendix of *Return to Nevèryon*, a move necessitated by Delany’s decision to continue the series after having originally planned “Plagues and Carnivals” to be its end.

Spencer discusses the ancillary material in *Trouble on Triton* and *Tales from Nevèrÿon* within a Derridean frame; while Derrida was certainly one of the primary influences on Delany's work from the 1970s forward, the ancillary material can also be seen somewhat more generally within the margin/center context Delany develops most fully in his essays of the 1990s. Analyzing, for instance, the hegemonic discourse of desire, he writes: "What we on the margins have been most able to appropriate of this discourse is the power analysis that so much of the discourse of patriarchy is structured precisely to mystify. In many cases, its demystification is precisely what has allowed us to survive" (*Shorter Views* 21). The power/knowledge from the margins is not the power/knowledge from the center.

From Spencer's Derridean analysis, we can see how Delany's formal, aesthetic, textual choices meld here with what may seem to be more socio-political concerns: The dominant discourse is primary, and for those for whom such discourse is unproblematic, it is complete and sufficient. The marginal discourse, however, makes evident that the central discourse is not exhaustive — and not only is it not exhaustive, it is not sufficient. The marginal exists in excess of the central. The implications of this are especially clear in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, where Delany notes that in a democracy it is unacceptable to argue that what is relevant to the marginal is *only* relevant to the marginal:

People are not excess. It is the same argument that dismisses the needs of blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Asians, women, gays, the homeless, the poor, the worker—and all other margins that, taken together (people like you, people like me), are the country's overwhelming majority: those who, socioeconomically, are simply less powerful. (90)

In the original edition of *Flight from Nevèryon*, the argument that the aggregate of the marginal is in fact the majority becomes physically apparent: the central text (“The Tale of Fog and Granite” and “The Mummer’s Tale”) takes up about 170 pages, while the appendices (“The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” and “Closures and Openings”) take up about 210 pages. By 1994, when Wesleyan University Press reprinted *Flight from Nevèryon*, what had previously been marginal was now central, and the new appendices only required 15 pages.

The basic structural differences between the original edition of *Flight from Nevèryon* and the later editions have a slight, though meaningful, effect on how readers may experience the text. For a reader who comes to *Flight* after reading the first two Nevèryon books (and/or *Trouble on Triton*), appendices may be fictional but they are not positioned as fictional – in other words, they do not partake of fictionality. For that reader, turning the last page of “The Mummer’s Tale” in the original edition leads to a different set of expectations than turning the last page of “The Mummer’s Tale” in subsequent editions. In the original edition, the reader is

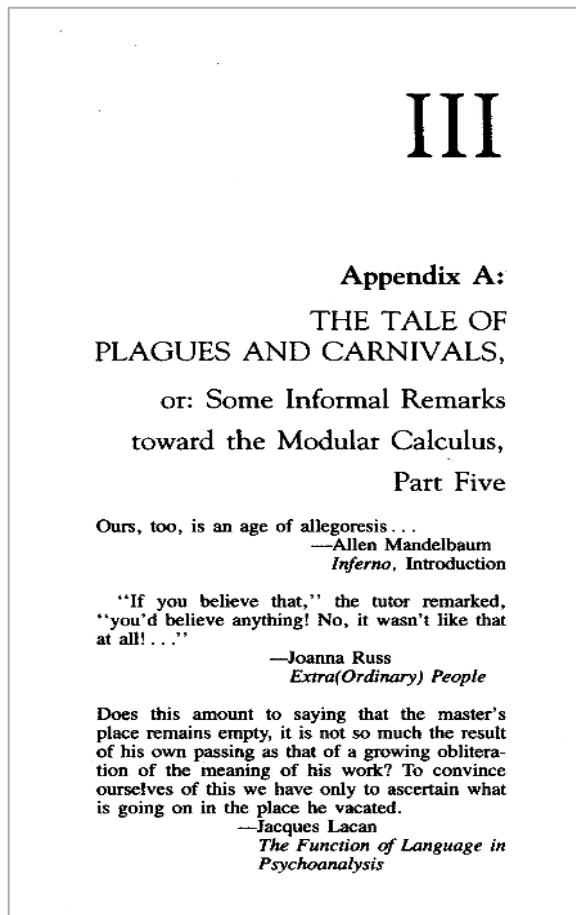


Figure 1:
 Original title page of “*The Tale of Plagues
 and Carnivals*”, Bantam, 1985

confronted with a title page that announces the third section/chapter and an appendix before the title (Figure 1), and that reader would then likely assume the appendix is, as all the previous ones are, a text that may or may not be fictional but which is, unlike the various “Tales”, written as if it is nonfiction. With an assumption of a nonfictional mode in mind, the reader then reads the first paragraph of “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”:

1. On —th Street, just beyond Ninth Avenue, the bridge runs across sunken tracks.

Really, it’s just an extension of the street. (In a car, you might not notice you’d crossed an

overpass.) The stone walls are a little higher than my waist. Slouching comfortably, you can lean back against them, an elbow either side, or you can hoist yourself up to sit. (183)

This reader is unlikely to assume this paragraph necessarily takes place in Nevèryon. Indeed, given the evidence of previous appendices, the best assumption is that the setting is closer to what is considered reality. (The title “The Tale of...” would be the only element to complicate this assumption, as so far everything titled “The Tale of...” has been set in Nevèryon.) To understand how this matters, we can compare the later editions.

After the original Bantam edition, “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” was no longer an appendix. Its title page now became the same as the title pages of the previous tales. Thus, the reader beginning the story has no reason to believe it is anything other than another Nevèryon story. There is nothing in the first few paragraphs that overtly contradicts this assumption; the first suspicion is likely to occur with the last sentence of the fourth paragraph: “Except for this twentieth-century detail, it has the air of a prehistoric structure” (183). The next paragraph introduces the first-person point of view: “At various times over the last half-dozen years, I’ve walked across it, now in the day, now at night.” (This does not set the story outside of Nevèryon, however, as “The Mummer’s Tale”, which precedes it, is written in first-person.) It is not until the end of the eighth paragraph that the text contains a clear, unambiguous statement that what we have read so far is *not* about Nevèryon:

Give it the pedestrians you get a few blocks over on Eighth Avenue, just above what a musician friend of mine used to call ‘Forty-Douche’ Street: kids selling their black beauties, their Valiums, their loose joints, the prostitutes and hustlers, the working men

and women. Then put the market I saw on the Italian trip Ted and I took to L'Aquila at one end, and any East Side business district on the other, and you have a contemporary Bridge of Lost Desire.

When reading any of the post-Bantam editions of *Flight from Nevèrjon*, we must now revise our assumptions. Instead of the title page (potentially) pulling us out of the fantasy setting before we read the first paragraph, we must do that work ourselves. It's not difficult, but it is briefly jarring, as any experience of assumptions being suddenly proved wrong is jarring. Such a reading experience is a hallmark of a pedagogical structure, and the paragraph's imperative mood not only establishes a narrator/audience relationship but also sets up the narrator as an instructor of the audience.

Readers of any edition of *Flight from Nevèrjon* must revise their assumptions again with the second section of the tale, which returns us to Nevèrjon via mentions of a "kitchen girl" (an archaic term unlikely to appear in a contemporary story about New York City) and Lord Vanar. The section also gives us a third-person point of view, further separating it from the beginning of the story. We might assume at this point that the story will alternate between settings and points of view (which it does), but there is one more feature that we must assimilate into our reading protocols: The section is not numbered simply 2, but rather 2.1. The next section, which discusses Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* and AIDS, is not numbered 3, but 2.2. (Any assumption that the odd-numbered sections will take place in New York City and the even-numbered sections Nevèrjon is quickly dispelled, as the structure is more complex than that.) This hierarchical system of numbering the sections is most similar to Wittgenstein's system in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, a system that has led to much argument among philosophers

but which in Delany is relatively straightforward.⁶⁰ In “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”, the numbering system not only indicates relationships between the parts of the text, but also suggests to an informed reader that the text is (or at least wants to appear to be) something other than a work of fiction. Hierarchical numbering is atypical in fiction, but not in mathematics, logic, and philosophy; it suggests a system of propositions that are connected. Though for most of “Plagues and Carnivals”, New York and Nevèryon remain separate, their connection as part of the system of the text is evident from the moment the reader understands the numbering system of the sections.⁶¹ Georgia Johnston, borrowing a term from Derrida, reads the numbering system as one of the tympanic elements in the text:

This writing style suggests accretion through formation of borders (edges, margins), but with an aim simultaneously to undermine accretion and hierarchies, by paralleling experience, and foregrounding that parallel, where subunits of 6.31, 6.32, 6.33 would have a similar relationship to 6.3. The numbering is Delany’s use of something like Derrida’s parallel actual columns, a structure that can go beyond two, underscored by his discursive explanations, such as his beginning of 6.321 by marking his technique: “the double narrative, in its parallel columns...” (“From the Margins” 67)

⁶⁰ For discussion of Wittgenstein’s system and the history of reactions to it, see Verena Mayer’s “The Numbering System of the Tractatus.” *Ratio*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1993, pp. 108–120.

⁶¹ Delany would go on to use the system briefly in “The Tale of Rumor and Desire”, completed in February 1987, and throughout *The Motion of Light in Water*, his autobiography completed in August 1987, as well as in the second part of *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, “...Three, Two, One Contact: Times Square Red”. It is a system he has associated with the Nevèryon stories and with autobiographical writing, but the only text in which it is associated with *both* is “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”.

Derrida's concept of the tympan is, indeed, a useful one for this text (and many of Delany's other writings), as it suggests both a biological membrane that produces sound and an element of a letterpress that sits as a buffer between the platen and paper.⁶² As a concept for the sound or signs that can be produced by the connection of a margin to a center, it is a valuable metaphor, and suggests that much of the meaning in "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" may be found not in individual pieces of text or narrative, but in all that sits between the pieces, quiet until it is struck, then, afterward, bearing some trace from the pressure of producing meaning. This makes the text similar to Paula Treichler's influential 1987 description of AIDS as "an epidemic of signification":

Of course, AIDS is a real disease syndrome, damaging and killing real human beings. Because of this, it is tempting – perhaps in some instances imperative — to view science and medicine as providing a discourse about AIDS closer to its "reality" than what we can provide ourselves. Yet the AIDS epidemic — with its genuine potential for global devastation — is simultaneously an epidemic of a transmissible lethal disease and an epidemic of meanings or signification. Both epidemics are equally crucial for us to understand, for, try as we may to treat AIDS as "an infectious disease" and nothing more, meanings continue to multiply wildly and at an extraordinary rate. This epidemic of

⁶² A tympan is also a plate in an astrolabe that is calibrated to a specific latitude, a significant meaning given the importance of astrolabes throughout the Nevèryon stories (see Tucker 120-124), though there is no evidence Delany was familiar with that particular meaning of the word and it never appears in the books. Derrida's use, though, Delany was almost certainly aware of, because he likely got a copy of *Margins of Philosophy* when the English translation first appeared in 1982, and "Tympan" is the introduction in that book. In an interview with Kenneth James in the spring of 1986, Delany included *Margins of Philosophy* among the books (along with *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*) that he would not recommend as a starting point with Derrida (*Silent Interviews* 242). In a June 1984 letter, he noted that he was reading Derrida's *Signsponge* and *My Chances*, despite the two books' expense (1984 151). For more on Delany and Derrida, see Spencer, "Deconstructing *Tales of Nevèryon*" and my own introduction to the Wesleyan University Press edition of Delany's *Starboard Wine*.

meanings is readily apparent in the chaotic assemblage of understandings of AIDS that by now exists. (263-264)

“The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” is too carefully constructed to be described as “chaotic”, but it is certainly an “assemblage of understandings”, and one of the ways it consistently explores those understandings is through its analysis — both in content and form — of metaphor.

Many of the early sections of “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” that are written in a nonfictional mode discuss the limitations of metaphor and illness and answer Susan Sontag’s argument that, in Delany’s words, “Diseases should not become social metaphors.” However, Delany understands that metaphors are complicated; they “fight each other. They also adjust one another” (*Flight* 184), so “Perhaps the job is to find a *better* metaphor”, a metaphor that becomes useful because it “destabilizes short-run strategies, the quick glyphs, the clichés, the easy responses history has sedimented”. Such a metaphor, or system of metaphors, would allow “restraint of judgment as well as a certain order of complexity” (187).

In 1996, Delany could reflect on the ways metaphor had worked through the AIDS crisis, saying to interviewer Thomas Long (who proposed that “apocalyptic discourse is America’s chief structure for constructing social identity” [*Shorter Views* 131]) that by 1985

people were beginning to realize that the constraints metaphors such as “plague” and “victim” imposed had much farther-reaching effects than had been heretofore supposed. Susan Sontag’s very weak book on AIDS (*AIDS and Its Metaphors*, a follow-up to her extremely strong *Illness as Metaphor*) locates the range of military metaphors as the fall guy in AIDS rhetoric—and totally misses the boat. I know that she never saw my novel.

If she had, she might have noticed that the controlling metaphoric structure for AIDS from the very beginning was: “What metaphor shall we use for it?” AIDS has been from the beginning a term-in-search-of-a-metaphor—and, in that sense, both her book and mine fall right into the controlling, dominant metaphoric structure. (*Shorter Views* 137)⁶³

Ten years later, in a short piece titled “Art & AIDS” (written for a New School conference panel on “Beyond Lament: AIDS and the Arts”), Delany would express a very different opinion of Sontag’s *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, calling it an “extraordinary work” and averring that “To say that it ‘holds up’ is to pay it a compliment quite shy of its actual import. I do not think a book could be more relevant to us today” (2).⁶⁴ What Delany appreciates in Sontag’s essay now is its attention to how metaphors control epistemology, ethics, and education. “Passage after passage, I wanted to print out in large letters and post on the walls of all offices dealing with AIDS and AIDS education” (3). What Sontag does not see, however, is that the dominant ideology creates a

complex metaphoric system in which AIDS is constantly the disease that finally escapes *all* metaphors; it is the disease for which no single metaphor is adequate. It is a phenomenon in which no metaphor is ever taken to extreme, or ever carried totally

⁶³ The plague metaphor has been discussed at length in literature about AIDS, and it is beyond my scope to survey that literature here. Gould cites complaints about the terms *plague* and *epidemic* from as early as 1982 (76 note 34), and Sontag analyzed the term in chapters 5 and 6 of *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (132-156), as did James W. Jones in his 1993 review-essay, “The Plague and Its Texts: AIDS and Recent American Fiction”. The metaphor is powerfully persistent and has been given new life by David France, who uses it unproblematically in the book and (Academy Award-nominated) movie *How to Survive a Plague*.

⁶⁴ I am referencing a Microsoft Word document of “Art & AIDS” that Samuel Delany sent me, and use the page numbers here to give a sense of where in the 3-page, double-spaced manuscript the passage appears. I have silently corrected only obvious typographic errors. I expect the text will be published in an upcoming collection from Wesleyan University Press.

through, but is rather abandoned midstream and changed to another, so that even a glib reading of Sontag's own analysis, that reads her as saying get rid of the metaphors (or any non-critical attempt to distance oneself from one or another of them), is finally in league with that system. It is precisely because AIDS uses up so many metaphors and abandons them that fuels its stability in the social circuits from which we would try to dislodge it. (3)

Keeping in mind the idea that AIDS is a phenomenon constantly slipping away from metaphors, we might still find it useful for the moment to think of metaphor simply as comparison (an idea Delany himself once proposed [*Silent Interviews* 3]), because doing so allows us then to see that the juxtaposition of imaginary and real cities in "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" invites readers to think metaphorically — to build, for themselves as they read, a system of metaphor to account for the juxtaposition of the two settings in the text. Though united across a textual field, Kolhari and New York are separate settings produced by separate histories and existing at different levels of fictionality. As such, they are able to produce different systems of metaphors individually; for instance, "plague" in Kolhari does not mean quite the same thing as "plague" in New York 1983. "What metaphor shall we use for it?" is a question that does indeed flow through the text of "Plagues and Carnivals", but because of the two very different settings, any answer to the question, whether from the writer or readers, will not necessarily work in both settings, and certainly will not work in the same way, since the separate histories and different levels of fictionality affect the metaphorical systems. Though, as Delany says, his need to find a metaphor (or metaphors) for AIDS is part of the dominant discourse of his time and place, juxtaposing the fictional world of Kolhari with the less fictional world of New York in

1983 sets up a dialectic that may provide some cracks in the dominant discourse by encouraging the reader to compare what is perceived as real with what can be imagined. Any clearly imaginary world incites readers to think about how that world differs from the reality they perceive themselves to live in — this is one of the important insights of Delany’s theories of science fiction, though the process applies in a general sense as much to fantasy, surrealism, or even to descriptions of a real place the reader is unfamiliar with.⁶⁵

“The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” first asks the reader to think about Kolhari and New York separately in the text, with the different sections serving as boundaries, but the boundaries become porous as the text continues. First, the New York sections comment on the Kolhari sections: 4.11 begins, “If a mid-twentieth-century orthodox Freudian could return to Kolhari and present Nari with the theory of ‘penis envy’ [...] Nari, a primitive woman in a superstitious time, would probably find the notion intriguing, even plausible” (192). This application of Freud to characters in Kolhari continues in 4.231, 4.31, 4.41, and 4.51, while 4.32 sets the narrator as the writer of the Nevèryon stories: “There is something incomplete about Pheron. (Since there *is* no Pheron, since he exists only as words, their sounds and associated meanings, be certain of it: *I* have left it out.) My job is, then, in the course of this experiment, to find this incompleteness, to fill it in, to make him whole” (196). The melding has been quick: 4.11 arrives just under ten pages into “Plagues and Carnivals”. The reader thus learns the conventions of this text quickly, and then those conventions are adjusted and adjusted again. 4.5 brings the movement together: Kolhari and New York, fiction and metafiction, tale and autobiography all merge.

⁶⁵ See *Starboard Wine* and *The American Shore* for detailed explorations of this concept, though Delany insists on more of a separation between science fiction and other modes than I do, as, for instance, in his discussion of Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” in *Starboard Wine* pp. 135-136. Whatever particular differences in applying the labels *science fiction*, *fantasy*, *surrealism*, etc. that Delany and I may have, it seems clear to me that the Return to Nevèryon series depends very much on readers wondering about the imagined world and its relationship to our own consensus reality.

She thought of Lord Vanar and, as an aged woman might at that time, pondered magic, disease, power, and felt...

An absence? She noted somehow it was hers. No. It's not. It has been inflicted on you by...

That's me, of course, protesting ineffectually across the ages. But my inability to reach her on that morning, millennia ago, only confronts me with my own failings, incompletions, absences.

I content myself with noting, then, that she does not much resemble our housekeeper when I was a child, Mrs Bembry. (198)

Now, fifteen pages into the text, everything that had been set up before as separate has been brought together, separated only by a couple of ellipses. Soon, other sorts of merging occur via narrative shifts in one of the New York sections (5.1):

“Hey!” Joey said. “How you doin’?”

The man looked up and said, matter-of-factly: “Oh, you’re here? I was just gonna kill myself.”

“Yeah: How?” Joey squatted down before the mattress to watch.

You gotta understand, Joey told me, I thought he was joking. I was livin’ in my clothes and sleeping out, which means I wasn’t sleeping much. (201-202)

Between the third and fourth paragraphs there, the narrative shifts from dramatized dialogue to reported speech, the dialogue becoming submerged in the first-person account not of Joey but of the narrator. Toward the end of the story (and section), the reader must be alert to who is telling which story:

There was no breath, no heartbeat, no nothing. So I left him there with the needle still hangin' off his arm.

But he'd just decided it was time to go.

In the almost three years I've known him, I've seen Joey dragging through the retarded slough of pain that is his biweekly bout of heroine deprivation sickness. (202)

The first paragraph is Joey speaking, but without quotation marks, his “I” now assimilated into the narration. The third paragraph reveals its “I” to be not Joey, but the standard narrator (a textual Samuel Delany), though we only learn this after reading “I’ve” twice without getting an indication of the shift until Joey’s name appears. The second paragraph is ambiguous: grammatically, the antecedent to “he’d” ought to be the same as the antecedent to “his” and “him” in the previous paragraph, since no new noun has been provided; however, the “but” at the beginning of the sentence and the context of the next paragraph suggests that the “he” is more likely to be Joey. The reader must choose: one or the other ... or both.

From here, the text’s dialogism expands: some sections set in Kolhari are narrated by The Master (the addressee of “The Mummer’s Tale”, giving us a different view of him); various writers are quoted (Baudelaire via Walter Benjamin, Jeremy Campbell’s *Grammatical Man*, and, at some length, Artaud on plague); Imperial criers shout out through Kolhari that the plague is

not an emergency; the (elsewhere stylistically conventional) Kolhari sections are disrupted by section 6, a fragmented, lower-case, unpunctuated representation of Pheron in fever; and the Delany-narrator provides substantial statements from his friend Peter, a volunteer at the Gay Men's Health Crisis.

By the end of "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals", the text has merged all of its modes, images, ideas, and settings. The final section, number 13, is one of three that has no subsections (the others are 1 and 10; 10 is a metafictional discussion between K. Leslie Steiner and S. L. Kermit of whether the text we have been reading is accurate and effective). In section 13, fantasy and reality collide, as Noyeed, one of the main characters in the Nevèryon tales, appears as a homeless man on the banks of the Hudson River, and the first-person narrator of the New York sections, who we've previously associated with Samuel R. Delany, has a conversation with him. The man struggles to speak English ("the accent recalled something Middle Eastern" [354]), telling the narrator that he flew a dragon, but his words are hard to understand, so the narrator says, "Tell me in your own language. Go on. I'll understand" (355), and then an italicized monologue begins, its vocabulary and syntax (and described landscape) familiar to us from previous tales. After the monologue, we read the final few paragraphs:

"Tell me," I said at last, "since you've only been here a little while, how do you find our strange and terrible land? Have you heard that we have plagues of our own?"

Curious, he looked at me across the fire, turned to the river, glanced at the city about us, then looked at me again.

And I would have sworn, on that chill spring night, he no longer understood me. (360)

Section 13 returns us to the bridge of section 1, but unlike when reading that beginning, the reader is now well practiced in negotiating the movement between New York and Nevèryon and between various modes of fiction and nonfiction. The tympan has spread over the gaps and margins; some sort of resonance has produced sound. But such resonance is always contingent. Communication between real and imaginary worlds occurs, but any pretense of an omnidirectional communication breaks off in the final sentence. We are left to wonder what we ourselves have understood. As with *The Years*, the text provides readers with a collage of scenes, images, characters, and ideas that are pieces within an overall system that readers must unify for themselves.

Delany makes explicit the reader's role in section 11.41⁶⁶, where he writes about the limits of narrative fiction to propose what he calls “the *radically* successful metaphor” — limits that show that the radical potential of the text itself exists in “letting the fragments argue with one another, letting each display its own obsolescence, suggesting (not stating) where still another retains the possibility of vivid, radical development.” Realizing such potential, though, is “the job of the radical reader” because writers, “whatever their politics, only provide raw material—documents, if you will” (348). The end of section 9.7 had previously declared, “the Nevèryon series is a document” (280) and sections 8.5 and 8.55 both raise the question of art as a document of its times (“How can one make a recognizable pattern that *isn't* a document of its

⁶⁶ In every edition after the Bantam paperback, 11.41 is a second, repeated 11.4, but it seems to me this is likely an error. Delany agrees, telling me in an email of 13 September 2017 that he does not remember making the change and doesn't think he would have done so, but perhaps for a moment, when correcting the text for the Grafton edition (which provided the plates for the Wesleyan edition), made the change “to indicate that the first [section] should really not be in the book at all.” Given the various and important ambiguities within “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”, any definite judgment about whether there should be two 11.4s or an 11.4 and 11.41 seems to me worth keeping suspended, though here I will refer to 11.41 for the sake of clarity.

times?” [249]), so here we have not only “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” but the whole of the Return to Nevèryon series set before us as raw material for whatever radical thinking we can make from it.

In 11.41, Delany-the-narrator discusses the inevitable incompleteness of his portrait of the character Pheron in Nevèryon, an incompleteness partly resulting from Delany’s own lack of experience with AIDS support groups, but no narrative portrait can possibly be complete without extended imagining by the reader: “One could make Pheron far more ‘whole’ by thinking in fictional terms precisely where he was among all these possibilities that night with his particular support group, what precisely had happened, and how. Go on, then, *mon semblable,— mon frère!*” (349). With an allusion to both Baudelaire and T.S. Eliot in the final phrase, Delany here exhorts readers to make the characteristically Modernist move of completing the portrait to our own satisfaction via the exertion of our own knowledge, experience, and intellect. We, the readers, are openly encouraged to become activists of imagination. Imagination is vital to any process of learning. Kutz and Roskelly see imagination as the vehicle that allows us to move between fantasy and reality, knowledge and ignorance, experience and fantasy: “the imagination names the active mind, and the mind’s activity is a process of making sense of the world through discovery of connections and formulation of concepts. The imagination therefore forges the essential link between the outer and inner world, between object and perceiver” (221). That essential link explains the textual dance between the two worlds of Nevèryon and early-1980s New York City. The textual dance between the fictional and nonfictional modes teaches the reader how to use imagination to discover knowledge, even if the knowledge discovered is more about the limits of what can be known than about anything else.

Neveryon is clearly imaginary, while the diaristic form of the New York material creates an impression of nonfictionality. The reader who wants the fantasy story must either skip the New York material or figure out a reading strategy to unify it with the Neveryon material; the reader who prefers the diaristic/journalistic mode of the New York material must do the same. The sections are not entirely separate, however, and as the novel continues, they overlap more and more. One pedagogy of the text, then, is to frustrate readers' genre expectations and to provide the readers who continue reading with some tools to turn frustration into understanding. The possibilities of that understanding become clear when we consider Delany's postscript:

I beg my readers not to misread fiction as fact. *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals* is, of course, a work of imagination; and to the extent it is a document, largely what it documents is *misinformation, rumor, and wholly untested guesses* at play through a limited social section of New York City during 1982 and 1983, mostly before the 23 April 1984 announcement of the discovery of a virus (human t-cell lymphotropic virus [HTLV-3]) as the overwhelmingly probable cause of AIDS. (361)

Again and again throughout "Plagues and Carnivals", the reader must negotiate various levels of fictionality, particularly in the sections that seem to be nonfictional, not only because the fictional and nonfictional modes seem sometimes to weave into (and through) each other, but because by the end of the text the fictional and nonfictional have merged: the figure we have come to associate with Samuel R. Delany has a conversation on Riverside Drive with a figure who seems to be Noyeed from Neveryon. The next sentence after "And I would have sworn, on

that chill spring night, he no longer understood me” is the first of the Postscript: “I beg my readers not to misread fiction as fact.”

If Delany had simply wanted readers not to misread fiction as fact, he would have given them a work of fact. Instead, he requires readers to learn how to separate fiction and fact from the text, to understand how fiction and fact work together, and to acknowledge when fiction and fact cannot be separated. Though as a writer Delany is more fond than most of italicizing words, the words he italicizes in the first paragraph of the Postscript deserve their emphasis, because the text provides us not with lots of fact to separate from fiction, but rather lots of “*misinformation, rumor, and wholly untested guesses*”. The Postscript does the didactic, factual work; it is the text before the Postscript that provides the pedagogy helping readers to understand why the epistemological skills the text requires are necessary and important. Before we can make good use of the information in the Postscript, we must practice ways of thinking about not only that information, but also about the contexts affecting its status and transmission as information.

CONTINUING CRISIS

In the third update to his “Tales of Plagues and Carnivals” Postscript, written in July 1988, Delany said: “In spring of ’84 I could write that personally I knew no one with the disease. Today it is the single largest slayer among my friends and acquaintances” (364).

As the crisis deepened, as knowledge of the disease’s etiology and vectors developed, as AIDS came to be seen not as a local problem but an international health emergency, as political activism grew more and more sophisticated in its quest to increase public awareness and influence medical and political institutions, Delany’s writing strategies shifted.

Whenever asked, Delany denied being an AIDS activist, saying, for instance, in a 1996 interview, “Outside of writing and writing-related activities (lecturing to and talking with various groups, usually in colleges around the country), I’ve done very little. // I am not a member of any organization” (*Shorter Views* 125). Jeffrey Tucker has written that “in his numerous works of fiction and nonfiction essays that address AIDS [...] Delany effects his own brand of AIDS activism” (*Sense* 233), which, whether we agree with the idea of writing-as-activism or not, does identify an impulse within many of Delany’s writings from 1983 through the 1990s, and helps explain some of the shifts in his writing career during that time: an impulse to address (and perhaps shape) the discourse of AIDS in a way that would not reify homophobic and heteronormative assumptions.

In 1987, Paula Treichler wrote that the “homophobic meanings associated with AIDS continue to be layered into existing discourse” because the “text constructed around the gay male body — the epidemic of signification so evident in the conceptions cited above and elsewhere in this essay — is driven in part by the need for constant flight from sites of potential identity and thus the successive construction of new oppositions that will barricade self from not-self” (285). Those barricades were in need of storming: “The question is how to disrupt and renegotiate the powerful cultural narratives surrounding AIDS. Homophobia is inscribed within other discourses at a high level, and it is at a high level that they must be interrupted and challenged” (285-286). In many ways, Delany’s work had sought at least since *Equinox*, *Hogg*, and *Dhalgren* to interrupt and challenge homophobic discourses, but from “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” onward, it would add an energetic, radical intervention into the “powerful cultural narratives surrounding AIDS” that Treichler identifies.

After *Return to Nevèrÿon* (originally released as *The Bridge of Lost Desire*) in 1987, Delany published no new science fiction or fantasy until his 2012 novel *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, which in its first half or so is set in something like the recent past and present, then extends into the future.⁶⁷ From 1987 to 2012, his fiction tended toward the recent past and present (*The Mad Man*, *Dark Reflections*) or historical topics (*Atlantis: Three Tales*, *Phallos*). In a 2014 roundtable discussion of Delany occasioned by his being named a Grand Master by the Science Fiction Writers of America, critic Michael Dirda efficiently summed up many people's feelings about Delany, particularly within the science fiction community:

Given that Delany was so wonderful when a young writer, what happened? Why have his later books proven to be so problematic? Have we, as readers, simply not been able to keep up with him? Or did his prodigious intellectuality gradually inhibit anything resembling conventional storytelling? His career—prodigy, master, academic, grand old man—isn't all that unusual, except that he and most of science fiction diverged and have never, it would seem, really come back together again. (Zinos-Amaro)

As an account of how many people, particularly science fiction fans, feel about Delany's career, Dirda's is an accurate representation. In the roundtable discussion, Delany's "early work" gets defined in two different ways: for some readers, it means "pre-*Dhalgren*", for others it means "pre-*Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*". Such definitions hide two major social

⁶⁷ *They Fly at Çiron*, published in 1993, included some new material, but it was an expansion of material written in the 1960s. It has most recently been reprinted as part of the 2015 omnibus collection *A, B, C: Three Short Novels*, where Delany writes in the introduction: "Although *They Fly at Çiron* was, in fact, the third of the three [novels] here to be published [...], while I think of it as my second novel, actually it was my nineteenth published" (xiv).

influences on Delany's development: the Stonewall riots and the AIDS crisis. All of the science fiction stories and novels for which Delany won Nebula and Hugo Awards were written before Stonewall in the summer of 1969. The other shift occurs with the AIDS crisis. As Lavelle Porter pointed out in a counter-roundtable at my blog *The Mumpsimus*:

I don't think the term [HIV/AIDS] even came up in that conversation. Once you address the role of HIV/AIDS in Delany's work then it should be much clearer why Delany's later writing deals with sexual politics in a more direct way. If you've read "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals," if you've read *1984* and *The Mad Man*, and if you understand that Delany's own mortality was at stake, and that he, like so many other people who survived that awful, scary time, lost so many friends to this illness, and if you saw that the response of most mainstream Americans to the epidemic was "Good! Let the faggots die!" then it should be obvious why a sexually active, politically engaged, gay writer in NYC might turn his attention to sexual matters, and why that writer might believe that the way we think about sex and respectability and morality needs to be challenged. (Cheney et al.)

Delany began drafting *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* in the late 1970s and had a substantially completed draft by the spring of 1983, when he began sending it to friends. Bantam

originally scheduled it for May 1984 publication, but postponed it to December.⁶⁸ Though the novel was finished while Delany's awareness of AIDS was increasing, it was a novel conceived and mostly written before AIDS had become a crisis for him. That, along with the end of a long-term relationship, contributed to Delany's inability to write the announced sequel, *The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities*, as he discussed in a 2009 interview:

I was in a major relationship at that time, that kind of fueled the first volume, *Stars In My Pocket Like Grains Of Sand*. And that relationship broke up, and that was the beginning of the Eighties, at the same time the AIDS situation came in. A lot of it, as the diptych was originally planned out, was a celebration of a lot of the stuff I saw at the time in the gay world. Sort of in allegorical form, a lot of that was being celebrated. There was a lot of the gay situation that made me rethink some of that, not in any kind of simplistic way, but in a fairly complicated way. So between the personal breakup, which was an eight-year relationship that came to an end, and the changes in the world situation, there were other things that sort of grabbed my interest more. (Anders)

In some ways, this statement downplays the crisis in Delany's life at that time. As readers of *1984: Selected Letters* would be aware, *Splendor and Misery* was essential to any hope Delany

⁶⁸ The first notes toward what would eventually become *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*, at least that I've been able to identify, appear in Delany's journals in late 1974/early 1975. The first piece of what is now recognizable as the opening page of the novel appears in a journal of 1977 (BU 56: 10), work continues in the journal alongside draft material of *Neveryóna* (BU 58: 1), between October and December 1982 he was making notes on "what remains to be done, what must be done" for *Stars* while also beginning to draft small pieces of its sequel, *The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities* (BU 58: 5), and in the same 18 February 1983 letter to Robert Bravard in which he says he had lunch with his Bantam editor who has scheduled *Stars* for May 1984 release, he also announces that he is "back from the doctor, who says I have neither syndromal nor pre-dromal (first time I've ever heard that word) AIDS" (BU 66: 7). In May 1983, he sent a copy of the manuscript of *Stars* to Bravard; by August, Joanna Russ acknowledged receiving the manuscript (letter of 3 August 1983, BU 68: 6).

had of escaping the perilous financial situation he was in at the time, and which haunted his life for at least the next decade. He was unable to get very far in writing the book, however, and between *The Bridge of Lost Desire (Return to Nevèryon)* in 1987 and *The Mad Man* in 1994, no new Delany novels appeared, a gap almost as long as that between *Nova* and *Dhalgren*, although unlike earlier, in the later gap, Delany wrote a significant body of nonfiction. However, as with the earlier gap, the novel that resulted was significantly different from what Delany had published before.

Though concerned with sexual practices, “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” is not pornographic.⁶⁹ Though pornographic, Delany’s earlier novels *Equinox* (aka *The Tides of Lust*) and *Hogg* were written more than a decade before the AIDS crisis. *The Mad Man* is, then, his first post-AIDS pornography, and Delany employs the pornography to explore crucial questions about AIDS and urban gay male culture. Additionally, at this time Delany began full-time work teaching at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; this experience, along with the beginning of his relationship with Dennis Rickett (chronicled in the 1999 graphic narrative *Bread and Wine*), would provide some of the seeds for *The Mad Man*, a book of which Delany said “the most important genre—or subgenre—it takes to itself is the ‘academic novel’. [...] Exploding, or just messing with, the expectations of the academic novel is where it does its most subversive work” (*Shorter Views* 312).

Part of the subversive work of *The Mad Man* is to infuse the academic novel genre with other genres. “Jumping genres as Delany’s works do, *The Mad Man* is part detective novel, part

⁶⁹ Delany insists that his pornography be seen as pornography (particularly because his theory of reading requires a clarity of genres): “*The Mad Man* is a serious work of pornography. I suppose I ought to be flattered by some readers’ confusing it with realism. But, finally, it is a pornographic work. [...] Those who say it is not a pornographic work (and that I am being disingenuous by saying that it is) are, however well-intentioned, just wrong” (*Shorter Views* 133-134).

academic novel, part philosophical novel, and almost entirely pornographic” (Tucker, *Sense* 241). Such generic mixing serves a specific purpose for Delany: to invite (and incite) certain ways of reading, for, as he has said, “no genre (or its language) is necessarily subversive—or even challenging—by itself. The challenge—the subversion—is always in the way a specific text is read by a specific reader. That’s why readers—and articulated readings, in the form of criticism—are so important” (*Shorter Views* 311). Reading conventions elicit and control readers’ expectations for a text, and those expectations affect how that text is interpreted and evaluated, as we have seen in the cases of Woolf’s *The Years* and Delany’s “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”. What *The Mad Man* gives us is a more complex field of genres than any of Delany’s previous novels, requiring readers to learn to switch or meld reading conventions nimbly if they are to grasp an overall meaning for the novel. That one of the primary genres Delany invokes in *The Mad Man* is not just *pornography* but *urophilic and coprophilic pornography* adds another level to the challenge, because such pornography is, for many readers, repellent, even nauseating, a feeling that may be an obstacle to the careful practice of shifting reading conventions. This, too, though, is something that readers can learn from if they work through it: as Woodhouse writes, “*The Mad Man* constantly forces the reader to reexamine the whole question of sexual desire: how it should be expressed, whether it should be restrained, and if so, by what means” (213). Call it the Pedagogy of the Repulsed.

Art and sex can both be pedagogical. In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz discusses how in *The Motion of Light in Water* Delany juxtaposes his at-first-disappointed experience of Allan Kaprow’s *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* (an experience of art that he first approached with the wrong expectations, then, through experiencing and reflecting on it, learned new ways of perceiving the work and developed a richer set of expectations for future encounters) with his

early experiences of public sex, first among a mass of men seeking quick sex on the Hudson piers and then at the St. Mark's Baths. Muñoz reads all three (*Eight Happenings*, the piers, the Baths) as avant-garde performances, with Delany's representation of his visit to the piers as a discovery of "a care of the self that encompassed a vast care for others" (51), and then his first visit to the bathhouse as an apex of aesthetic, sexual, and utopian possibilities: "His moment of seeing the whole of public sex is a utopian break in the narrative — it is a deviation from the text's dominant mode of narration. Public sex culture revealed the existence of a queer world, and Kaprow's happening explained the ways in which such utopian visions were continuously distorted. [...] Kaprow's performance and the piers were adjacent happenings that presented only shades of the whole; the blue light of the bathhouse offered a glimpse of utopia" (52).

Muñoz's focus is utopia, so though he notes the hermeneutical development described in *Motion*, he does not emphasize the insight Delany's wrestling with the meaning of Kaprow's happening causes:

mine was the disappointment of that late romantic sensibility we call modernism presented with the postmodern condition. And the work I saw was far more interesting, strenuous, and aesthetically energetic than the riot of sound, color, and light centered about actorly subjects in control of an endless profusion of fragmentary meanings that I'd been looking forward to. Also it was far more important: as a representation and analysis of the situation of the subject in history, I don't think Kaprow's work could have been improved on. And, in that sense, *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* was about as characteristic a work as one might choose in which to experience the clash that begins our reading of the hugely arbitrary postmodern. (*Motion* 208)

What Delany describes here is (among other things) the development of his aesthetic knowledge beyond what he had learned from the Modernism that had to that point shaped his understanding of the value and possibilities of art. This development required him not only to encounter a work of avant-garde performance, but to be productively frustrated by it: “I’d expected a unified theatrical audience before some temporally bounded theatrical whole. But it was precisely in this subversion of expectations about the ‘proper’ aesthetic employment of time, space, presence, absence, wholeness, and fragmentation, as well as the general locatability of ‘what happens,’ that made Kaprow’s work signify,” though he did not immediately have access to the performance’s systems of signification because they were alien to him (206-207). As such, he was forced to start from what he knew and expected, and then to confront the failure of the systems of meaning (conventions, expectations, protocols, assumptions) that he applied: “Figuring it out for myself, I began by reviewing my expectations” (205).

Though he does not analyze his first encounters of the piers and the bathhouse as fully as his experience of Kaprow’s work, Delany tells the stories in detail across the chapters of *The Motion of Light in Water*, showing how his curiosity and desire move him from bewilderment and hesitation to full participation in and enjoyment of what the sites had to offer. He began an assumption that the piers might be “kind of scary” (216) and on first encountering the bathhouses he felt “a kind of heart-thudding astonishment, very close to fear” (292), but he did not stop there, he entered the experiences and learned what they could teach. His expanded knowledge and experience then helped him understand the worlds he entered, and how they related to the wider world, more fully, much as his reflections on Kaprow’s happening allowed him to expand his sense of art and history:

Institutions such as subway johns or the trucks, while they accommodated sex, cut it, visibly, up into tiny portions. It was like *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts*. No one ever got to see its whole. These institutions cut it up and made it invisible—certainly much less visible—to the bourgeois world that claimed the phenomenon deviant and dangerous. But, by the same token, they cut it up and thus made any apprehension of its totality all but impossible to us who pursued it. And any suggestion of that totality, even in such a form as Saturday night at the baths, was frightening to those of us who'd had no suggestion of it before—no matter how sophisticated our literary encounters with Petronius and Gide, no matter what understandings we had reached with our wives. (293)

Totalities may be impossible to know, and lack of an adequate hermeneutical frame (the knowledge and experience that shape expectations) may make some encounters both frustrating and frightening, but more can be known, even if the total can't be exhausted, and hermeneutical frames can be reconfigured and expanded. Experiences in life allow this, but so do experiences of reading. Moments of crisis make the distance between life and reading feel too great, and so the writer in crisis feels an imperative to seek out new ways of writing that reduce the distance, that provoke new ways not only of reading, but also, perhaps, of living.

PORNOTOPIA

A disclaimer prefacing *The Mad Man* provides readers with a lens through which to view the novel:

The Mad Man is a work of fiction—and fairly imaginative fiction at that. No character, major or minor, is intended to represent any actual person, living or dead.

(Correspondences are not only coincidental but preposterous.) Nor are any of its scenes laid anywhere representing actual establishments or institutions. Certain parks, commercial sites, churches, and city landmarks, mentioned as locations of minor off- or on-stage actions, do exist (or have existed). But these mentions are only to lend verisimilitude to what the reader is expected to take wholly as a pornotopic fantasy: a set of people, incidents, places, and relations among them that have never happened and could never happen for any number of surely self-evident reasons. (K30-35)

Pornotopic has a specific meaning for Delany: “‘Pornotopia’ is not the ‘good sexual place.’ [...] It’s simply the ‘sexual place’—the place where all can become (apocalyptically) sexual. ‘Pornotopia’ is the place where pornography occurs—and that, I’m afraid, is the world of *The Mad Man*” (*Shorter Views* 133). Pornography as a genre is concerned with arousal, but as Roger Bellin pointed out in a review of Delany’s later *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, the effect of Delany’s pornographic writings is for many, if not most, readers *libidinal estrangement*: “all the characters’ pleasures, all their ‘glittering extremities,’ are decidedly not shared by their reader, and the sheer quantity of verbiage devoted to bare descriptions of who drank or ate what, while who else put his penis where, might strain the limits of anyone’s patience.” Just because I am reading pornography does not mean that the pornography is effective for me. Why, then, read on?

Part of the importance of the other genres *The Mad Man* invokes is that they make reading itself a valuable activity even if the pornographic elements are not arousing to individual

readers (a text that is solely pornographic and does not arouse a particular reader is useless to that reader, though it may be useful to a different reader). If we are aroused, then all the better, but if we are not, then the other generic elements pull us along, and by continuing to read we continue to consider the content and purpose of the pornographic material. In many ways, the pedagogic power of *The Mad Man* is increased for the reader who does *not* respond with arousal to the pornography, because that reader must then confront the fact of not being aroused by what does, in fact, arouse other people, including the characters in the novel. Even the reader who skips through the many, many pages of pornographic writing in *The Mad Man* must wonder why there are so very many pages of such material. The question answers itself if you find that material arousing, but if not, then you must imagine people for whom this material is more arousing than tedious, and because such people are characters in the novel, you must test your ideas against the representations of those characters. For instance, if a reader thinks that coprophilia is more than “not my thing” but also disgusting and therefore immoral, then that reader will, if they continue reading the novel, have to come to some reconciliation with a representation of characters who get much pleasure and little harm from coprophilia. The pornography is pornography, but it is also in service to the novel’s other goals, both philosophical and social. Steven Shaviro has explored this well, noting that “the philosophical themes of the novel are energized and given form by the pornographic depictions, rather than standing in opposition to them.” Even if the porn in *The Mad Man* is not your porn, you can gain much from reading it because of the intellectual structure that frames and shapes the pornographic material.

In *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (which is in many ways to *The Mad Man* what Woolf’s *Three Guineas* is to *The Years*), Delany states a credo: “given the mode of capitalism

under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will” (112). Much of *The Mad Man* serves to illustrate this idea, and in doing so shows not only a social vision notably different from that of mainstream American society at the time of the novel’s publication (and now, for that matter), but also a perspective on the AIDS crisis that is both a consequence and extension of that vision.

Shaviro provides a useful entry to *The Mad Man*’s relationship to AIDS discourse:

The Mad Man is a novel quite cognizant of, and continually haunted by, death: in the form of Hasler’s death which is the starting-point of the narrative, and the homeless man’s death which is its conclusion, and more generally in the ever-present reality of AIDS in the world of its narrator. But this death is in no way intrinsic to or carried by the sexual acts that the narrative describes; rather, death *always comes from outside* (to use or abuse a phrase from Deleuze). Death arrives in *The Mad Man*, and the book thereby takes on a fully tragic dimension. But although death is inevitable, for we are all mortal, and it is more of a danger for gay men than for many other groups of people (because of the sort of society we live in), nonetheless death is also *inessential*. It is not a constituent and motor of sexual desire. One cannot imagine a greater contrast to the transgressive — Kantian or Hegelian — logics of Sade, Bataille, and so many others.

As Shaviro says, this separation of sex from the narrative of death is not a utopian association of sex with redemption either. Rather, it is not so much sex acts that matter, but the kinds of community and mutuality they promote. “Sexuality,” Shaviro says, “for Delany is a kind of

communism, where anonymous relations with multiple others coexist with the exclusivity and special passion of (romantic?) love for one particular other person.” That a novel like this contains tragedies but is not shaped around a tragic arc is one key to its intervention. “The most shocking thing about this book,” Woodhouse writes, “is not its presentation of extreme sexual acts [...] but its assumption that even they can be occasions of friendship or love.” Further, if the characters were presented “as desperate, compulsive people, most readers would be perfectly content with them. But this is precisely the sort of smug judgment Delany will not permit. He and his hero are heartwarming aboveboard in their pursuit of pleasure — John in his life, Delany in his deliriously dirty text” (213). This makes it a profoundly anti-heteronormative text, as well, because it works against the tragic discourse of AIDS narratives that made those narratives amenable to mainstream discourse. “We know perfectly well that straight critics like gay writers to write about AIDS,” Woods writes. “They tend not to be interested in other aspects of our lives. We only move them when we talk about death” (370). AIDS confirmed, for many otherwise very different audiences, a narrative of queer life as tragic and diseased. Deborah B. Gould’s *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS* offers a particularly thorough examination of this dynamic:

Dominant understandings of AIDS tended to blame gay men and gay male sexual practices for the spread of the virus. The media and politicians, not only those from the religious right, consistently made distinctions between “innocent AIDS victims”—children, hemophiliacs, and other ostensibly straight, middle-class people—and queers, junkies, and prostitutes, the lowlives of society who were “guilty” not only of bringing AIDS on themselves, but of spreading the plague to the innocent. Dominant discourses

sanctioned repressive and punitive measures—including quarantine—to deal with the epidemic. As well, there were frequent assertions by the media, politicians, and bureaucrats that the scientific-medical establishment was doing all it could to fight the epidemic. There was no public acknowledgement of the role that homophobia, racism, and sexism were playing in the government's and other institutions' handling of the crisis. (236)

Gould shows in great detail that the dominant discourse(s) of AIDS proved to be both a blessing and curse for activists, creating new avenues for sympathy while also reifying prejudices about sexual practices.⁷⁰ This discourse was not at all limited to conservatives or heterosexuals. Gould provides numerous examples of a phenomenon well described by Carol Patton as early as 1986:

Even gay liberation ideology was equivocal: if an initial goal was the assertion of “gay is good,” then perhaps the solution to AIDS was to consider the years of promiscuity and exploration to be the community’s “adolescence,” which now (though admittedly tragically) should “mature” into “responsible,” directed, even monogamous sexual expression. (*Sex and Germs* 107-108)

⁷⁰ This discourse continues, and has adapted to developments in HIV/AIDS knowledge, treatment, and communication since. In 2002's *Globalizing AIDS*, Patton writes: “The continuing reinforcement of the idea that African cases were different — first sociosexually and later virally — influenced mainstream North Americans’ conviction that it was virtually impossible for ‘ordinary people’ (now encompassing straight, native-born, white, and probably middle-class folks) to contract HIV during ‘ordinary intercourse.’ This latter activity probably meant ‘missionary-position sex,’ but it was rarely clear what activities were proper to the ‘ordinary’ person and whether, for example, individuals who engaged in ‘nonordinary’ sex were thereby somehow liable to transmit HIV even when they engaged in ‘ordinary intercourse.’ Just as there was confusion over whether male-male intercourse was a risk practice or the defining activity of a risk group, there was confusion over who needed to consider safe sex, and those who were encouraged to see themselves as ‘ordinary’ or as members of the ‘heterosexual community’ were discouraged from thinking much about it” (xiv).

Gould writes that “The sort of distancing that created a good gays/bad gays dichotomy corroborated homophobic stereotypes and fostered heteronormativity, even among lesbians and gay men. This reproduction of heteronormativity, in turn, (re)generated gay shame and further encouraged politics that demonstrated lesbian and gay ‘normalcy’ and ‘respectability’” (85). It is exactly this temptation toward distancing that *The Mad Man* engages within its pedagogy — a pedagogy aimed not only at undoing the temptation to create a “good gays/bad gays dichotomy” wherein the reader is on the side of the “good gays” against the “bad gays”, but to provide the reader with habits of mind that will make the dichotomy’s destructive nature apparent.

Jeffrey Allen Tucker writes that in *The Mad Man*, “Delany seems to be committed to not only validating sex and a range of specific gay sexual practices, but also rethinking the parameters of ‘sex’ itself, which in a sexually spread epidemic is a matter of immense importance” (*Sense* 264-265). Pornography and AIDS education both require specificity about sexual practices (though of course pornography is not necessarily AIDS education any more than AIDS education is necessarily pornographic): *vague pornography* verges on the oxymoronic, and vague AIDS education is at best inaccurate, at worst murderous. All of the questions raised in the postscripts to “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” (and, later, “The Gamble”) are dramatized within *The Mad Man*, which includes as an appendix the Kingsley et al. study “Risk Factors for Seroconversion to Human Immunodeficiency Virus Among Male Homosexuals: Results from the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study”. AIDS becomes part of the sexual equations of *The Mad Man* because the syndrome is fatal and because the exact mechanisms of its fatality are unknown. As Tucker shows (*Sense* 268-275), *The Mad Man* stands in opposition to a general idea that frequent sexual contact and the exchange of bodily fluids are high risk factors for HIV

transmission: rather, Delany both argues and dramatizes that it is very specific acts (particularly anal intercourse) that have the highest risk, while other common acts (such as oral intercourse) likely (but not certainly) have little to no risk.⁷¹

The Mad Man juxtaposes the pre-AIDS-era experiences of Timothy Hasler with the experiences of John Marr, the novel's narrator, a philosophy graduate student investigating both Hasler's work and his mysterious death. Marr ends up being able to understand Hasler's world, and to solve his murder (which was only a mystery to people outside Hasler's social-sexual circle), because his own desires are similar to Hasler's, and so his experiences end up repeating Hasler's own. These repetitions are pleasurable and tragic for Marr, but Delany is careful to show separate etiologies for the pleasure and tragedy. Both Hasler and Marr have numerous sexual contacts and literally bathe in bodily fluids, yet the first sentences of the novel are: "I do not have AIDS. I am surprised that I don't. I have had sex with men weekly, sometimes daily—without condoms—since my teens, though true, it's been overwhelmingly ... no, more

⁷¹ It is not my purpose in this dissertation to argue whether Delany is correct about this; I expect he is right about the risks generally, but I am not an AIDS scientist, and my most thorough knowledge of the science dates back to the mid-1990s when I trained as an AIDS educator. (Coincidentally, the same time I first read *The Mad Man*.) The advice of most HIV/AIDS-prevention organizations to use a condom with any male partner whose status is unknown remains sound, it seems to me, given that oral practices do appear to have some small chance of transmitting HIV, but we are unlikely to know with any certainty for a long time, if ever. The scientific literature of the last 15 or 20 years typically (and responsibly) points out the practical limits of researching specific sexual practices, and also notes areas of more and less certainty. That more research is necessary is undoubtable, but there is enough of a body of research now for some meta-analyses to have provided useful information. See Tucker, *Sense of Wonder* 273-274 for more recent studies and discussion, as well as Wood, Lianna F., et al. "The Oral Mucosa Immune Environment and Oral Transmission of HIV/ SIV" (*Immunological Reviews*, vol. 254, no. 1, July 2013, pp. 34-53); Patel, Pragna, et al. "Estimating Per-Act HIV Transmission Risk: A Systematic Review" (*AIDS*, vol. 28, no. 10, June 2014, pp. 1509-1519); and Rice, Cara E., et al. "Beyond Anal Sex: Sexual Practices of Men Who Have Sex With Men and Associations With HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections" (*The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, vol. 13, no. 3, Mar. 2016, pp. 374-382). For a discussion of the legacy of the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study, see Engels, Eric A., et al. "Invited Commentary: A Landmark Study Launched in a Public Health Maelstrom" (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, vol. 185, no. 11, June 2017, pp. 1157-1160).

accurately it's been—since 1980—all oral, not anal” (K88-90).⁷² It is not disease, sexual promiscuity, or bodily fluids that killed Hasler or kills Marr's friend Joey, but rather the combination of an encounter with someone violently mentally ill along with misunderstandings of economic relations and community etiquette. The world of The Pit bar is not lacking in danger, but this is more a fact than a moral judgment; the same is true of an interstate highway: certain rules and traditions, both spoken and unspoken, limit the danger. A bartender explains to Marr that “the thing that makes this whole place possible is a belief that sex—the kind of sex that gets sold here—is scarce. Because it's scarce, it's valuable. And because it's valuable, it goes for good prices” (K6835-6836). As a known hustler bar, and one where the hustlers can make better money than elsewhere, The Pit is not a place where people openly offering sex for free is received kindly by men trying to sell sex. When someone sympathetic to or reliant upon The Pit's economy is violently inclined, a person openly offering free (or cheap) sex is in real danger. Hasler and Marr knew this, but Mad Man Mike and Crazy Joey did not, and so Mike and Joey ended up being attacked, with Hasler dying because he put himself between Mike and the murderer, Dave Franitz, and Marr unable to repeat Hasler's self-sacrifice so as to save Joey. As Marr quickly figures out, and as Christian Ravela elucidates, The Pit's “logic of scarcity harshly contradicts the premises that undergird value” in Marr's encounters with Joey, Mike, Leaky, Tony, etc., especially the orgiastic “turning out” at Marr's apartment. “Indeed, it is precisely this conflict between opposing systems of value that prompts the murder of both Hasler and Crazy Joey. In lieu of scarcity, an overabundance of sex structures value in Marr's turning out. [...]

⁷² Delany has here given Marr basically his own sexual history, as can be seen from the evidence of *The Motion of Light in Water, 1984: Selected Letters*, and numerous interviews and essays. See “The Gamble” for the clearest intersections with Marr.

Thus, the endless possibilities of different kinds of sexual activity become impossible to structure according to value” (Ravela 101).

These systems of economic value are also systems of epistemological value. *Who knows what* becomes a matter of life and death in the presence of violent personalities or fatal diseases. It is inaccurate, though, to suggest that *The Mad Man* proposes that the systems of The Pit are equal to the systems Marr explores with the homeless men. The Pit has had to establish protocols for dealing with the results of violence that would threaten the bar’s ability to continue to operate; for instance, they move injured bodies to a nearby parking lot. (Readers familiar with the history, or who have read *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*, will know that places such as The Pit were ultimately closed by city regulations designed to lessen the spread of AIDS.) For all its systems and etiquette, The Pit is a dangerous place — though whether and to what extent it is more dangerous than other, more socially acceptable, institutions is unclear. The kind of communalism Marr discovers and participates in during Wet Nights at the Mine Shaft and then with homeless men is presented far more positively than the hustling at The Pit, and is also given many more pages in the novel, allowing readers to learn what structures the systems of these encounters and to see various iterations of behavior. Only after these many positive encounters, including the epochal “turning in” scene, are we reminded that this is not a utopian vision: after the turning in and Joey’s murder, Mad Mike rapes John.⁷³ *The Mad Man* does not end there, however, nor does John suddenly recognize the error of his ways and renounce the “mad” life he’s lived in favor of monogamy or celibacy. John’s relationship with Leaky becomes deeper and more permanent, and together they visit Leaky’s family in Maryland, an experience that

⁷³ The complexities and implications of the word “rape” (which John insists on) are well explored by Darieck Scott, who also provides the most thorough reading of the use of racialized language within the novel.

shows John not only how pleasure and danger exist outside his own world of experience but also how and why, as he says, “Though I love him, Leaky and I disagree about the way the systems of the world work as much as two people possibly can” (K9716-9717).

Through such complexities, *The Mad Man* renders any “good gay/bad gay” dichotomy nonsensical, and undermines any desire on the reader’s part to understand the novel via a culturally dominant, salvationist discourse. If *The Mad Man* is transgressive, it is not so in a way that substitutes one set of predetermined boundaries for another. Rather, it is a novel in which “transgression is more than the crossing of a boundary and is, rather, the subject’s exploration of the elasticity of boundaries” (Wachter-Grene 340), with the reader invited into the exploration. The novel’s richest character portraits are of the very “queers, junkies, and prostitutes, the lowlifes of society” that Gould sees the dominant discourse branding “‘guilty’ not only of bringing AIDS on themselves, but of spreading the plague to the innocent” (236), and so any assumptions derived from the dominant discourse that the reader brings to the text must be revised or else the text will be unreadable.

That the dominant discourse is raced is also important to *The Mad Man*. Tucker points out that “Delany has forged a representation of black gay life that interrogates anxieties about black gay masculinity and race consciousness” (*Sense* 252), which is true, but it is also important to point out that Timothy Hasler, the object of John Marr’s quest, is Korean-American. While discussing *Dhalgren* and urban unrest, Tucker acknowledges the Los Angeles riots and how they “highlighted conflicts within and between different racial and ethnic communities, black antagonism toward Korean-owned and operated businesses in particular” (86), but it seems to me at least worth noting that the novel written shortly after the L.A. riots is shaped around an African-American man’s efforts to uncover how and why a Korean-American man died. Delany

could have chosen to give Hasler any other heritage he wanted; that he did not suggests we ought to bring in the utopian communism that Shaviro identified in the book's sexual politics, a politics that might offer some glimpse of a response to Rodney King's famous question, "Can we all get along?" (Cho 196).

Tucker does discuss how Hasler helped his student Peter Darmushklowsky to accept his erotic attachment to Asian women (an attachment that Hasler then wrote into science fiction stories) and makes an insightful connection: "It can be said that Darmushklowsky suffered from a belief in sexual scarcity, which, within the logic of the novel, is a myth that informs the sale of sex as 'hardcore hustling bar[s]' like *The Pit*, where Hasler was stabbed" (262) and which is anathema not only to characters such as Leaky, but also to characters such as Pheron in "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals", both of whom think it is silly to pay for what is easy to find if you know where to look and aren't especially particular. Darmushklowsky didn't gain happiness by following Hasler's practices — he ended up happily, heterosexually married, without any apparent promiscuity or water sports — but rather by learning a philosophy of sex and social relations from him, telling Marr:

I think that I'm a reasonable and happy man today, and that I'm married to Sue — and very happily, I might add — basically because of ideas about what we were allowed to do in this world that I'd never realized before and that Tim first introduced me to. And I think I'm still married to Sue, if you know what I mean, because of ways that he suggested that a person act with another person that he cares about, that he loves, that he wants to stay with him. (K4057-4060).

The complexity of *The Mad Man's* pedagogy becomes clear in the scenes with Darmushklowy, particularly the conversation between him, Sue, and Marr, because that conversation depicts a straight white man, a gay black man, and a straight Japanese woman coming to agreement about ways of being in the world, even as their individual practices of being in the world are quite different. Peter and Sue Darmushklowy are vital to the novel's plot because they provide key information about Timothy Hasler; they are vital to its pedagogy because they allow us a way to think about what it means to be outside the practices the novel depicts without condemning those practices. Indeed, a philosophy that can guide those practices may prove nourishing even for lifestyles utterly different from those of the philosophers.

The ways that *The Mad Man* explodes the common racial groupings within porn is also important, as Darieck Scott has shown well. While a reader unfamiliar with hardcore pornography might be most surprised by the prevalence of urine and feces, Scott writes that it is the fluidity of racial groupings within the novel that is less common to pornographic genres:

the bulk of North American gay male pornography, written or visual, does not feature characters of identifiable African descent at all, though of course there is a significant market niche of porn videos centered on African American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Brazilian actors. Gay male pornography centrally featuring African American men and other men of color might be said to constitute a slice roughly equal to or only slightly greater than that of BDSM of the work produced. Depictions, let alone explorations that rise to the level of the thematic, of interracial or cross-racial sexual play in the general category of gay male porn, BDSM and non-BDSM, occupy a still smaller portion of the market—though in this relatively small group, black-white interracial pairings may well

be in the majority. The three groupings (men of color, interracial, BDSM) are generally separate: there are some African American, Latino, or Asian men who appear with white men in BDSM porn fiction or video, but vanishingly few, and all-black or all-Latino porn will sometimes feature the paraphernalia or, less frequently, the explicit evocations of BDSM practice; but these depictions or themes are marginal to arguably already marginal spheres of porn. The proportions and numbers of the depictions of men of color or interracial sex decline significantly in the case of written porn—though my impression is that BDSM erotic fiction seems to hold a fairly large segment of the written porn market.

(211)

Scott's analysis is useful not only in expanding our understanding of the various assumptions Delany's text challenges, but also in adding to our understanding of *The Mad Man's* pedagogy for certain audiences. A porn-familiar gay male reader attracted to the book because of the porn will be challenged in his assumptions about who should be represented within such a story. We are thus returned to the question of the usefulness of porn that is not *your* porn. What makes it not yours? Repulsion is one thing, but if you are a reader for whom the bodily fluids and specific sexual activities are not necessarily turn-offs, then *The Mad Man* asks you to interrogate your assumptions about other features — including about racial categories and the ways they mix. Delany doesn't offer a clear answer to whatever questions the novel raises for you about your own racial-erotic imaginary, but he provides frequent provocations to question, to dig deeper into any reader's assumptions about not only what is arousing and not, but what is acceptable and not. Those questions, most valuably, also require readers who finds a particular erotic attachment or

behavior unacceptable to acknowledge that judgment, and by acknowledging, to open themselves to analyzing it.

Additionally, *The Mad Man* (and most of Delany's writing) poses real challenges to contemporary Queer Studies, particularly what Kadji Amin identifies as "the recent, though incomplete, emergence of the ideal of homosexuality as erotic symmetry." Amin argues that

It may be that today, power to discipline sexuality and categorize sexual types as normal or deviant operates less through the ideal of heteronormativity than through that of erotic egalitarianism. Insofar as erotic egalitarianism is now the ideal, if not the reality, of heterosexual and homosexual relationships alike, those couples that too ostentatiously broadcast their structuration by age, race, and class polarities appear far more aberrant, suspicious, and threatening than do comparatively innocuous age-, race-, and class- "appropriate" homosexual couplings. (38)

Delany's pornography has always shown sex between people of different ages, races, and classes.⁷⁴ In a late-'80s interview, Delany said, "The easier it is to name, survey, and pathologize

⁷⁴ Of *Hogg*, Ray Davis wrote: "one could say that *Hogg* is the (otherwise imaginary) porn which '80s anti-porn crusaders attacked: made up of violence against women and sexual abuse of children, with a dash of racism, all rolled in a thick coat of filth." *Hogg* is an angry, often intentionally nasty book; most recently, *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* is a kind of anti-*Hogg*: its pages overflowing with plentiful, polymorphous sex between people of different races, classes, and ages, but now in a utopian frame: "all the sex here serves as a kind of community outreach, reaffirmation of friendship, and shared recreation" (Bellin), turning the sex into what Keguro Macharia calls "a form of pleasant sociality" ("Rough Notes"). Macharia identifies *Through the Valley* as a "post-transgressive" novel "because it seems relatively uninterested in whether or not its bourgeois readers and critics will 'conquer' their disgust. And, also, I think, because it is so invested in 'fun' and 'affection.' Whereas the 'transgressive' novel is invested in a big 'fuck you' to the world, *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* is interested in what a livable world might be" ("Benign Perversion"). *The Mad Man* gestures toward — years for — the utopian vision of *Through the Valley*, but in even a pornotopic fantasy of early-'90s New York City, such a vision is impossible to sustain in the manner the rural, post-Millennium *Through the Valley* does. (As Delany shows how and why The Dump was created and sustained, the rural location is a key feature.)

the eroticization of any particular set of class relations, then the more dangerous that set of relations — and their eroticization — is to patriarchal status quo phallogocentric society. What makes certain such relationships dangerous is that they represent lines of communication, fields of interest, and exchanges of power” (*Silent Interviews* 136-137). *The Mad Man* assiduously avoids the salvationist discourse common both to mainstream rhetoric around AIDS and to liberal gay and lesbian politics generally. “Transgression, sexual dissidence, and the role of the pariah,” Delany has said, “[...] must be removed from salvationist discourse if they are to be anything more than a return to orthodoxy” (*Shorter Views* 136). To move away from orthodoxy — and from the particular orthodoxy of “good gay/bad gay” — Delany invites the reader to analyze discourses of power.

THE SYSTEMS OF THE WORLD

Darieck Scott asserts that *The Mad Man* does not attempt to escape the discourse of oppressor/oppressed, but rather to complicate and redeploy it, for “insofar as an identification with the oppressor is part of what is operating, such identifications seem, within the realm that Delany has created, a universal condition, in that, in a sense, everyone has an oppressor both external and internalized. Delany suggests that this is an inescapable aspect of existing in a social world: we are always in some way objects of interpellation in claiming subjectivity or agency” (255). Alternatively, we might say that Delany suggests that the oppressor/oppressed binary is part of the discourse of power, and since both the social world and desire are shaped by discourse, they are highly susceptible to whatever discourse of power infuses the particular site of interpellation. It’s not so much that the binary is itself inescapable in social life, but that social life is shaped by discourses of power, and so any anti-oppressive politics must account for how

such discourses work, which may not necessarily be in the form of such a binary (a topic more fully explored in *Trouble on Triton* and the Return to Nevèryon series).

Scott demonstrates that the racialized language filling *The Mad Man* (and all of Delany's pornographic writings) does not lose its oppressive power in a context of mutual pleasure and consent; instead, it depends on that power for its ability to arouse desire (other, less powerful and offensive words, simply would not do). As much as anything else in the novel, the effect of wielding the power these words possess depends on the system(s) shaping the encounter and the discourse(s) controlling how the words mean. For instance, the words' power is used and contained differently within the frame of John and Leaky's relationship than it is in other relationships. As Scott shows, these systems and effects are clear in the novel's events and character relationships, but there is also the relationship of the words to the reader:

Fantasy's connection to perversion and perversion's connection to the foundational instinct for freedom in both life and death instincts, blackness's connection to perversion and its nature as psychical (and thus political) rather than material reality—these connecting bridges and overlapping territories seem to correspond with the blueprint of Delany's project in this pornographic novel: which is to run the labyrinth-tracing thread between blackness, perversion, and (the will to, the imagination of) freedom, all through the arena of abjection, as abjection participates in and informs each, wherein we can discern blackness-as/through-abjection and blackness-as-power. (252)

Blackness, perversion, freedom, abjection, and power are shown within *The Mad Man* to be fuzzy concepts: John's blackness, for instance, has a different meaning for Leaky than it does for

John's advisor Irving Mossman, since they come from significantly different backgrounds and exist in utterly different worlds. That, perhaps, is the least surprising complexity among the concepts, however, because it is a complexity familiar in countless stories; what is less common is Delany's similar exploration of the valences of perversion and abjection, showing that the perverse and the abject are products of discourse and what Hasler calls "the systems of the world" as much as blackness, and as such all may interweave in ever more complex ways.

That complexity (or what Delany in his early novella *Empire Star* called *multiplexity*) is what the pedagogy of *The Mad Man* helps readers learn to see. Readers may bring numerous assumptions to the novel (beyond whatever assumptions they have about its genre) — assumptions not only about the transmission of AIDS or about safer sex practices, but more generally about sexuality, race, desire, language, homeless men, dirt, feces, urine, and semen. While no reader will necessarily arrive to the book with assumptions counter to all of what it explores, it is hard to imagine anyone (other than Delany himself) who would not arrive with some sort of assumption that the novel would then challenge. All such assumptions are pushed toward a recognition of complexity like that John develops regarding The Pit, noting that each visit adds new observations about how it works, its inclusions and exceptions, so that your description of the customers on your third visit is different from your fourth, and you must confront the fact that "the pattern you first intuited is only a reduction—or taming—of a vast number of exceptions to itself that, at any moment, make up the customer configuration" (K6680-6681). The same is clearly true not only for the systems affecting the customers at the Pit, but for all the discourses, etiquettes, and systems affecting every character and relationship in *The Mad Man*.

The use of racial language for erotic effect provides another example of Delany's complex approach to these systems. Because a frequent — even indispensable — element of the erotic fantasy in *The Mad Man* is not just racialized desire or imagery, but racialized language, freedom is imagined via a discourse that in nearly any other context would be wounding, offensive, even cause for violence. Scott asserts that the racialized language of the novel is more than simply erotic: its “eroticism has political meaning” (229). That political meaning may be read in a variety of ways, but I see it as tied to an idea of the utopian potential within erotic attachment, a meaning that suggests lust (more than desire) may be powerful enough to reconfigure the systems of the world. The language of racist and oppressive discourse possesses some sort of erotic charge already, and the discourse's history is saturated with sexual oppression and violence; the racist language in *The Mad Man* draws from this charge and history, as the words would not have the arousing power they have without it. However, the text suggests that so long as the language remains part of a libidinal economy that is also infused with the “communistic” values that Shaviro identifies in Delany's approach to sexuality, then the negative charge of the words may serve pleasurable — even liberating — ends for everyone involved. There are limits, though, because the world itself has not been reconfigured by a similar erotics, and outside the space of sexual encounter, the words once again exist within the discourse that shapes the larger society. Scott identifies moments in the novel that demonstrate “the ease with which such apparently agreed-upon, lust-producing uses of insults that we see at its greatest clarity with John and Tony can slip toward less fully consensual, nonsexual uses” (232). Without their negative charge, they would lose their erotic power, and so the words are not reclaimed, they are not made positive, they retain all their danger because they do not exist separate from discourse, and the discourse outside of pornotopia is one in which they do damage. It is only

within the pornotopic discourse that their negative charge may have positive effect. In Delany's pornotopia, racist language is a Derridean *pharmakon*.

While many of the ideas about abjection, perversion, freedom, power, and discourse are all apparent to some extent or another in "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals", the genre of pornography allows Delany a way to explore them differently than the genre of sword-and-sorcery, both because of the sexual explicitness that is de rigeur in porn and also because of the different reading conventions of the two genres. *The Mad Man* pushes against the generic conventions of pornography as much as "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" does of sword and sorcery, but while it is in its own way as essayistic as "Plagues and Carnivals", it does not position any of its text as Delany's own autobiography, and the "Disclaimer" warns the reader away from reading the novel as social realism, even as it draws from social realities. The presence of pornography serves to distance and distort the other material much as the presence of fantasy distances and distorts the journalistic material in "Plagues and Carnivals"; in the latter, though, this distance and distortion was regulated by the general separation of the modes via the section numbers as well as via a more explicitly metafictional approach.

The Mad Man has some metafictional moments, though, for instance when Marr refers to a character important to the early parts of the book: "I never saw my Piece of Shit again, which—this early in a book—makes a pretty unsatisfactory conclusion for a character in a novel. But then, 'unsatisfactory conclusions' is what AIDS seems to be about" (K3781-3783). Since *The Mad Man* could be described as the autobiography of John Marr, it is odd to see him refer to Piece of Shit as a character *in a novel*. This breaks the conceit of the fictional autobiography. At the moment where the reader's attention is directed toward the book as a book *and* as a work of fiction, "what AIDS seems to be about" comes in as a topic. It is as if here, relatively early in the

text (page 174 of 502 in the Voyant paperback), the crisis that cracked open the fiction of “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” threatens to crack the fiction of *The Mad Man*. Marr notes a historical (and epistemological) cleft between the world before AIDS and after: “it was becoming clear that soon the lives—at least the sexual lives—of those who had lived in an age that was, no, not more innocent than ours, yet by the same token was as different from ours in its outlines and articulations as sexual ages could be, would be all but incomprehensible to those coming after” (K3796-3798). The rift between the fiction and the reality is quickly healed with the arrival of a letter from Darmushklowsky, who was, among other things, a model for a fictional character Timothy Hasler included in some of the science fiction stories he wrote and published in graduate school. Thus, a (fictional) letter from a (fictional) character who, within the fiction, was transposed into a character in (the fictional) Hasler’s own fiction serves within the text of *The Mad Man* as the impetus to move away from an acknowledgment of nonfictionality and return to the distance of fictionality. Much later, in a humorous aside, Marr’s narration recognizes the book it is part of as containing copious descriptions of penises, and so to some extent positions itself within pornography: “in a book like this you just can’t say someone’s was the biggest cock you’ve ever seen. Because in a book like this, calling something the biggest cock you’ve ever seen doesn’t mean anything. It’s been said too many times...” (K8110-8112). The difference between this instance of the narration’s acknowledgement of itself and the earlier one is that here there is no mention of the book as a novel. It is simply *a book like this*. By that late point in the novel, though, the reader will have come to some sort of decision, however tentative, of what *a book like this means*, because by this point — almost exactly three quarters of the way through — the reader will have settled on some reading protocols.

The Mad Man positions itself as an autobiography written by a man seeking biographical information about another man. Though its characters and story are fictional, its mode is that of nonfiction, and it draws considerably from Samuel Delany's own life and repurposes material that is included in his letters and essays.⁷⁵ The closing of distance between fictionality and nonfictionality through the positioning of Marr not only as a first-person narrator but as a character writing an autobiography allows Delany different rhetorical effects than would be available in a narrative where the first-person narrator made no acknowledgment of the book in the reader's hand, while the fiction of Marr-as-autobiographer rather than Delany-as-autobiographer allows fiction's freedom of invention. Though he invents and shapes the characters and situations, Delany still maintains fidelity to details of social reality from his own experience. He does exactly what he discovered Rilke did with *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, incorporating material, events, and even verbatim passages from his own letters into his novel (e.g. in *1984* the letter of November 28, 1984 to Robert Bravard, particularly pp. 317-326, which is incorporated into Marr's immensely long letter to Sam Mossman⁷⁶). What the frame of fiction provides is access to reading conventions different from those of actual autobiography or memoir: *The Mad Man* is able to draw on the protocols of pornography, the detective story, the

⁷⁵ In "The Thomas L. Long Interview", Delany explained his perception of the autobiographical elements: "As far as my own experiences, suffice it to say that, without reproducing any of them photographically (the closest I come to that is the 'Sleepwalkers' letter), *The Mad Man* covers a great enough range of them so that a reader who bears in mind that it is written by a fifty-and fifty-one-year-old man about a twenty- to thirty-five-year-old man, and thence allows for the necessary novelistic exaggeration and foregrounding, would probably not be too far off in most of his or her assumptions about my own sex life" (*Shorter Views* 132).

⁷⁶ In the Voyant Publishing paperback of *The Mad Man*, Marr's letter runs from page 98 to page 162 (about 30,000 words). It's possible that readers find that the length of the letter, like a particularly pornographic penis, strains credibility. But in *1984*, Delany's September 1, 1984 letter Camilla Decarnin is 35 pages long (nearly 20,000 words), and the November 28 letter to Bravard is about 23 pages (roughly 13,000 words). Delany's archives contain a number of novella-length letters. His practice was to write these over weeks and sometimes months, send them to the original addressee, then copy or cannibalize them in letters to other close correspondents.

academic novel, etc. while still employing the essayistic, didactic, and even polemic modes more expected of nonfiction.

Such an approach may also allow something like the object-priority that Delany has repeatedly said is one of the attractions of science fiction for him. One of his clearest explanations of this idea is in the “Author’s Introduction” to *Starboard Wine*, where he says that science fiction is a writing category (“the complex of reading protocols, the discourse”) that encourages “a clear view of the figure/ground antagonism in all narrative matters” via indirection “by the continual (and, from specific SF text to specific SF text, the continually varied) ground/ground antagonism science fiction provides, where one ground is the fictive ground of the story and the other is the ground of the reader’s given world.” In contrast, the writing category of literature (“of which I take contemporary bourgeois fiction (mundane fiction) to be, today, the representative example”, and which is distinct from paraliteratures such as science fiction, pornography, comics, etc.) puts priority on the subject rather than object. Literature “encourages the reading of an extentional relation between figure and ground, between fictive subject (invented character or narrative voice) and fictive object (the fictive or biographical decor, the setting, the landscape, the institutions whose representations evoke the fictive or biographical world).” A title such as Susan Sontag’s *I, Et Cetera* “announces literature’s commitment to the subject and literature’s equal commitment to the subordination of the ground, rendering ground an expression of subject, of personality, of sensibility” (*Starboard Wine* xv). These distinctions are descriptive, not evaluative, but Delany’s writing career stands as a testament to his own preference (as a writer, if not reader) for exploring the relationship between “the fictive ground of the story and [...] the ground of the reader’s given world.” Such

exploration is most fully provided, in his theory of fiction and discourse, by paraliteratures rather than literature.

Here we see another reason *The Mad Man* needs to draw from the conventions of paraliterature, particularly pornography: in Delany's view, those conventions will de-emphasize subjectivity and encourage readers to speculate on how and why their world (and all that is its case) differs from the world within the novel. By positioning the text as both fiction and paraliterature (pornography, detective story), the force of subjectivity inherent to autobiography and memoir is diminished. *The Mad Man* may then remain a fictional autobiography in form, but its paraliterary status provides it with a rhetorical and epistemological breadth otherwise unavailable.

Having explored the limits of fiction in "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals", Delany pulled back from those limits when returning to fiction with *The Mad Man*, finding the fictional autobiography to be particularly effective for his goals when deployed via paraliterary categories. The clearly nonfictional preface and Appendix that frame the narrative set limiting terms for the fiction, however. The Disclaimer that is a preface insists that the narrative is not only fiction but "fairly imaginative fiction at that" and lays out some of what Delany sees the text excluding: "it is specifically a book about various sexual acts whose status as vectors of HIV contagion we have no hard-edged knowledge of because the monitored studies that would give statistical portraits of the relation between such acts and seroconversion (from HIV- to HIV+) have not been done." Further, it "is not a book about the homeless of New York—or, indeed, of the country. No book could be that all-but-omits scenes of winter and does not deal with—indeed, focus on—the criminally inadequate attempts by the municipality to feed, clothe, and

shelter these men, women, and children. Such a novel would have to be substantially darker than this one—which, I suspect, will be found quite dark enough” (K30-50).

The Appendix addresses the polemical point about sexual acts and HIV vectors, reprinting the 1987 *Lancet* study by Kingsley, et al. (a study that is also referenced within the text: At the beginning of Part 3, Sam Mossman sends it to John Marr some years after he sent her his long letter⁷⁷). *The Mad Man* ends by appropriating the authority of academic discourse and one of the world’s leading scientific journals, placing the reader about as far outside fictionality (and subjectivity) as is possible. The Disclaimer and Appendix not only situate the fiction, but highlight — indeed, insist upon — what is absent from the fiction that is present in the world of the reader, and even more so what is unknowable both in the world of the fiction and the world of the reader. Over the course of the book, attentive, engaged readers will have learned both that there are limits to fiction and that sometimes the limits of fiction are also the limits of reality.

Recognizing such shared limits allows a utopian impulse to bloom: as Muñoz writes, referencing Adorno, “Our criticism should [...] be infused with a utopian function that is attuned to the ‘anticipatory illumination’ of art and culture. Such illumination cuts through fragmenting darkness and allows us to see the politically enabling whole. Such illumination will provide us with access to a world that should be, that could be, and that will be” (64). The pornotopia of *The Mad Man* is not utopia, but its rhetorical achievement and pedagogical effect is to give intellectual and emotional force to speculations about the systems of the world as it is and also

⁷⁷ “Not too long ago, a kid here almost got in trouble for distributing an article that I’m enclosing with this letter. Probably you’ve seen it: ‘Risk Factors For Seroconversion to Human Immunodeficiency Virus Among Male Homosexuals: Results from the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study’ by Kingsley, Kaslow, Rinaldo, et alia, from *The Lancet* for Saturday, February 14, 1987. Although the medical stuff in your ’84 letter is really out of Cloud-Cuckoo Land, my friend, the article (from a study completed three years later) may suggest some of the reasons why you’re still HIV negative— assuming you still are” (4598-4602). See also note 71 above.

about all that those systems cannot encompass or allow, and therefore what yet-unrealized new systems might need.

4. AFTER CRISIS: J.M. COETZEE

I prefer, where truth is important, to write fiction.

—Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters*

In *Summertime*, Sophie, the fictional (and deceased) John Coetzee's colleague and occasional mistress, tells the interviewing biographer that John was not political, which causes the biographer to ask if she means "apolitical". "No," she says, "not apolitical, I would rather say anti-political. He thought that politics brought out the worst in people. It brought out the worst in people and also brought to the surface the worst types in society. [...] You want me to say what lay behind Coetzee's politics? You can best get that from his books" (*Scenes* 456). This is a provocative statement for Coetzee to write for a character to say about a character who shares his name, because it teases the question of commitment and politics that was so often raised about his work during the apartheid years, when critics such as Nadine Gordimer complained that his books were not sufficiently committed to political reality. Yet, it is important to look closely at Sophie's statement: She does not say you can discern the politics in the books, but that *what lay behind* the politics is in the books. This suggests a common originating/inspiring force between politics and art, a force that impels both politics and aesthetics. "He looked forward to the day when politics and the state would wither away. I would call that Utopian." He was anti-national, she thought, and also fatalistic: "He accepted that the liberation struggle was just. The struggle was just, but the new South Africa toward which it strove was not Utopian enough for him."

What would be utopian enough for him? “The closing down of mines. The ploughing under of vineyards. The disbanding of the armed forces. The abolition of the automobile. Universal vegetarianism. Poetry in the streets. That sort of thing” (457).

Sophie bristles against the attempt of the biographer, Mr. Vincent, to fit John into a clear ideological camp: “Hostile, sympathetic — as a biographer you above all ought to be wary of putting people in neat little boxes with labels on them” (457). The conversation continues in a variety of directions, many of them offering different inflections on ideas from earlier in the book, and then the interviewer says, “So, all in all, you see Coetzee as a conservative, an anti-radical,” to which Sophie replies, “A cultural conservative, yes, as many of the modernists were culture conservatives — I mean the modernist writers from Europe who were his models” (465).

TOO MUCH TRUTH FOR ART TO HOLD

Though there is disagreement among critics about whether J.M. Coetzee’s work is best classified as a type of modernism or, instead, of post-modernism, there is no disagreement that British and European Modernists have provided some of his most important influences and

references.⁷⁸ He wrote a master's thesis about Ford Madox Ford and a doctoral dissertation about Samuel Beckett's novel *Watt*; Franz Kafka is a touchstone; his nonfiction frequently discusses Modernist writers. Coetzee's interests are not at all confined to Modernism (Cervantes, Defoe, and Dostoyevsky are as important to his writing as Beckett and Kafka), but the form and purpose of his work would be utterly different without Modernism, as much of the critical writing on Coetzee has acknowledged. Derek Attridge opens *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* with a chapter on "Modernist Form and the Ethics of Otherness", and argues that Coetzee "does not merely employ but extends and revitalizes modernist practices" (6), thus creating a "modernism after modernism" (5). David James picks up this categorization in *Modernist Futures*, writing of "Coetzee's reprise of modernist aesthetics" (99), and then with Urmila Seshigari proposes what seems to me to be the least ill-fitting designation for Coetzee: *metamodernism*, a term for writers who "extend, reanimate, and repudiate twentieth-century modernist literature" (89).

Attridge pinpoints the usefulness of metamodernism for Coetzee: as an alternative to traditional realism, a metamodernism inflected with an awareness of poststructural philosophies of language and representation offers "a different literary practice, willing to reveal its own

⁷⁸ Attridge and James both argue strongly against Coetzee as a postmodernist, even under loose definitions of *postmodernism*. My sympathies are with their analyses, mostly from a dissatisfaction with the inevitable vagueness and imprecision of the term *postmodern*, though even if I were more comfortable with *postmodern*, I would still be reluctant to apply it to Coetzee because *metamodern* is so much more meaningful and clear with regard to his relationship to British and European Modernism(s). Dominick Head offers a more positive analysis of Coetzee as a writer strapped to three *posts*: poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism (*Cambridge Introduction to J.M. Coetzee* 23-36), though Head does admit that Coetzee's work "illustrates very well how the 'post' in postmodernism can be quite properly taken to indicate an extension of modernism, as well as a challenge to it, and to the dynamic of modernity. Indeed, without such an understanding, the historical complexity of a writer like Coetzee is difficult to define" (33-34). In *A Singular Modernity*, Fredric Jameson argues for a "late modernism" that extends, rather than breaks with, earlier modernism (his exemplars being Nabokov and Beckett), and thus is separate from anything identified as "postmodern", for which there must, by his definitions, be a break from modernism. As early as 1992, David Attwell proposed to Coetzee that his work was a type of "late modernism" (*Doubling the Point* 198), and Coetzee only objected in that he detected "the qualifier *merely* late-modernist hanging in the air" (200). Jameson's late modernism is to some extent accurate for Coetzee, but *metamodernist* remains for me a better label, for all the reasons I have stated previously and for the principles developed in David James's writings, which I find convincing.

dependence on convention and its own part in the exercise of power” (17). Such a literary practice provides methods by which “otherness is engaged, staged, distanced, embraced,” and “manifested in the rupturing of narrative discourse” (30).

The desire to use such methods may have been Coetzee’s regardless of his country of origin, but it is clear from *Dusklands* through *Disgrace* that his analysis of power and his need to press against the limits of language and representation stemmed from his experience as a white South African — indeed, a white South African who initially tried, and failed, to escape South Africa.⁷⁹ The inescapability of his context as a South African writer during the apartheid years created a tension within Coetzee’s writing between his desire to write from a position of more freedom and his recognition of historical situatedness. In discussing his Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech, Coetzee noted that the previous winner, Milan Kundera, devoted his own acceptance speech to Cervantes, and had once said that “when politics have become religion, I see the novel as one of the last forms of atheism.” Coetzee said,

There is part of me too that longs to be an atheist *à la* Kundera. I too would like to be able to go to Jerusalem and talk about Cervantes. Not because I see Kundera or indeed Cervantes as a socially irresponsible person. On the contrary, I would like to be able to say that proof of their deep social and historical responsibility lies in the penetration with which, in their different ways and to their different degrees, they reflect on the nature and crisis of fiction, or fictionalizing, in their respective ages. But [...] I *can't* do what Kundera does (or, to be fair to him, what he says he is doing). (*Doubling the Point* 67)

⁷⁹ For the fullest available account of Coetzee’s years in Buffalo, New York (1968-1971) and the events leading to his return to South Africa, see Kannemeyer Chapter 7 (166-204).

It is exactly the inability of the South African writer even to pretend to separate politics and literature that Coetzee made the subject of his own Jerusalem Prize speech, which he ended by saying: “We have art, said Nietzsche, so that we shall not die of truth. In South Africa there is now [1987] too much truth for art to hold, truth by the bucketful, truth that overwhelms and swamps every act of the imagination” (*Doubling the Point* 99). In the speech, he also identified one of the main concepts his novels through *Disgrace* explore, a concept that clearly builds off of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic: “In a society of masters and slaves, no one is free. [...] The masters, in South Africa, form a closed hereditary caste. Everyone born with a white skin is born into the caste. Since there is no way of escaping the skin you are born with [...] you cannot resign from the caste. You can imagine resigning, you can perform a symbolic resignation, but, short of shaking the dust of the country off your feet, there is no way of actually *doing* it.” The socio-political system of South Africa thus leads to “a banal kind of evil which has no conscience, no imagination, and probably no dreams, which eats well and sleeps well and is at peace with itself” (96). A year before South Africa’s first open elections, David Attwell summed up Coetzee’s situation clearly, saying that “as a South African, and one who returned to the country after a prolonged but finally unsuccessful attempt to emigrate, Coetzee cannot avoid having to deal with his national situation” (*J.M. Coetzee* 3).

It wasn’t until the caste system of South Africa was (legally, if not socially) abolished that Coetzee was able to shake at least some of the dust off his feet by moving to Australia in 2002. His reasons for moving were many, as J.K. Kannemeyer has most fully demonstrated, but inevitably the international press read the move through the lens of the coruscating portrait of South Africa in *Disgrace* or the controversies the novel faced in Coetzee’s home country on its

release (Kannemeyer 526-532). In December 1999, Coetzee wrote to David Malouf about his desire to apply to immigrate to Australia, noting that he was retiring from his academic career and saying that South Africa is a country “in a deeply interesting phase of its historical evolution. But it is not a good place to grow old in. Ever since I first visited Australia in 1991 I have felt a tug toward the country and its landscape” (qtd. in Kannemeyer 536). Kannemeyer interpreted Coetzee’s decision not as a move *away* from South Africa but rather as move *to* Australia. After reviewing many of Coetzee’s statements to friends and colleagues, Kannemeyer sums up:

Compared with South Africa, with its large number of people under the age of 25, Australia has more people over the age of 50 and fewer under the age of 20. The economy and the healthcare in a country with a demographic tendency to an older age group are just better attuned to the needs of that group than in a country with a preponderance of young people. What strikes Coetzee about Australian politics is how trifling the issues are that are debated in parliament and elsewhere, especially compared with South Africa, where the big political themes involve meaningful national issues. In Australia the big issues are something of the past, and democracy has advanced to the point of a healthy cynicism about and contempt for politics and politicians. (541)⁸⁰

It is difficult to forget, though, the many times Coetzee implied, and sometimes outright stated, that whites in South Africa have no legitimate claim to the land. As early as 1986, Stephen

⁸⁰ Though he may have appreciated the relative “smallness” of Australian political questions, after moving to Australia Coetzee became more openly politically active than he had been in South Africa (though this may also be related to his greater international fame after *Disgrace* and, especially, after the Nobel Prize). He became a spokesperson for the animal rights group Voiceless, attended the 2016 Palestinian Festival of Literature (where he made a short, typically sly statement effectively comparing Israeli policies to apartheid), and signed a September 2017 open letter from Australian writers and artists advocating for same-sex marriage.

Watson could write in *Research in African Literatures* that the key to understanding Coetzee's work is to recognize that he "is not only a colonizer who is an intellectual, but a colonizer who does not want to be a colonizer" (377). María J. Lopéz develops her entire book *Acts of Visitation* around what she sees as Coetzee's core (meta)narrative of the Europeans' illegitimacy in South Africa, and she finds it expressed outright in *Youth*, where the Coetzee figure is motivated by "his feeling that he is an illegitimate visitor both in South Africa (owing to his European ancestry) and in England (owing to his immigrant status)" (220). This idea was taken up by Coetzee's neighbor Mariana Swart in an email Kannemeyer quotes at length: "I ask myself: What are you doing in Adelaide, Australia? I just don't get it. I don't understand why you have left. [...] You should be settling down somewhere in the Karoo, and preparing yourself to write your last 2 or 3 (or whatever) books. Or is it maybe that you truly believe that whites have no place in Africa, and that you morally felt obliged to leave?" (542, bracketed ellipses in original).⁸¹ As I discuss below, the sentiment was also imputed to Coetzee by one of his own characters in *Summertime*.

On achieving Australian citizenship in 2006, Coetzee himself spoke about his new home in a speech at the Adelaide Writers' Week, a speech that was then quoted on the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection website: "I was attracted by the free and generous spirit of the people, by the beauty of the land itself, and – when I first saw Adelaide – by the grace of the city that I now have the honour to call my home.' [...] 'In becoming a citizen one undertakes certain duties and responsibilities,' Mr Coetzee told the crowd in a rare public address. 'One of the more intangible of those duties and responsibilities is no matter what one's

⁸¹ For an exploration of the connections between South African and Australian colonialism in Coetzee's later work, see Elleke Boehmer, "J.M. Coetzee's Australian Realism".

birth and background, to accept the historical past of the new country as one's own” (“John M. Coetzee”).

Whatever Coetzee’s reasons for moving to Australia, the change in his location correlates with a change in his novels, particularly in their relationship to fictionality. From *Dusklands* (more a collection of two novellas than a novel per se) through *Disgrace*, most of the novels at least draw their impetus from the situation of South Africa.⁸² It’s possible to read the post-*Disgrace* novels as abandoning the sort of postcolonialist concerns that many readers have seen in Coetzee’s work up to that point — indeed, in *J.M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship*, Jane Poyner does exactly that, saying that the novels Coetzee wrote while living in South Africa “address themes and issues pertinent to the (post)colonial and apartheid situations [...] the later works largely leave behind a specifically postcolonial paradigm” (1). The key words, though, are “*specifically* postcolonial paradigm”, because most of the concerns that Coetzee’s early work explores — particularly of authorship and authority — carry through to his later work, and that later work is shadowed by the violence and oppression of colonial states and cultures, even if colonial violence is no longer foregrounded. David Attwell paraphrases Coetzee’s own feeling that “it is the experience of his particular generation of settler-colonials to live out the end of Empire and decolonization”, a decolonization that is “is a form of profound disembedding” (“Coetzee’s Postcolonial Diaspora” 10). To Attwell, the effect of Coetzee’s move to Australia on his writing is to remove its sense of historical engagement: “It is the geography of

⁸² Aside from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Foe*, and *The Master of Petersburg*, all of Coetzee’s novels through *Disgrace* are set in South Africa, and *Waiting for the Barbarians* drew much of its inspiration from the murder of Steve Biko and from other tortures inflicted by the South African police and military (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing* 93-95). Further, it seems unlikely that Coetzee would have written *Foe* had he not been a citizen of a settler colony. (*The Master of Petersburg* is an anomaly, but the anomaly is easily explained by Coetzee’s long fascination with Dostoyevsky and especially by the fact that it was the novel Coetzee wrote after the death of his son.)

Australia that has made its mark on Coetzee, not its history (or rather, it is the idea of Australian geography that has influenced him rather than its particularity) whereas in South Africa, as the essays on land and landscape of *White Writing* reveal, geography and history are, in a certain sense, indistinguishable” (10).

While the decoupling of geography and history in the novels’ settings and the characters’ concerns affects the text’s content, the disembedding Attwell identifies finds form in the deeper unsettling of the texts’ fictionality. This is one of the primary features of the texts that leads (usually hostile) critics to say the books are not novels, not fiction, too didactic or allegorical. Those criticisms may derive from various causes, particularly the dominance of scene-based fiction in the U.S. and U.K. from roughly the early 19th century onward, a dominance that conditioned readers of both popular and literary novels to expect and desire mimetic physical description, psychologically-familiar character development, and conversational dialogue that adds up to a reality effect (even in highly fantastical novels; such books require even more determined tools of verisimilitude so as to aid the reader in suspending disbelief). But some of the complaints about Coetzee’s later work may also be artifacts of established postcolonial reading conventions that Alok Yadav has identified, applying narratological approaches to postcolonial texts to show that

as readers, our default assumption about fictional discourse is that it conforms to the criterion of historical falsifiability. It is only where and as it marks a departure from the world of actuality—that is, where and as we notice such a departure—that we enter (or not) into a willing suspension of disbelief. [...] [I]n the absence of contextual information

to the contrary, we tend to allow fictions to fill in or at least color our understanding of the world of actuality. (194)

Yadav applies his ideas to postcolonial theory and, particularly, the controversy over Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, but the ideas are useful for Coetzee's work as well, especially the later books. Yadav calls fictional texts "consensual affirmations":

One cannot force the fictitiousness of a fiction on someone. If they refuse to engage in a willing suspension of disbelief, one cannot insist on the "objective fact" that a given discourse is fictional to dismiss their response to the discourse in the very mode of nonfiction. A reader for whom the "blasphemy" or "sexism" or "racism" of a given work destroys its approachability in the spirit of collaboration cannot legitimately be chided for failing to take the fiction as a fiction. (195)

This statement seems to me to push too far toward an unhelpful relativism, since it negates any possibility of better and worse readings, but the insight at its core is useful: because novelistic discourse contains both the fictional and nonfictional, the fictional status of a novel is always a possible site for disagreement between readers. Gayatri Spivak has speculated that the changes in Coetzee's novels after *Disgrace* might result from the ways *Disgrace* was read in South Africa; specifically, she sees *Summertime* as "a rewriting of *Disgrace*, making the persona of the located South African who wants to claim South Africa as also his country a different one. [...] Here, the author-function is put aside, but not let go as in *Disgrace*, in favor of an older technique of unreliable narrator, that bad readers cannot notice. Here, the author-function is present, and

everyone is in character” (*Readings* 125). Regardless of whether this was Coetzee’s own goal, the development Spivak outlines is clearly present: *Disgrace* proved easy to read for less complex meanings than an analyst like Spivak interpreted it to offer, meanings that make Coetzee seem like a grumpy old white man with racist tendencies. Such readers were, to use Yadav’s terminology, ones Coetzee’s text could not collaborate with. Or, to use our own frame, these were readers for whom the book’s pedagogy, whatever it might be said to be, was ineffective (a rejection of a book is generally a sign of a rejection of its pedagogy). The later books foreground problems of reading and interpretation not only for the characters, but for the reader as well, and they do so by making historical falsifiability into an overt problem that readers must find a way to solve if they are to make sense of the text at all. It is certainly possible for readers to criticize and reject the post-*Disgrace* novels, and many have, but it is difficult to imagine anyone claiming that those novels are straightforward in the meanings they offer.

The break between the novels up through *Disgrace* and Coetzee’s writings after it is clearly about fictionality itself, and about fictionality’s relationship to the novel genre. After *Disgrace*, readers and critics struggle more often with the question not only of whether a particular text is a novel, but whether it ought to be classified as fiction of any sort. Reviewing *Elizabeth Costello* for *The Guardian*, Hermione Lee said that the book is “more like a collection of propositions about belief, writing and humanity than a novel”; Ron Charles at *The Washington Post* said that in comparison to *Elizabeth Costello*, “Initially, *Slow Man* looks more like a novel,” but the book left him wondering “why one of the world’s most celebrated writers would abandon the dramatic structure and implicit truth-telling of novels in favor of hectoring his characters and lecturing at his readers”; in *The Independent*, Justin Cartwright said *Diary of a Bad Year* is “a wonderful book of essays, a subtle and touching near love story, and an autobiography” and

never labeled it a novel, using the word only once, to describe the protagonist, whom he reads as a stand-in for Coetzee himself, as a writer who “has lost his appetite for constructing novels”; and in a *Guardian* review of *The Schooldays of Jesus* (Coetzee’s most recent novel as of this writing), Elizabeth Gilbert said, “In his fidelity to ideas, to telling rather than showing, to instructing rather than seducing us, he does not actually write fiction any more.” Both journalistic reviewers and academic critics have connected Coetzee’s move to Australia with his move away from narrative novelism: In the Australian newspaper *The Age*, Peter Craven (reviewing *Diary of a Bad Year*) wrote that “In 2002 Coetzee came to live in Australia, in sandstoned Adelaide, and has become a citizen of this country. In the process (or at any rate along with it) he has divested himself of much of the narrative and dramatic resource of the novels that made him famous.” In the 2009 *Cambridge Introduction to J.M. Coetzee*, Dominic Head noted that “Coetzee’s preoccupation with investigating the bounds of fiction has taken an increasingly self-conscious and metafictional turn in his most recent fiction” (85), while in a 2010 essay on *Diary of a Bad Year* David Attwell stated, “The overriding subject of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), *Slow Man* (2005) and *Diary* is really the practice of authorship itself, a question always in the background of earlier work, but it has now become the fabric and substance” (“Mastering Authority” 217), and Johan Geertsema has said of the same three books that “these texts seem less straightforwardly to be *novels* than Coetzee’s earlier, decidedly novelistic works” (“Diary” 209).

In 1997 Coetzee told interviewer Joanna Scott: “a novel is ultimately nothing but a prose fiction of a certain length. It has no formal requirements to satisfy; to that extent, the question of whether X or Y is a novel can't be very interesting” (87). Given his interest both in 18th century literature and in 20th century Modernism, it is no surprise that Coetzee’s aesthetic ranges beyond

the familiar conventions of 19th century English-language novelism, but if the question of whether a particular text is a novel or not lacks interest, the question of how fictionality is summoned and deployed is one that remains central to our ability to analyze Coetzee's later works. After social crisis, Coetzee pushes his texts toward greater crises of fictionality, as if he has found a certain safety — one unavailable in the midst of social crisis — that will allow him to experiment with reducing the rhetorical distance that constitutes fiction. Any crisis of fictionality may be metafictional in a general sense (such crisis inevitably drawing attention to itself), but Coetzee's post-crisis fictionality-in-crisis is not simply metafictional. Though the post-*Disgrace* books up until *The Childhood of Jesus* are, indeed, metafictional, that property alone does not distinguish them from Coetzee's earlier novels, for he has long been called (rightly or wrongly) a writer of metafiction.⁸³ The break is in the direction Geertsema points toward: the texts now are not only self-conscious of their genre, they seek to make the determination of genre into a problem for the reader. Such problematization both makes readers reflect on what the text's genre(s) might be (and why), and also invites readers to consider what they expect and desire from genre(s) more generally.

If we consider in particular *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year* alongside the third of Coetzee's quasi-memoirs, *Summertime*, we can see the texts push against the limits of fiction from two different directions, and they do so by weaponizing the reader's expectations. "The distinction between fiction and nonfiction," Richard Walsh asserts, "rests upon the rhetorical use to which a narrative is put, which is to say, the kind of interpretative response it

⁸³ Reviewing *Foe* in *The Nation* in 1987, George Packer said, "This kind of metafiction is not new to Coetzee: *Dusklands* blurs the distinctions between author and character, and between history and fiction; in *In the Heart of the Country* much of Magda's agony is directed toward language itself" (404). In 1993, Attwell began the introduction to his *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* by stating "J.M. Coetzee's first six novels constitute a form of postmodern metafiction that declines the cult of the merely relativist and artful" (1).

invites in being presented as one or the other” (45). Such a rhetorical use is less a feature of the text than of its paratexts and contexts — the features, such as the book’s packaging, that create reader expectations.⁸⁴ Those expectations are themselves a rhetorical tool for a writer like Coetzee. What *Elizabeth Costello*, *Summertime*, and especially *Diary of a Bad Year* all do is place the question of fictionality at the forefront of any reader’s thinking about the text.

The reader enters *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year* with the assumption that they are works of fiction (they are both labeled as such on their front covers in the U.S. editions), while the reader may enter *Summertime* expecting something at least basically nonfictional.⁸⁵ Regardless of whether readers enter expecting fiction or nonfiction, they end up at the same place with all three texts: somewhere in between. These books require us to suspend our expectation that fiction and nonfiction may be easily separated, and if we are to have a reading experience with any hope of satisfaction then we must find a way to be comfortable with how

⁸⁴ Though I am sympathetic to Walsh’s rhetorical approach to fiction and fictionality, since at a basic level it is congruent with the perspectives of both Delany and Coetzee as they’ve expressed themselves in nonfiction, Walsh is often more confident of his assertions than I would be. For instance, following the sentence I have quoted, he says of the distinction between fiction and nonfiction: “the distinction is categorical, not because there are any defining attributes inherent to either, but because the interpretative operations applicable to a narrative text are globally transformed, one way or the other, by the extrinsic matter of the contextual frame within which it is received” (45). While this seems to me useful as a general rule, and I agree that there is no single textual feature that separates fictional and nonfictional narrative, nonetheless Coetzee’s later works show that a text’s status as fiction or nonfiction not only may be much harder to pin down than Walsh seems to suggest, but that some texts may become so unmoored from the fiction/nonfiction binary that their status is undecidable: they are both/and while *also* neither/nor.

⁸⁵ More readers may begin *Summertime* expecting fiction than might begin *Elizabeth Costello* or *Diary of a Bad Year* expecting something other than fiction, particularly in the United States, where the hardcover included the label “fiction” (in the U.K., the book was not categorized by genre, but instead given the subtitle common to *Boyhood* and *Youth*: “Scenes from Provincial Life”). The collected edition *Scenes from Provincial Life* is labeled as “Fiction/Memoir” in small print on the back of the U.S. paperback, perhaps the most accurate label for these texts). But *Summertime*’s predecessors, *Boyhood* and *Youth*, were both marketed and read as at least mostly-nonfictional memoirs, and I remember my own reaction on first encountering *Summertime* being some combination of frustration, puzzlement, and amusement as my desires for a memoir of Coetzee’s adulthood were smashed. That initial reaction is visible in my 2009 *Quarterly Conversation* essay on Coetzee’s memoirs, “Intentional Schizophrenia”, an essay that also fits with much of my analysis here of Coetzee’s use of genre expectations for particular purposes.

unsettled the texts are. Nonetheless, it is a different experience to have nonfiction reveal its fictionality than to have fiction function in a nonfictional mode, because where the reader enters determines what is (at least initially) questioned. The first lesson of these texts' pedagogies is that their form and genre are unstable, but in *Elizabeth Costello*, for instance, it is not the genre of the essay that is destabilized but the genre of the novel.

With the end of apartheid, and then with his move to Australia, Coetzee was able to realize the goal he had spoken of to David Attwell in 1991 when discussing his Jerusalem Prize speech, the goal of being able to be closer to Kundera and Cervantes, whose "deep social and historical responsibility" could be expressed through "the penetration with which, in their different ways and to their different degrees, they reflect on the nature and crisis of fiction, or fictionalizing, in their respective ages." To be able to address the crisis of fiction and fictionalizing without feeling socially and historically irresponsible, Coetzee needed first to escape the system that made him a colonizer and to leave the country where "truth [...] overwhelms and swamps every act of the imagination." Before he could feel comfortable moving the crisis of fictionality to the forefront of his writing, Coetzee had to get through the social crisis that was life in the apartheid state.

FROM SOCIAL CRISIS TO THE CRISIS OF FICTIONALITY

The first six chapters (or "lessons") of *Elizabeth Costello* began as lectures Coetzee delivered between 1996 and 2002 (Attridge, *Ethics* 192-195), a period that corresponds to the final years of Nelson Mandela's tenure as South Africa's first democratically elected president through the first few years of Thabo Mbeki's presidency. In the situations of their original presentations, these texts had a similar initial effect as the one I am ascribing to *Summertime*: the

audiences expected nonfictional lectures and instead found themselves listening to J.M. Coetzee read about a fictional woman, Elizabeth Costello, giving lectures and having conversations. This situation was highlighted when two of the lectures were published as *The Lives of Animals* in 1999; *Publisher's Weekly* began their review by saying, "The audience of the 1997-98 Tanner Lectures at Princeton probably expected South African novelist Coetzee to deliver a pair of formal essays similar to those on censorship he presented in *Giving Offence*. Instead, he gave his listeners fiction[...]."⁸⁶ The reader of *The Lives of Animals* can't help but wonder how much of the clearly fictional narrative is to be taken as expressing Coetzee's own opinions — is Elizabeth Costello, as some reviewers wondered or suspected, just his mouthpiece, a disingenuous tool he uses to distance himself from having to take responsibility for controversial opinions? In his own response at the Tanner Lectures and reprinted in the book, Peter Singer wrote a dialogue between a representation of himself and his daughter in which the Peter Singer character says, "It's a marvelous device, really. Costello can blithely criticize the use of reason, or the need to have any clear principles or proscriptions, without Coetzee really committing himself to these claims" (*Lives of Animals* 91). Singer's own dialogue shows that form does not have to allow the radical unsettling that Coetzee's does: Singer's dialogue is a conversation without much tension in which the reader has no reason to believe that anything the Singer character says is not what

⁸⁶ The many complexities *The Lives of Animals* offered its initial readers were well summed up by Harold Fromm shortly after publication: "Presented as the Tanner Lectures at Princeton in 1997-8 shortly before the brouhaha resulting from Princeton's appointment of Peter Singer, author of *Animal Liberation*, to its philosophy department, the presentation is a veritable Postmodern hall of mirrors: a fiction writer, J.M. Coetzee, invited to speak philosophically on an ethical problem, instead gives two lectures that are in fact short stories about a fiction writer, Elizabeth Costello, who is expected to talk about literature but who instead gives two lectures on the philosophic subject of animal rights. The characters, locale, and venue are given slightly askew versions of the names of actually existing professors and places, while the narrative that surrounds the fictional lectures is highly critical of both Costello herself and the things she has to say. As if this weren't dizzying enough, the book version is laced with authentic scholarly footnotes by Coetzee documenting his fictional statements about lives and rights and it concludes with brief commentaries by four preeminent thinkers in literature, philosophy, religion, and anthropology, all packed into 122 supercharged pages" (339).

flesh-and-blood Peter Singer would write in an essay (and, indeed, has). Singer's text offers no crisis of genre or fictionality: it's a light philosophical dialogue that does nothing except what we expect a light philosophical dialogue to do; its fictionality sits at exactly the rhetorical distance we would expect if we'd ever read even just a Wikipedia page about Plato.

There is, though, a clear crisis of fictionality in *The Lives of Animals* and in the other story-as-lecture situations Coetzee created. It is a crisis instigated by the presence of fictionality within the situation and paratexts, a presence announced by the third-person point of view, the present tense, and the lack of a commenting and authoritative narrator. These features are not exclusive to fiction — they are common in many narrative essays and works of journalism, though essays usually include some sort of commenting narrator and journalism is rarely in the present tense — and, indeed, they are features of *Boyhood* and *Youth*, both of which are at least as much memoirs as they are novels. In the situation of public lectures, however, and on pages of what is supposed to be a collection of lectures (with footnotes!), these features stand out and draw attention to themselves.

Whether we believe we are hearing/reading fiction or some sort of narrative nonfiction, the point of view, tense, and lack of unifying, authoritative commentary invites us to reflect on what the presence of fiction in nonfiction achieves, and what narrative may be able to accomplish that more straightforward and polemical essaying cannot. When these texts became part of *Elizabeth Costello*, the event of the Tanner lectures was not emphasized, the footnotes were removed, the texts were no longer surrounded by other writers' critical essays in response, and the book was packaged as fiction, making readers' expectations different from what they were for either the lecture events or the book *The Lives of Animals*. The crisis of fictionality becomes reversed. Instead of a text that frustrates the desire for a straightforward lecture or

essay, Coetzee now offered a text that frustrates the desire for a straightforward work of fiction. The additional chapters beyond those from *The Lives of Animals* complicated the reader's understanding of the character of Elizabeth Costello, creating, in Dominic Head's words, "a more pronounced inconsistency in the central character [that] suits the development of Coetzee's concerns" ("A Belief" 109). The development of his concerns was toward new explorations of fictionality and what Jane Poyner, following Coetzee's lead, calls "the pact of genre". Poyner states that "*Lives, Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary* ask, what is the cost of truth to the genres of the public lecture and opinion piece? Or, what are the necessary conditions for truth to be spoken?" (171). It is important to note that though the questions Poyner reads the texts as raising may be valid ones, their priority via the individual texts is quite different. *Lives of Animals* indeed places questions of truth and public writing (and public thinking) at the forefront, but *Elizabeth Costello* begins to subsume and complicate them toward other concerns, and *Diary of a Bad Year* highlights the desire and intention to share opinions publicly, but does so with no depiction whatsoever of the presentation and reception of opinions beyond the novel's three characters. In showing the process of creating, expressing, and distributing opinions, *Diary of a Bad Year* precedes *Elizabeth Costello*, and *Summertime* serves as a kind of coda. *Diary* dramatizes the desire to be and/or to encounter a public intellectual; *Elizabeth Costello* often dramatizes the public intellectual on public stages, allowing an exploration of the consequent implications and problems; in *Summertime*, we see the ripples of a public life after that life has ended.

It seems to me that the movement Poyner describes shows not that *The Lives of Animals* is a text in congruence with Coetzee's later concerns, but rather is, like *Boyhood* and *Disgrace*, a last reckoning with the situation of the writer who lives amidst social crisis, while *Elizabeth Costello*, *Youth*, *Diary of a Bad Year*, and *Summertime* all seek to help the writer and reader

think about life in some sort of *after*. *Youth* is in many ways the text caught most powerfully in between the *now* of social crisis and whatever lies beyond it: its topic is a first escape from the scene of crisis. Though it doesn't reach beyond Coetzee's time in England, and thus does not describe the events leading to Coetzee's return to South Africa, *Youth* nonetheless conveys a strong sense that the exile the Coetzee figure in the book finds is dismal and unsatisfying, and it ends with the character's reflection on what he assumes will be the death of his fellow computer programmer, Gunapathy, who eats terribly ("despite his M.Sc. in computer science he doesn't know about vitamins and minerals and amino acids"), while he himself is "locked into an attenuating endgame, playing himself, with each move, further into a corner and into defeat." The book ends with a vision of the two exiles dead: "When they have fetched Ganapathy they might as well come and fetch him too" (*Scenes* 284). The word *fetch* twice in the final sentence links the idea of death with the idea of return, for though the image the text sets up in the sentence before it is one of police and medics taking a corpse out of a flat on a stretcher, *to fetch* does not simply mean "to bring out" but "to bring back".

If we consider *Elizabeth Costello*, *Diary of a Bad Year*, and *Summertime* as together exploring a crisis of fictionality via a pedagogy that makes the crisis one for the reader (in a way that separates those texts' strategies from the concerns and pedagogies of *Boyhood*, *The Lives of Animals*, and *Disgrace*), then we must pay some attention to how each book concludes, because it is at the moment of conclusion that the text most obviously leaves readers to go forth into the world beyond the text and to contend with the crisis on their own. *Summertime* ends with an "undated fragment" written by the now-deceased John Coetzee, a fragment written in the style of *Boyhood* and *Youth*, that begins with a return to the Karoo of *Boyhood*, then ends with John facing what he perceives as a choice: Whether to take care of his ailing father or to abandon him:

It used to be that he, John, had too little employment. Now that is about to change. Now he will have as much employment as he can handle, as much and more. He is going to have to abandon some of his personal projects and be a nurse. Alternatively, if he will not be a nurse, he must announce to his father: *I cannot face the prospect of ministering to you day and night. I am going to abandon you. Goodbye.* One or the other: there is no third way. (484)

This was not, in fact, a choice Coetzee himself faced. As Kannemeyer points out, “This is part of the fiction that *Summertime* interweaves with fact, because [Coetzee’s parents] died in the 1980s, while in the 1970s John was married with children. Jack [Coetzee’s father] did not at any stage live with John’s family” (440). *Summertime* ends with a fiction, and it ends with a stark choice between losing yourself in caring for someone who is ailing and preserving something of yourself by abandoning a parent, a person who, whatever you may feel about them, is intimately part of your creation, development, and life.

Elizabeth Costello ends with the beguiling “Postscript” that is the letter from “Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon”, the final paragraph of which ends as a plea to “you, who are known above all men to select your words and set them in place and build your judgements as a mason builds a wall with bricks”, a description of Bacon that in some ways fits with reviewers’ and critics’ descriptions of Coetzee’s prose. “Drowning,” Lady Chandos says, “we write out of our separate fates. Save us.” This plea to a writer and public intellectual to *save us* rhymes with the obligation that John in *Summertime* seems to feel from his father, but it comes from the other direction: this is not Francis Bacon considering whether to devote his life to himself or to

someone else, but rather someone else pleading for consideration, sympathy, and help. The crises the characters face are quite different — in *Summertime*, it is a crisis of body and age, utterly concrete and familiar; in *Elizabeth Costello*, it is a crisis of language and philosophy, abstract and difficult to understand — but the texts similarly end by opening space to imagine the value, duties, and limitations of caring; such opening is consistent with the transition in Coetzee’s work that María J. López identifies as beginning with *Age of Iron*, a transition that begins a consistent concern with ideas of caring, charity, and *caritas* (López 276).

The final paragraph of *Elizabeth Costello* is not quite the end of the book, because there is the signature (“Your obedient servant/ Elizabeth C.”) and a date: “This 11 September, AD 1603” (230). 11 September is among the most infamous dates of modern times, but even before the terrorist attack of 2001 it was a tragic date in contemporary history, being the day when Salvador Allende died in Chile’s 1973 coup d’état, a coup supported by the CIA, and which led to the murderous dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. (Isabel Allende, Salvador Allende’s first cousin once removed, would go on to be an internationally bestselling novelist.) 1603 was the year of another Elizabeth’s death, Queen Elizabeth I (who signed official documents *Elizabeth R.*, as does the current Queen Elizabeth). If we accept these dates as meaningful and not random, we might say that *Elizabeth Costello* ends with a plea for help in a crisis of language and then with allusions to death: mass, highly political death, and then the personal death of a highly public person, a monarch with a successor in title and name alive (and elderly) when *Elizabeth Costello* was written and published.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ The “Strong Opinions” section of *Diary of a Bad Year* is also dated: “12 September 2005 — 31 May 2006”. Not only is 12 September one day after 11 September, but it was also the day of Steve Biko’s death in 1977, a day we know from Kannemeyer and Attwell was important to Coetzee. 31 May is less obvious to most U.S. readers than anything related to 11 September, but it was the date of the end of the second Boer War in 1902, the date of the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, and the date the Union of South Africa became the Republic of South Africa in 1961.

Diary of a Bad Year continues to develop ideas of caring and responsibility up to its last pages, but its conclusion makes a new move in Coetzee's novels: instead of ending only with the death or abjection of the protagonist, in *Diary of a Bad Year*, the protagonist is supplanted. Because of its tripartite structure, the novel's final page concludes three sections. The top, JC's "Second Diary" ends with a paragraph about Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky as writers who clearly set "with such indisputable certainty the standards toward which any serious novelist must toil" and who, through their models, allow a writer to become "a better artist: and by better I do not mean more skillful but ethically better. They annihilate one's impurer pretensions; they clear one's eyesight; they fortify one's arm." (Ever the formalist, Coetzee ends the first of his three sections with a sentence of three parts. The final sentence of the third section will also end with a trio.)

The second section is Anya's letter to JC, though presented to us via his own diary, which is what the center section has been up to page 191, when Anya's letter began. "I know you get a lot of fan mail from admirers which you chuck away," Anya writes, "but I am hoping this got through to you." (*Got through to you*, of course, is an ambiguous phrase. Might Anya's letter get through to him like Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, might it help annihilate some of JC's impurer pretensions, clear his eyesight, and fortify his arm? That question is up to the reader to answer. Has the letter gotten through to us?) Anya not only signs her name, but adds a parenthesis: "(admirer too)".

The third section is Anya's own diary, one JC does not read. If this final page is read from top to bottom, Anya's diary is the last and the end of the book. It is a paragraph in which she imagines his death, and she imagines herself doing exactly what John in *Summertime* considered a burdensome obligation, one he considered fleeing from: Anya will "hold his hand tight and give him a kiss on the brow, a proper kiss, just to remind him of what he is leaving

behind. Good night, Señor C, I will whisper in his ear: sweet dreams, and flights of angels, and all the rest” (227).

This final page of *Diary of a Bad Year* moves us from the public and literary-historical into the private, personal, and intimate. It also moves the book from the voice of the old white male author to the voice of the younger Latina, the woman who writes (her own diary and letters, at least) but who is not a public figure. (With an allusion, it also subsumes another white male patriarch: Shakespeare, via Anya’s offhand reference to Horatio’s words at Hamlet’s death.) Anya’s voice doesn’t simply exist in its own diary, which often is also given over to her representations of speech by JC and Alan, but it infiltrates the other sections, too. In his diary, JC tells us about the effect of Anya’s questions and comments on the essays he is writing. In a diegetical sense, in some ways the top section texts are also touched by Anya, as she is their typist. Then, for the last 36 pages of the book, Anya’s own writing takes over the middle section.

In all of these books’ endings, we have a diminishment of a white male figure of at least some public stature (John in *Summertime*, who is a diminishment of J.M. Coetzee and a character who ends in a sad, even pitiful dilemma; Francis Bacon in *Elizabeth Costello*, who, the dates after the signature suggest, can provide no help to Elizabeth C.; and JC, whose voice is displaced even in his own diary). The diminishment of the prominent white male and the suggestion of his uselessness links these endings to that of *Disgrace*. Only *Diary of a Bad Year* has an ending that could be read as hopeful, but these three books’ conclusions are nonetheless different from what came before and also united with each other. The difference that unites these texts and separates them from *Disgrace* (as well as *The Lives of Animals*) is that each of these three works somehow unsettles assumptions of fiction and nonfiction (as *Disgrace* does not) while resolving that crisis by returning the reader to fiction at the end (as *The Lives of Animals* does not). As much as the

text of *Elizabeth Costello* keeps pushing away from fictionality, the final lesson is the most openly and explicitly fictional, while the “Postscript” breaks from the narrative to offer a fictional epistle (to a nonfictional person) that stages a call for help against the metaphorical and allegorical properties of language and storytelling. Anya, a fictional character, writes the last words of *Diary of a Bad Year*. The situation of John and his father at the end of *Summertime* is completely imaginary. For all the differences in the ways that they push toward the limits of fiction, then, each book ends up, in its own way and to different degrees, back at fiction and as fiction.

In an interview conducted by Jane Poyner and published in 2009, Coetzee said “It is hard for fiction to be good fiction while it is in the service of something else” (21). The question from Poyner that led to the response was, “Does fiction have an important part to play in maintaining a critical opposition?” (part of a longer question about the role of the writer in relation to the post-apartheid African National Congress), and so Coetzee’s “something else” in this instance means a specific political position. However, fiction’s inherent — definitive — distance from fact makes it, in a broad sense, always in service to *something else*. While Samuel Delany maintains that science fiction makes the reader compare the world of the story to the world as the reader knows it, this is the situation of all fiction, and perhaps the situation of any text that requires the reader to exercise imagination, because imagination begins from personal experience and knowledge. (From a post-structuralist point of view, one very familiar to both Delany and Coetzee, we would have to say that this is inherent to language and the play of *différance* and deferral.) The reader of a novel set in a familiar place will compare the writer’s description to the reader’s experience; the reader of a novel set in a place unfamiliar to that reader will be likely to compare what is unfamiliar to something familiar. The rhetorical mode of fiction always makes

metaphor possible, because readers may at any moment compare their experience of the text with their experience of the world, not only in the veridical way of nonfiction and familiar realism (“Does this account of the world match my experience of the world?”), but, with fiction, in a way that could broadly be called allegorical (“What within this imaginary description of a world compares with or stands for something real in the world itself?”). In that sense, fiction is always in danger of being read allegorically, and the possibility and desire for allegory is a possibility and desire that Coetzee often teases from his readers, always to some extent frustrating and complicating it via destabilized meaning and paradox.⁸⁸

Social crisis increases the desire among writers and readers to narrow the rhetorical distance that constitutes fiction. Such a desire often finds expression not only via outright didacticism but also through a limiting of the potential allegorical meanings of the fictional text, rendering proper and acceptable only readings that see a one-to-one symbolic relationship between the figures in the text and the figures of the world outside the text. (That desire is vividly demonstrated by Nadine Gordimer in her famous review of *Life and Times of Michael K* for the *New York Review of Books* in 1984.) Dominic Head reads the ending of the last lesson in *Elizabeth Costello*, “At the Gate”, as dramatizing the paradox that “the writer cannot escape the imposition of metaphorical levels on his or her expression, and this may produce a nightmarish sense of being misunderstood (as in Costello’s parodically Kafkaesque experience ‘at the gate’). In this sense, the frustration of Costello is a way for Coetzee to explore and express the limits of fiction and of the writer’s authority” (“A Belief” 115). Head is right to see *Elizabeth Costello* by

⁸⁸ The question of Coetzee and allegory is one of the most fraught in Coetzee studies, particularly since Derek Attridge’s *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, where the second chapter is titled “Against Allegory”. Dominic Head’s “A Belief in Frogs: J.M. Coetzee’s Enduring Faith in Fiction” is a thoughtful counter to Attridge’s view. See also “Coetzee and Late Style: Exile within the Form” by Julian Murphet and “Allegories of the Bioethical: Reading J.M. Coetzee’s *Diary of a Bad Year*” by Stuart J. Murray.

the end enacting, and not merely describing, such paradoxes of language and metaphor, but what needs to be added to this insight is an awareness of the rhetoric of fiction.

To the extent that fiction may seem to be in service to something else, and to the extent that it opens up possibilities for polyvalent allegory, it remains “good fiction” not only in the discourse of Modernism, but more generally in western traditions of storytelling since Flaubert.⁸⁹ *Good fiction* means *not propaganda*, because propaganda is a type of nonfictional rhetoric that not only is interpreted to be close to a perceived reality, but which also disdains any sort of ambiguity in favor of a call to action. Elizabeth Costello’s lectures may seem to verge on propaganda at times, but *Elizabeth Costello* the book abjures propaganda in favor of the multiplicities offered by the rhetoric of fiction.

THE DEATH OF THE AUTHORITY: *DIARY OF A BAD YEAR*

Given the obscurities and ambiguities common to Modernist works, it seems safe to propose that Modernist aesthetics valorizes destabilizing texts. Even if, for instance, a given novel is not as difficult to parse as *Finnegans Wake*, in scorning the most familiar established conventions of narrative the given novel will still force readers who normally rely on such conventions to reflect on how to make sense of what they read. Thus questions of interpretation become unavoidable during reading, making the reading process, if not necessarily unstable, at least destabilized. This is a familiar experience for readers of Coetzee, but though his oeuvre is

⁸⁹ See Part 1 of Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction* for a lively exploration of this history. For a more recent approach, see Mazzoni, *Theory of the Novel* chapters 5 and 6. In *Narralogues*, Ronald Sukenick offers an interesting alternative, seeing the same difference as beginning with Henry Fielding, who had a background in the theatre that influenced his assumptions about fiction, and with Laurence Sterne, whose background was the pulpit, and who, Sukenick says, “in my perspective was closer to the essential of fiction with a self-conscious use of language and a feeling for it as persuasion, an ironic view of representation and an explicit use of rhetoric, none of which prevented him from constructing effective dramatic scenes” (2). Sukenick’s proposed lineage fits well with Mazzoni’s comments on the theatrical model of the novel, but Mazzoni traces it to Walter Scott (239-250).

filled with destabilizing texts, *Diary of a Bad Year* is the most destabilized. The first page presents four paragraphs from an essay (“On the Origins of the State”), then a horizontal line and one paragraph of first-person narrative. With the sixth chapter, the page breaks into three sections, adding Anya’s first-person narrative beneath JC’s. Until the middle of the tenth chapter, each section is syntactically complete, but on page 42, Anya’s section ends mid-sentence, forcing the reader into a choice: whether to continue reading Anya’s narrative on the bottom of the next page or to move to the top and continue with the essay “On National Shame”. The form requires the reader to be active, to make choices, to negotiate changing points of view and changing rhetorics. By placing text that seems unambiguously essayistic above text presented as characters’ diaries, the book sets the rhetorics of fiction and nonfiction beside each other, and in doing so, undercuts any block of text’s straightforward existence as rhetoric. The essay cannot remain only an essay, the fiction only a fiction. This is important not only because it is further evidence of Coetzee pressing against the limits of fiction, but also because one of the central concerns of *Diary of a Bad Year* is the value and effect of polemic and public speech. If the Modernist aesthetic is to abjure polemic in fiction, there is no reason that a Modernist essay should not be able to speak directly and forcefully to socio-political concerns (or anything else), and many aesthetics, Modernist or not, consider nonfiction a more efficient mode with which to directly address (and potentially affect) public life. Certainly, as we’ve seen, Woolf didn’t shy away from polemic in her nonfiction. But *Diary of a Bad Year* is set up in such a way that the reader must question the usefulness and ethics of polemic even in nonfiction, and hence must cast a skeptical eye on both the impulse to intervene directly in public and the effect of such interventions.

Much writing on *Diary of a Bad Year*, particularly the reviews on publication, raises the question of whether JC's "Strong Opinions" are J.M. Coetzee's own opinions. Even as skilled a reader as Peter Brooks can't keep himself from reading what is ascribed to JC as being the unfiltered ideas of J.M. Coetzee: he begins an essay on "The Ethics of Reading" for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* by discussing "Coetzee's fictional persona", but by the end describes one of the "Strong Opinions" essays as "Coetzee's bitter condemnation of our [that is, teachers of literature] role in the world", without once noting that the essayistic passages only take up part of the pages and thus are not given to readers as straightforward, unmediated excursions. Coetzee, though, tempts us toward such a reading. He could have made the character of JC distinctly different from himself — not just given him a different age (as he does), but given him initials that don't fit his own, a background that would not have any echo of his, and a writerly history that does not include the names of books Coetzee himself wrote. Instead, Coetzee chose to make some alignment with JC, a South African writer who has moved to Australia, and among whose works are a book on censorship that sounds awfully like Coetzee's *Giving Offense* and, most blatantly, a novel titled *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Part of the project of *Diary of a Bad Year*, then, is to seduce us toward aligning JC and J.M. Coetzee and perceiving the "Strong Opinions" as those of Coetzee himself.

Jan Wilm points to Coetzee's frequent "technique of increasing the ambiguous force of a text", a technique that "is directly geared at the reader, but it is also geared at making the reader reflect on reading" (123). For a reader who stops and reflects on the desire to equate Coetzee and JC, new understandings become possible. One might wonder, for instance, why it matters and how it changes the text to assume that the opinions are those of the in-the-flesh writer J.M. Coetzee rather than a character imagined by that in-the-flesh writer. That question leads the

reader toward a choice of rhetorics. To read the “Strong Opinions” and the later “Soft Opinions” (as Anya dubs them [193]) as the opinions of J.M. Coetzee is to read them via the rhetoric of nonfiction; to read them as the opinions of a fictional character is to read them via the rhetoric of fiction. The question that naturally follows is: What difference does such a change of rhetorics make?

Though they might disagree about the extent, both post-structuralist and reader-response critics would agree that the effect of rhetorical differences depends on how the reader makes sense of the rhetoric and the differences. *Diary of a Bad Year* goes beyond this basic insight, however, to provide — indeed, to make unavoidable — a level of readerly freedom of choice previously unavailable in Coetzee’s texts, no matter how much those texts otherwise place questions of interpretation at the forefront of the reading experience or otherwise unsettle writer-to-reader communication. As Barbara Dancygier writes, “every novel requires assembly in the reader’s mind — no story is ever told in its entirety and crucial information is often withheld till the last minute or left unsaid. In *Diary*, the process of this ‘narrative construction’ is explicitly acknowledged and revealed. Here, as elsewhere, the reader is charged with ‘putting it all together’, but it is done explicitly” (248). Alexandra Effe says that with *Diary of a Bad Year*, “the reader is made aware of their participatory role in reading as they have actively to decide on the order of reading by turning the pages in one direction or the other, thereby choosing which voice to prioritize, which to skip or to re-read” (139). Peter McDonald’s experience of reading the novel is likely a common one: “To read *Diary* for the first time is, if my own experience is anything to go by, to feel torn between the conventional novelistic desire to read for the plot, as it were, chasing forward to see how things unfold for either JC or Anya, and the traditional essayistic impulse to reflect on JC’s provocative opinions” (494).

What such a reading experience achieves is not only to dramatize certain ideas and concepts within the text itself, but to place the reader into a position of having to choose between different possibilities. The range of possibilities opened by the material that comprises *Diary of a Bad Year* nudges the reader toward a field of ethical choices and an awareness of the possibility of ersatz ethics that Jonathan Lear identifies (69). Like familiar literary forms, ersatz ethics allow conventional thinking, allow the reader/thinker to avoid examining the status quo structures that make conventions possible. Such conventions allow us to think of ourselves as holding upstanding, progressive thoughts when in fact we are filling a template, reciting the lines for the role of ethical thinker without, in fact, doing any meaningful ethical thinking at all.

To combat such ersatz thinking, Coetzee could have used a technique he used previously, one common to many novels: presenting a character that readers must assess for themselves. JC could, in other words, have been another version of David Lurie in *Disgrace*, and readers could have decided to what extent they found his beliefs and actions to be ethical. Or, in another approach, a satirist would have created situations in JC's life that showed him capable of writing liberal-minded essays while behaving in his own life in ways more congruent with what he denounces than what he praises, thus highlighting the hypocrisy, for instance, of a complacent liberal class. (Coetzee's fiction has always been more complex than this.) Though at first *Diary of a Bad Year* may seem to approach satire, it uses a fundamentally different technique. As Lear notes, Coetzee faced a challenge if he wanted to explore ethical thinking: the challenge of his own authority. "The aim of the style," Lear says, "is not for Coetzee to show off—to demonstrate that he, unlike the melancholy, infirm, single-voiced JC, can do postmodern hip. Rather, it is an attempt to defeat the reader's desire to defer to the 'moral authority,' the 'novelist' J. M. Coetzee" (71). In one way or another, all of Coetzee's fiction is anti-authoritarian in this

this sense; it's one of the reasons many readers find his work vexing. However, in whatever ways Coetzee's previous novels undermined the singular authority of the text, *Diary of a Bad Year* is the first to place the authority of Coetzee's own byline into question (*Summertime* will do this as well, differently). While, as we have seen, some readers were tempted to read Elizabeth Costello's opinions as J.M. Coetzee's own, nonetheless, Elizabeth Costello was undeniably a character without any direct equivalence to Coetzee himself. The same cannot be said of JC. The nonequivalence of Costello and Coetzee allows the reader a way out if they want one: If, for whatever reason, I do not want to think that J.M. Coetzee believes what Elizabeth Costello believes, I have plenty of ways to preserve Coetzee as an authority preferable to Costello. Because novelists choose the textual structure and content of their books, and those books are given a byline as a sign of the shaping authority, no novel whose author is known can completely disavow the novelist's authority, but, as Lear demonstrates at length, *Diary of a Bad Year* does whatever it can to frustrate the reader who seeks an author-function to communicate an ethical meaning or message. Additionally, it puts the very idea of writer-as-authority at the heart of its concerns with one of the starkest differences between JC and Coetzee himself, which Ana Falcato identifies: "As tempting as it may be for readers to conflate JC and John Coetzee, there is something that sets the two apart unmistakably. JC is willing to publish his strong opinions on contemporary social issues precisely as they stand: parched theoretical fruits from a stage of life of decreasing vitality. John Coetzee is not willing to do so" (257).

Here, then, we have one way that Coetzee approaches the problem of didacticism and Modernist aesthetics of artistic autonomy: he wraps didactic material within a novelistic context that doesn't simply complicate the content of that didactic material or submit it to critique (as in *Elizabeth Costello*), but that makes both the idea and form of didacticism central to the novel's

concerns. The differences between the two diaries are important, too, as it is the soft opinions of the Second Diary that seem most effective to readers, critics, and the characters themselves. The soft opinions are more personal and idiosyncratic, less hieratic, less aimed at some abstract, dispassionate realm of universal laws.⁹⁰ The influence and growing prominence of Anya through the Second Diary seems quite fitting from a common feminist standpoint regarding how opinion is valued — what Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* critiqued as “masculine values” that inevitably affect what is seen as authoritative and what is not (*Room* 72-73). Even the terminology is familiar to feminist analysis: for instance, the traditional association of men with *strong* and the withering phallic associations of *soft* opinions. Though *Diary* includes just such a gender critique within its implications, its destabilizing of authority is more general rather than specifically feminist, because the book does not offer the reader any ultimate judgment on the various voices and opinions. Anya may be the most sympathetic character and Alan the least, but such sympathies don't lead to a rubric that would help us evaluate the opinions that fill the top sections of the pages. Unlike *Elizabeth Costello*, most of what is discussed in the essays is not discussed by the characters directly, so the opinions are simply there on the page, our perception of them affected, certainly, by how we feel about JC (and, depending on how we perceive the fiction's distance, how we feel about J.M. Coetzee), but the essays take up such a large part of the book that it is difficult to separate how we feel about JC from how we feel about the essays, as much of our perception of JC is a perception of his voice and opinions atop all of the pages. There are a few pages without diary sections, but none without JC's essays, and so every reader must contend with the dominating authority that the opinions attempt to exert. However,

⁹⁰ Considering Coetzee's criticisms of Nabokov, discussed later, this may suggest one reason why he chose Nabokov's own title of *Strong Opinions* for JC's writings.

everything about the book (texts and paratexts) serves to confirm an insight Fred Moten stated in an interview: “the authority that we tend to want to invest in authorship is always-already broken and disrupted and incomplete.”

Diary of a Bad Year stages a crisis of authority that is also an opportunity for pedagogy, one Barbara Johnson identified in *A World of Difference* as “the depersonalization of deconstruction and the repersonalization of feminism” (44). This is not to say that JC’s opinions are models of deconstructive reading; they are not, and for all of his post-structuralist moves, Coetzee himself has never shown a commitment to deconstruction in the way that, for instance, Samuel Delany has. What we see with *Diary of a Bad Year* is an impulse toward deconstruction, an impulse that serves as one tool within the book’s pedagogy, as the utopian impulse in *The Years* served Woolf’s pedagogy there. The writings and, to a greater extent, the figure of Paul de Man offer one way to reconcile some of the difficulties *Diary of a Bad Year* offers. From citations of de Man in “Confession and Double Thought” (in *Doubling the Point*), we know that Coetzee was familiar with *Allegories of Reading*, and in de Man’s formulation of deconstruction we find ideas that become (at least partly) literalized by the structure of *Diary of a Bad Year*. For instance, after a discussion of a passage from Proust, de Man writes:

The reading is not “our” reading, since it uses only the linguistic elements provided by the text itself; the distinction between author and reader is one of the false distinctions that the reading makes evident. The deconstruction is not something we have added to the text but it constituted the text in the first place. A literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode, and by reading the text as we did we were only trying to come closer to being as rigorous a reader as the author had to be in order to

write the sentence in the first place. Poetic writing is the most advanced and refined mode of deconstruction; it may differ from critical or discursive writing in the economy of its articulation, but not in kind. (17)⁹¹

Johnson includes part of this quotation in an essay on “Teaching Deconstructively”, where she positions deconstructive reading as a technique to help students move toward an active mode of reading: deconstructive interpretation “enables students to respond to what is there before them on the page, it can teach them how to work out the logic of a reading on their own rather than passively deferring to the authority of superior learning” (*Reader* 348). Where in *A World of Difference* Johnson positions deconstruction (or at least its general public perception) as impersonal and thus the converse of personal-is-political feminism, in “Teaching Deconstructively” (first published in 1985) she sets deconstruction in opposition to “humanism”, so that “deconstruction is a reading strategy that carefully follows both the meanings and the suspensions and displacements of meaning in a text, while humanism is a strategy to stop reading when the text stops saying what it ought to have said” (*Reader* 347). That strategy to stop reading when the text doesn’t say what, in the reader’s assumption, it ought to have said brings us back to propaganda: in Johnson’s formulation, humanism desires texts to be Spivak’s Narcissus “waiting to see his own powerful image in the eyes of the other”, perhaps even to be texts that function primarily as propaganda, while deconstruction allows texts to escape Narcissus and to be something other than propaganda.

⁹¹ The chapter this passage appears in was first published as “Semiology and Rhetoric” in *Diacritics* (vol. 3, no. 3, 1973, pp. 27–33), which Coetzee cites in his essay on passives in *Doubling the Point* (152, 408).

Johnson concludes her essay with a deconstruction of the binary she has proposed, claiming that

no matter how rigorously a deconstructor might follow the letter of the text, the text will end up showing the reading process as a resistance to the letter. The deconstructor thus comes face to face with her own humanism. This is small comfort, of course, since the text has shown humanism to consist in the blindness of self-projection. But then, in the final analysis, it is perhaps precisely as an apprenticeship in the repeated and inescapable oscillation between humanism and deconstruction that literature works its most rigorous and inexhaustible seductions. (355-356)

Such an oscillation is at the heart of Coetzee's project in *Diary of a Bad Year* and, in many ways, throughout his other novels. In an interview in 2000, Coetzee said of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, "Sometimes the people who believe in and act in terms of humane values get used, and perhaps they ought to be a little more aware." Writing fiction, he says, is for him a way to explore ideas of humane values and to raise questions for the reader not only of how to be "a little more aware", but also of what such values can achieve. "I'm writing these books to pose the question of what good humane values are. And to pose that question without having the answer signalled from the beginning — namely, that humane values are everything or humane values are nothing. We cannot only believe in humane values quite sincerely; we must also act in terms of humane values. The question is, is that going to be enough?" (Wachtel 228). Humane values are not enough, rationality and argument are not enough, abstracted ideas are not enough. Is there an "enough"? Coetzee has no answer to that question — or, at least, no positive answer; one might

easily imagine him answering, “No” — but it is the posing of the question that is necessary, even if it is unanswerable.

Like the Magistrate, JC is “a man of humane values”. Those values are expressed through his essays, which in their form as *Strong Opinions* are impersonal and seeking a kind of universal value that the lower parts of the pages undercut not through argument, which is a minor part of the diary entries, but through a presentation of context, thus creating a new (and more feminist) way of deconstructing a text, a way of requiring the reader to see the text, as de Man says, simultaneously asserting and denying “the authority of its own rhetorical mode”. The simultaneous assertion and denial of authority is the primary effect of *Diary of a Bad Year’s* rhetoric: authority of opinion, authority of social position, authority of genre, authority of language.

The deconstructive force within the form of *Diary of a Bad Year* works to add resistance to all of its textual moves, but it does so while also insisting on an awareness of the contexts that make writing and reading possible, what Lear calls the book’s *spectacle of embedding*: “That is, we see how the moral stances that are officially to be presented in the book form are embedded in the fantasies, happenings, musings, and struggles of the author's day-to-day life. It is that from which a normal book of moral essays would be cut off. I suggest that this imaginary embedding is meant to draw along parts of the reader's soul that would not be led by argument alone” (75). Along with Stuart J. Murray, I am not convinced by “Lear’s claim that *Diary’s* sections are designed to reflect the three different parts of the Platonic soul (one could just as easily propose psychoanalytic or semiotic topographies)” (5), but Lear nonetheless identifies significant ways the text makes an appeal beyond straightforward argument and shows the limits of argument divorced from context. Johnson reaches a similar conclusion when discussing Paul de Man,

deconstruction, and feminism: “While de Man’s writing is haunted by the return of personification, feminist writing is haunted by the return of abstraction. The challenge facing both approaches is to recognize these ghosts not as external enemies but as the uncannily familiar strangers that make their own knowledge both possible and problematic” (*World of Difference* 46).

Those ghosts haunt *Diary of a Bad Year*, a book that recognizes and dramatizes just how much the disavowal of authority is not a straightforward task. Of de Man, Johnson writes: “Testimonials repeatedly assert that it was precisely his way of denying personal authority that engendered the unique power of his personal authority” (*World of Difference* 45). This is not necessarily the case for JC, but it is very much a bind J.M. Coetzee was in at the time he wrote *Diary of a Bad Year* — he was not simply an eminent writer and academic, but also the first person to win a second Booker Prize, an internationally bestselling writer, a Nobel laureate. Discussing Solzhenitsyn in *Giving Offense*, Coetzee stated that when he won the Nobel, Solzhenitsyn acquired “a degree of invulnerability” (137). Much of Coetzee’s writing and public speaking from the beginning of his career onward demonstrates attempts to question the invulnerable authority of the author figure, but such attempts enter the foreground with *Elizabeth Costello*, *Slow Man*, *Diary of a Bad Year*, and *Summertime*. The critical and commercial success of *Disgrace* and then the award of the Nobel Prize added an inescapable, unrenounceable weight to the byline *J.M. Coetzee*. No matter how difficult it may have been before for Coetzee to deny or lessen his personal authority — to create vulnerability — after *Disgrace* it became nearly impossible.

As Johnson points out, there is a gender element to the inability to disavow authority, for she notes that “de Man’s discourse of self-resistance and uncertainty has achieved such authority

and visibility, while the self-resistance and uncertainty of *women* has been part of what has insured their lack of authority and their invisibility.” (A simple thought experiment is worthwhile here: Would Nadine Gordimer or Toni Morrison have won the Nobel Prize if they expressed as much discomfort with making authoritative statements and issuing opinions as Coetzee did? Certainly, patriarchy punishes women for speaking out more than men, but this does not mean that patriarchy rewards self-resistance and uncertainty in women, even as it may desire those traits. White, heterosexual men’s silence is readable as wise and enigmatic; women’s silence stays silent.) For people already in a position outside of power, disavowal of authority only confirms the dominant discourse and strengthens forces of erasure. “It would seem,” Johnson writes, “that one has to be positioned in the place of power in order for one’s self-resistance to be valued. Self-resistance, indeed, may be one of the few viable postures remaining for the white male establishment” (*World of Difference* 45). With *Diary of a Bad Year*, it appears that Coetzee came to appreciate that, like humane values, self-resistance by the white male may be necessary, but it also may not be sufficient. The solution to such a problem was to create texts where the reader cannot take for granted either the authority of the text’s content, or, more importantly, the authority of the byline. *Diary of a Bad Year* is still a book by J.M. Coetzee, but in reading it we learn how perilous it is to ascribe an authority to authorship beyond the brute fact of a byline.

Like Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, *Diary of a Bad Year* is a fundamentally anti-authoritarian text, but it is differently so because it is written by someone with some of the greatest privileges of authority — the most privileged gender, sexuality, skin color; a man of international renown; a man whose work has made him wealthy.⁹² Most of the world’s newspapers, magazines, and

⁹² By the time she wrote *Three Guineas*, Woolf had accumulated significant privilege and authority (she’d recently been on the cover of *Time* magazine), but the reception of her work, and *Three Guineas* in particular, proves the truth of Barbara Johnson’s insight about women and self-resistance.

book publishers would be happy to host Coetzee's opinions. He would be perfectly positioned for ersatz ethics, no matter what debates he entered or what side he took in the debate.

While Coetzee could see (and admire) that Dostoyevsky's dialogism increased the realism of his novels and made his characters convincing, straightforward dialogism isn't enough to render ethics real. Jonathan Lear notes a weakness of the dialogue form made famous by Plato and, in a different way, used by Elizabeth Costello.⁹³ Such dialogue "can encourage in the reader a sense that he is in the audience, watching the characters debate as though they were up on stage. Rather than being thrown into philosophy's midst, challenged to examine one's beliefs, one can feel like an arbiter, able to choose one's position from among the many presented according to taste" (72). Being *thrown into philosophy's midst* may be, then, one goal for the reader of *Diary of a Bad Year*, a goal congruent with actual ethical thinking. It is the form of the book that allows such thinking, because "there is no easy way for a reader to take on the strong opinions simply by taking Coetzee's or JC's word for it. If we think of ethical thought as something that cannot be accepted on authority, then this is a literary form that defeats a typical way in which ethical thought is itself defeated" (81). The destabilizing form allows not simply an absence of authority — a pedagogy seeking to teach readers to rely on their own insights (common to fiction from the 19th century forward) — but a problematization of authority that requires readers to learn both to do their own ethical thinking and to be aware of the seductions of authority.

⁹³ Whether Coetzee's work is Socratic is a question addressed by various scholars. See, for instance, chapter 7 of Jan Wilm's *The Slow Philosophy of J.M. Coetzee*, "The Legacy of Socrates".

GOOD INFINITY: SUMMERTIME

In the fall of 1997, J.M. Coetzee was in residence at Stanford University, where, less than a month after the Tanner Lectures at Princeton, he read his *Lives of Animals* lectures (“The Philosopher and the Animals”, “The Poets and the Animals”). Additionally, he gave a reading from his newly-released book, *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*. The Stanford Humanities Center website reported that “Coetzee began his reading from *Boyhood* with the question his publisher asked him: ‘Is this fiction or memoir?’ Coetzee answered, ‘Do I have to choose?’”⁹⁴

The choice was one that seems to have vexed him as he was writing. Kannemeyer reports that Coetzee began writing the book in the first person point of view, then switched to third person early in the process. During the writing in August 1993, he made a note to himself: “Not a memoir but a novel, a slim novel” and then in September: “Think about all I did not do in this memoir: bring the atmosphere to life, tell anecdotes” (Kannemeyer 505). Nonetheless, despite the distancing effect of the third-person viewpoint, most readers seem to have read *Boyhood* and its sequel, *Youth*, as relatively unproblematic memoirs, and Kannemeyer himself considered them generally reliable sources of biographical information.⁹⁵

With *Summertime*, the problem of genre became a central concern of the book itself, because what was published as the third of the *Scenes from Provincial Life* could not in any way be read uncomplicatedly as memoir. Not only does most of the text consists of interviews with characters who knew a character named John Coetzee in the 1970s, but the John Coetzee of

⁹⁴ The web page is now defunct, but is available via the Internet Archive here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20020817083443/http://shc.stanford.edu:80/shc/1997-1998/events/coetzee.html>. The passage is also quoted by Sheila Collingwood-Whittick in “Autobiography as *Autre*biography”, p.14.

⁹⁵ For discussion of Kannemeyer, Coetzee, and biography/autobiography, see Clarkson, “J. M. Coetzee: ‘n Geskryfde Lewe./J. M. Coetzee: A Life in Writing”, Boehmer, “Reading Between Life and Work”, and Powers, “Beyond the Death of the Author”. For a thorough and insightful analysis of the use of third person in the books, see Clarkson, *Countervoices*, particularly Chapter 1.

Summertime is dead. The death of this author is one key to the book's purposes, as Spivak says: "All texts lay out desires. Some make it their topic. All texts can give you the practices of the ethical reflexes. Some texts present those practices. This text presents the desiring character, about whom truth can be told because he is dead" (*Readings* 136).

Though published recently, *Summertime* has already received significant, insightful critical attention, and my purpose here is not to reiterate what has already been said, but to consider how *Summertime* develops our understanding of Coetzee's relationship to aesthetics, fiction, fictionality, pedagogy, and didacticism. *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year* push fiction perhaps as far from fictionality as it can go when the reader enters the text expecting a novel (or, at least, fiction); *Summertime* pushes from the opposite direction, showing what traces survive when what is assumed to be nonfiction is infused with fictionality. Of the three books, *Summertime* is by far the least polemical in its content — there is nothing like Elizabeth Costello's lectures or JC's *Strong Opinions*. The primary focus of *Summertime* is the personal and intimate, which is exactly what Julia, at the end of her interview with Mr. Vincent, identifies as "what novels are about" (348). But from its beginning, Coetzee's work has shown not so much that the personal *is* political, but that the personal is embedded within contexts that are social, political, and historical. These contexts are also often textual, and it is unsurprising that a man who is not only a novelist but also a scholar of language and literature should value an analysis of textual inflections of power. Such an interest is highly Modernist — certainly, one of the shared qualities in the work of Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee is a persistent concern with inflections of power — even as it stands in opposition to certain Modernist tendencies that idealize an abstraction of the text from everything but itself.

In an interview in *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee says he has “lost interest in Nabokov” because though Nabokov suffered the loss of his homeland and a beloved Old World culture, he “balked at facing the nature of his loss in its historical fullness” (28). Before he ever published a novel, Coetzee was already criticizing Nabokov for an ideal of artistic autonomy at odds with his own: “The ideal of *Pale Fire*,” Coetzee wrote in 1973, “is a Symbolist ideal: a state of being in which, having incorporated into itself all possible interpretations of itself, the work of art has, like a closed system of mirrors, shut itself off forever from interpretation and become a monument of unageing intellect” (“Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*” 6). Such an ideal is not Coetzee’s: though he clearly desires that art be autonomous from socio-political determinism, his idea of autonomy does not require the work of art to be hermetic. That vision of art is apparent in his 1973 essay as an opposition to what Coetzee calls the “bad infinity of exegesis” that Nabokov attempts to contain in his novels (6). For Hegel, the “bad infinity” was a kind of closed loop — “the perpetual movement back and forth from one side of the persistent contradiction to the other ... uninterrupted flitting over limits which it is powerless to sublimate, and the perpetual falling back into them” (Hegel 192-193) — and while pinning down exactly what the “true infinite” might be remains a topic of considerable discussion among philosophers, Coetzee is not entering into a weedy Hegelian analysis, but is instead pointing toward an ideal of an artwork that would allow it to remain in the world and not close it to a potential infinitude of meaning.⁹⁶ In his analysis of Nabokov (both in his remarks on *Pale Fire* and his more general comments in *Doubling the Point*), Coetzee sets himself against what he sees as Nabokov’s desire for a self-

⁹⁶ Andrew Davis discusses the philosophical difficulties of the good or true infinity in “Hegel’s Idealism: The Infinite as Self-Relation”, which, in its interpretation of beings as infinite and “active subjects relating to themselves” (178), might offer some possibilities for viewing Coetzeean autobiography as an expression of true infinity.

contained text, a text stabilized by the authority of the text itself. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, JC's own Nabokov-titled "Strong Opinions" seem to aim to be "a monument of unageing intellect", and the anti-authoritarian force of the book shows the delusion of such a goal.⁹⁷ *Summertime* presents even more voices than *Diary of a Bad Year*, and it repeatedly emphasizes the historical and geographical locations of its characters, not only via their own words but also via the places and dates listed at the end of each of the interviews. It is only at the end of the book that we encounter anything undated (the final notebook of "undated fragments"). By the end, though, there is less need for situating: readers should by this point be able to situate the text for themselves. Once again, the progress of the book is away from outside authority (in this case a biographer) and toward the good infinity of the unstable text.

An unstable text is not, though, a text outside of "historical fullness"; quite the opposite, as history itself is not a stable text. *Summertime* begins with news that has become historical: First, a diaristic date ("22 August 1972") and then the opening sentence: "In yesterday's *Sunday Times*, a report from Francistown in Botswana." This fragment from John's notebook begins shortly after his return to South Africa, and immediately he is confronted with brutality outside South Africa that nonetheless originated there: "The killers appeared to be black, but one of the neighbours heard them speaking Afrikaans among themselves and was convinced they were whites in blackface. The dead were South Africans, refugees who had moved into the house mere weeks ago" (*Scenes* 287). Not only that, but the killers' car was "a white American model". John's own identities and movements are mirrored in this act, his own bind clear: if he ever thought of himself as a refugee, he would now have to confront his use of such a term for

⁹⁷ It is worth noting that Nabokov's *Strong Opinions* was first published in 1973, the year of Coetzee's *Pale Fire* essay and the year his first book, *Dusklands*, was finally accepted for publication after years of rejection.

himself, because whatever hardships he faced did not include hit squads. Regardless of his origins, he has arrived in South Africa like a white American vehicle, an item designed and built in white America. His challenge, as a white South African returned from America and with an Afrikaans name (if not exactly an Afrikaner identity), is how to avoid replicating violence, a violence that here is likely committed by murderous minstrelsy. Again and again, John must acknowledge white state violence against perceived enemies at the margins of the state — and must acknowledge it not as a general, abstract tendency, but as daily news items both horrifying and numbing: “So they come out, week after week, these tales from the borderlands, murders followed by bland denials. He reads the reports and feels soiled” (287).

His father, who dislikes “on the one hand, thugs who slaughter defenceless women and children, and, on the other, terrorists who wage war from havens across the border”, avoids the news by reading cricket scores. “As a response to a moral dilemma it is feeble; yet is his own response — fits of rage and despair — any better?” The violence of “the men who dreamed up the South African version of public order” is not, as he says he once thought, a misreading of history, but rather an absolute ignorance and denial of history: “to say they had misread history was itself misleading. For they read no history at all” (288). The Afrikaner Nationalists “erected their fortress state and retreated behind its walls; there they would keep the flame of Western Christian civilization burning until finally the world came to its senses” (289). Building a fortress against public criticism, denying history, insisting on one’s own rightness — John reads the violence of the Afrikaners as resulting from a closed epistemology, a denial of any reality outside the feedback loop of narrow ideology, the creation of a hermetic text that contains all its own answers and bends the world to its own shape, regardless of the misery and terror that results.

Each fragment ends with notes that the biographer later calls “memos addressed to himself”, written in 1999 or 2000, “when he was thinking of reworking his diaries as a book” (299). The memo after the first fragment reads: “To be expanded on: his father’s response to the times as compared to his own; their differences, their (overriding) similarities” (289). The memos incite a ghost text in readers’ minds by pointing toward unexplored directions and unwritten pages. The final fragment links the personal and political physically, reflecting on the nearness of Pollmoor Prison to John’s own home. “It is of course an irony that the South African *gulag* should protrude so obscenely into white suburbia[...]”, leading him to wonder, “What does one do with the brute fact of Pollsmoor once the irony is used up?” The memo that follows states: “Continuation: the Prisons Service vans that pass along Tokai Road on their way from the courts; flashes of faces; fingers gripping the grated windows; what stories the Truscotts tell their children to explain those hands and faces, some defiant, some forlorn” (296-297). If we as readers pause here before turning the page, if we imagine the continuation that is sketched, then we must take a moment to reflect on how we tell stories to cover up unpleasant truths; how we reconcile the way we live with what we know; how, in other words, we use stories to help us get through our days and escape the crushing, debilitating guilt that might attend true contemplation of the gulag at the end of our street, without having to look in the eyes of the faces that glance our way through grated windows.

The reader who comes to *Summertime* after *Boyhood* and *Youth* is primed for such work because the earlier books have set up expectations of form and meaning, and each reader has had to learn how to make sense of what the words are up to and how to reconcile their own reading practice with what these texts have given them to read. The pedagogy of *Summertime* builds on the knowledge and habits the reader accumulated with the earlier books, expanding on the

techniques each reader has developed to make sense of those texts while also, and quite quickly, challenging those techniques, complicating them, contradicting them. That reader is used to the third-person point of view and has probably come to think of the work nonetheless as a memoir, since aside from the point of view there is nothing in either text to undermine that assumption of genre and much to support it. These opening pages of *Summertime* are in the same style as the earlier memoir-novels, thus setting readers up for an expectation of continuity, an expectation first unsettled by the memos and then shattered with the Julia interview that replaces the notebook fragments after about ten pages. Considering the works together in the single volume of *Scenes from Provincial Life* makes the effect stark: After nearly three hundred pages, the reader must learn new reading strategies for the rest of the almost-500-page book. (On a purely pedagogical level, we might consider this like the leap between high school and college.) The shift is likely less jarring for a reader who came to the texts as separate books, particularly if they read them as they were published, and so had years between reading each. Nonetheless, *Summertime* was always labeled and marketed as the third of the series, so the likelihood of the reader expecting it to be a continuation of *Boyhood* and *Youth* was always there, even if the reading experience may have been a bit different.

While the memos gently break the continuity with *Boyhood* and *Youth*, they create a continuity with *Diary of a Bad Year*, adding an overtly dialogic element to the text in much the same way as JC's diaries do. The texts are not parallel on the page, however, and once the first notebook section ends, the book is given over to other (mostly female) voices, much as JC's diary section at the end of that book is given over to Anya. In *Summertime*, though, the white male author's text is not present; the author is dead, his authority open not only to contestation but also to obliteration.

Though the shift from the notebook fragments to the interview with Julia is the most abrupt and radical jump in the text, readers must continue to adjust their strategies with each interviewee. Julia's interview is set up in a standard, familiar Q&A interview format, with the interviewer's questions and comments italicized and the interviewee's responses in standard font. The next interview, with John's cousin Margot, is exactly the opposite: the interviewer (Mr. Vincent) speaks at length and in standard font, while the brief responses from Margot are italicized. Or so it seems at first. After a few paragraphs, the text proves to be more complicated: What we are reading is a transcript of Mr. Vincent reading an edited interview with Margot back to her for her comment. He has "fixed up the prose to read as if it were an uninterrupted narrative spoken in your voice" (350). Within the diegesis, then, much of the substance of this section is a work of prose created from an original text to which we have no access. Instead, we read the edited-interpreted prose and the commentary by the original interviewee and the interviewer who edited her words. (The levels of voice and situation are quite complex, but the presentation is straightforward and not especially confusing.)

What this fiction stages is difficulties of biography, memoir, history, and interpretation. These difficulties will raise questions for any readers, but they will raise particular questions for readers of *Boyhood* and *Youth* — not because Margot necessarily contradicts any of the content of those books (though her recollections often cover the time period that those books themselves do), but because they force us to consider to what extent Coetzee's own smooth, third-person texts are far from simple transcriptions of experience. Margot says to Mr. Vincent, "When I spoke to you last year, I was under the impression you were simply going to transcribe our interview. I had no idea you were going to rewrite it completely," to which he responds, "I have not actually rewritten it, I have merely recast it as a narrative, giving it a different form. Giving it

new form has no effect on the content” (353). If Coetzee had written a “raw” transcript alongside the narrative Mr. Vincent reads, we could have judged for ourselves, but that would have undermined the effect, because we have no access to the raw material of life that he shaped into *Boyhood* and *Youth*. We must reflect on the question of to what extent the reworking of material (such as memories) into narrative reconfigures that material. Though we know from all of his critical writings that Coetzee does not agree with Mr. Vincent that form has no effect on content, Coetzee the author of *Summertime* does not intrude to contradict him, instead leaving us to come to our own conclusions. That the question is raised is what matters.

After the Margot chapter, *Summertime* returns to the traditional interview form, though the book now moves us to a character, Adrianna, who is mostly negative toward the character of John. While Julia and Margot both presented unappealing aspects of John’s personality and behavior, they still maintained a generally positive assessment of him overall. Adrianna does not. She says she “detested him” and told him so, that he “forced me to detest him” (425). She calls him “disembodied” and asks “How could this man of yours be a great man when he was not human?” (436). She is aware of the desires of the biographer regarding the subject: “This is not the story you wanted to hear, is it? You wanted a different kind of story for your book” (425), a statement that not only implicates the biographer but also echoes out to readers generally, because the word Adrianna uses is *story* — bringing our thoughts back to the “tales of the borderlands” and the “stories the Truscotts tell their children” from the very first pages of *Summertime*. After the first notebook section, *Summertime* is mostly (though not completely) concerned with personal questions, but because it begins as it does, the personal questions are inevitably shadowed by their historical situation.

Following Adrianna, Martin provides a more generally positive view of John. This interview also brings us toward a different sort of personal, intimate world: that of male academic colleagues. The topic of white South African identity appears when the interviewer raises it as something John would not write about, at least about other people: “When he gets to your white South Africanness he stops and writes no more. Have you any idea why he should have stopped just there?” Martin suggests the topic was either too complex for what John was writing or that he grew bored with writing about academic life. Martin himself suspects it was the former. “Broadly speaking, he and I shared a common stance towards South Africa, namely that our presence there was illegitimate. [...] Whatever the opposite is of *native* or *rooted*, that was what we felt ourselves to be” (442). Sophie, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, rounds out the interviews with a wide-ranging exploration of writing, politics, utopia, South Africa, language, and, ultimately, John as both a person and a personage. “He was just a man,” Sophie says, “a man of his time, talented, maybe even gifted, but, frankly, not a giant” (467).

The notebook of “Undated Fragments” that closes *Summertime* is notably less political or social in its concerns than the notebook at the beginning. Now, the concerns are memories of friends and family and of certain works of art, particularly music, which has a significant role throughout *Summertime*, especially the works of Schubert and Bach. Axel Englund sees the music in the book (and in *Diary of a Bad Year*) as expressing John’s desire to escape the Cartesian duality of mind and body, a desire that he can never fulfill, even as he appears to know it is based on a false dichotomy — the dichotomy is too deeply culturally embedded for him to escape it, and in any case his body doesn’t much want to cooperate with his mind. But there is a further purpose to the use of music, one visible elsewhere in *Summertime*, especially in the final notebook: “Coetzee’s evocation and self-conscious questioning of the clichés attached to these

composers and genres reveal his awareness that music, even when it raises claims to spiritual transcendence, is given its meaning in the realm of discourse that it supposedly bypasses. It is culturally embedded discourse that ascribes to music the capacity to reach beyond language, either into pure spirit or bodily pleasure” (102). An attempt — even if destined (or predestined) to fail — to reach beyond language is common to Coetzee’s novels from early in his career. As early as his 1973 essay on *Pale Fire*, Coetzee identifies Nabokov as inferior to Beckett because “That art is radical which, facing the abyss between language and the world, turns toward silence and the end of art” (5). That sort of radicalism is clearly a type the flesh-and-blood Coetzee values, perhaps not as an absolute goal, but at least as a temptation. The desire to reach beyond language, to face the abyss between language and world, is not a merely literary or artistic desire. As Coetzee’s many discussions of Afrikaans (in and out of *Summertime*) show, language is political and politics is a linguistic activity as much as it is a bodily activity, not only because of the ideas, instructions, laws, etc. that get communicated via a language, but also because of what sort of language is valued and rewarded, the social role of particular ways of speaking and writing, the official validation of some languages over others. (We must not forget that the Soweto uprising of June 1976 was a protest against the mandating of the Afrikaans language in schools. At least 176 people were killed by the police during the uprising.) Language may be a matter of life and death. The desire to go beyond language is similar to the desire to go beyond politics: an impossible dream, perhaps, but more clearly a self-annihilating desire — a desire for silence, the end of art, the end of history, society, culture, politics. The death of the author.

A PEDAGOGY FOR LIBERATION

To cede authority one must first assert it. This is a dilemma that Coetzee's novels between *Disgrace* and *The Childhood of Jesus* wrestle with. If Coetzee simply wanted to get rid of his authority, he would stop writing and wield whatever legal power he had to reclaim the rights to his books and prevent them from being reprinted and distributed. He would refuse all public events, all lectures, all interviews, all awards. Obviously, that is not what he wants. From the evidence of his texts, Coetzee seems to want to use his situation to illuminate the forces, desires, and assumptions that make his situation possible. That his situation is unique in many of its features does not mean the forces that formed that situation are unique, and it is those forces that these novels make visible and, in making visible, render open to analysis and critique. As author, Coetzee is taking on the authority of the pedagogue, the didact, but he does so in a way that tries to mitigate the didactic power of his authority, thus infusing his books with what we might call, borrowing from Paulo Freire, a pedagogy of liberation. Such a pedagogy is a process for both knowledge production and knowledge analysis.

In *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, Freire identifies some of the elements necessary for the production of knowledge as “action, critical reflection, curiosity, demanding inquiry, uneasiness, uncertainty” (8). These are good virtues for the reader of Coetzee, as well, especially given how often his work leaves us uneasy and uncertain. Commenting on *Summertime*, Alexandra Effe says, “As in *Elizabeth Costello*, the metanarrative commentary points to the reader's active part in bringing the story into being” (125), an insight that could apply to *Diary of a Bad Year* as well, for, as Effe says, *Diary's* “dialogic structure functions to strip authority from any position expounded in the text. As in *Summertime*, there is no metanarrative that judges and evaluates the

different voices and perspectives” (132). The narratives are so full of gaps and ambiguities that they scream out for interpretation, yet the narratives refuse to interpret themselves.

Some authority remains, however: the authority of the pedagogy. Freire repeatedly says that a pedagogy of liberation is anti-authoritarian but not anti-authority in the sense of being “anything goes”: “When I criticize manipulation, I do not want to fall into a false and nonexistent nondirectivity of education. For me, education is always directive, always. The question is to know towards what and with whom is it directive.” (109). A perfectly anti-authoritarian book would either be one of blank pages or one filled with random words. While either may be of use to the writer — who may assert the authority to make a mark on the blank page or to rearrange the random words — neither is much good for readers. The writer’s arrangement of words, sentences, and paragraphs directs the reader’s thoughts, but in texts like Coetzee’s (and Woolf’s and Delany’s), direction doesn’t need to be determining. This is ultimately the difference within a Freirian paradigm between authority and anti-authority: a Freirian pedagogy directs learners via the authority of the teacher toward open thought that is potentially able to recognize and analyze the dominant ideology. The teacher’s authority, Freire says, must be mobile, flexible, and itself open to learning, and he agrees with his interlocutor Ira Schor, who says that “the teacher's authority must always be there, but it changes as the students and the study evolve, as they emerge as critical subjects in the act of knowing. The teacher also is recreated if the process is working” (*Liberation* 92). Since the text is separate from the writer, it’s impossible to say whether the writer is “recreated in the process” of writing, but certainly in *Diary of a Bad Year* and *Summertime*, Coetzee uses recreations of himself and his public image to spur readers on toward new ways of thinking and knowing the texts.

Such flexible ways of thinking and knowing — and of teaching and learning — are valuable during a crisis, because countless examples of hasty thinking and bad knowledge are available from the history of crises, but the novels Coetzee wrote after the end of apartheid show the necessity for careful thinking after a crisis, too, because the world is not utopian, and one crisis may end just as ten others begin.

“Reality,” Freire says, “is a becoming, not a standing still” (*Liberation* 182).

5. CONCLUSION

In dominator culture the killing off of the imagination serves as a way to repress and contain everyone within the limits of the status quo.

—bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*

We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable — but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art. Very often in our art, the art of words.

—Ursula K. Le Guin, speech in acceptance of the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters

In *Woolf's Ambiguities*, Molly Hite describes the effect of Woolf's novels in a manner reminiscent of descriptions of Coetzee's work by Carol Clarkson, Jonathan Lear, Jan Wilm, and others: "In Woolf's fiction, attitudes that appear to have the author's sanction and that counsel us to think and act in particular ways arise only to be undercut, within prose that scrupulously refrains from endorsing a single position as the one that Woolf 'wants us to see' or 'means' or 'is showing us' (or 'assumes' or 'cannot see beyond') or other such critical locutions." Hite goes on to contrast Woolf's work both with that of other Modernists and with polemical writers in a way that fits with Coetzee's relationship to writers such as Nadine Gordimer: "The writing is radically experimental in ways that other modernist fiction writers did not attempt and stands in explicit contrast to a tradition of feminist polemical fiction that critics are only beginning to bring into dialogue with Woolf's work." While I prefer to stick with ideas of dialogism and

polyphony rather than Hite's "tonal complexity" (productive in her study, but too much of a catch-all for my purposes), she describes well the effect of such texts, whatever label we apply to them: "When we pay attention to their tonal complexity, her novels emerge as disorienting and difficult in original and positive ways: full of unfamiliar and disconcerting effects, resisting translation into other idioms, embodying a newness that remains strange despite long acquaintance, and raising the possibility of further revelations the more profound because unanticipated — revelations of precisely what readers have not always thought and felt" (xi). *Newness that remains strange* is common to all three writers I have discussed, and it is central to their texts' pedagogy because such newness is what fuels the possibility that readers will experience revelations beyond what they have already thought and felt. In that sense, then, the "Make it new!" of Modernism is not a command that fetishizes newness for its own sake, but rather is a fundamental technique of critical pedagogy.

In describing his work in Brazil, Paulo Freire wrote that he and his collaborators sought to create "an education which would lead men to take a new stance toward their problems — that of intimacy with those problems, one oriented toward research instead of repeating irrelevant principles. An education of 'I wonder,' instead of merely, 'I do.' Vitality, instead of insistence on the transmission of what Alfred North Whitehead [in *The Aims of Education*] has called 'inert ideas — that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilised, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations'" (*Education* 32-33). What is made new via critical pedagogy is the student's perception of something in the world; learning is not a matter of received, inert ideas, but of research born from intimacy with the problems of life and society. The fundamental value in a stance of "I wonder..." is congruent with Modernist and

metamodernist texts that spurn propaganda and preaching for a pedagogy that requires an active, thinking, critical, questioning reader.

In *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, Freire argues that it is not general techniques that differentiate the liberating teacher from the non-liberating (or even oppressive) teacher; rather, it is the stance toward reality and the object of the pedagogy. Switching from lecturing to class discussions, for instance, is no guarantee that a pedagogy is liberating because “traditional teachers will make reality opaque whether they lecture or lead discussions. A liberating teacher will illuminate reality even if he or she lectures. The question is the content and dynamism of the lecture, the approach to the object to be known. Does it critically reorient students to society? Does it animate their critical thinking or not?” (40). Such a perspective is a helpful one when we think of how Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee navigate the genres of the essay and the novel, because, as Hite says of Woolf, “her antipathy toward ‘teachers and preachers’ extended in her own writing practice only to works of fiction, and in particular to the novels ‘of vision’ that we associate with her great middle period. She was a master of teaching and preaching in essays intended to instruct and persuade” (172).⁹⁸ The same is true of Delany. For Woolf and Delany, the essay form is often like a particularly talented teacher’s lecture: full of ideas, analyses, demonstrations, quotations, and, not infrequently, didacticism. Yet Woolf is also often like Coetzee in that her dislike of “preaching” leads her toward particularly ironic and polyphonic styles for her essays, styles that in both writers’ works complicate any simple representation of an authorial self. In Woolf, this was a feminist practice, as Lisa Low has described: “Instead of

⁹⁸ Hite quotes the “teachers and preachers” phrase from the drafts of *The Waves*, where Rhoda says, “Teachers & preachers I have always thought the lowest of mankind” (Hite 51). Woolf’s own feelings on teachers were complicated, depending on the institutions to which the teachers were affiliated and the assumptions about learning and society that the teachers held. It seems to me that Hite is correct in saying that “Woolf herself clearly objected to ‘preaching’ —and ‘teaching,’ if we construe this word to connote its literary form, didacticism” (52).

writing that expresses the personality, the voracious need for the assertion of self, Woolf strives to find a writing that expels the self” (265). While I think a case can be made for Coetzee as an at-least-occasionally feminist writer, his striving for a writing “that expels the self” comes from other motivations, as discussed in Chapter 3.⁹⁹

Delany works differently; in stark contrast to Woolf and (especially) Coetzee, he has embraced an authoritative authorial stance in his essays and interviews, conveying a pose of confidence in his own opinions, knowledge, and perception of the world that has been remarkably consistent since his teenage journals. This brings us back to Barbara Johnson’s notion that self-resistance is a viable mode for members of the white male establishment but not others. The authoritative stance seems to me necessary given Delany’s context(s). Imagine it otherwise: What would be the effect if the first black, gay writer to gain any prominence within the field of science fiction — a field often considered juvenile, subliterate, and unserious — wrote essays in which he consistently undermined his own authority? While Woolf’s gender certainly set her below men in the social hierarchy, and because of her gender she was denied many of the routes to cultural authority, she nonetheless wrote for respectable publications and was soon seen as part of highly serious literary and social communities. And though Coetzee’s identity as a South African did not lend him the cultural authority that citizenship with a more powerful country would, his identity as a white heterosexual male (with a Ph.D.) marked him from the beginning of his career with privileges unavailable to either Woolf or Delany.

Therefore, we could see these writers as existing on a spectrum of access to hegemonic power, and that spectrum coincides with the strategies of authorial authority within their

⁹⁹ Such an expulsion of self is also central to numerous writings on Coetzee and autobiography, including my own essay “Intentional Schizophrenia”, which is why I do not belabor it here.

nonfiction: Coetzee, the least marginalized, continuously works to undermine the authority in his texts; Woolf's nonfiction, particularly in its longer forms, grows more polyphonic as her reputation solidifies (with *Three Guineas*, published less than a year after her appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine, at the apex); Delany, the most marginalized in both a social and literary position, writes nonfiction that rarely undermines its authoritative stance.¹⁰⁰

Nonetheless, when writing fiction, even Delany tends toward a complex, un-settling, destabilizing dialogism, and the differences in the ways these writers approach narrative authority in nonfiction compared to the similarity with which they approach narrative authority in fiction suggests a shared view of how to approach the task of writing around (before, during, after) crisis: that, in fact, it is nonfiction that is limited, while fiction, in all its heteroglossic glory, offers a wider range of possibilities for the writer who wants to do something other than preach.

What we have discovered, then, is not that these writers pushed fiction to the limits of its fictionality for the sake of inserting polemic in a disingenuous way, but that by pushing against fiction's fictionality, these writers of very different backgrounds, geographies, privileges, situations, tastes, and styles created texts that do the pedagogic work of liberating the reader toward a critical, ethical thinking that less Modernist, less polyphonic, and more traditionally fictional texts do not — even if those texts are more explicitly committed to particular socio-political visions. Monologic, preaching, propagandistic texts may *present* ethical thought, but they are less likely to *stimulate* it than the polyphonic pedagogies practiced by Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee in their fiction. These texts work against the ersatz ethical thought Jonathan Lear

¹⁰⁰ A good argument could be made that Delany's memoir *The Motion of Light in Water* undermines its authority by highlighting the vagaries of memory. I think there is justice to such a view, but the authorial voice in that book still sounds to me quite confident and monologic. The (often biting) self-critiques Delany writes as K. Leslie Steiner and S. L. Kermit are almost entirely associated with his fiction (mostly the Return to Nevèrÿon series), making Steiner and Kermit characters within his fictional universe, not dialogic functions within his nonfiction.

describes, a kind of thought which may offer information and ideas, but which nonetheless is overwhelmed by “the sense that the space for ethical thought [is] already filled” (69). Such ersatz ethical thinking is similar to Freire’s “banking concept of education”, where “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 72). Against the banking concept of education stands critical, liberatory education, an approach that bell hooks describes as one that “makes education the practice of freedom” by encouraging a type of “teaching that enables transgressions — a movement against and beyond boundaries” that will “open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions” (*Teaching to Transgress* 12). Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee never fall into the oppressive ideological trap of assuming an absolute ignorance in their readers, and so their texts demonstrate a practice of freedom and enable — indeed, demand — transgressions against settled boundaries of accepted genres and accepted opinions.

Fictionality, through its serious games of make-believe, stimulates ethical thought in a way nonfictionality can’t, because fictionality allows an added level of rhetorical and conceptual distance through which to reimagine the world. However, settled techniques of any sort are less likely to encourage an active reading than techniques that first incite and then frustrate readers’ expectations. The unsettling of fictionality and nonfictionality is one set of such techniques, but as *The Years* and *The Mad Man* both make clear, readers’ expectations of genre may be just as effective for a pedagogy of liberation. Different crises require different approaches to fictionality if authentic ethical thought is to be possible. Fictionality has a complex relationship to ideas of

truth, and crises may not only be crises of society or politics, but also crises of the discourse of truth. Delany could have kept writing about a fantasy plague in a fantasy land and trusted that many readers would have read the text as an allegory of AIDS, but he chose to break through the fictionality in “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” because he was in a crisis where, as Coetzee said in his Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech, there was “too much truth for art to hold, truth by the bucketful, truth that overwhelms and swamps every act of the imagination” (*Doubling the Point* 99). By alternating between the truth of his everyday experience and the fantasy of Nevèryon, Delany was able to bring in bucketfuls of truth without swamping every act of his imagination. Later, while the crisis continued but had become subject to multiple discourses, he could return to a less problematized fictionality with *The Mad Man*, but here through the liberating pedagogy of “pornotopic fantasy” rather than sword & sorcery fantasy.

Coetzee’s most sustained and beguiling experiments with fictionality began after the crisis of the apartheid state was resolved and the new reality of the new South Africa (with a new set of crises) emerged. It was then that he seems to have judged it appropriate to tie the pedagogy of his novels to a problematization of fictionality because now the risk of that problematization of fictionality becoming a problematization of truth was lower, the stakes less stark — now, there might be just enough truth for art to hold it without artfulness becoming overwhelmed or, alternately, without the idea of truth itself getting scared to death by the spectre of relativism. (No-one who seeks liberation from authoritarianism can afford to be a relativist, because relativism risks equating freedom with slavery, ignorance with strength, war with peace.) This is not to say that Woolf, Delany, or Coetzee are relativists — they are not — but that any unsettling

of fictionality inevitably runs the risk of being perceived as relativistic simply because of the complex historical and discursive relationship between ideas of fictionality and truth.¹⁰¹

These writers cannot risk relativism because the crises they face are real to the point of being life-threatening. (“Reality,” Philip K. Dick said, “is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away” [4]. The threat of a crisis killing you may make reality suddenly quite vivid to anyone less committed to relativism than Dr. Pangloss.) It is for this reason that Modernism remains attractive. Mazzoni points out in *Theory of the Novel* that for

many of the great authors born between the 1870s and 1880s — for Proust, Woolf, Forster, or Lawrence — the task of the novel was still that of telling about the existence of people like us, and not of creating fantastic worlds, stylistic games, metaliterature, *écriture*, or pure lies. The critical vocabulary that dominated during the years of modernism was very different from the critical lexicon used by the avant-garde movements of the 1950s and 1960s to justify their works. The basic reason was that, although conceived in different terms, a majority of modernist novelists remained faithful to the same project we find in the critical writings of the authors who were born around 1840 (Zola, James), and even before that in the critical writings of Balzac or Stendhal: to properly, realistically represent everyday life. (288)

There is plenty to quibble with in Mazzoni’s details (Woolf’s *Orlando* is nothing if not metaliterature) and many details that are not applicable here (Delany spent much of his career

¹⁰¹ These ideas are explored at length by Robert Newsom in *A Likely Story* and Catherine Gallagher in “The Rise of Fictionality”.

creating fantastic worlds; *écriture* could describe most of Coetzee's work), but his valuable insight is that the writers from Flaubert up through the Modernists shared a commitment to an idea of reality that many post-World War II avant-garde writers and critics did not; this insight explains why such writers as Delany and Coetzee, both born in the early 1940s, so often refer in their nonfiction to Modernist touchstones and so rarely to, for instance, John Barth or Thomas Pynchon. There is reason to believe that Delany and Coetzee share a general belief that the task of the novel is "to properly, realistically represent everyday life" (which includes, of course, the way the mind works in everyday life, the way we experience everyday life — the complaint of the Modernists, including Woolf, was not that the 19th century social novels were realistic, but that they were not realistic enough). Their commitments are to a particular way of structuring reality via fiction that is more congruent with the assumptions of the Modernists than with many later avant-garde writers. Mazzoni, who (as Ben Parker has astutely criticized) squeezes the novel into an anti-transcendent teleology, can't account for this, but David James can in his description of metamodernists in *Modernist Futures*. For James, metamodernist writers are different from other contemporary writers in "their capacity to articulate modes of ethical and political commentary precisely through a sincere rather than self-parodic dedication to rendering perceptual experience" (13).

What James calls metamodernist writers' attention to the "participatory nature of form" (16) is what leads me to read the works I have discussed here as having a pedagogy. Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee each identify ways that form may affect readers' participation with the text, but identification is not enough — they also put that participatory nature of form to work. The methods by which they do so, and the ends toward which they aim, are the pedagogy. That each is a liberatory pedagogy is clear from the demands they place on readers: demands to be active

and thoughtful, to think beyond the authority of the writer, the writer's reputation, or even the text itself.

Whether such thinking can carry over into the world outside the text is not within the writer's ability to determine any more than a teacher is able to determine if students will all transfer their experience of the classroom to the world beyond its walls. But if the writer is able to encourage authentic ethical thought, and to provoke the reader toward recognizing and analyzing ersatz ethical thought, then there is every possibility for imaginations to be activated and for certain habits of reading to transfer into habits of thinking that then affect habits of being.

CODA

Throughout the summer of 1940, Virginia and Leonard Woolf endured numerous air raids while at their country home in Rodmell, Sussex. Then in the fall, bombs destroyed their London home in Mecklenburgh Square. Asked by Americans to write something about "what should be the attitude of women towards war and peace", Virginia Woolf created the essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid", in which she said that though war is male ("The defenders are men, the attackers are men"), if a woman believes this is a fight for freedom, then she might fight on the side of the English. "But there is another way of fighting for freedom without arms; we can fight with the mind. We can make ideas that will help the young Englishman who is fighting up in the sky to defeat the enemy" (*Essays* 6: 242). The difficulty is that men hold all the positions of power in government and society. But women must be willing to think and express themselves. She quotes William Blake: "I will not cease from mental fight," and adds: "Mental fight means thinking against the current, not with it" (243).

To demonstrate thinking against the current, Woolf echoes an idea from *Three Guineas*: “Let us try to drag up into consciousness the subconscious Hitlerism that holds us down. It is the desire for aggression; the desire to dominate and enslave” (243).

She insists on thinking beyond the immediate moment, even as the bombs fall. The mind needs to create, the imagination needs to continue, and even now, Woolf says, we must think about the world the men in the airplanes will return to once the battle is over. Masculine violence must end, but the desire for it can't be ignored. Young men love glory, they find glory in guns, and if society takes away that glory, then what will such men do? “Therefore if we are to compensate the young man for the loss of his glory and of his gun, we must give him access to the creative feelings. We must make happiness. We must free him from the machine. We must bring him out of his prison into the open air. But what is the use of freeing the young Englishman if the young German and the young Italian remain slaves?” (245).

The sound of guns interrupts her thinking. A German plane lands and the pilot, relieved that the fight is over, is captured by English soldiers, who give him a cigarette and a cup of tea. There may be hope in such shared humanity, Woolf suggests.

But then it is just a quiet summer night, and she must send her fragmentary notes off to America, “to the men and women whose sleep has not yet been broken by machine-gun fire” (245). Perhaps the fragments can be shaped into something useful. Now, though, “in the shadowed half of the world”, she must sleep.

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