Fictional representations of time in narrative

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FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF TIME IN NARRATIVE

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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
2021**

FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF TIME IN NARRATIVE

School of Humanities

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University in partial
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2021

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to address what constitutes the experience of time by examining the works of three writers who are fundamentally concerned with the relationship between time, experience and reality: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Dermot Healy's *A Goat's Song* and Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*. By placing the thematic concepts and perceptions of time as one of the primary concerns in their novels, these writers experiment with the ways that time is presented from two major angles: the realm of the narrative and the fictional reality of the characters in terms of their experience and perceptions. The word "fictionality" in the title of this project serves two purposes: Firstly, it reminds us that the very nature of time and its measurement is a human construct. Secondly, it observes how the way one perceives time—and reality—in the novel is very much dependent on the various rhetorical devices employed in its conception. Through the examination and comparative analysis of the narrative techniques in each of their novels, this dissertation will argue that the narrative experiments of these writers offer new and innovative ways of contemplating the experience of time, including the abstract question of whether time can serve as a measurement of an individual's lived experience and reality.

CHAPTER ONE — INTRODUCTION

Narrative is a [...] doubly temporal sequence [...]; There is the time of the thing told and the time of the narrative (the time of the signified and the time of the signifier). This duality not only renders possible all the temporal distortions that are commonplace in narratives (three years of the hero's life summed up in two sentences of a novel or in a few shots of a "frequentative" montage in film, etc.) More basically, it invites us to consider that one of the functions of narrative is to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme.

— Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of Cinema*

At the heart of every narrative, there is a form of temporal division: between the chronological events that take place in the story, and the time that shapes the telling of that story. As Christian Metz explains in the excerpt above, it is "this [duality that renders] all the temporal distortions that are commonplace in narratives" (18), which invites us to look for alternative directions in temporal sequencing that are not determined solely by events. These temporal distortions can come in many different forms, with their respective effects similar in that they prompt us as readers to reconsider how we experience the passing of time, perhaps in our own lives as well. Indeed, Metz's observation highlights the formalistic possibilities associated with the representation of time in narrative. From the basic sequentiality of components associated with the very process of reading, temporal distortions in the narrative world of the text appear commonplace precisely because of the very logic that we have a pre-established notion of time.

Given that time is relative in terms of perception, it is thus formalistically possible for "time schemes" to be invented by writers who are fundamentally concerned with how problematic the ordering of time in narrative can be. It is these "time schemes" and formalistic concerns which this dissertation intends to investigate, specifically in the works of three writers who are eminently interested in the relationship between time, experience and reality: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Dermot Healy's *A Goat's Song* and Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*. By

placing the thematic concepts and perceptions of time as one of the primary concerns in their novels, these writers experiment with the ways that time is presented from two major angles: the realm of the narrative and the fictional reality of the characters in terms of their experience and perceptions. Through the examination and comparative analysis of the narrative techniques in each of their novels, this dissertation will argue that the narrative experiments of these writers offer new and innovative ways of contemplating the experience of time.

The word “fictionality” in the title of this project serves two purposes: Firstly, it reminds us that the very nature of time and its measurement is a human construct. Secondly, this paper borrows the definition from Richard Walsh’s work *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, which defines fictionality as “a distinctive rhetorical resource, functioning directly as part of the pragmatics of serious communication” (1). In other words, how one perceives time—and reality—in the novel is very much dependent on the various rhetorical devices employed in its conception. Gérard Genette, in describing a story with complex chronology as “a perfect zigzag,” claims that the narrative text has “no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading” (*Narrative Discourse* 34). Yet, it is how time is presented that distinguishes between experiences through different diegetic realities.

Addressing what constitutes “the experience of time” is an extremely complex issue which has been examined by different philosophers throughout history, including most notably Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy, St. Augustine’s autobiographical work *Confessions*, as well as modern theorists such as Bergson and Heidegger in their own respective treatises that contemplate the nature of time. While each of these figures developed their own perspective on time, it is most commonly divided into past, present and future. However, closer inspection of this division reveals several conceptual problems. The past is often shrouded with events which

are often unverifiable and subjected to distortion based on acts of forgetting or repressed memories; the present ceases to exist the moment it appears; and the future is incomprehensible because it has not yet arrived. This explains why clock time has been commonly assumed to be the most viable form of measurement, giving time a presence and shape that would not be as clear otherwise. Just as language serves as the medium for the articulation of one's thoughts and feelings, the measurement of time provides us with the means to understand reality as an abstract concept—how individuals perceive time according to their memories and experiences—by the same logic, fictional narratives give time shape and organisation. In turn, the significance of certain moments and events is created because of how we make sense of duration. This is explicated by the concept of the intervals between “tick” and “tock”, first raised by Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending*, and further developed in Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*. According to Kermode,

the interval [...] between ‘tick’ and ‘tock’ is now charged with significant duration. The clock's ‘tick-tock’ I take to be a model of what we call a plot, an organization that humanizes time by giving it form; and the interval between ‘tock’ and ‘tick’ represents purely successive, disorganized time of the sort we need to humanize. (Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* 45)

Kermode's raises the need for us to “humanize” time, for the very simple reason that duration can only be perceived when it is contained temporarily in a structure. Fiction in its narrative form thus offers the means of accomplishing this, converting what is chronologically framed into meaningful experiences that comprehend the essence of time. As Ricoeur observes, “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains

its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (*Time and Narrative* 1: 52).

Peter Brooks further develops this line of discussion by explaining how

[n]arrative is one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, specifically [...] with the problem of temporality: man’s time-boundedness, his consciousness of existence within the limits of mortality. And plot is the principal ordering force of those meanings that we try to wrest from human temporality. (*Reading for Plot* xi)

These respective definitions provide a clear summary of how narrative allows us to understand the boundaries of time, and how they are fundamentally important in the construction of meaning in lived experiences. Yet, these definitions also highlight how containing time within a comprehensible framework can be inherently problematic. In his examination of Edmund Husserl’s *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, John B. Brough brings to our attention Husserl’s contention that time “offers not only the most difficult but also the most important of all phenomenological problems” (504). Understanding time through perceptual experience presupposes that the individual has the composure to remember the exact sensations felt in the moment, which many do not have in episodes of heightened emotion. If the act of remembering events accurately is already a problem, being conscious of the presence of time while simultaneously experiencing these events becomes an even more difficult endeavour. In other words, how narrative provides structure in the form of connected events is just the first step, which explains why experimentation with different types of narrative serve to further our understanding of how time is to be understood phenomenologically.

Deciphering this relationship between time and its role in narrative is not a new endeavour, and this particular discourse has been explored by critical theorists such as Gérard

Genette in *Narrative Discourse*, Mark Currie in *About Time*, and as previously mentioned, Frank Kermode and Paul Ricoeur. Indeed, while narratives are constructed in time and space, the way we understand signifiers of time can be manipulated, creating different ways of perceiving reality. Ricoeur claims that all fictional narratives have their roots in time and therefore are tales of time, given that “the structural transformations that affect the situations and characters take time” (*Time in Narrative* 2: 101). The interesting part of his discussion involves tales about time, of which “the very experience of time that is at stake in these structural transformations” provides much room for exploration in how they are represented in the respective narratives (101), as it helps to explain the fascination with phenomenological readings of time, where individual experiences can take shape based on the organisation of words. In *About Time*, Currie proposes that there is a normative, “right” order when it comes to reading:

Read in the right order, therefore, the novel is asymmetrical in the same way that time is, since the present of the reading becomes a kind of gateway through the words, descriptions and events pass in their transition from the realm of possibility into the realm of actuality. The experience of reading, thus described, corresponds to a tensed conception of time and represents the egocentric, or subjective, pole in the relation of the reading subject to textual object. (16)

The expression “tensed conception of time” is both at once a logical way of understanding and grounding time in terms of parameters, and a method that is abstract in nature given that tenses remain a linguistic construct created to set indicators of experience. Thus, there is at once the concurrent phases of time, of reality unfolding in the very present of which the reading takes place, even as the events have already been assigned respective spots in the fictional time of the story-worlds. In any instance where time is experienced as a phenomenon, it is not uncommon to

see the presence of certain literary devices and narrative techniques. These include prolepsis (the representation of a subject's existence before the actual occurrence), analepsis (flashback), parataxis (arrangement in terms of clauses), hypodiegesis or metafiction, and each of these devices are employed in different ways by each writer in their own respective investigations of how time shapes their narratives, and how their narratives shape the perception of time.

In each of the selected texts, many of these devices take place simultaneously. These interactions with time are not always physical, while observing time as linear would be, in Ricoeur's words, "deficient" if we were to limit our perceptions of time to either the sequence or length of an event, as doing so "takes into account neither the centrality of the present as an actual now, nor the primacy of the future [...] nor the fundamental capacity of recollecting the past in the present" ("The Human Experience of Time and Narrative" 18). Thus, time-conscious narratives often have to include multiple perceptions of time, for the simple reason that time passing is experienced both externally and internally by the narrators even as they struggle against the clock in their physical realities while dealing with memories from the past. According to Genette, time in narrative begins with three major aspects—order, duration and frequency—all of which are essential when it comes to shaping story-time and discourse-time. Fragmentation caused by non-linear narratives and temporal distortions takes place when story-time (how time passing is measured in the fictional world of the story) does not cohere with discourse-time (the length of time needed to narrate the tale, or how the events in the narrative are ordered). Any sense of reality is thus destabilised in the narrative due to the ontological indeterminacy caused by different perceptions of time within the same space.

At times, these measures to create episodes of anachronism may be taken to the extreme, compelling the reader to contemplate the very existence of time as a concept to test our pre-

existing perceptions of reality. As Brian Richardson explains in his work on narrative time in postmodern and nonmimetic fiction, there are many different classifications of fictional temporalities, all with their different purposes and modes of execution. The notable ones include: being circular (without beginnings or ends), contradictory (lack of coherence in timelines), antinomic or retrogressive (movement in terms of contradiction), differential (when time acts differently for different characters, such as the process of aging), conflated (merging of different time zones), or multiple (beyond one timeline due to the multiplicities of realities) (*Narrative Dynamics* 47-52). Richardson proceeds to conclude how “[t]he text types identified above, though covering the most prominent varieties of nonmimetic temporality in narrative, nevertheless do not exhaust the entire range of experimental fiction” (55), leaving room for even more narratological possibilities. One prominent example of such a novel that pushes the boundaries of traditional narratives is Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow*. With its overt experimentation with narrative form in order to explicate the relationship between time and narrative, *Time’s Arrow* has been described by Stephen Baker as a text that “indulges in apparent celebration of postmodern textual play [by] modelling its reversal of narrative order on the capabilities of a video” (*The Fictionality of Postmodernity* 139), contradicting the normative modes of reading and interpretation. While the fundamental process of reading is still governed by grammatical laws and basic linguistic structures, there is a complete reversal of events in terms of physical reality. This can be seen from an excerpt in the novel, where the first-person narrator describes a simple mundane event in a way that defies chronological sequencing:

First I stack the clean plates in the dishwasher... Then you select a soiled dish, collect some scraps from the garbage, and settle down for a short wait. Various items get gulped up into my mouth, and after skilful massage with tongue and teeth I transfer them to the

plate for additional sculpture with knife and fork and spoon... Next you face the laborious process of cooling, of reassembly, of storage, before the return of these foodstuffs to the Superette, where admittedly, I am promptly and generously reimbursed for my pains. (*Time's Arrow* 11)

The reversal of order in this simple process of eating, which Jan Alber describes as the narrator's "retrogressive version of his life" in the form of "unnatural temporal organisation," presents many thematic possibilities that come with its unnatural form (*Unnatural Narratives* 153). The signposts that dictate the order of events taking place, yet the sequencing of the actions and events is deliberately reversed to create new ways of presenting thematic concerns. Baker considers how *Time's Arrow* "exposes, while simultaneously exemplifying, the inadequacy of a postmodern reimagining of history" (139), presenting the problematic nature of recollection and memory. Valentina Adami, writing of trauma in *Time's Arrow*'s narrative, observes how "the breakdown of chronology, coherence and predictability mimics the collapse of temporality and the crisis of truth caused by trauma in the individual's mind" (*Preface*). Thomas Neumann opines that "backward narration offers a solution to specific problems in Holocaust literature and how it helps to avoid the danger of anesthetising Auschwitz" (*Making Sense of the Holocaust by Means of Backward Narration* 3). These are just examples of how different modes of experimentation with time in narrative can flesh out critical possibilities which would otherwise be more difficult to express.

Time's Arrow is generally considered to be a postmodernist novel, just one of the many examples which reflect how these discussions about time and narrative can be found predominantly in both Modernist and Postmodernist fiction. Randall Stevenson's study of time

in both Modernist and Postmodernist fiction offers a comprehensive summary of their similarities and differences. According to Stevenson, modernist fiction offers narratives

which turn away from the reifying pressures of modern life towards more inviolate inner states of consciousness, ones which allow what Virginia Woolf calls ‘time in the mind’ to replace the rigours of public time, its divisions and subdivisions dissolved in a seamless, unchronological stream of mingling memories and impressions. (“Greenwich Meanings” 131)

Postmodernist tendencies in fiction offer a rather different approach by being “self-consciously interrogative of some of the textual strategies practiced within it” (132), and Stevenson quotes Ursula K. Heise’s observation that postmodernist writing is capable of “extending or radicalizing modernist tropes,” but goes on further to explain how it responds to “an altered culture of time” (Heise 64), one “in which the media and information technologies have heightened a sense of foreshortened present, and of simultaneity, and have made several other alterations to any sense of time that might have been familiar to modernism” (134). In other words, Modernist writers were largely influenced by Bergson’s concept of *la durée* – the differentiation between chronological and intuitive time, and were more traditionally fascinated by the tension that exists when authors and characters alike attempt to make sense of internal time. Postmodernist writers, on the other hand, have been more overtly experimental with the representation of time in their fictional worlds, often utilising narrative techniques that subvert readers’ very fundamental understanding of reality.

When it comes to experimental narratives in these two categories, two writers come to mind: James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. Kermode provides an astute overview of Joyce and Beckett, whom, in his opinion, were great modernist writers who “retreated into some paradigm,

into a timeless and unreal vacuum from which all reality had been pumped” (Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* 113). The difference between them, Kermode contends, is in their respective approaches to modernism. Joyce, in his opinion, was a realist who “concerned himself with mess, the disorders of common perception” and in *Ulysses*, “studies and develops the tension between paradigm and reality, asserts the resistance of fact to fiction, human freedom, and unpredictability against plot” (113). On the other hand, the younger Beckett’s approach to fiction was minimalist, almost reductionist in terms of narrative structure; a sharp contrast which leads Kermode to describe the role of Beckett as “a link between the two stages [of old and new modernism], and as illustrating the shift towards schism” (26). In other words, Beckett, for Kermode, represents the supposed shift, from a form of “new” modernism to postmodernism fiction. As with their predecessors, Coetzee, Healy and Barnes are preoccupied with the relationship between past and present realities; yet, in the way in which these three writers explore the possibility of imagination debunking past or reality to produce its own layers of reality, the transition from modernism to postmodern writing does not signify a literary climax or death, but rather, pushes the boundaries of aesthetic representations—of time in this case—in fiction. In other words, their works do not simply reflect a return to modernist fiction, but rather, represents a form of fluctuation between the critical boundaries of modernism and postmodernism that reflects the very nature of time that they try and represent in their works.

Understanding this development in tradition allows us to better understand the selection of these three writers and situate them in a larger discourse about the representations of time in the novel. Coetzee has made it clear that Beckett has “remained his most important literary reference” (Hayes, *J. M. Coetzee and the Novel* 2), describing him as “a clear influence” in terms of prose to the point that he was interested in discovering a ‘secret’ of prose style and making it

“his own” (*Doubling the Point* 25). Aidan Higgins holds the view that Healy “was the natural heir to the experimental narrative tradition in Irish literature, a counter-realist tradition which includes Joyce, Beckett, Flann O’Brien, and Higgins himself” (*Writing the Sky* 21). Further description of his works seems applicable to the works of all three writers in the discussion, that there exists in his novels “a productive tension between the representation of complex lives and events, and the modernist desire to find new ways of expressing the rich subjectivity of these lives” (xii). As a writer who is deeply interested in psychological realism, it makes sense to include Barnes in this discussion to get a sense of how he approaches same subject matter of time in narrative, given how his experimentation with different forms of the novel addresses the “rich subjectivity” of human experience, reflecting certain possible mindsets of contemporary writers. The question of how these writers employ respective narrative techniques in their narratives is important. But examining the reasons for these selections could be just as critical, allowing us as readers new ways of understanding time as a product or creator of human experience.

By extending the discussion beyond the fundamental pleasures of reading or aesthetic appreciation, more deeply philosophical issues concerning the temporality of human existence and mortality quite naturally come into consideration. Perhaps what is unique about Coetzee, Healy and Barnes is how their narratives address certain existential concerns individuals face in life by mirroring the exact state of their experiences. In other words, the basic premise of the various works explored here have a single theme, revolving around the logic that reducing human experience into simple descriptions of emotions chronicled by empirical dates and timeframes inevitably fail to address the complex psychological effects caused by major shifts in one’s life. They also address how reality can be twisted and shaped into unrecognisable forms

simply by focusing on the subjective experience of time, timeless concerns which represent the complexities of the human condition. In *Foe*, Coetzee presents to us the state of existential anxiety that the mind experiences when historical events and memories are forcefully altered or removed completely by external authoritarian entities. The time-centric aesthetic concerns in *Foe* explore how the relatively fragile nature of identity can be compromised when one's perception of time is manipulated and structured in ways that are very far removed from what was originally perceived. In a similar if arguably less complicated fashion, Healy's protagonist in *A Goat's Song* helps us psychologically understand the time-sensitive concerns of a break-up in terms of how pain is experienced, and more importantly, endured over time. In his obsession with a figure that no longer exists in his physical reality, the protagonist undergoes the torment of waiting despite his subconscious awareness that it is a hopeless endeavour. Lastly, Barnes demonstrates to us the deeply unsettling experience of having one's narrative disrupted by the abrupt and untimely inclusion of information which completely alters the versions of truth that were present earlier in the novel. By paying close attention to time sensitive elements such as the order and duration of events in one's memory, *The Sense of an Ending* provides a poignant example of how viewing reality in the present—without considering the gaps and possible accounts from the past ultimately— offers an incomplete version of the truth.

By scrutinising how time is perceived by these novels' respective protagonists and how their lived experiences are constructed, readers are allowed a visceral experience of the characters' inner state of mind. Whether it is existential anxiety on the part of Susan Barton in *Foe* which quickens the pace of the narrative at certain points in the novel; the trauma that Jack Ferris struggles with in *A Goat's Song*, which results in a circular and chaotic narrative. And perhaps the inherent doubt that exists because of the unreliable nature of memory, which Barnes

explores through the narration of Tony Webster in *The Sense of Ending*, where he eventually discovers how the gaps in narrative have led to a distortion of the past and reality as he knows it.

From the brief description of these three novels, the various treatments of time may not be so overtly subversive as the use of reverse chronology in *Time's Arrow*, but each novel does display metaleptic characteristics which deal with time in narrative in innovative ways. Monika Fludernik explains Genette's concept of metalepsis as

an existential crossing of the boundaries between extradiegetic and diegetic levels of a narrative or the (intra)diegetic and metadiegetic levels; or in short, as the move of existants or actants from any hierarchically ordered level into one above or below (also possibly skipping intermediate levels). ("Scene Shift, Metalepsis, and the Metaleptic Mode" 383)

Fludernik goes on to identify five types of metalepsis in Genette's *Narrative Discourse*: author metalepsis which refers "to the baring of the mimetic illusion by undermining the realistic expectation that the narrator merely tells a story over which he has no power"; the literal move of the narrator or character to a lower level of embedded story world; implicating the narratee "on the story level or the protagonist as narratee on a superior (discourse level)"; borrowing from what Marie-Laurie Ryan dubs as "rhetorical metalepsis" where the narrator "takes the opportunity of providing the reader with some background information"; and lastly, pseudo-diegetic or reduced metadiegetic, where the "substitution by the frame narrator for the narrator on the intra- or metadiegetic level is only very tangentially related to a metaleptic crossing of boundaries" (387-388). These definitions are characteristic of embedded narratives in general, and can potentially "undermine heuristic distinctions relating to time, level, and addressor/addressee in narrative" (*Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* 303), which

consequently disrupts a reader's sense of time and reality. Although brief, this summary of Genette's proposals regarding metalepsis is enough to suggest that Coetzee, Healy and Foe all have metaleptic properties in their fiction to varying degrees. Whether it is narratorial transgressions or fragmented narratives, these shifts between diegetic realities are made visible largely through references to time.

Of the three texts, the shifting roles of the author and narrator in *Foe* provides an obvious example of intradiegetic intrusions in the texts, which are linked to the problematic issues with historiography and metafiction. However, the other two novels also have narrators who are not consistently in the same diegetic frame of reality, given how much they traverse between diegetic levels in their constructed memories, and what constitutes their narrative present. When Jack (in Healy's *A Goat's Song*) creates an entirely new fictional world to house his imaginative desires, constant reminders of his presence, as both a character and creator of the fictional reality, complicates the different levels of diegetic realities. Likewise, Tony (in *The Sense of an Ending*) experiences random shifts in between his memories and present reality, and the active participation at times in both reveals how our perception of time can be an inherently problematic endeavour. Even the presence of a physical text (in the form of the novel) does not necessarily mean that primary diegetic levels are ascertained, leading to further complications to the narratives that illustrate the very abstract nature of human experience. These observations return to the premise of this dissertation that human experiences are constructed based on the measurements of time, just as how the various layers of time present in narratives are built on one's perception of individual experiences.

BREAKING DOWN THE NOVELS

According to Paul Ricoeur, “the relationship of time and narrative is reciprocal [...] to the extent that any understanding of time is marked already by the shape the narrative has given to it” (Ricoeur from Currie, *About Time* 355), and it is in the form of such narrative techniques that such effects can be achieved. It thus makes sense that the work of each author will be examined according to the various structures of their narratives, whether they are fragmented or even deformed. My dissertation will be organised in the follow sequence: J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986) as the first chapter, followed by Dermot Healy’s *A Goat’s Song* (1998), and concluding with Julian Barnes’s *The Sense of an Ending* (2012). *Foe* will be examined in terms of the role of the narrator in a text devoid of a concrete, narrative framework; *A Goat’s Song* will consider the creation of a fictional reality which exists simultaneously within its own sphere of temporality and the protagonist’s imagination; *The Sense of an Ending* uncovers similarities with detective fiction in terms of the slippages of information that distorts our perception of time and reality.

Organising these three novels chronologically may seem counterintuitive initially, given that the level of experimentation decreases with each novel. Instead of development in terms of complexity as one would expect from this chronological arrangement, Coetzee is arguably the most experimental out of the three, and the form of *Foe* has perplexed critics with its abstract variations of prose since it was conceived. Healy’s style, while experimental in its own right, is comparatively less complex. As the last writer in this discussion, Barnes’s formalistic experimentations are even less radical, with his focus seemingly more on plot development than finding ways to represent time. However, this simplification of form does not mean that Barnes is by any means a lesser writer, as his ability to capture the same time-sensitive poignancy of the other novels with comparatively less experimentation is reason enough to justify his inclusion in

my discussion. As a time-based narrative, the escalation does not take place in terms of formalistic development, but in terms of how Barnes's writing is arguably more conscious of form than his predecessors. Therefore, the positioning of *The Sense of an Ending* as the last novel in my dissertation serves to temper expectations of radical narratives which are supposed to capture the aesthetic uses of time.

Viewed in this sequence, there is a clearer form of development in terms of how these three novels approach time-sensitive narratives. Coetzee's attempt to address what constitutes lived experience begins with recollections of Susan Barton's past memories, and *Foe* reaches a point in his last chapter where reality is deconstructed in its entirety to reveal how it is essentially formless without structures in place to measure time. Healy's less radical approach sees *A Goat's Song* divided into three parts: the first chapter where time is understood through lived experience; the second part where a reality is completely imagined; and the third part finds him observing how time passed in his past. Placed together, the three chapters in *A Goat's Song* offer us a general overview of time can be experienced in different ways even in the same individual. Barnes concludes the discussion by explicating how what constitutes lived experience of time can unravel when it is observed in retrospect. Here, it is quite clear that these three authors are representative of their respective literary experiences, but tied by their responses to temporality.

These three novels were selected because they share a similar question: how does one experience time authentically? More specifically, does the creation of reality require a process of observing temporal arrangement, or living through the very process of experiencing the events? The logical response is that one has to live through the process and experience time passing in each moment to have any form of measurement or understanding. However, the reality is that observation from a distance, both physically and metaphorically, occupies a much more

significant portion of our consciousness. Indeed, all three novels are compelling in their respective ways in terms of how they engage philosophical discussions of time without being overtly and excessively theoretical in terms of approach. From Coetzee's intense dissection of time-based narratives, to Healy's emotional treatise on love and loss, to Barnes's almost clinical and dispassionate observation of how time passes by, this development returns to my observation that creating an authentic experience of time is not necessarily dictated by experimental or complexity of form. Instead, it is by establishing how conscious we are of time, both philosophically and phenomenologically, that grants us a deeper understanding of what constitutes the human experience of reality.

Given that time can be measured in Bergsonian terms as intuitive, perceptions of time are also subjected to many different factors, ranging from minor emotional shifts to realities distorted by traumatic memories. For instance, the passing of time viewed by a narrator from the first-person point of view is vastly different from the way time is presented from a third-person narrative. For while third person-narration provides a clearer link with objective measurements of reality, first-person narration is largely self-dependent as a fictional character controls the narrative based on his or her own terms. The oral immediacy that is presented by the epistolary form creates a sense of the present, which then creates a greater sense of disorientation when the credibility or authenticity of the speaker's account is undermined or compromised. In the case of Coetzee's *Foe*, these characteristics are present right from the beginning. As a rewriting of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, *Foe* offers the alternative narrative of a character that claims to have been deliberately removed. In her search for her daughter, Susan finds herself on an island with Cruso and his slave Friday, and after returning to England, tries to convince an author named Foe to write her story. Readers who are familiar with the original text would have noticed

the immediate discrepancies: Coetzee's Cruso does not return to England as he does in the original, Friday becomes a mute character, and most importantly, the narrator is an entirely new character of a different gender.

From this, there are obvious intradiegetic and intertextual questions which are brought about by the distortion of temporality in the narrative. At times, it is difficult to ascertain which state of reality the characters are in, whether it is in a shared plane of physical reality in the narrative, or the imaginary world of their consciousness. In some cases, one questions whether it really matters at all, given how little control one has over the way events are recorded. In her response to Foe's story about the Irishwoman, Susan points out that it is more important "knowing to what interpreter the story of my [her] hours has been consigned" (*Foe* 124), given how the exact content of the story is much less important than how it is told. By clearly referencing how time in the form of events has already been fixed in terms of "hours" at the same time, Susan creates a rift in the narrative by subverting any possibility of a realist, chronological flow. Indeed, this quickly escalates into a more major conflict when Susan and Foe argue about the order of her story. In Foe's view as the author of the story, Susan's narrative has to be arranged chronologically, in terms of "loss, then quest, then recovery; beginning, then middle, then end" (117), which completely derails what Susan herself perceives as the actual account of events.

This provides just one example of temporal manipulation in the text, where there are gaps in narrative that cannot be filled, creating a sense of non-movement in the text where temporal progression is seemingly negated by the lack of words to fill the space. While Cruso's account of what takes place is conveyed in a fragmented and random manner, Friday's inability to give his side of the story creates a vacuum, where the absence of events clearly distorts the way in which

we understand what really takes place in the story world. More importantly, however, is how one's perception of time in any narrative can be dictated by the various accounts of the characters. This is not measured by linear, empirical terms, but also by the packing of details in the form of dialogues and observations. Susan's intrusion into the original text of *Robinson Crusoe* creates a case of disjunctive temporalities, where the contradiction of certain details in Defoe's original novel provides an extension to the narrative in terms of the time that is required for reading. Not only has the length of the narrative been stretched physically in terms of the number of words, but also by the additional perspectives which add layers to the pre-existing storyline, be it addition or distortion. All these will be discussed in the first/next chapter.

The second chapter will focus on Dermot Healy's *A Goat's Song* and the concept of duration. Healy's narrative begins with a playwright named Jack Ferris who, in the process of waiting for his lover, finds himself writing a completely new narrative from his imagination, transitioning from his lover's childhood to the point when they meet, and subsequently back to the very present moment where he left off, except that it is not the exact same circumstances as when it first begun. Described by Dermot McCarthy as "uroboric" ("Recovering Dionysius" 148)—the image of a serpent with its tail in its mouth—Jack is presented as both the creator and participant of his own narrative, contemplating past events from both the external image of his memories, as well as the interior worlds of the characters involved in a tragic chapter in his life. A self-confessed alcoholic who yearns to be with his lover Catherine, Jack finds himself rewriting his narrative of memories with the intention of finding a compromise between the harsh reality he faces in the present, and the possibility of reconciliation and redemption in a fictional reality created from fragments of past images, conversations and events. With the first eighty-four pages devoted to a description of his drunken stupors and grief, the next few hundred

pages presents an extensive, disturbingly detailed narrative that begins with Catherine's father Jonathan Adams, extending from the moments of her childhood to their meeting, and eventually, coming full circle to his position on the bridge. Here, recollection becomes a process of recreation; memory becomes fiction, and the narrator becomes an artist of his own past and present states of imagination, leaving a narrative that draws attention to the very fictionality of its construction. This convergence of multiple realities contemplates the very representation of imagination—and consciousness—in the form of the writer's work.

In other words, Jack's attempt to write his love into his play is an act that exists simultaneously on two separate diegetic levels of reality. This is a characteristic that is present in almost any novel that is concerned with the treatment of time, where the significance of an event can be dictated by how lengthy their descriptions take, be it extended or condensed. The various states of consciousness of the narrator in *A Goat's Song* provides a visceral representation of how duration works in narrative. In the early stages of the novel, Healy's main protagonist Jack Ferris finds himself shifting between states of temporary lucidity and long, extended moments of drunken stupor. The heightened state of awareness of the things around him is expressed through the elongation of time, when Jack obsesses on minute details with even the most mundane of tasks or observations. Regardless of whether it is important or relevant, each additional layer of information requires more time for the reader to absorb and visualise reality from Jack's perspective. At the same time, the flow of time seems to slow down as Jack's focus seems to detach entirely from the surroundings he is in. Even the intermittent mentions of clock time in brief instances are separated almost clinically by sentences which are deliberately short to accelerate the progress between each period. Indeed, beneath the multiple layers of Healy's narrative techniques lies a form of existential anxiety that occurs on a plane where imagination

and memory contradict and cohere simultaneously, all done with the protagonist's intention of sustaining the viability of a particular reality. The deliberate, self-conscious manipulation of time serves to highlight the very fictionality of duration, leading to extended questions with regard to the impossibility of any singular, concrete reality. These separate states of diegetic realities and their different frames of time resonate perfectly with Genette's concept of duration in narrative, which considers how long the events in the story take in relation to how long the narrative takes to narrate them.

The last chapter will address the importance of order in the text, specifically in terms of how the events of the story are positioned in relation to the sequencing presented by the narrative. Of the three novels discussed in this project, Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* presents the most literal case of how the narrative ceases to progress purely on a chronological trajectory due to the discovery of "gaps" that are not revealed till much later in the story. These "gaps" comprise of withheld information by the characters in the text, potentially caused by misinterpretations and miscommunication which distort the flow of the narrative when retrospection and reflection by the protagonist takes place. The shattering peripeteia that takes place in the life of Tony Webster echoes what Frank Kermode describes as "the registration of impressions we fail to 'take in', but can be recovered a little later by introspection" (Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* 53). As Tony attempts to piece together a new understanding of past events which he had a distorted view of, fragments of memories and information begin to resurface, revealing how the first chapter summarising the first forty years of his life has been reduced to a summary that is woefully inadequate in setting up our understanding of how the chain of events take place after.

As the novella begins with “I remember, in no particular order,” there is a foreshadowing of characteristics belonging to the genre of detective fiction, where disparate pieces of information are left scattered and unorganised. According to James Dalrymple, this beginning “confronts the reader immediately with a hermeneutic challenge that may be described as the ‘crisis of the sign’ (Stewart 20), in which we are offered signifiers without any obvious signified, images with no clear representational context” (Dalrymple 89). These gaps in the narrative are made explicit by Tony’s own assessment that he is an unreliable narrator, and that he is very much aware of the exact placement and authenticity of events in his recollections. At one stage, he states rather bluntly: “That’s how I remember it now, though if you were to put me in a court of law, I doubt I’d stand up to cross-examination very well” (Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* 119). In fact, Tony’s narrative is littered with doubt, with terms such as “evidence” and “proof” signifying the lack of confidence he has in his own narration (39), as well as the need for “witnesses” to verify the truth of his words (59). In other words, the order of events and the exact sequencing of actions are left unanchored in time. This leaves both protagonist and reader in a state of uncertainty, without a sense of grounding in reality which the measurement of time provides.

From the brief summaries of these selected novels, we can see that each text offers its own unique take on how an authentic experience of time can be either lived or observed from a distance. More importantly, these discussions are not presented in unnatural forms simply for the sake of unusual experimentations, but rather to highlight how an authentic experience of time is never chronological. It is difficult to take psychological realism seriously without considering how there can overlapping temporalities due to an individual’s state of mind. As Ricoeur observes, “[i]f reading involves the active presentification of events, living often involves the

opposite: the active depresentification of event which takes place before the eye” (Ricoeur from Currie, *About Time* 355). In other words, the presentation of how time is experienced in various forms is never singular, given that even the simple process of recollection also involves multiple frames of different times. More importantly, these effects reinforce the point that the ordering of time in different forms of narratives will never have identical time schemes in their respective story worlds, which promises the potential of new narratological possibilities.

However, despite having made the claim that the narrative experiments undertaken by each of these writers offer new and innovative ways of contemplating the experience of time earlier, there are a few difficult but crucial concerns that need to be addressed before proceeding. Given the range of authors who are interested in experimenting with time and narrative, how do these new narratological possibilities justify the exclusion of other contemporary writers who have arguably written experimental works that are arguably even more compelling and relevant? By extension, how do Coetzee, Healy and Banville, known to be very different kinds of writers, fit together in this discussion? The last question is probably the most difficult one to answer: given the rich and extensive selection of works from each of these authors, were there other novels that could have been similar, if not more suitable candidates?

To begin with, a common thread that binds all three novelists, and by extension their novels, lies in one of Coetzee’s more intriguing claims, that “[a]ll writing is autobiography: everything that you write, including criticism and fiction, writes you as you write it” (*Doubling the Point*, 17). Though Coetzee’s quote does not seem to reference the concept of time directly, the line “writes you as you write it” already addresses how reality will always be inevitably shaped by perception, just as how time can never be just understood in/on chronological terms. This is evident in *A Goat’s Song*, where the lines between fiction and reality became so obscured

that it necessitated a reconfiguration of how we understood time as a construct, and more critically, brings to our attention how the construction of self in the narrative of one's own imagination can feel so authentic, yet strangely artificial at the same time. Likewise, there are similarities between *Foe* and *The Sense of an Ending*: both protagonists find their versions of the truth distorted by forces beyond their control, disrupting their senses of continuity and leading them to question whether their memories and experiences really did exist the same way that was remembered.

The existential anxiety that ensues after this revelation finds its roots in all three novels, albeit with different approaches; Susan Barton, Jack Fenris and Tony Webster are all characters who attempt to shape the narratives of their lives based on their memories and lived experiences, be it as fictional narrators searching for an author's acceptance, (re)constructing an entire fictional narrative to address unanswered questions, or attempting to piece together an incomplete narrative with parts that appear at different points in time. All three authors, to borrow Coetzee's words, "confront or evade the problem of how to know the truth about the self without being self-deceived" (*Doubling the Point* 252). Indeed, while it may not have been intentional, the different backgrounds of each author, with Coetzee as a South African postcolonial writer, Healy as an Irish novelist, and Julian Barnes as a writer of contemporary British fiction, demonstrate how our inability to make sense of time and derive meaning from memories and events is a universal concern which extends beyond race or culture. Therefore, even though there may be other works of fiction that can contribute to the discussion, I do believe that these three novels are not only fascinating in their own right, but are also tied together by the parallels between each author's approach to temporality.

As such, I hope that the following dialogue between these three authors and their respective novels will engage what Healy describes as the difficult challenge of giving “some form to what cannot be uttered” (*A Goat’s Song* 5). This is a poetic way of describing how difficult it is to understand what constitutes lived experience, much less give it a definitive shape, which echoes Coetzee’s sentiment that writers should undertake “responsibility toward something that has not yet emerged” (*Doubling the Point* 246). This in turn leads to Barnes’s conclusion that “[h]istory is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation” (*The Sense of an Ending* 17), which aptly summarises the problems faced by every author, or indeed every individual, when one tries to make sense of reality through the empirical measurements of time. The alignment of these respective viewpoints will shape the discussion in the rest of this paper.

CHAPTER TWO — FICTIONALISING, MANIPULATING, DISTORTING: TIME IN *FOE*

You are free to give to the story what application you will [...] To me the moral of the story is that there comes a time when we must give reckoning of ourselves to the world, and then forever after be content to hold our peace.

— J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*

In this discussion of how the workings of time in narrative help shape the way human experiences are perceived in fiction, we begin with J. M. Coetzee, a writer whose works have displayed an acute sense of “reflective self-consciousness” (Atwell from Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 3) — whether it is through the characters of his novels, or expressed through narrative form. According to David Atwell, Coetzee’s mode of self-consciousness “is directed at understanding the conditions—linguistic, formal, historical, and political—governing the writing of fiction in contemporary South Africa” (*Doubling the Point* 3); in other words, Coetzee’s works are concerned with how fiction can shape the spectrum of what ultimately constructs human experience, in any of the four areas mentioned above. However, the focus of this dissertation is not on these four areas but rather on a common thread that binds them together in the form of fictional time. More specifically, I am interested in how time is articulated through Coetzee’s use of various literary expressions, and how these different variations of time ultimately provide the foundation for how realities are perceived.

Whether it is referencing history or making sense of political strife, the manipulation of time plays a key role in Coetzee’s depiction of these events, a characteristic that is distinct in his work. In an interview with Atwell, the author himself had this to say about time:

Afrikaner Christian nationalism came to power and set about stopping or even turning back the clock. Its programs involved a radically discontinuous intervention into time, in that it tried to stop dead, or turn around a range of developments normal (in the sense of being the norm) in colonial societies. It also aimed at instituting a sluggish no-time in

which an already anachronistic order of patriarchal clans and tribal despotisms would be frozen in place. This is the political order in which I grew up. And the culture in which I was educated — a culture looking, when it looked anywhere, nostalgically back to Little England — did nothing to quicken time. So I am not surprised you detect in me a horror of chronicity South African style~

But that horror is also a horror of death... Historicizing oneself is an exercise in locating one's significance, but it is also a lesson, at the most immediate level, in insignificance. It is not just time as history that threatens to engulf one: it is time itself, time as death.

(Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* 209)

These references to time seem to suggest that individual or collective perceptions of reality are controlled by the manipulation of events in various forms, or to be more precise, how the appearances of events are distorted for various political purposes results in a heightened awareness of time. In such a socio-political environment it is perhaps unsurprising that time is perceived as not really passing in a continuous manner, but as “radically discontinuous,” lacking any basic sense of structure.

Indeed, Coetzee’s point here is quite clear: the individual or party which manages to gain control of history and time can control reality. As Paul Ricoeur reminds us, “[a]ll history may be understood as the advent and progress of a unique meaning and as the emergence of singularities [...] History wavers between a structural type and an ‘event’ type of understanding” (*History and Truth* 73). In other words, given how lives and experiences are dictated by event time, the historicising of time is an act of power that can drastically alter the way people perceive their lives. While there is an inherent pluralism in terms of human experiences and timelines, aligning the population to one general, isolated framework is essentially the re-development of a culture’s

sense of time. It is a long and arduous process, difficult to calibrate in terms of the sheer magnitude of effort required. Most importantly, the manipulation at work here involves the removal of ruptures, as well as exploiting the ambiguous nature of history, fundamentally unethical gestures which provide what is perhaps one of Coetzee's strongest points of resentment, moving against what he perceives as despotism in its most sinister form.

What is even more interesting is Coetzee's point that one's individual presence in history is not restricted to its relation with historical time, but that time seems to be the fundamental basis of reality, which has the potential to threaten one's very existence. If time cannot exist on a visceral, cognitive level, it seems restricted then in terms of how reality and planes can be concretised. The problem with being denied a concrete plane of reality is that the basic essence of one's existence comes into question, which subsequently condemns the individual to a state of ontological uncertainty or existential crisis. Subjecting oneself to a historical version of time is, in effect, to surrender one's autonomy, which explains why Coetzee refers to it as locating one's "insignificance." Indeed, his main concern lies in how this particular aspect of human experience comes in the form of oppression — more specifically, the sensation of being oppressed by having time, and consequently, reality, dictated and controlled by entities in power. This much is clear in his description of "patriarchal clans and tribal despotisms," that there is something inherently politically destructive about the control of people's realities for the consolidation of power. To make matters worse, it may not even be possible to hold these tyrants accountable most of the time. In Attwell's critical commentary on Coetzee's essay on Beckett's *Watt*, he points out that "while history is shown [...] as a final horizon or perhaps a determining frame surrounding and circumscribing human acts, including analytical acts, the causal relationships governing this contingency remain opaque" ("The Problem of History in the Fiction of J. M.

Coetzee” 580). This offers a sobering reminder that the root of these issues may not be easy to identify, much less resolve.

Besides offering these relatively vocal opinions in his series of interviews, Coetzee’s views on these social and political issues are further expanded in the realm of fiction, where the fictionalising of time in constructed narratives offers a range of thematic possibilities that may not have existed otherwise. In ways that are at times extremist in the expression of his views, Coetzee’s writing demonstrates his thought process of crafting characters and narratives which are overtly aware of how time shapes the very reality they exist in, whether it is the “quickenings” of time that changes a culture’s lifestyle, or a kind of stasis in which the abuse of power is allowed to take place. In his introduction to *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee*, Dominic Head comments that Coetzee’s style constitutes “an astonishing duality, a mode of writing that combines a sophisticated control of fictional time and space with a self-consciousness that continually threatens to disrupt it, but without ever quite doing so” (*Preface*). As a writer, Coetzee displays an extraordinarily sensitivity with regard to how fictional time is not only constructed, but made clear to both the reader and the fictional characters that inhabit the realm of his imaginative world. Indeed, the threat of disruption raised by Head is an understatement: Coetzee does not just “threaten to disrupt” this space of self-consciousness, but actively destabilises the very vantage point that supposedly provides a diegetic centre. And this is done by establishing time as a fictional representation of the construct that it actually is.

While Coetzee’s vested interest in the concept of time in fiction and storytelling is rather clear in most of his works, these thoughts and analyses are laid out more explicitly and extensively in his academic work. There may or may not have been a direct correlation between how Coetzee writes academically about time in other pieces of work and how he formulates his

craft of writing fiction. Yet, even though the levels and types of experimentation can be different, the fascination and specific observations of craft in other works of fiction may have informed his own awareness of narrative techniques, and shaped the way certain thematic concerns are dealt with. One of his more famous pieces is his essay “Time, Tense and Aspect in Kafka’s “The Burrow”” where he examines how “the relations between the time of narration (the moving now of the narrator's utterance) and the time of the narrative (referential time) turn out to be far more complex and indeed baffling, the more closely we read the text” (557). Like Kafka, whom Coetzee claims to have written “numerous passages [...] that reveal a preoccupation with the metaphysics of time,” Coetzee’s own play with tenses and time relations is almost labyrinthine in nature, thus removing any possible presence of a dietic hierarchy.

In the same interview with Atwell, Coetzee discusses the importance of time in narrative, using Kafka’s “The Burrow” as a reference point:

[...] Kafka’s concern is with the experience of a breakdown of time, of the time-sense: one moment does not flow into the next – on the contrary, each moment has the threat or promise of being (not becoming) a timeless forever, unconnected to, ungenerated by, the past. One can choose to regard this as a symptom of psychological breakdown in the man Kafka, but only at the risk of dismissing as pathological every so-called mystical intuition.

Leaving Kafka behind now, let me say two things. The first is that by its nature narrative must create an altered experience of time. That experience can be heady for both writer and reader. For the reader, the experience of time bunching and becoming dense at points of significant action in the story, or thinning out and skipping or glancing through nonsignificant periods of clock time or calendar time, can be exhilarating – in fact, it may

be at the heart of narrative pleasure. As for writing and experience of writing, there is a definite thrill of mastery – perhaps even omnipotence – that comes with making time bend and buckle, and generally with being present when significance, or the will to significance, takes control over time. You asked about claims for some capabilities of narrative, and this is one claim I make. (*Doubling the Point* 203)

There are a few expressions here that are really interesting when considering Coetzee's position on time in narrative. The first one is an echo of Kafka's concern "with the experience of a breakdown of time," where the word "experience" is critical to the main argument of this chapter. The entity which deals with this experience can be on the diegetic level of a fictional character, whose conscious reactions to the events subsequently affects the experiences of the reader. While the consequences of this breakdown are not stated explicitly here, the prospect of "being (not becoming)" is a daunting one which suggests a disconnect or alienation with the past, and possibly the future. The second is how specific he is when it comes to describing the nuances of time. Coetzee displays a certain degree of caution in the choice of vocabulary, as evident in this unpacking of terms: "each moment has the threat or promise of being (not becoming) a timeless forever, unconnected to, ungenerated by, the past." Likewise, the awareness of multiple possibilities and definitions that necessitates the loaded distinction between "unconnected" and "ungenerated" may be easily dismissed by the disinterested. It is thus difficult to believe that these very techniques are not similarly incorporated in one way or another into Coetzee's own writing.

Coetzee's logic comes from the premise that "narrative must create an altered experience of time," and this is fundamentally crucial when it comes to the creation of a story world for the narrative to exist in. For Coetzee, the point of this endeavour comes in two forms—"mastery"

and “narrative pleasure”—that the new realities that are created are ultimately based on the manipulation of time. Here, he lists some narrative techniques that can alter time in overt ways, such as “time bunching and becoming dense at points of significant action in the story, or thinning out and skipping or glancing through nonsignificant periods of clock time or calendar time,” methods which show clearly that the play with time in fiction is more than a simple game of numbers and sequences. The contrast between “becoming dense” or “thinning out” time suggests the presence of visceral characteristics which can be used to manipulate how certain events are perceived, particularly the ones which are extremely important to the characters or the telling of the story.

In the Introduction to his book *The Slow Philosophy of J. M. Coetzee*, Jan Wilm observes that “[o]ne of the most striking aspects of Coetzee’s work, on both a formal and topic level, is its aesthetics of slowness, a complex oscillation between momentum and stasis, a system of deferring and tarrying [...]” (Wilm 3-4). Wilm goes on to draw parallels between Coetzee’s and Beckett’s fictional characters, commenting that “[l]ike Beckett’s characters, who cannot go on but will go on, Coetzee’s characters and Coetzee’s form are ceaselessly driven forward while simultaneously being slowed down,” echoing what Mary Bryden calls “dynamic stillness”:

I find the ambiguity of [the phrase “dynamic still”] useful. It draws into collocation two tendencies which, though *potentially* mutually exclusive, are in fact part of an uncomfortable continuum in Beckett’s scenic world. (Bryden 182; original emphasis)

Coetzee’s fictional characters do experience this inherent paradox present in their predicaments, which is important when illustrating the effects of emotional throes, albeit in different forms. In moments of crisis, the phenomenological experiences of time vary. How time passes is affected indirectly by the spacing of time between events, and more critically, the level of affliction

which the protagonist struggles with based on societal perception and personal memories. An instance of such a character comes in the form of Susan Barton in *Foe*, who is trapped in a strange place where she is constantly moving, from searching for her daughter, to the shipwreck and being stranded on the island, before finding herself search for Foe in England; yet she comes no closer to finding the truth or closure that she desires, reflecting Wilm's observation that Coetzee "animates his narratives with interminable deferrals, continued retardations" (3).

In this way, Coetzee's characters would appear to share a similar form of existential plight as Beckettian or Pirandellian characters, in that there is a constant slowing down of time in order to reevaluate their respective situations, to reduce the pace of how time flows inexorably forward, or in Wilm's words, how one "rethinks, ruminates, reevaluates, and perhaps even philosophizes" (4). Borrowing from this understanding of slowness, Wilm identifies the novels of Henry James and Marcel Proust as "epistemological analyses" based on how their forms are constructed, specifically in terms of "their slow, meandering, minutely detailed descriptions and mappings of inner landscapes, a probing of characters' and readers' minds alike, through a deceleration of time by the means of syntax, vocabulary and grammar" (9). Wilm's concept of "slow reading", the central theme of discussion in his book as well as a theory referred to by Nietzsche, offers an interesting way of reading Coetzee as a writer and his works. According to Wilm, slow reading is

first a technique of reading, of actually lengthening the clock-time spent with a literary work, the time spent in the little world embraced by book covers. More substantially, however, it entails an attitude toward a literary artefact, an openness to the text, embracing of elusiveness and ambiguity, of the text's strangeness and otherness, as

Attridge puts it, welcoming the contemplative impetus that lies in formal complexity.

(15)

Given Coetzee's concerns with time, fiction and reality in his novels, the possibilities of abrupt diegetic shifts and experimentation with language means that his narratives are non-linear in a way that challenges the way we read. More importantly, Wilm's argument that "a certain kind of literature actually engenders a slow, detailed, deeply reflexive response by the reader" addresses involvement on the reader's part that goes beyond reading for pleasure's sake, but rather, forces the reader to reflect, respond and evaluate its effects, and "how these effects, reflections, and responses can be *described* in a phenomenological way" (16, emphasis from source). In some of his other novels such as *Disgrace* and *Waiting for Barbarians*, there are such moments when the pace of the narrative is slowed down not linguistically but semantically.

Foe, on the other hand, offers an entirely different proposition altogether, as the following discussion will show. An introduction to Coetzee's *Foe* can be relatively simple or quite complicated, depending on one's approach. From a layman's standpoint, it is a rewriting of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* involving sections of Defoe's *Roxana*. However, it can also be thought of as an unwritten chapter from the perspective of an individual who was written out of Defoe's original narrative for various reasons. The thematic concerns of the original are retained while additional elements are included which produce new interpretations of the original work — subversions and reworkings which in Angel Garcia Landa's words constitutes a "counter-narrative." Yet, any examination of Coetzee's work as simply a continuation of Defoe's work, be it for socio-political commentary or functioning as a fictional extension, would be limiting when one considers the narrative structure of Coetzee's novel.

Foe is divided into the four chapters, each with its distinctive features. The first chapter takes the form of a travel log; the second takes on the epistolary form; the third comprises a long conversational dialogue; and the fourth, involves a strange reality not unlike a dreamlike state. The only structure that binds them is that of incoherence and uncertainty itself. Most importantly for my own work, each of these chapters deals with narrative time in odd and almost deliberately destabilising ways, unfinished products of experimentation which fail to recollect where they begin. As the protagonist of *Foe*, Susan Barton's character chronicles her struggles against a series of obstacles which deny her a space in a concrete, diegetic reality. Whether it is swimming in the remains of a shipwreck or being swept away by the borrowed waves of Defoe's imagination, Susan finds herself searching for another to recognise her existence. Without explicitly stating her purpose in rewriting herself back into a narrative that has supposedly silenced and removed her, the eventual involvement of characters—who are quite clearly from diegetic realities at some remove from her temporarily constructed one—results in disturbingly uncomfortable situations where the ontological indeterminacy severely disorients our sense of reality.

It is quite impossible to begin a discussion of time and its different layers in fiction without referencing Henri Bergson's concept of *la durée*, where he differentiates between two kinds of time—homogenous and heterogenous—with the latter formulated from our intuitive experiences. While there are multiple instances when Susan Barton attempts to situate her narrative in a chronological framework with references to timing, dates and the ordering of events, it is quite clear that the empirical timestamps introduced consciously by her narration, ultimately serve to mask the reality that she seems to fear: that her entire narrative is an imaginative space that exists only within her world, which implies that all measurements of time

are intuitively constructed. Unfortunately for Susan, the subjectivity of her own experiences means that the external world is beyond her understanding or control. As each of the following chapters in *Foe* will illustrate, approaching the narrative from different perspectives of time ultimately fails to give the protagonist any assurance that her existence is nothing more than her own recognition of her own consciousness.

Indeed, this personification of time as the enemy of the individual prompts Georg Lukács to suggest that: “In the novel, meaning is separated from life, and hence the essential from the temporal; we might almost say that the entire inner action of the novel is nothing but a struggle against the power of time” (*The Theory of the Novel* 122):

Time brings order into the chaos of men’s lives and gives it the semblance of a spontaneously flowering, organic entity; characters having no apparent meaning appear, establish relations with one another, break them off, disappear again without any meaning having been revealed. But the characters are not simply dropped into that meaningless becoming and dissolving which preceded man and will outlast him. Beyond events, beyond psychology, time gives them the essential quality of their existence: however accidental the appearance of a character may be in pragmatic and psychological terms, it emerges from an existent, experienced continuity, and the atmosphere of thus being borne upon the unique and unrepeatable stream of life cancels out the accidental nature of their experiences and the isolated nature of the events recounted. (125)

What Lukács spells out in this excerpt is reminiscent of Coetzee’s earlier point about how reality, of individuals and the collective alike, can be defined largely by their perceptions of time, giving meaning to the isolated events that are experienced by each individual. Yet, what Lukács proposes as an ideal form of reality is precisely what Susan pursues: the notion of totality, to

belong to a larger narrative. As Paul de Man points out, Lukács's theory "emerges in a cogent and coherent way out of the dialectic between the urge for totality and man's alienated situation" (de Man 530), an explanation which does much to identify how Susan feels in her current predicament: an individual's "frustrating experience of [her] own inability to acquire universal dimensions" (531). While Susan's appearance is accidental, it is not situated in any form of time that is recognisable, at least to her. In other words, the reality of her endeavour to be part of a larger narrative lies in her need to belong to that frame of time, even if it is a fictional one, as long as it grants her movement towards an eventuality or conclusion.

The problem here is that Susan seems to underestimate how an endeavour to exist in a novel of someone else's imagination can be a perilous one, and how the consequences of her pursuit extend beyond her struggle against time. Timothy Bewes offers a relatively convenient way of summarising Lukács's stand on the novel in the form of a few primary observations (7), that "the novel is the form of the epoch of absolute sinfulness" (152), that the "novel form is [...] an expression of [...] transcendental homelessness" (41), and that it is "the epic of the world that has been abandoned by God" (88). All these quotes reflect one of the central characteristics of the postmodern, Jean-François Lyotard's suggestion that postmodern narratives display "an incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). Again, these themes reflect the very predicament that Coetzee undertakes as the premise of *Foe*. There is the persistent echo of this loss of faith that is evident in Susan's eventual and growing realisation that her existence cannot be enclosed in a novel, and the corollary recognition that fictionality is almost as nihilistic as Lukács's observations about the novel form.

Maire Kurrik summarises this problem by raising the question of which comes first, consciousness or the exterior world: "Was the rise of interiority the cause of the rise of the novel,

or was the disappearance of the purposive world the basic cause of peculiarly strained and threatened structure that Lukács calls the novel?" ("The Novel's Subjectivity" 106-107). Susan's predicament seems to be based on a similar premise: given that time is ultimately a human construct, was time first created to give man a sense of reality, or did the formulation of reality give rise to the need for time? This problem is paradoxical in nature, even when raised through asking a series of relatively simple questions: during which section of Defoe's narrative is Susan meant to have appeared? How can she justify her existence without the presence of preceding narratives chronicling her life? At which point of time did Crusoe (or Cruso), or Defoe (or Foe) decide to remove her from the narrative? Rather than moving forward with the exploration of this fictional realm, the process of reading appears to mirror the flow of time in the narrative, where every passing moment seems to be a step backwards in terms of retrospection and self-doubt. This characteristic of the novel appears to echo Coetzee's words in *Doubling the Point*, that works of fiction are "closed systems, prisons," even if they give the illusion suggesting otherwise. These confusing narrative(s) form a labyrinth — a series of dislocated temporal pathways which leave no doubt that Coetzee's deep concerns with representations of fiction and reality appear in his treatment of time.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Foe begins with a proclamation:

At last I could row no further. My hands were blistered, my back was burned, my body ached. With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slipped overboard. With slow strokes, my long hair floating about me, like a flower of the sea, like an anemone, like a jellyfish of the kind you see in the waters of Brazil, I swam towards the strange island, for a while

swimming as I had rowed, against the current, then all at once free of its grip, carried by the waves into the bay and on to the beach. (Coetzee, *Foe* 1)

It is worth considering why the story begins at this juncture. One possibility is that it is a conscious decision of the protagonist, or the narrator. Another could be the deliberate withholding of information which shifts the focus purely to the present, while providing a sense of tension that the narrative that comes before could potentially be compelling. Indeed, the physical ailments of the narrator provide signs of her arduous journey; her hands were “blistered, back was burned, body ached.” But one thing is quite clear: a certain amount of time has passed since she first stepped on the boat. That the story begins with the acknowledgement that this is the start of an important event, even in the form of a mundane expression of exhaustion, reveals a level of self-consciousness which already reveals to us that there is more at work than just a simple retelling of the event.

The distinction between Susan’s voice as a character and the main narrator becomes unclear at times. A reiteration of the opening paragraph emerges in an exchange between the Susan and Cruso:

Then at last I could row no further. My hands were raw, my back was burned, my body ached. With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slipped overboard and began to swim towards your island. The waves took me and bore me on to the beach. The rest you know.
(11)

The possessive noun “your island” draws our attention to an authorial figure who intrudes into the narrative, and the acknowledgement of “[t]he rest you know” suggests the breaking of the fourth wall, with the relatively problematic question of whether this wall is the one between the narrator and reader, or narrator and author. According to Alexandra Effe, “these metaleptic

transgressions between voices and narrative levels intertwine Susan, Foe, Defoe, Coetzee, and the reader” (*J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Narrative Transgression: A Reconstruction of Metalepsis* 34). If the diegetic levels between narrator, reader and author are indeed obscured, Susan is simultaneously an author of sorts given her status as the individual narrating how she wants the story to be told. This internal fragmentation breaks up any perception of time as the temporal continuity of the recounting of the event is disrupted every single time the narrator makes an extradiegetic reference, affecting the experiences of all parties involved in this process of narration. The phenomenology of fragmentation that takes place here addresses Effe’s argument that “[s]hared authorship constitutes a levelling of hierarchal structures between author, reader, and character, and between world and storyworld” (34), and the failure to establish how this hierarchy works contributes to the main reason why a sense of disorientation permeates the text from the very beginning.

Like the currents that sweep her towards the shore, the descriptions are vivid and detailed, leaving little doubt that the narrator is still very much part of this reality that she can measure. With the almost panoramic view of her long hair floating artistically above her, the photographic scene provides another cut in time, with the temporary reference to jellyfish in the waters of Brazil appearing unnaturally languid considering her circumstances. The elongation of time in order to focus on her posture and gestures shows a sense of control that she has over her reality, which arguably also serves to display how experience relies more on an intuitive perception of time rather than a fixed, chronological framework. Here, it is quite evident that the recounting has fictionalised the reality in which Susan Barton exists.

Despite this deliberately construction of diachronic settings, the logical consistency that coheres with Barton’s situation lends the scene a sense of authenticity. As a person who has very

recently experienced a shipwreck, and has even more recently undergone severe physical exertions, a sense of disorientation is to be expected. As Susan lays “sprawled on the hot sand” (1), it is quite clear that very little time that passes before the shadow falls over her, given how she is still able to physically lift herself and utter her plea for water. At the very least, there is an overtly conscious sense of time that is complemented by very practical needs that do not defy conventional logic. Her concern that they might become a source of food and “shortly expire” is one very small detail, while the attention to how her breathing “slowed” shows a sense of progression in time, as well as her own awareness that time is passing. Lastly, Barton’s acknowledgement that they “could not stay thus forever” indicates the presence of physical conditions that dictate her sense of urgency.

Further shifts in diegetic realities take place even in this early stage of the novel. When Susan encounters the apes in her brief overview of the island, the parenthesis with her disclaimer that she “will say more later” provides a sudden break in the narrative flow. There is no other indication prior to this moment that reality is not unfolding as it should, and that this account involves a retelling of a past experience. Other diegetic shifts include moments when Susan seems to be addressing the reader, which creates confusion: “I have told you how Cruso was dressed; now let me tell you of his habitation.” This can be assumed to be a break in the fictional worlds where the character addresses the reader, and the time stamp “now” follows up from the previous disclaimer that she “will say more later.” The use of the present tense—specifically present perfect tense in the first part—in both statements, suggest that this narration is taking place in a shared fictional present between fictional character (Susan) and the reader.

However, it becomes problematic when we remember that Susan’s primary addressee is Cruso, which complicates matters when a similar manner of speech is adopted to illustrate the act

of “telling”: “Let me tell you my story,” said I; “for I am sure you are wondering who I am and how I come to be here” (*Foe* 10). When Susan begins with “[l]et me tell you my story,” it should have been quite clear that Cruso is the entity that she addresses. Yet, the use of “I” has its roots already set in both diegetic realities, which complicates matters as the reader is no longer certain of where Susan is situated. While the reference to “how Cruso was dressed” in the first example makes it clear that she is addressing the reader, the second example above could very well be addressing both Cruso and the reader at the same time, given how it is phrased in a potentially misleading way that could have worked in both scenarios. Indeed, two different versions of the pronoun “I” that is used in the same sentence—in her verbal dialogue and as the narrator telling the story—is destabilising, and at the moment, the only entity that seems to have any measure of control over how the narrative is told is Susan herself. By denying the reader any chance of situating her temporally in the narrative, reality is shaped according to her perspective.

One important issue to address is the different use of tenses between the two episodes, bringing to attention how our usual ways of perceiving time through the medium of tenses can be problematic in *Foe*. At a basic level, “tense is a relation between the time of an utterance and the time of the event being spoken about” (Currie, *About Time* 15). In this particular scenario where Susan is beginning her story, the tenses are not consistent, which means that the “relation” between time of utterance and time of event is obfuscated. For the narrative to exist, the narrator has to be telling her tale in the fictional present of her reality, yet our inability to discern where this narrative takes place in a concrete story world echoes Mark Currie’s observation that “the ontological priority of the present is an error produced by the mere psychological experience of time” (15).

This introduces Currie's concept of "an untensed view of time", which addresses the inherently problematic issues that arise when the narrator is not only responsible for telling the story on one diegetic level, but also concurrently crafting the dialogue of her past narrating the same tale. An untensed view of time, according to Currie, "generally hold that there is no ontological distinction between past, present and future, and that in order to purge understanding of its egocentricity and its linguistic aberrations, time must be viewed as a single dimension" (15). This leads to difficulties differentiating the different frames of time in the narrative, beginning when Susan introduces herself to Cruso. In that moment, it is not entirely certain which frame of time she chooses to speak from, whether it is a recount from her past memories, or the fictional present of the narrative. This will be a recurring problem in the chapters that follow, where the main protagonists in *A Goat's Song* and *The Sense of an Ending* both traverse between their past memories and their present predicaments, leaving us in a perpetual state of confusion.

As illustrated earlier in this chapter with his critical analysis of Kafka's "The Burrow," manipulating tenses in fictional narratives is certainly an area of interest for Coetzee, and he alternates between tenses quite often in his works in order to distort or recalibrate our sense of time. At the same time, the use of present tense as the protagonist narrates the tale signifies a form of neutrality when it comes to the situation of events, avoiding a fixed placement in either the past or the future. James Harrison argues that the present tense utilised in the novel allows the protagonist, with all his limitations as both a narrator and character, "to comment from a relentlessly advancing present on the irrevocably receding past that led up to it" ("Point of View and Tense in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee" 81). More importantly, and in Harrison's words, "less manipulatively," Coetzee "enables the reader to remain abreast of a first-person narrator who is

grappling with the events of the novel, and however imperfectly, assessing and reassessing his own response to them in retrospect” (81). Other instances, such as the sudden reuse of the first line in the novel: “Then at last I could row no further. My hands were raw, my back was burned, my body ached,” followed by the rest of narration with relatively minor alterations, reminds us that ultimately this is a narrator who is trying to craft a convincing tale, and repeating it using the exact words may serve that function of imprinting the tale on our memories.

Besides the shifting between different tenses, telling Susan’s story through her first-person narration creates relatively unique ways of constructing perspectives, and Coetzee is certainly aware of the effects that his works generate. Utilising first person narration limits the narrative to the narrator’s perspectives, both with regard to the events that take into account the narrator as well as the narrator’s personal feelings about various characters involved in the plot. It is central to my argument that this restriction of perspectives is also a measure of control over time. A literal analogy of this perspective be derived from the very space that an event occupies. The uncovering of events requires time on the part of the protagonist and consequently extends the narrative whenever something new takes place. Similarly, the internal monologues that protagonists grapple with, either in the recesses of their memories or their deliberation in a moment of conflicts, break the flow of chronological time by extending it between points of contemplation. Take for example these short excerpts from *Foe*: by allowing us to follow every single action and thought from Susan, we are able to see the Coetzee’s fictional story world through her lenses. In turn, this gives her a measure of control over the narrative as she is able to dictate how it unfolds in terms of not only how it is described, but how it is sequenced as well.

As readers, we are allowed insight into how the narrator feels, but we are also similarly aware of the fact that this knowledge is available only to external parties, while the other

fictional characters anticipate and experience the pacing of time on their own terms. Although there is a sense of familiarity that comes from gaining access to an individual's thoughts and memories, it is difficult to take the information completely seriously as well, given that such personal narratives are limited by the narrators' personal experiences and incomplete information. These instances of familiarity and insights, according to Peter Mendilow, are contrivances which serve to destabilise our sense of reality:

a narrative in the first person and written throughout in the present tense would, if it were possible at all, appear so artificial as to make any identification impossible. It would obviously be limited to sensations and thoughts and exclude all action. It would also obtrude the act of writing itself, and by specifying itself so closely in time would appear even more remote to the reader, for it would impress on him constantly the fact and the act of communication. (*Time and the Novel* 107)

According to Mendilow's time-specific summary of present tense narration, there are several ways that the utilisation of first-person narration might contribute significantly to Coetzee's treatment of time in his works. In Mendilow's words, such an endeavour would "appear so artificial as to make any identification impossible" (107), meaning that Coetzee's characters would serve more as temporary mediums that help move the narrative forward, as caricatures rather than authentic human beings with stories that fill up their individual pockets of time. It is precisely this artificiality with which Coetzee's works seem to be so enamoured. A narrative that specifies itself "so closely to time" creates the sort of distancing one has from reality without a concrete sense of chronological time. This goes beyond the common trope of the unreliable narrator. By being granted the ability to justify his or her own thoughts using the ability to create sets of reasoning which sound reasonable, a heterodiegetic narrator who is "different from and

external to the story” is also freed from certain moral and existential dilemmas that other characters have to grapple with in their own worlds (Simpson 28).

In other words, there is an insidious element to the use of first-person narration. That it is taking place in the very moment of reading seems to absolve the narrator of any potential attempt at introspection and reflection, and by default, be removed from any potential guilt. The urgency of the moment does not allow this space for discussion. Indeed, the very premise of *Foe* lies in the incomplete narrative of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, where the entirety of the novel is told through the eyes of Crusoe in first-person narration while deliberately omitting Susan Barton’s presence (or so she claims). By denying her supposedly rightful presence in his story, Crusoe (or Defoe) has effectively silenced Susan’s voice. This provides a clear example of how first-person accounts can be abused to potentially deliver false narratives. In the same vein, this also allows readers to realise that Susan’s account of events cannot be fully trusted.

This discussion of first-person narration brings in David Attwell’s observation that there is the presence of a “difficult, seemingly intractable relationship in all of Coetzee’s novels between, on the one hand, system, structure, synchrony, acts of apprehension or consciousness, and on the other, events, diachrony and history” (“The Problem of History in The Fiction of J. M. Coetzee” 580). Besides *Foe*, there are a few notable works that come to mind when addressing this description, and it may be helpful to explore how first-person narration works in Coetzee’s *Waiting for Barbarians*. Narrated in first person by an unnamed magistrate, the very title of *Waiting for Barbarians* contains a time stamp in the word “waiting”, suggesting that the narrative unfolds in a way that anticipates the eventual arrival of what the novel has classified as barbarians. However, there is one critical ambiguity that seems to subvert/demean the very process of this waiting: the absence of specification when it comes to the very length of this wait.

Key questions, such as how long the wait must be or when to begin waiting seems to have been left deliberately unanswered. The most important concern of all may also be the most difficult one to deal with: like Vladimir and Estragon's futile wait for Godot, why must the narrator wait for an event which may not even come to be?

Finding answers to these questions may be fundamentally important when it comes to understanding Coetzee's views on the importance of time in *Waiting for Barbarians*, and perhaps the concept of time in narrative as a whole. The story revolves around the first-person narration of an unnamed magistrate, whose peaceful job under "The Empire" is thrown into uncertainty when rumours of a wild barbarian invasion emerge. After a series of encounters with the barbarians, including a brief affair with a young barbarian girl, the magistrate begins to question the very legitimacy of the authority he serves, realising that these violent narratives are forged in order to justify the atrocities committed by The Empire's operatives, including the main villain Colonel Joll, in order to hold on to their power and control. Written in 1980, there are signs that the experimentation with time in narrative in *Foe* had already begun to surface in this earlier work. Anne Waldron Neumann comments that, every moment in *Waiting for the Barbarians* "is present; past fades; future is hidden; cause and effect remain to be unravelled and pondered" ("Escaping the 'Time of History?'" 67). Indeed, the thematic concerns are relatively similar, as the censorship of marginalised voices and repression of memories are the main struggles faced by the characters in the text, given that the narrative is usually dictated by written history that has been enforced by a higher authority. In the expression of their personal experiences, it is clear that one's sense of interiority and awareness of time is a more complex, yet considerably more accurate, way of internalising the events that occur in their external reality as compared to the grand narratives proposed by establishments to control power. In other words, the case can be

made that cyclical time, a form of intuitive time, is a more authentic and natural way of perceiving the world, with all its multiple perspectives, than through the linear and limiting lens of human history.

These episodes in *Waiting for Barbarians* produce many points of discussion about how time can be perceived in the narrative, and some of which are similar to the concerns that will arise in *Foe* in its later chapters. Perhaps the most important one examines how historical narratives can impose order on its people, affecting how their lives are perceived not only by future generations, but by the people themselves in the actual timeline because of how their thoughts and actions are controlled by a despotic authority. A similar concern arises when Susan attempts to tell Cruso's history through first person narration. While it is not of the same magnitude in terms of dictating an entire population of people, Susan's position as the narrator of the story gives her the power to shape or distort narratives as well. Interestingly enough, just as how the original story of *Robinson Crusoe* omitted her presence from its storyline, Susan now has the ability to remove certain parts of Cruso's history from her retelling.

When the story then jumps to the narration of Cruso's history, the narrator kindly signals to the reader: "I would gladly now recount to you the history of this singular Cruso, as I heard from his own lips." Susan's assertion that the story would be exactly the same as what was heard "from his own lips" is hardly reassuring, but given how the reader is only given access to her thoughts and views, there are no possible alternatives. Like the villagers in *Waiting for Barbarians*, we are as helpless, under the The Empire's control of time and measurement of reality. At the same time, we are also restricted to the magistrate's account of events, with no means of verification. This discrepancy is pointed out by Teresa Dovey in her examination of Coetzee's fiction, observing that present-tense narration by the magistrate is "a single source of

information, with no mediating commentary either from the perspective of a heterodiegetic narrator or from the perspective of a narrator who is able to comment from a position in the present upon a past self” (210-211). It is ironic then that although the first-person narrative in *Foe* has enabled Susan to share her side of events, its inherent limitations have reduced the credibility of her account, and in an extreme scenario, transformed her into the same authoritarian figure that she seeks to subvert.

Susan’s announcement that she is about to recount Cruso’s history also serves as a metaleptic leap which once again disjoints/destabilises our sense of time, given that the diegetic realities which are at work here are once again unclear in terms of distinction. At the same time, Susan’s need for consistency is also reflected in the almost excessive focus on time stamps and indicators, and very specific ones at that, which vary in terms of length. While “two years” is a relatively general gauge of time, the next indicator of time comes in the form of “ten days out from port,” and these self-conscious references to time help ground the narrative in a structured way that retains the memories in their original form, or at least as far as possible. In other words, this may explain Susan’s frustration with Cruso when it comes to his version of events: “But the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another, and I was more and more driven to conclude age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory, and he no longer knew for sure what was truth, what fancy” (*Foe* 11-12). To say that there is a huge contrast between the recollections of Susan and Cruso is an understatement to say the least.

When we consider how specific Susan’s version of events strive to be compared to the messy descriptions of Cruso’s accounts, the immediate takeaway is that his account cannot be trusted. The idea that it was “hard to reconcile one with another” indicates the lack of coherence that stems from discontinuity and an inability to structure or sequence the events in a way that

makes sense. Indeed, these discussions of truth and unreliable memories form references that will constantly resurface in the other chapters, none more explicit than a direct conversation exchanged between the two:

Later, when I had grown freer with him, I told him of my surprise. “Suppose,” said I, “that one day we are saved. Would you not regret it that you could not bring back with you some record of your years of shipwreck, so that what you have passed through shall not die from memory? And if we are never saved, but perish one by one, as may happen, would you not wish for a memorial to be left behind, so that the next voyagers to make landfall here, whoever they may be, may read and learn about us, and perhaps shed a tear? For surely, with every day that passes, our memories grow less certain, as even a statue in marble is worn away by rain, till at last we can no longer tell what shape the sculptor’s hand gave it. What memories do you even now preserve of the fatal storm, the prayers of your companions, your terror when the waves engulfed you, your gratitude as you were cast up on the shore, your first stumbling explorations, your fear of savage beasts, the discomforts of those first nights (did you not tell me you slept in a tree?)? Is it not possible to manufacture paper and ink and set down what traces remain of these memories, so that they will outlive you; or, failing paper and ink, to burn the story upon wood, or engrave it upon rock? We may lack many things on this island, but certainly time is not one of them. (17)

There are isolated moments of interesting references to time. Firstly, this sequence of narration has a certain immediacy because it begins in the first person, with Susan retelling a part of her experience with Crusoe. Between connectors which enable the traversing between present and past tense, the recount contains the spoken conversation as well, which thus creates disjunctive

temporalities when one tries to locate where the narrator is in the timeline of the novel. There is an overt attempt to adhere to chronological ordering, evident through the use of a time stamp in the form of “later” to situate the event in the conversation, or even a future reference that “one day [they] are saved[.]” But these instances seem to serve little purpose other than provide a touch of realism, which instead heightens the sense of artificiality. The inability to locate this exchange in any discernible frame of time renders not only Barton’s account inauthentic in terms of validity, but goes even further to question the entire frame of reality she bases her perspectives and events on.

Whether the presence of two time stamps in the first line of this excerpt helps us locate Susan temporally in the narrative is less important than her philosophical discussion with Cruso, given that it examines two important concerns in the novel: the intricate relationship between time and memory, and the importance of writing when it came to preserving one’s past experiences. In this short outburst, Susan raises the issue of chronicling one’s presence in a historical narrative, so that these episodes “shall not die from memory.” As she runs through the various events that are in danger of being forgotten, Susan’s concerns fixate on the importance of leaving a legacy, and the nature of her questions reveals a more pressing existential concern. The metaphor of “shape that the sculptor’s hand gave it” can be read as an overt reference to the concept or idea of authorship. When read in relation to the problems of narration raised earlier in the chapter, Susan’s motivations do not ultimately appear to come from a noble desire to preserve Cruso’s narrative, but stem from her own anxiety to be written into being. The metaphor of “marble [being] worn away” suggests alterations to the original by natural causes, thus requiring the medium of art to encase such moments for eternity, preserved and untainted by changes. On a more insidious level, this also reflects how the occlusion of women’s experiences

in traditionally patriarchal narratives marginalise female figures who have their own stories to tell. Despite being physically absent, the fact that the entirety of Cruso's story has been privileged over Susan's leads one to wonder whether things may have been very different had it been two male characters instead of one.

Susan's existential anxieties are examined further at the end of her monologue when she concludes with an extremely specific reference to time. In a statement that reeks of desperation and naivety, Susan declares that "[they] may lack many things on this island, but certainly time is not one of them" (*Foe* 17). In a place where there are only three people, the limitations in terms of events and interactions that can take place result in blank spaces of time where nothing happens, which helps to explain why Susan perceives the movement of time passing as either a process that is extremely slow, or seemingly non-existent. This goes back to the earlier point about the time stamps, given that the lack of a chronological time frame helps to explain the sense of timelessness in the story world.

If we consider how the premise of Susan's reality is fictional in its essence, stating that the characters in the story will not "lack" time would be accurate as they belong to an ontologically indeterminate sphere where chronological time does not exist. This aligns with a broad definition of postmodern literature's view of time as "elusive and volatile, leading readers in the end not toward a clear and conclusive product, but through an uncertain and inconclusive process; not toward a definitive answer about the nature of time, but into an infinite and interesting journey on a Möbius strip of questions" (*Encyclopedia of Time* 482). From another perspective, Susan's extended narration creates a physical lengthening of time, as the words take up space in terms of dialogue in the narrative space and as words on the page. In other words, she undergoes the process of self-creation as she speaks. These valiant efforts, whether deliberate

or sub-conscious, are dismissed casually by Cruso's response: "I spoke fervently, I believe, but Cruso was unmoved. 'Nothing is forgotten,' said he; and then: 'Nothing I have forgotten is worth the remembering'" (17).

This throws Susan into a state of frenzy, and her response to Cruso is immediate and intensive:

"You are mistaken!" I cried. "I do not wish to dispute, but you have forgotten much, and with every day that passes you forget more! There is no shame in forgetting: it is our nature to forget as it is our nature to grow old and pass away. But seen from too remote a vantage, life begins to lose its particularity. All shipwrecks become the same shipwreck, all castaways the same castaway, sunburnt, lonely, clad in the skins of the beasts he has slain. The truth that makes your story yours alone, that sets you apart from the old mariner by the fireside spinning yarns of sea-monsters and mermaids, resides in a thousand touches which today may seem of no importance, such as: When you made your needle (the needle you store in your belt), by what means did you pierce the eye? When you sewed your hat, what did you use for thread? Touches like these will one day persuade your countrymen that it is all true, every word, there was indeed once an island in the middle of the ocean where the wind blew and the gulls cried from the cliffs and a man named Cruso paced about in his apeskin clothes, scanning the horizon for a sail.
(*Foe* 17-18)

Susan Barton's insistence that there is the existence of "[t]he truth that makes your story yours alone" carries with it a touch of anxiety, especially in how it is followed by a series of questions which strive towards an empirical grounding. The emphasis on empirical details is necessary as it provides Susan's tale with much-needed credibility. In his summary of Marie-Laure Ryan's

argument on “worlds semantics,” David Herman points out that “the number of virtual or unactualized states, events and actions in a narrative increases in proportion to its tellability” (*Story Logic* 58), which is a term that is apt given that Susan is, quite literally, trying to convince Foe that her tale is tellable. For Ryan, such constructs

include not only the dreams, fictions, and fantasies conceived or told by characters, but any kind of representation concerning past or future states and events: plans, passive projections, desires... and beliefs concerning the private representations of other characters. Among these embedded narratives, some reflect the events of actual factual domain, while others delineate unactualized possibilities. The aesthetic appeal of a plot is the function of the richness and variety of the domain of the virtual, as it is surveyed and made accessible by those private embedded narratives. (Ryan and Thon, *Storyworlds Across Media* 156)

Ryan’s observation provides a nice analysis of why this outburst from Susan is important. By listing every possible detail that can contribute to the narrative in a meaningful way, Susan includes not only the physical descriptions of actions and objects, but also pays close attention to the order of how these details are narrated. More importantly, her argument displays a sensitivity towards how the passing of time is integral when it comes to the construction of one’s reality, acknowledging that there are events which “today may seem of no importance,” a statement which implies that these details might yield different results in the future. There is also the conflation of different realities at any one point in time.

Ryan’s references to “the domain of the virtual” and “private embedded narratives” include not only a character’s dreams and imagination, but memories and concerns that form the past which are not as clearly detached from the present as one may imagine. With this influx of

details, “when” it happens becomes as critical as “what” happens. All the details, such as making the needle, the sewing of the hat or even pacing about in apeskin clothes, may seem trivial at the initial stage, but Susan’s desperation for her own unique identity compels her to imbue these details with even more significance as they are closely tied to her own problems. The irony here is that this take is already narrated at a point in the future, yet the distance between the supposed moment of utterance and this present moment of narration is one that seems to escape measure. On the other hand, Cruso’s casual dismissal of Susan’s existential predicament may seem cruel at first, but it does hold a certain element of truth. When Susan lists all the moments and episodes that seem significant in the crafting of Cruso’s history, the fact remains that Cruso is the only witness to all his past experiences, and it is impossible to determine which particular past incident has shaped his present self.

Indeed, the more important thematic concern here lies in the need to be recognised. In other words, these events which will soon become memories need to be authenticated in order for both Susan and Cruso to exist as characters. Declaring that “seen from too remote a vantage, life begins to lose its particularity,” it is clear that Susan is very aware of how the position from which these events are recollected affects the identity that is created. In other words, Susan is terrified of slipping into anonymity, of being reduced to the same fate as all her counterparts, to become like “all castaways the same castaway, sunburnt, lonely, clad in the skins of the beasts he has slain.” As she implores Cruso to avoid forgetting more with every passing day, Susan fails to contemplate or fully understand the implications of his statement that “[n]othing [he has] forgotten is worth the remembering” (*Foe* 17). Even such a simple statement carries with it a couple of immediate interpretations. Does Cruso mean that he remembers everything and this serves an uneasy sort of reassurance? Or does this assurance actually imply that nothing of the

past is inherently important, and that his existence is merely based on the consciousness that exists in the space of his fictional mind? Poetic as she is with the description of time passing, Susan's fixation with the empirical and material is ultimately a hollow assertion, since most of these details that she waves defiantly in the face of scepticism comes from the plane of imagination that is imposed on Crusoe.

As Susan continues her tale, the days that pass by become more difficult to track, given that there are no dates recorded. The only traces are references to events, such as Susan's nursing of Crusoe "[f]or twelve days and nights" (*Foe* 27) after she's been there "for about a month" (27), or the rain that takes place for "two nights and a day" (29), in between rather random mentions of daylight and night which serve to signal the beginnings or endings of any activity. These recordings of every minute details to chronicle her experiences is a re-enactment of Defoe's original text, where *Robinson Crusoe* records everything thing that happens in order to keep track of time. This form of verisimilitude is described by Richard Harvey Brown as "the mask a text assumes as it convinces the reader it has conformed to the laws of its genre," which effectively "has reproduced reality in accordance with those rules" (*Postmodern Representations* 42-43).

More exchanges between the two take place, and as Susan laments, "[t]ime passed with increasing tediousness" (*Foe* 34). These frequent observations of time signal an attempt to locate herself in this narrative, as she continues to create as complete a recollection as she can. One specific example includes a very specific observation of time, marked by parenthesis—"(it is not the same night, it is a different night, we are ploughing through the waves, the rock of England looms closer and closer) (44)" —which reveals the necessity to remind us that it is a different night she speaks of suggests an attempt to create a chronological sequence. That this information

is placed in parenthesis serves as both a disruption to the narration, as well as an overt attempt to minimise this very minor rupture in her storytelling process. It is an attempt to prevent the breaking of an illusion, to sustain the presence of an event that has supposedly taken place. The effect achieved is quite the opposite, as this serves instead to remind us that it is only Susan's word that we have at this moment, and the narrative continues with Susan adjusting to life on the island, eventually reaching a point when a ship arrives and the three of them are transported on board.

Cruso passes on, together with all the memories that he deemed worthy. However, it is the last few lines that summarise the most important part of the first chapter: "[...] Do you think of me, Mr Foe, as Mrs Cruso or as a bold adventuress? Think what you may, it was I who shared Cruso's bed and closed Cruso's eyes, as it is I have disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind, which is the story of his island" (*Foe* 45). As a recollected narrative, the suspicion has always been that the open inverted commas indicate dialogue or speech that is taking place, as one directional as it is. The emergence of this direct address to Foe reveals this entire chapter as a recount to an entity that has not yet revealed himself. This may be confusing as to whether it is taking place in a collective fictional plane with both characters in conversation, or a story written on a manuscript that is read through the eyes of the addressee. With this new development, what was previously assumed to be a narrative moving forward chronologically is now embedded with new narrative possibilities. Discrepancies, such as how Friday is abruptly given his name without Cruso revealing it, and then reverting back to "The Negro" like a stranger even though we already know that she knows his name, serve as just one of the many moments where we get a sense of the difficulties Susan faces in her attempt to complete the narrative.

There is one notably /parenthesis around “who was of course the Cruso I told you of”, which draws our attention back to the very beginning of the chapter. Because Susan has not previously mentioned Cruso before that moment, there two possible interpretations. The first is that Susan is deranged in her mind and may be speaking to herself. The second, and more important possibility, is that Susan’s story-telling began before the novel did, implying that there is an extended reality beyond the confines of the novel. The chapter that we are given access to is an incomplete one. While there is no way to verify how true this is, what it does is to remind us that there is more than one layer of reality to this narrative, and it may not be possible to associate a chronological timeframe in this particular novel. With a final reminder that she is the one “who shared Cruso’s bed and closed Cruso’s eyes [...] who have disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind” (*Foe* 45), Susan’s version of the “story of his island” now requires an author’s narrative reality to house it, and the difficulties of this endeavour will be explored more in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2 – LETTERS THAT TRACK TIME

While the previous chapter was based on a recount of events that took place on the island, the storyline in this chapter reveals how Susan has already left the island for quite some time, and has settled down in England. Unlike the previous mode of narration, the story is now delivered in the epistolary form, and this offers intriguing thematic possibilities in the discussion of time in narrative. Each of Susan’s letters have one common purpose – to convince Foe that her story is worth telling, and her desperation becomes increasingly evident as the chapter progresses. The act of keeping track of the dates in the series of letters to the mysterious Mr Foe provides a sense of the time that elapses between each wait, lending the narrative a touch of realism in the

process. However, given the nature of how the novel has progressed thus far, enclosing the relationship in a specific frame of time is far more complicated. In order for the letter to be sent and received, it is only logical to assume that both Susan and Foe must be of the same fictional diegetic reality, even if it is a temporally-constructed one, or even an imaginative reality. Given that the text has been written, the presupposition therefore must be that Mr. Foe has read her messages and decided to write the novel of her story. On the other hand, the fact that letters have to be a form of last resort suggests that Foe is not within Barton's immediate vicinity, whether it is spatial or temporal. The need to recount the events that have supposedly taken place is thus an interesting point to consider, almost as if there was a need to provide self-assurance to herself.

Perhaps the very form of the epistolary narrative, with all its illusory mediums of connectivity and shared emotions, serves only to highlight the inescapability of our human condition, that experience remains elusive to others outside of one's consciousness, arguably denied even to oneself in terms of understanding. While the (re)writing of an experience appears to be even more distant than an actual exchange, the differences may not actually be that pronounced when one considers the variables involved in shared experiences: "I have set down the history of our time on the island as well as I can, and enclose it herewith. It is a sorry, limping affair (the history, not the time itself)—"the next day," its refrain goes, "the next day... the next day"—but you will know how to set it right" (47). The idea of enclosing time is a very literal one, both in terms of a (unrevealed) narrative that Barton has written, as well as the specific time period referenced. To describe it as a "sorry, limping affair" is strange to say the least, while the additional disclaimer that it is the history that is referenced and not the time itself makes even less sense.

This could be Susan's personal acknowledgement that her recounting of events is relatively disconnected in terms of structure, possibly due to both the unreliability of her memory as well as the absence of witnesses or external forms of verification. Time, on the other hand, cannot limp if it has a structure not bounded by chronological parameters. "The next day" thus becomes a very poor time indicator, given that what follows is based on a premise that is arguably non-existent in the first place. Lastly, handing Foe the power "to set it right" removes the current time scheme of any possible grounding or importance, and the fictionalisation of time that comes with the removal serves to undermine the prospects of synchronised diegetic realities. In other words, this moves beyond a simple layering of narratorial levels, and also considers the transitions and mediums involved between diegetic levels:

You will wonder how I came to choose you, given that a week ago I did not so much as know your name. I admit, when I first laid eyes on you I thought you were a lawyer or a man from the Exchange. But then one of my fellow-servants told me you were Mr Foe the author who had heard many confessions and were reputed a very secret man. It was raining (do you remember?); you paused on the step to fasten your cloak, and I came out too and shut the door behind me. "If I may be so bold, sir," I said (those were the words, bold words). You looked me up and down but did not reply, and I thought to myself: What art is there to hearing confessions? – the spider has as much art, that watches and waits. "If I may have a moment of your time: I am seeking a new situation." "So are we all seeking a new situation," you replied. "But I have a man to care for, a Negro man who can never find a situation, since he has lost his tongue," I said – "I hoped that you might have place for me, and for him too, in your establishment." My hair was wet by now, I had not even a shawl. Rain dripped from the brim of your hat. "I am in employ here, but

am used to better things,” I pursued – “You have not heard a story before like mine. I am new-returned from far-off parts. I have been a castaway on a desert island. And there I was the companion of a singular man.” I smiled, not at you but at what I was about to say. “I am a figure of fortune, Mr Foe. I am the good fortune we are always hoping for.”

(Foe 47-48)

For all her words of invitation and surrender, Susan’s anxiety is reflected in her desire to grapple with narratorial authority. Again, the specific time reference of “a week ago” is both relatively detailed and ambiguous at the same time, and the actual sequence of actions suggests the presence of causality. The subtle reference to how Foe “paused,” and the subsequent reaction of her coming out and shutting the door gives the sense of order of how the event took place. Her admission of her initial thoughts upon meeting him, as well as the relatively innocuous insertion of reminders in parenthesis is quite evidently an attempt to fortify the parameters of her memory and experience. Her heightened awareness of time passing is also reflected in her comment that “[her] hair was wet by now,” which also betrays how cautious she is with making sure that every detail is captured in order to display her sincerity.

Yet, the rupture created by the untimely insertion of additional information may have covered certain gaps left by imperfect knowledge, even while creating more confusion due to the multiple timelines that have appeared. At the point of articulation, Susan addresses a few variations of Foe — the individual from the past to whom she has already spoken to; the individual she is speaking to now in the re-enactment of the memory; the individual reading the letter in her imagination; and lastly, the one who is supposedly reading the letter at the very moment we as the readers are given access as well. To position her reality in any of the four mentioned ones would be problematic in different ways, just as the phrase “the spider has as

much art, that watches and waits” fits with multiple timelines and consciousnesses, whether it took place in the very moment, or whether it was actually just a recollected moment.

The more important question here comes in the timing of these letters. When one takes into account the presence of the first chapter, it becomes difficult to pinpoint when these exchanges take place. Taking into consideration the minute details that are given and assuming that discussion does take place, the ordering of the chapters seems to be problematic. In essence, time is constantly in a flux, and any illusion depicting time as stagnant is illusory. In a similar sense, the messages in the letters will never remain stationary – not just due to the different interpretations and linguistic barriers, but also because perspectives and perceptions of the information can change. Every time Susan writes a letter, her understanding of Foe is limited to that particular point in time. In other words, every letter in this chapter represents a transitory stage, a different state of mind which Susan occupies.

The urgency which occupies Susan’s tone may stem from her subconscious awareness that things may have changed by the time Foe reads her letter, a passage of time she is not in control of. There is a sequence of second-person narration in the next letter, dated 21st April, which takes place one day after the previous one. This coheres with its subject matter, which begins with an apology about mocking the art of writing: “In my letter yesterday I may have seemed to mock the art of writing. I ask your pardon, I was unjust. Believe me, there are times when, as I think of you labouring in your attic to bring life to your thieves and courtesans and grenadiers, my heart aches with pity and I long only to be of service” (*Foe* 52). The immediacy of this need to rectify an error can be quantified as the passing of a day, with how this thought being conceived occurring between any point when the previous letter was written, and when the next letter is completed. What cannot be clearly defined is the chain of events, thoughts and

emotions that have taken place beyond the knowledge of Susan as a character. “I ask your pardon, I was unjust” is the plea, yet there is no guarantee that Foe will read these words before his opinion of her is formed, or even set in stone. To put matters in perspective, it is also unclear whether Susan retains this apologetic attitude by the time Foe reads the letter, and as the subsequent letters prove, her thoughts are constantly shifting and evolving.

The second-person narration that takes place shortly after this sequence seeks to re-enact the interactions Susan has with Foe, and her close attention to the details of every action lends her narrative a certain appeal of authenticity. However, a closer inspection of her words reveals how all of this takes place in the space of her imagination, and the barrage of details that follow reveals how Susan visualises Foe as a “beast of burden” in a metaphorical sense:

In the early mornings, lying in my warm bed, I seem to hear the shuffle of your footsteps as, draped in a rug, you climb the stairs to your attic. You eat yourself, your breathing is heavy, you light the lamp, you pinch your eyes shut and begin to grope your way back to where you were last night, through the dark and cold, through the rain, over fields where sheep huddled together, over forests, over the seas, to Flanders or wherever it is that your captains and grenadiers must now begin to stir and set about the next day in their lives, while from the corners of the attic the mice stare at you, twitching their whiskers. (*Foe* 52-53)

There are quite a few things going on in this narrative: the most important is Susan’s interaction with Foe, between diegetic realities taking place across a metaphorical distance. Susan begins her account by admitting that this scene might be imaginary, as the use of the verb “seem” implies a lack of verification. In the shift from first to second-person narration, the pronoun “you” involves Foe directly in her narration, magnifying his role in the construction of the

narrative while simultaneously distancing herself from implications or accountability. Such a gesture produces the illusion of control, and in turn, provides an overt reference to a character's lack of it, and to a certain extent in this novel, the writer's supposed authorship over his/her characters. From another perspective, Susan is demonstrating her own ability to construct a narrative via imagination. By describing Foe's actions using such vivid details, the sequencing and the sense of structure that is constructed when Foe moves from one action to another.

What takes place next is a transition from an intradiegetic position to an extradiegetic one. While the mundane gestures of getting up and moving around may exist in the same plane of reality between character and author, the next shift goes into the story world of the author's imagination. In other words, the character is imagining how the author's process of imagination begins, which is a rather bizarre situation given that the positions are reversed. Defying all conventional rules of authorship and writing, Susan takes on the role of an author momentarily by writing Foe into being, which also writes herself into being in a circular, aporetic way. By further evoking images of sheep, captains and Flanders, Susan is obviously referencing all the novels written by Daniel Defoe, including *Robinson Crusoe* (which she is supposedly a part of) and *Moll Flanders*, which is occasionally mentioned in passing throughout the story. Without complicating the roles of Defoe and Foe at this juncture, Susan's act of narrating how she envisions Foe's thought processes could have been easily dismissed as imagination on her part, except that the intertextual references to novels outside of her own story world puts this simplistic notion to rest. Her awareness of other works of fiction within a fictional realm subverts any possibility of a stable reality.

This invites a strange question: what happens in a novel where the character chases her author and challenges him, only to find out that the entity she actually needs to find is the one

who has crafted this very author from a higher ontological plane? According to Alexandra Effe in her work *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Narrative Transgression: A Reconstruction of Metalepsis*, “[t]he very lack of substantiality that leads to Susan’s despair prepares the way for the reader’s approach to Friday; the fact that the boundaries of the world of Foe are permeable leads to Susan’s existential doubts about her ontological status and about the truth of her story, and therefore holds potential for repetition with a difference” (37). Robert Pippin offers an interesting summary of this situation, observing that

Coetzee’s complex presentation of the problem of his own authorship or even control over the meaning of his creation could be understood outside of what has become a fairly standard “postmodernist” way: as dissolving into mere play, toying with its own impossibility, finally being about only itself, not what it purports to be about, and revealing, if that is the right word, only the impossibility of revelation. (“The Paradoxes of Power in the Early Novels of J. M. Coetzee” 34)

In other words, the problematisation of authorship results in the destabilisation of the very story world that the characters inhabit, resulting in a strange plane of reality that is timeless and static in its conception. Even in this chaotic dissolution of different realities, the narrative’s sense of time still hinges on the dates which offer a semblance of sequence and structure.

However, this problematic conception of dating letters according to when they were written reaches its conclusion on the birth date of this dissertation’s author (in the year 1986, the year Foe was published), who is atemporally crafting these sentences even as you read them. As with the rest of the letters preceding it, this last letter is dated June 1st, and it ends there. There is no further indication of days passing, which can be read in two ways: Susan has acknowledged that labelling each letter with a specific date has not achieved much beyond a time stamp for her

own reference; secondly, the indication of any specific date was artificial in its conception at any rate, and Susan has given up this possible deception to prove her own authenticity. Indeed, after all these points, it is still unclear whether there is a more profound effect beyond just dates, which arguably are relatively confusing given how there is already an acknowledgement of their existence in a fictional space. Susan's quest to belong to another frame of time effectively ends at this juncture— in eternity, limbo or both, or both— without any decipherable difference.

CHAPTER 3 – SHARING A DIEGETIC REALITY WITH FOE

The third chapter is arguably the most “normal” chapter in the novel, with an actual physical setting in a house and not on a strange island whose features are clearly limited by the narrator's memory or consisting of letters from a character to an author pleading for her existence.

However, this illusion of a normative reality all changes very quickly when Susan begins her pitch to Foe. From casually observing her new surroundings to an aggressive argument about the value of her story, Susan finds herself engaging Foe in a complex discussion about fictional worlds and struggling to convince him that her narrative is worth his time:

“It is not as I imagined it,” I said. “I expected dust thick on the floor, and gloom. But life is never as we expect it to be. I recall an author reflecting that after death we may find ourselves not among choirs of angels but in some quite ordinary place, as for instance a bath-house on a hot afternoon, with spiders dozing in the corners; at the time it will seem like any Sunday in the country; only later will it come home to us that we are in eternity.”

“It is an author I have not read.”

“The idea has remained with me from my childhood. But I have come to ask about another story. The history of ourselves and the island – how does it progress? Is it written?”

“It progresses, but progresses slowly, Susan. It is a slow story, a slow history. How did you find your way to me?” (Coetzee, *Foe* 113-114)

From the previous chapters, it is quite clear that this is not a casual conversation about random authors and their stories, but is, rather, somehow associated with the specific author who is writing the very story world inhabited by these two characters. The short line “only later will it come home to us that we are in eternity” contains two indicators, which, while cryptic, reveals a structured sequence of events that can only exist in retrospect. It is fitting then, that the next subject of discussion is that of “progress,” both in terms of how far *Foe* has gone in terms of Susan writing her own story, and in terms of how much time has passed. The reference to pace is especially important, given that *Foe* repeatedly informs Susan how slow everything is, from the progress of his writing, to commenting about how the story itself had a slow sense of pace, to labelling history as slow perhaps possibly the most confusing definition out of the three.

It is necessary at this juncture to address certain potential points of confusion concerning the multiple states of realities in Chapter 3. Since they are interacting in the same physical space, it seems logical to assume that *Foe* and Susan belong to the same diegetic reality. This interpretation of the scene also positions Susan as a marginalised female character who has actually survived the shipwreck and desires to have her side of the story written in the male-dominated narrative. However, while the silencing of the female voice is certainly a crucial point that deserves attention, there is an alternative, allegorical reading of the text: the creation of a liminal space where the characters are actually from different diegetic realities. Instead of just

being remembered as a key member in a shipwreck narrative, Susan's goal in this scene is to convince Foe that she deserves to be written into existence, specifically into the novel *Robinson Crusoe*. In other words, Susan is a fictional character who appears to have a physical body in that plane of reality only if Foe chooses to recognise her presence. To complicate matters further, Foe is also a fictional character that has been written into existence by Coetzee, so to have one fictional character negotiate with another is problematic to say the least.

Therefore, Foe's question that comes after his short explanation is a simple one, but it sets the tone for the ontological indeterminacy that follows. Firstly, by asking how Susan managed to find him, Foe is informing us right off the bat that Susan's consciousness is hers to control, and as an autonomous entity, she is able to make decisions that are independent of his directions. This makes her desperation to be written into reality by an author even more bizarre, because someone would already have had to write her into being for her to be in this predicament in the first place. Thus, Foe's implied relinquishing of her as a character not only automatically confirms her removal from his reality, but relocates her in a limbo-like space where time ceases to matter because there is no one else in this collective reality. Susan's subsequent reference to her letters brings us to the realisation that it is as was suspected previously – we have no idea whether Foe had read the letters at the point when they were written in the novel, rendering it even more uncertain as to which diegetic reality the letters actually belong to.

This open discussion about the process of writing creates a temporary space where a character comes to life, long enough to have a conversation with an author about whether she can be written into existence. Susan's plight resembles that of a character in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Instead of existing according to the dictates of a clearly explicated script, the characters in Pirandello's play, spend their time concerned with the issue of

their own authorship. Given the existential circumstance of these characters, *Six Characters* has been labelled a modern tragedy – a tragedy made all the more pronounced when we realize that the various characters are meant to play out their roles and instructions over and over again, with each performance, without any purpose or sense of reprieve. The consequence of this meaningless meandering is that they are then left in a state of denial, unable to achieve catharsis through any greater meaning or understanding. In many respects, Susan is no different from these Pirandellian characters, as her existential anxiety manifests itself in a heightened awareness of time and a desperate search for any concrete reality to house her memories and identity. While Pirandello examines this discourse of appearance, time and reality in the form of metatheatrical disruptions, we see much the same methods applied in Coetzee's novel, particularly in the metafictional moments and ontological intrusions by authorial figures, reminding that the worlds we see in the words on the page are artificial constructs. Such characters are not all that dissimilar to the souls of Dante's imagination, described by Umberto Mariani as "[e]xiled in the limbo of formlessness" (*Living Masks* 5-6).

However, unlike Pirandello's characters with their flimsy storylines with little in the way of plot or environment, Susan has her literary history: the idea she has had since childhood, her story in Bahia, as well as the experience on the island with Cruso, which saves any interested author the trouble of producing a whole new narrative on the spot. However, she has to go through the same process of negotiation as the *Six Characters* did — convincing the writer that they deserve to be written into being. Foe, as the writer she seeks, is not convinced that it is the narrative that he wants to take ownership of. The difference in their respective opinions is displayed very clearly in their exchange: "But there is much to be said of Bahia. Bahia is a world in itself. But why? Bahia is not the island. Bahia was but a stepping stone on my way" (*Foe* 114).

What takes place next is a very tightly woven sequence of events, which Foe labels “a rehearsal” and dissects clinically why Bahia is a much better choice of a story. His level of investment can be seen from the questions raised, including specific references to the amount of time that passes in each episode within the span of “two fruitless years.” With every sequence and event laid out in precise detail, Foe even condenses the entire story into “five parts in all,” like a book made up of “loss, then quest, then recovery; beginning, then middle, then end” (117). The island becomes just part of the larger narrative, merely a “novelty” lent to the second part of the middle:

‘The island is not a story in itself,’ said Foe gently, laying a hand on my knee. ‘We can bring it to life only by setting it within a larger story. By itself it is no better than a water-logged boat drifting day after day in an empty ocean till one day, humbly and without commotion, it sinks. The island lacks light and shade. It is too much the same throughout. It is like a loaf of bread. It will keep us alive, certainly, if we are starved of reading; but who will prefer it when there are tastier confections and pastries to be had?’ (*Foe* 117)

There are several metafictional elements at work in this short exchange. From the perspective of a reader, witnessing a conversation between two fictional characters about the writing of fiction confounds one’s sense of reality due to the ontological uncertainty that is created in this process. If the fictional characters are aware of their own fictionality, discussing the process of how they have been written into existence makes us question the very words that appear on the page, leading us to wonder who the entity behind the crafting of this reality is. At times, it seems more convenient to see Foe as an author surrogate for Coetzee, which removes an additional diegetic reality and the layer of complication it brings. As it stands, Foe, as a character created by Coetzee, seeks to be convinced by another fictional character, Susan (who is, technically, also a product of Coetzee’s imagination, but has found herself in a paradoxical situation where she is

supposedly without a narrative to exist in, even when we are aware that we reading about her in Coetzee's novel), why part of her historical narrative is considerably more entertaining than the part he has selected for her. For a character who supposedly does not have a narrative to situate herself in, Susan certainly has a rich history of events, laid out by Foe in a clear, chronological timeline.

According to Foe, Susan's episode at Bahia is of great significance and worthy of a story of its own. In contrast, the island becomes an afterthought to him, a side episode that deserves minimal attention. When we revisit the beginning of the novel, it is clear that Susan thinks otherwise. By devoting the entire first chapter to her struggles on the island, Susan places such emphasis on every single detail that has transpired, including the length of time spent on each activity and her interactions with Cruso. In that way, Susan is herself "a writer" of her story. The more important question is Foe's role in all of this. With her narratives already written, why is it so important to convince another writer to bring her story to life? After all, unlike Pirandello's characters, she actually has a backstory that is more than a short excerpt on a script:

"I am not a story, Mr Foe. I may impress you as a story because I began my account of myself without preamble, slipping overboard into the water and striking out for the shore. But my life did not begin in the waves. There was a life before the water which stretched back to my desolate searchings in Brazil, thence to the years when my daughter was still with me, and so on back to the day I was born. All of which makes up a story I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world. I choose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Cruso and Friday and what we three did there: for I am a free

woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire.” (*Foe* 131)

With this simple outburst, Susan extends the narrative in two opposite directions, backwards into the past to uncover those parts of her personal history which will help us understand how she came to this point; and forwards, because this new information pushes the narrative forward with an insertion of possibilities. In this way, Susan quite literally extends time by increasing the events for Foe’s consideration, and consequently, the number of pages that have to be read by an external reader. However, this new development also makes it difficult to measure time, because the conversations between Susan and Foe stand outside each other’s respective diegetic realities. Susan has not been given an existence in Foe’s diegetic plane of reality at the moment, which means that her sense of chronological time cannot be aligned with his. Indeed, he is mindful of this fact, and constantly reminds her of how she needs to convince him that her narrative is worth, of all things, his time.

Unfortunately for Susan, time is a valuable commodity, quite evident in the way she describes the narrative in comparison to Foe. For instance, Foe adopts a methodical approach when it comes to summarising events, which is evident from the way he dissects her experiences in Bahia as brief, episodic, sequences. As the owner of these experiences with more to lose, Susan counts “[e]very hour” with “the watchman rapping on the doors below”, and she is also mindfully aware of when the dawn comes after the night. This contrast shows the vast difference in mindsets between a writer, whose perception of time in a fictional reality can be governed from a macro perspective because of the control he possesses, and a fictional character, whose fixations with narrative identity and her internal thoughts heightens her awareness of time in a

reality where she has no measure of control. Indeed, Susan does not even know what is happening around her:

Then he was upon me, and I might have thought myself in Crusoe's arms again; for they were men of the same time of life, and heavy in the lower body, though neither was stout; and their way with a woman too was much the same. I closed my eyes, trying to find my way back to the island, to the wind and wave-roar; but no, the island was cut off from me by a thousand leagues of watery waste. (139)

Susan's forceful declaration that she "is not a story" and that she does not owe anyone proof of her substance fails to consider how little she understands of the events that are happening, much less gain any control of the surroundings in her reality. Indeed, there is a brief moment when "[a] long pause fell between [Foe and Susan]" that leads us to wonder if the word "long" has any actual meaning at all. In a world where time is so evidently an immeasurable construct, whether the moment lasts for a brief moment or eternity seems to have very little significance.

Yet, just as Susan is lost in her thoughts temporarily, an external intrusion takes place when "[f]rom the street below came the noise of a woman scolding." This brings us back, rather abruptly, to the reality of Foe's world from her point of view. If this interruption was meant to lend the current diegetic world a sense of authenticity, it does suggest that Susan is an actual individual in this story world who is trying to record her experiences. However, the ontological uncertainty surrounding Susan's existence in *Foe*, given how she is supposedly an omitted character from a pre-existing narrative, merely adds to the confusion. The other strange occurrence in this chapter comes in the form of Susan's daughter, who appears suddenly and mysteriously, almost as if she was conjured out of thin air in order to fulfil Foe's point. The reunion is surprisingly brief considering how supposedly arduous her journey was in the search

for her daughter. When she disappears as quickly as she appeared, it seems that the little girl was never meant to be anything more than a prop in her mother's narrative, to serve merely a point of interest.

In retrospect, Foe's literal act of "reducing" Susan's narrative may seem to reflect an author's hand at work, but is actually a scenario that raises the same problematic concerns with history that were addressed earlier in this chapter. As Susan expresses, quite firmly, that she "would not accept [how the events were presented] because they were not the truth," she does not realise how simplistic and naïve her reaction actually is. Whether it is a blatant misalignment of events or small mistakes made in the retelling of a story, piecing together a completely accurate narrative is impossible. Even if Foe had not lied in an outright manner, the removal of specific episodes would have been problematic, and failing to track how time passes specifically between events means that there will always be gaps in the narrative which are unaccounted for. Indeed, the forceful removal of key episodes in order to fit a "grand" narrative is a measure commonly undertaken by authoritarian regimes to maintain control over the masses, the very situation that was previously discussed in *Waiting for Barbarians*.

How Susan is silenced, by either Foe as the author of her existence, or as the historian of her past experiences, thus effectively reduces her perception of reality into a fictional construct of her imagination. In other words, with her past experiences left inaccessible to everyone but herself, Susan is left with no choice but to subscribe to any chronological framework that has been assigned to her given that there is no one else that recognises her perception of time and reality. The idea of freedom, or rather, free will comes into question here, as Foe gently raises an important existential point:

Let us confront our worst fear, which is that we have all of us been called into the world from a different order (which we have now forgotten) by a conjurer unknown to us, as you say I have conjured up your daughter and her companion (I have not). Then I ask nevertheless: Have we thereby lost our freedom? Are you, for one, any less mistress of your life? Do we of necessity become puppets in a story whose end is invisible to us, and towards which we are marched like condemned felons? (*Foe* 135)

The reference to “puppets in a story” reminds us again of Pirandello, whose characters exist in a deterministic setting without any free will to write their future. As Foe explains it, the ending of the narrative is “invisible” to these characters, which means that they are denied a complete picture of the reality they are in. More importantly, the existential themes have reduced the narrative at this point into a theoretical discussion where the physical setting is no longer important, and the space they exist in temporarily is a timeless void. Ina Gräbe notes quite rightly that “in paying more attention to the telling of the story than the story itself, the novel clearly participates in postmodernism’s favouring the signifier over the signified” (Gräbe from Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* 147-48). Whether it is the island or Bahia that eventually becomes the main focus of Foe’s narrative is of secondary importance, while the decision-making process involved in selecting the story and how it is subsequently told takes precedence.

Thus, the necessity of adhering to a shared perception of time is irrelevant in this space that houses our two characters. How much time passes in this space is not something that can be discerned, and the very possibility that Foe is the writer of this narrative space means that he may be able to extend the narrative at will, and by default, extend time as he wishes to accommodate the events he wants to incorporate into his narrative. Foe’s subsequent sharing of a trick he learnt

when “lost in the maze of doubting” by placing “markers” is an allusion to the necessity of time stamps when recollecting moments in an extended history, as such indicators give a sense of structure and sequence to an otherwise chaotic reality. After all, a sense of reality is ultimately dictated by one’s perception of time, and Foe’s denial of Susan’s preferred chain of events, in terms of how much time and space they occupy in his version of the narrative, distorts her sense of time, and consequently, her standing in any concrete diegetic reality.

CHAPTER 4 – THE ENDING?

Foe’s last chapter stands out for many reasons, especially how short it is compared to the chapters that come before, as well as the strange, sinister setting that unfolds from its opening. Another major component is the contrast between how it begins and how the previous chapter ends. When Foe says to Susan that “[i]t is a beginning [...] Tomorrow you must teach him a” (*Foe* 152), this raises the expectation that there will be a form of continuation in the narrative. The promise of “a beginning” hints at the possibility of a linear plotline, a sense of chronological order that pushes towards a resolution for Susan. This further amplifies the destabilising effects that take place with an opening that is very far removed from the previous reality established just before:

The staircase is dark and mean. On the landing I stumble over a body. It does not stir, it makes no sound. By the light of a match I make out a woman or a girl her feet drawn up inside a long grey dress, her hands folded under her armpits; or is it that her limbs are unnaturally short, the stunted limbs of a cripple? Her face is wrapped in a grey woollen scarf. I begin to unwrap it, but the scarf is endless. Her head lolls. She weighs no more than a sack of straw. (Coetzee, *Foe* 153)

The first sentence's description of the staircase is exactly the same as the beginning of the third chapter, giving the impression or effect that we have been transported back to the same moment. However, there are also some notable discrepancies. In the third chapter, the narration takes place in past tense, while here it is in the present, which signals an obvious change in how we should perceive time. Also, instead of an encounter with Foe from Susan Barton's first-person perspective, what we have instead is a body. From the rather grotesque description, the female form can only be Susan, which indicates almost immediately that the narrator has shifted as well. However, identifying the body does not help to make sense of what is taking place. Instead, there is an acute sense of disorientation, in terms of where this narrator is in relation to physical or diegetic reality, and more importantly, where this location is in terms of timelines for the simple reason that it feels like a repeated scene. All we have are the minute sequences which give a semblance of order. How long does the narrator take to examine the body? Even if this can be answered, is it even a question that matters? How long would the unwrapping of the scarf be? These are questions which arise immediately when reading the excerpt, at least in part because there are no conceptual markers on which to base any sense of reality.

The ontological references to beginnings and endings are suggestive of what Frank Kermode refers to as "apocalyptic." Unlike the more contemporary usage of the word "apocalypse" which signals a doomsday narrative that spells the end of the world, Kermode's use of the term can be summarised as attempting to humanise time, to impose a form on historical time so that any order constructed can give a meaning to life itself. In fiction, humans with their short mortal lives are allowed temporary bridges to form a beginning which they were not there to witness, a middle where they supposedly belong to in an ambiguous, abstract sort of existence, and an ending which they can only imagine. This describes the plight that is

experienced by Susan, and part of her struggles is articulated clearly by Kermode, who points out that “[i]t seems to be a condition attaching to the exercise of thinking about the future that one should assume one’s own time to stand in an extraordinary relation to it” (Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* 94). What takes place here, however, is quite the opposite, as the scene unravels in a way that prevents any form of imposition from taking place. The empirical markers that are placed are disjunctive in terms of temporalities because of the simple fact that they have been replicated from another scene, and this possible conflation of alternate timelines complicates rather than clarifies our sense of reality when reading the scene.

However, to reiterate the point raised earlier in this chapter, Susan’s predicament may be less a consequence of her status as a fictional character than it is an existential concern which extends to the reality of the reader as well. The key difference lies in the physical mortality that chronological time brings to bare, and in this scenario, Susan’s state of limbo is arguably a much worse situation to be in given that she is doomed to remain in the same state with no hope of change. This opening to the chapter speaks to the diegetic reality she faces in the absence of an author — she is a lifeless, doll-like figure, without a face or identity to situate her sense of being. Susan’s weightlessness becomes a metaphorical reference to her lack of essence, and this dystopian reality’s sense of incompleteness offers an abstract perspective of the purgatory she is in.

As the chapter progresses, it becomes abundantly clear that despite how it draws certain elements from what has been narrated before, this is a separate reality from the previous three chapters. Through self-reflexive narrative strategies highlighting the inconsistencies and gaps in the narrative, Coetzee creates a point of indeterminacy when it comes to the author, narrator and

reader. In allegorical terms, this means that the last chapter exists as a unique hermeneutic space, where the normative laws of physics do not apply:

Face down I lie on the floor beside him, the smell of old dust in my nostrils.

After a long while, so long I might even have been asleep, he stirs and sighs and turns on to his side. The sound his body makes is faint and dry, like leaves falling over leaves. I raise a hand to his face. His teeth part. I press closer, and with an ear to his mouth lie waiting. (*Foe* 154)

Even in this space of apparent timelessness, there is a sense of timing created in between sequences, which is perhaps indicative of time as a construct that is created based on individual perception and the ordering of events. After the narrator lies down beside Friday, he/she comments that it was “after a long while”, highlighting how the process of waiting for any response is one that is consciously taking place. Consistent with the lack of chronological time frames throughout the chapter, the time stamp is left deliberately vague, with no sense of measurement beyond the fact that the narrator felt that it was a stretch of waiting beyond what was expected. After the body of Friday stirs and sighs, the rest of the action is described meticulously and in sequence, yet another sign that the narrator has a heightened sense of order and the timing that comes with it.

The sequence ends with another indicator of time as the narrator presses closer and begins the process of “waiting,” perhaps for more information or any kind of response:

At first there is nothing. Then, if I can ignore the beating of my own heart, I begin to hear the faintest faraway roar: as she said, the roar of waves in a seashell; and over that, as if once or twice a violin-string were touched, the whine of the wind and the cry of a bird.

Closer I press, listening for other sounds: the chirp of sparrows, the thud of a mattock, the call of a voice.

From his mouth, without a breath, issue the sounds of the island. (154)

What follows is a sense of pacing, with the time stamp “[a]t first” indicating a certain time that has elapsed before anything takes place. After that, the next event takes place in the form of sounds. Beyond the sounds of the sea, a musical instrument and other figurative responses from nature, what is important here is the reference to a female figure speaking. As the main female figure in the narrative, it only makes sense that this reference is to Susan Barton, which would eliminate her from contention as one of the possible candidates for the role of this unknown narrator. Yet, it has already been established that the diegetic reality that we are observing now is not a natural one, and given the apparent self-referential nature of the narrative, it would not be a stretch if the narrator actually turns out to be separate self within Susan’s consciousness. The familiarity with Friday, clearly seen by the willingness to come into close proximity with him without any inhibitions suggests a certain understanding between them which is arguably denied to both Foe and Coetzee. These conjunctures may all be valid, given that all these characters occupy the role of both narrator and narrated at the same time. Nonetheless, the sense of time, or lack of it, is exemplified again with the close attention to detail that there is no breath taken before the sounds of the island are uttered.

The identity of this narrator is a subject of much debate. David Attwell sees this narrator as a representation of “Coetzee’s sense of his own presence in the book,” and he argues that this is clear how the novel “ends with a revelation about its author, who in seeking to represent Friday discovers that Friday’s story is not his to tell” (*J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face-to-Face with Time* 160). Tisha Turk offers a different angle to this issue, stressing that this

mysterious narrator “is represented not as a writer but as a reader, someone who is, quite literally, moved by Susan’s narration” (“Intertextuality and the Collaborative Construction of Narrative” 308). As Effe observes, these two readings are not incompatible; according to her, “[t]he narrator stands for Coetzee, representing his failure to tell Friday’s story, but the narrator simultaneously represents the reader, and the ending thus calls on the reader to take on the responsibility to labour for a future in which Friday’s story can be told” (*J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Narrative Transgression* 39). This addresses the dynamic relationship that exists between the reader and writer, with the narrator functioning as a proxy that traverses in between these two entities. More important is how all three readings seem to naturally isolate Friday as an entity who defies being situated in a chronological time frame.

This mixture of confusion and conflation between the possible roles is ultimately a reemphasis of how unstable any diegetic reality is in this story world, and that the presence of multiple diegetic realities means that shifting between different timelines is inevitable. As short as the chapter is, there are three sections to it, with the first and second separated by asterisks to delineate the transition. The third part, on the other hand, arrives without any clear typographical marks, even though it is quite evident that it takes place on board a ship. This puts to rest any simplistic understanding of this chapter as a brief summary of the events that have taken place. Subsequently, what happens is a disorientation of ontological hierarchies, given that the sense of time is ultimately misaligned by each character’s reluctance to take control and impose their perception of reality on the narrative. In the previous two chapters, it was a struggle between characters to set a fixed reality for mutual coexistence; Susan first demands and then pleads with Foe to write her into a narrative, which is strangely paradoxical considering how the fictional

narrative that houses their exchange is created by her first-person narration, with the details of Foe's denial narrated by the very character that he has denied existence in the narrative.

In other words, the absence of time reveals an absence of perception. In the present narration without any explanation of backstory and context beyond what we have read in the previous three chapters, the close attention to visceral details and lack of obvious thoughts or emotions suggests that the narrator's attitude towards his/her subject is more exploratory than conclusive or deliberately neglectful. When the narrative leaps forward to the second part of the chapter, with the transition marked with asterisks, there is again no mention of how much time has passed. The duration of time spent listening to the sounds of the island could be quite drawn out, which explains the need to separate the two parts.

As we read on, an artefact which further disrupts our sense of reality emerges: "At one corner of the house, above the head-height, a plaque is bolted to the wall. Daniel Defoe, Author, are the words, white on blue, and then more writing too small to read" (*Foe* 155). This is a very strange moment for several reasons. The first and most obvious oddity is the abrupt introduction of Daniel Defoe. Despite being the author of the very novel on which the premise of this entire narrative is based, this is the first time his name is mentioned, although it is a, a fact that hangs in the backdrop of the entire novel. The title "Author" is, then, an overt reminder that this whole narrative is fictional, which is less disruptive at this moment in the text given how this chapter had begun in such a surrealistic manner that defies the expectations of conventional story worlds.

The second oddity is the placement of the plaque itself. From the previous chapters, it is clear that this house belongs to Foe, and the appearance of such an important artifact not present in the previous chapters prompts an inevitable revisit or rereading of those earlier chapters. The possibility that Foe as the author Susan seeks has been Daniel Defoe all along is a possibility

which does influence our perception of time and reality, given that the coexistence of two entities who belong to very different worlds is confusing to say the least, forcing a further reconsideration of the diegetic realities that exist simultaneously at this juncture; there is the primary diegetic reality of Defoe's fictional novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, and Susan's narrative may not even exist without its existence. However, the second layer is not Susan's narrative, but Coetzee's plane of existence. Through his imagination and writing, Susan Barton emerges as a character that engages Defoe's novel, while creating a fictional world on the premise that there are gaps in the original novel that were not addressed. Assuming that Susan is still a fictional character, Coetzee then creates the figure of Foe, who may belong to the same hierarchical level as Coetzee himself due to their roles as "writers."

However, the rupture which takes place when Susan asks Foe to write her into being comes about because of our inability to separate the fact that Susan only exists in the first place because Coetzee has written her into existence, as well as accept her claim that she does not belong to any narrative given how we are reading about her exploits even as she speaks. To complicate matters further, Susan (or Coetzee, or even Foe if one does not follow the temporal order of the novel) can be said to be the one doing the very act of writing and narrating. The inherent temporal paradoxes that result from these multiple diegetic realities can be located and summarised in this very harmless positioning of the seemingly innocuous plaque, given how its presence removes any possibility of a concrete, stable story world. In fact, temporal reference that is made in the process is both extremely important as a means to provide a semblance of order, yet arguably as empty and weightless as the figures in this chapter are as well.

These questions are unsurprisingly left unanswered, even while the next part of the chapter presses on into yet another layer of the story world, which is no less confusing than what

has been described so far: “I enter. Though it is a bright autumn day, light does not penetrate these walls. On the landing I stumble over the body, light as straw, of a woman or a girl. The room is darker than before; but, groping along the mantel, find the stub of a candle and light it. It burns with a dull blue flame.” At this point, the word “enter” no longer holds any meaning as a physical gesture in the narrative, but as a shift into another reality. To account for similar moments in postmodern fiction, Brian McHale’s draws an analogy to the Chinese Box, and its “effect of interrupting and complicating the ontological “horizon” of the fiction, multiplying its worlds, and laying bare the process of world-construction.” (*Postmodernism* 112). What is noteworthy here is the change of the article “a” to “the” when the narrator stumbles over the body. The seeming awareness that such a scene has taken place before shows the presence of mind on the character’s part, which is further emphasised when he/she notices that the room “is darker than before.”

Indeed, there are references to past events in the earlier chapters of the novel, but it is uncertain whether these instances of repetition are based on extratextual or intratextual memories. When the narrator lights the candle, a couple in bed comes into view. From the description, it is rather clear that this is a scene from the past, an episode that took place in the previous chapter when this very state of affairs transpires between Susan and Foe. Like the rest of the characters in this chapter, the woman and girl here are inanimate, and the narrator finds himself/herself in the same supposed physical space as these figures, but distanced in terms of time, space and reality. While time is still passing for the narrator given the sense of structure that the chain of events provides, the only movement so far is Friday’s, who seems equally displaced at times as well. With two strands of time passing at different paces, the narrator is no different from a spectre visiting an alternate plane of reality.

The appearance of the novel's manuscript in the form of Susan's letter paves the way for the next diegetic leap. One moment, the narrator is exploring the confines of the house she is in, while in the next she finds himself/herself slipping overboard into a boat. It is possible to read this as a metaphorical journey in retrospection, as the figurative connotation associated with "slip" holds overt references to our inherent inability to hold on to time, as well as to such common phrases as "slippages of memory." Both references facilitate the erasure of boundaries which might typically delineate one reality from another, as the narrator is projected into another world. The words on the script— "At last I could row no further"—are also interesting, given how they mirror the first line in the very first chapter. However, while the first chapter was enclosed in quotation marks, the text in the fourth chapter continues on after the quote as part of the narrated reality of the novel instead of the narrator's recollection. As Marco Caracciolo points out, this "metaleptic leap corresponds to what Marie-Laure Ryan calls "fictional recentering" ("J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Embodiment of Meaning" 103-105)—the reader's imaginary projection into a fictional world—except that in this case the narrator's movement is presented as real, not as imaginary" (93). As with the rest of the chapter thus far, time stamps, if any, are left deliberately vague or absent altogether, which creates a greater sense of disorientation.

The employment of such narrative strategies to distance the reader from developing a structured sense of time has been explained by some critics as Coetzee's commentary on political and historical discourse, where his views on postcolonialism in South Africa include the examination of disembodied voices and temporal dislocation. In *Foe*, rather, Coetzee seems to be questioning the hermeneutic space that exists between reader and narrator, and the suspension of time allows a more incisive dissection of these imaginary boundaries. This is reflected as the

chapter continues. While there are rather detailed descriptions of the narrator's short journey at sea, the vivid images do not offer any new insights as to what is taking place. The narrative at this stage of the chapter is relatively shapeless as there are no signposts or basic structures to indicate the presence of a stable story world:

It is not a country bath-house. In the black space of this cabin the water is still and dead, the same water as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago. Susan Barton and her dead captain, fat as pigs in their white nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks, their hands, puckered from long immersion, held out in blessing, float like stars against the low roof. I crawl beneath them. (Coetzee, *Foe* 156-157)

This short excerpt provides the clearest references to time in this abstract chapter, but they are so abstract in nature that they do little to help us locate the narrator temporally. By stating that there is no difference between “as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago,” the implicit declaration is that time has ceased to matter, and reality is thus reduced to a state of unstructured chaos. The strange phenomenon comes in the form of the puckered hands, given that the “long immersion” indicates that a considerable amount of time has passed. The exact timing of when they drowned remains anyone's guess, and to some extent, it does not really matter. In a way, this scene resembles the end of a narrative, where the characters are left suspended for all eternity, even as the author of that reality decides to end the writing process. In comparison with other fictional characters in other novels who have to live in an endless and repetitive loop, the removal of consciousness from these inanimate figures is a merciful gesture, releasing them from the limbo which perception and awareness of time can bring.

It is fitting to end this chapter with a brief discussion of Friday's role in all of this so far, especially since the last chapter of *Foe* concludes with his involvement. Friday's final state, a

perpetual state of tonguelessness, is consistent throughout the novel, where he is positioned as a mute and illiterate individual that follows Susan about. “By robbing [Friday] of his tongue (and hinting that it is Cruso, not I, who cut it out),” Coetzee writes, “I deny him a chance to speak for himself: because I cannot imagine how anything that Friday might say would have a place in my text. [...] What is lacking to me is what is lacking to Africa since the death of Negritude: a vision of a future for Africa that is not a debased version of life in the West” (Coetzee from Attwell, *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing* 157). Given Susan’s claim that her narrative is not written in the most accurate and authentic way, Friday’s account is removed altogether. The last scene, where his mouth opens and “[f]rom inside comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption,” all the way to how “it beats against [the narrator’s] eyelids, against the skin of [the narrator’s] face,” is significant due to the obvious absence of words. Denying Friday a chance to speak or write removes a critical perspective and story from the entire storyline, leaving us with gaps in the narrative and unresolved blocks of time.

This goes back to the excerpt right at the beginning of this chapter on Foe, where a point was made about how the manipulation of events by an authority can distort one’s perception of time and reality. For almost the entirety of the novel, Friday is a peripheral figure who is under the control of authorial figures such as Defoe (the author of the original text), Cruso (his master in the fictional world of *Robinson Crusoe*), Susan (his mistress after Cruso passes away), and finally, Foe himself, who seemingly holds power over how Susan’s narrative will be written, which directly affects Friday’s role as well. All these authority figures dictate how Friday’s time is spent, on various activities which are described in the narrative, from the moment he wakes to the moment of his unspoken demise.

Within this socio-political discourse, the silencing of marginalised voices speaks to a particularly insidious consequence: that this act of silencing the marginalised both literally and metaphorically removes the presence of time from their lives, reducing their lives to a void that has no movement. The image of Friday dressing up as Foe in his robes and wig and pretending to write at the end of the chapter thus makes sense when juxtaposed beside the final image of his final form – “under the transoms, half buried in sand, his knees drawn up, his hands between his thighs.” In both moments he is deprived of agency, performing a function that has been imposed on him by the society or reality he inhabits. This seems to suggest that being denied a role in the shaping of narrative time ultimately means that Friday has no substance in the story beyond what the others impose on him – a shadow, with a story that no one can hear.

Just as one cannot metaphorically write one’s fate without language, one cannot hope to understand or inhabit a reality without time. However, there is more to Friday’s situation than this cynical interpretation. Rather than being completely stripped of agency, Friday’s silence can be seen a sign of his potential to transcend time and history in the alpha-omega insinuation. Compared to Susan, who seeks at every turn to narrate her story in order to give substance to her character, or Foe, who seemingly wields power over how the narrative should be told, Friday’s calm acceptance of his fate is, in actuality, an act of preservation that protects his own world from external violation and distortion. As Marco Caracciolo points out, the final chapter “confront[s] the reader with a repetitive structure and a bundle of contradictions, and resist[s] being described in terms of the narrative mode of sense-making” (“J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and the Embodiment of Meaning” 99-100). Instead of being embroiled in a struggle of who can tell a better story and thus control the narrative, be it historical or fictional, Friday’s flower ritual on the island speaks of a culture and history that transcends what we understand, exactly because

the articulation is denied to us. His involuntary control over his own narrative is also his hold on us as readers, and our understanding of his meaning and his place in history.

In this case, it seems that the deeper meaning behind Coetzee's novel lies in its inaccessibility, suggesting that "[i]f we reduce meaning to words and sentences (or to concepts and propositions), we miss or leave out where meaning really comes from" (Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body* 11). By showing us how experience can never be fully articulated through the medium of language, Coetzee is, by default, highlighting how a phenomenological discussion of time in narrative is no different from the abstract, indecipherable mess that frames the last chapter. Indeed, Susan's effort is arguably counter-productive. By trying to convince and craft an entirely new narrative, the multiplicity of narratives that emerge as a consequence reduces whatever account she has into a matter of subjective perspectives that are easily refuted or distorted by Foe. In this sense, Friday's refusal to partake in any of the verbal exchanges preserves his sense of self and identity, and perhaps puts to rest any doubts that while time can be constructive to build a collective shared plane of reality, one's internal world is ultimately assessable on a personal, individual level, with its own sense of chronology and perceptions of experience.

CHAPTER THREE — FRAMING NARRATIVES FROM THE PAST: THE FICTIONALITY OF TIME IN *A GOAT'S SONG*

He could hear her say that word nostalgia. When she'd say it, his senses would rear back in alarm, then relax, for her inflexion carried all the meanings of the word – her woman's past, her childhood, her jealousies, her other lovers, her private moments – everything that was herself. Nostalgia. Nostalgia. It was like breathing out after holding your breath for a long time.

— Dermot Healy, *A Goat's Song*

Much has been written about Dermot Healy's experimental style, his play with multiple narratives and realities, as well as his uncanny ability to create interior, fictional worlds which are both deeply contemplative and fractured. Widely regarded as his finest work, *A Goat's Song* is a strong reminder of why Healy has been called "a writers' writer." Annie Proulx calls it "an exceptional novel, one of those rare books that permanently colour one's ideational map of place and human behaviour" ("*A Goat's Song*: A Writer's Appreciation" 112), while Neil Murphy, co-editor of *Writing the Sky: Observations and Essays on Dermot Healy*, praises how Healy "sought to address the complex problem of assigning fictional narrated forms to the human experience, or to reflect a sense of how that experience is imbued with the fictional as a matter of fact" (279). In Dermot McCarthy's words, *A Goat's Song* presents itself as "a narrative of confession, exorcism, and therapy; the telling is intended to be a freeing of the self from the pain and guilt of the past, from the demons of alcohol addiction and self-abuse, from the despair that self-loathing brings" ("Recovering Dionysus" 134). It is as the name suggests: a tragedy, a tale of separation and irreconcilability that seeks refuge in the imaginary world of one's desperation.

As already noted, *A Goat's Song* is described by McCarthy as "uroboric"—the image of a serpent with its tail in its mouth—and its main protagonist Jack Ferris is presented as both the creator and participant of his own narrative, contemplating past events from both the external image of his memories, as well as the interior worlds of the characters involved in a tragic

chapter in his life. As a self-confessed alcoholic who yearns to be with his lover Catherine, Jack finds himself rewriting his narrative of memories with the intention of finding a compromise between the harsh reality he faces in the present, and the possibility of reconciliation and redemption in a fictional reality created from fragments of past images, conversations and events. With the first eighty-four pages devoted to a description of his drunken stupors and grief, the next few hundred pages present an extensive, disturbing and detailed narrative that begins with Catherine's father Jonathan Adams, extending from the moments of her childhood to their meeting, and eventually, coming full circle to his position on the bridge. In this almost schizophrenic endeavour, recollection becomes a process of recreation; memory becomes fiction; and the narrator becomes an artist of his own past and present states of imagination, leaving a narrative that draws attention to the very fictionality of its construction. This convergence of multiple realities contemplates the very representation of imagination—and consciousness—in the form of the writer's work; in other words, the aesthetic representation of reality in fiction comes into question, even as the readers deal with what Frank Kermode terms as *peripeteia*, “a falsification of expectation, so that the end comes as expected, but not in the manner expected” (Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* 53).

This excess of imagination, or imaginary imagination, seems to echo Johann Gottlieb Fichte's claim that “all reality [...] is brought forth solely by imagination [...] that this act of imagination forms the basis for the possibility of our consciousness, our life, our existence for ourselves, that is, our existence as selves” (*The Science of Knowledge* 202), working with what Richard Kearney defines as the “human power to convert absence into presence, actuality in possibility... [designating] our ability to transform the time and space of our world into a specifically human mode of existence” (*Poetics of Imagining* 4). Healy himself has commented

on the nature of fiction, notably its unreliability in terms of narration and, of course, the problematic nature of memory and its changes over time. “In fiction, something that did not happen has to happen,” he said in 2011, “In memoir, something that happened has to happen all over again. And by making it happen all over again, of course, you somehow change it.” In this short musing, the similarities between the two mediums are drawn. Memoirs, against traditional modes of definition, can possess elements of fiction given how the exact experience can never be recreated, and Healy formulates this conclusion based not only on the abstract nature of language in the process of recollection and writing, but the difficult process of understanding memory and its relation to reality. In his own words, the writer’s difficult task is “to give some form to that which cannot be uttered” (*A Goat’s Song* 5):

For a moment it could have begun all over, but it didn’t. She had struggled against the disillusionment. She had seen what was coming. Now he had to live on in a different world. To transcend. To enter a new story. She had to be imagined. He opened a spiral-bound notebook and thought, here it begins. (*A Goat’s Song* 84)

Thierry Robin describes this scene as the foregrounding of “fictional therapy,” and her point that “[f]iction is then a remedy to reality” provides a logical explanation for Jack’s impulses to begin a new narrative (“The Importance of Being Dermot” 200). On the other hand, there are traces of references to epistemology here which are relatively puzzling. The fact that she “had seen what was coming” may indicate a literal reference to her loss of hope and expectations, a consequence of the struggle against her sense of disillusionment. Yet, it is the recognition that she has the knowledge which he does not which creates a sense of dislocation in space and time. They are, in Jack’s worlds, in “different world[s],” and the absence of any coherent account from Catherine’s part creates a void in the narrative which cannot be properly filled. That she “had to be

imagined” suggests contradictory approaches in terms of feelings: at once a constructive move which offers, albeit imaginary, a chance at redemption; as well as an admission of defeat in this particular version and perception of reality.

Beneath the multiple layers of Healy’s narrative techniques lies a form of existential anxiety that exists on a plane where imagination and memory contradict and cohere at simultaneous points, all done with the protagonist’s intention of sustaining the viability of a particular reality. In other words, the deliberate, self-conscious manipulation of time serves to highlight the very fictionality of duration, leading to extended questions with regard to the impossibility of any singular, concrete reality. This attempt, futile as it is, echoes a line in W.B. Yeats’s poetry, “[i]nto the artifice of eternity,” which Frank Kermode describes as “a striking periphrasis for ‘form’, for the shapes which console the dying generations” (Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* 3). Yeats’s expression here proves to be especially apt when reading *A Goat’s Song*, given the fictionality of reality presented in a story world that defies the immortality provided by art. Kermode’s observation highlights the gaps that are characteristically present in the narrative of modernist fiction, gaps that can arise due to the problematic nature of language or deliberated deception on the narrator’s part. It also conveys what Con Coroneos has called modernism’s “anxious discourse of a troubled interiority” (“Heartless Modernism” 142), and in this case, allows the narrator to “volubly project his pathology on his environment” (Rau, *English Modernism, National Identity and the Germans* 116). A more significant question presents itself: with this new beginning, what happens to the knowledge accumulated in the past? From a reader’s perspective, the answer is clear: by the recreation of a new world away from individual autonomy and stories from the past, Jack is able to gain the authority of the text required to shape reality according to his desires.

The choice to position Jack as a playwright is thus an appropriate, if unsurprising, move. As a writer by profession, Jack experiences a difficult task in the piecing together of a fictional world on stage, involving characters, movement and dialogue. However, when one considers Jack's role as the protagonist and the implications of having him frame the narrative through his perspective, the problematic reality of this fictional world is revealed. Jack is at once both an extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrator, or by Gérard Genette's term metadiegetic, creating an image of *mise en abyme*. Frequently transgressing the boundaries between the narrative levels of the novel, Jack ends up in the strange position of occupying a strange place between the subject of a third person narration, and a character who openly expresses awareness of his consciousness in a self-constructed reality.

This overt instance of metalepsis is made even more pronounced when a critical part of the plot is considered: Catherine, the object of his memories and past realities, is supposed to be one of the actresses in his play. Considering the multiple roles she now occupies—a real fictional character, a character from memory and a recognised fictional character on stage—prompts us to first contemplate the medium of theatre, and how the very form of its presentation of reality serves as a valuable narrative strategy when observing the fictionality of time. "Theatre, as a performance art, depends on a tripartite distinction between the fictional world of the invariant text, the production world imagined by the director, and the highly variable world created by the actors in every performance" (Ryan and Thon, *Storyworlds Across Media* 8). With these three worlds existing simultaneously in a confined space on stage, the notion of performance comes into question here. Things become even more complicated when we realise that Catherine may actually be performing as herself in a role specifically modelled on her character, in a play that may very well be a shortened version of *A Goat's Song*, creating an addition layer of reality—a

play within a play within a main narrative—when this fact is confirmed later in Jack’s fictional rewriting. With these different layers of realities coexisting in one plane, it becomes even more difficult to separate fiction and reality.

Besides writing roles for actors to perform, Jack finds himself in a similar position for very different reasons. His need to perform the reality that he sorely desires manifests itself in the form of actions and words, subsequently affecting the way he interacts with the people around him. In separate incidents of phoning the theatre for Catherine, Jack deliberately puts on a façade in order to continue his state of denial. In the first incident, he explains cheerfully to Mrs Moloney that he has “no luck with phones,” putting on the pretence of joviality even when he was just screeching moments ago (*A Goat’s Song* 17). In the next instance, he is observed “talking into a void,” chuckling cheerfully into the speaker and speaking of “spring, politics and wishing everyone well,” even going as far as to tell Mrs Moloney “[i]t was as easy as that” (19). This positive facade is all the more painful when the shift back to reality takes place almost immediately after he leaves the booth. The use of a metaphorical void is thus particularly apt here, with the gap between himself and Catherine presented in terms of physical distance, as well as the spiritual disconnect between them which he fails to bridge. Acting, then, becomes one of the only ways he can hold on to his sanity. When he dials the theatre and hears only “a recorded voice repeating the times of various shows” (35), the refusal to verbally admit this to Mrs Moloney highlights the fear that saying it out loud would concretise the fact, given that it would become part of the collective reality instead of a truth that is only known to himself in that setting.

The implications of this dual role of a narrator and a sort of dramatist are significant, especially when we consider that

the difference between narrative and the dramatic use of internal framings, bearing in mind the narrative metafiction cannot escape the limits of its own medium – language, while a play implies its double existence as both word and virtual body, a written text to be read and virtual act to be performed, a virtual action to be lived. (Feldman, “The Context Within” 287)

At certain points of the novel, it is no longer clear whether Jack is the scriptwriter, narrator or actor, or whether he is performing all the roles at the same time. This link to theatre is critical, when we consider the words of drama critic Vimala Herman who postulates that “[d]ramatic interactions are orientated to the deictic centre, the time of speech exchange, and therefore, the ‘present’ of speech is the unmarked time of dramatic speech event” (Herman, *Dramatic Discourse* 62). In other words, the essence of theatre has its roots in time; the form of drama is representative of the artifice displayed in its mirroring of reality. As a playwright by profession, it is highly likely that Jack understands the fundamental concepts associated with the craft and art form of theatre, and the selection of a play with an actual character playing its main role as herself highlights his awareness that his constructed narrative is equally artificial in its composition. It is then rather ironic, when Eddie tells him, rather bluntly, that the revised scripts “belong to another play. They don’t belong to this play” (*A Goat’s Song* 38). In a few words, Jack’s illusion is shattered. Like the extra pages of his play, he no longer belongs to Catherine’s imagination.

In this process of separating collective reality from his internal states of consciousness, Jack seems to have applied the same concept to the way he views himself. He begins talking to himself, or rather, creating figures of his imagination to hold conversations, to say the things he feels but dares not say. The most prominent figure of his imagination is the Leitrim man, an

interesting label given how the place of his birth was prompted by a random question from a countryman. It is also how Catherine first gets to know him, as “the man from Leitrim.” This random attachment to words suggests a need for grounding, labels that provide actual significance in a reality that is slowly spiralling out of control. As the Leitrim man, Jack is given a temporary identity, fittingly in the form of the physical location of his origin at a time where is dislocated from the reality around him.

At times, this figure of the Leitrim man seems to have wrestled autonomy away from his creator, even going as far as to advise Jack “[n]ever to listen to all the things that are said on both sides when your mind is astray” (*A Goat’s Song* 47). Although it is stated explicitly in the text that it is the Leitrim man speaking, we know that reality in Jack’s world is never simple. In fact, Jack is both the Leitrim man and a projection of the Leitrim man, speaking to the people beside him and offering his rather strange insights: “We are all in the shit. I lost two stone because my brain was moving too fast” (47). Besides the disturbing fact that he is responding to a man speaking in his sleep, Jack’s words show that he is all too aware that he is not behaving normally, and that this knowledge is present in his sub-consciousness. There is, in fact, subtle acknowledgement that the lines that demarcate the separation of his imagination and physical reality are not as clear as he would like them to be, given that the deterioration of his physical self because of how “[his] brain was moving too fast.” In other words, the trauma that he is experiencing now has led him to experience time on an intuitive level, to the point where he has neglected his physical body, of which little is described in the earlier parts of the novel.

However, presupposing the fact that Jack understands that he is the one speaking creates another sense of disorientation when we consider the shift in references. While the third-person narration remains consistent here, the change from “Jack” to “Leitrim” is potentially disruptive

due to this introduction of a new character. Lying on his bed in the hospital, Jack remains physically unchanged, yet there are now two presences in the same space. Besides being medically classified as schizophrenic, the uncanny sensation of Jack actually looking at the projection of himself suggests how he is able to reconstruct a figure of himself through his imagination. This mirroring effect not only suggests the presence of multiple worlds within Jack's consciousness, but also emphasises the state of dislocation that he is currently experiencing. The use of parataxis here breaks the flow of the narrative and reminds us, in an overt sense, that Jack is slipping in between sleep and consciousness, and his waking moments are subjected to random images and sentiments.

The lack of continuity between these two paragraphs are not the only instances of disruption in the narrative, and the gaps are present for a few reasons: to offer a realistic perspective of one traversing between dreams and reality, and to highlight Jack's heightened awareness of time, in terms of both its fluidity and its ability to remain absolutely static in moments of contemplation. Henri Bergson's *durée* comes to mind here, and as he explains in *Time and Free Will*, time can be divided into "two species of quantity, the first extensive and measurable, the second intensive and not admitting of measure, but of which it can nevertheless be said that it is greater or less than another intensity" (3). The second type of quantity describes the "intensive" sensation that is felt by Jack, one that is not measurable or comprehensible by anyone but himself, echoing Neil Murphy's sentiment that "*A Goat's Song* is an exploration of what it means to lose a sense of shape, to bereft of a system with which to name a world framed by pain, self-deception, alcoholism and loss" (*Writing the Sky* 289). Given that time is possibly one of the only measurements of reality, this may explain the hallucinatory texture of Jack's words and thoughts.

The empty spaces of Jack's silence that lie between the narratives can be read as a refusal to articulate his sense of trauma, a condition which conveys what José M. Yebra terms the "unbridgeable gap between traumatic events and their narrative representation," where "disruptions, temporal and logical gaps, silences, unreliable narration, grammatical dislocations are some of the formulae to (mis)represent the vacuum left after a period of latency" ("Ethics Aesthetics and Gayness in *The Line of Beauty*" 185). In this scene, the man in the hospital, who is not verified to be either a real person or fictional character, offers his assessment of Jack's condition. "One minute," he says "you're the one thing, the next, the other thing. How do you explain that?" (*A Goat's Song* 50). This is literally performed by Jack in the next part of the narrative, where he is seen saying "hurtful things" about Catherine, and then overcompensating and praising her, and then criticising her again. "I distrusted her," said Jack, "since I first trusted her. I disbelieved her. She considered me her ballast. I loved her humour" (50). The circular reasoning given here shows clearly how Jack has remained in the initial stages of depression, and the conflicted nature of his responses shows that he is torn and even lost about how he is to deal with this betrayal, as reflected in the following episode:

All night the painful image stared unflinchingly back at him.

As it would sometimes in the future from a splinter of wood. A splinter of wood told her face. From a blurred print on a page her features would one day emerge. For a long time her face would enter inanimate objects. Then her likeness began to haunt the living. And one day he would see a picture of Our Mother of Perpetual Succour on the TV before the evening news and even see Catherine's face there. This was what he had feared ever since he was a child, a fear that he would forever be followed by the face of one he loved and yet never be able to make contact.

Every second signified no change in the icon. The night-light was unerring. Her gaze, a distilled distance.

A man's heart clicked like a wristwatch in the dim ward. (Healy, *A Goat's Song* 46)

Here, there is a sense of timelessness despite various markers that signal the passage of time. The moment takes place in the space of one night, yet time is seemingly extended due to his obsession with the image. That her image "would one day emerge" has a few potential interpretations. As the past form of the modal verb "will," the most common usage of "would" is to create conditional verb forms, yet the critical issue here is that it can either indicate repetition of the past or serve as a future tense, especially with the marker of "one day" present.

Indeed, multiple usage of "would" in this short excerpt further complicates matters. The reference to "a long time" is obviously a measurement from his perspective. Yet the use of "would" again creates a sense that Jack's perception of time is not only misaligned with his world, but exists in multiple forms that may be beyond even his own comprehension. To claim that the painful image would "sometimes in the future [stare back] in the future from a splinter of wood" gives the sense that he is not just observing from the present, but projecting his mind into the future to imagine how he would act. At the same time, the specificity of details used to describe a simple speculation shows how clearly Jack has linked his memory of her to his present life, that the shadow of her presence has already invaded his consciousness. The level of this affliction is reflected by how even childhood memories are tainted with fear due to his memory of her, and this abrupt case of disjunctive temporality reminds us of how detached he is from everything around him.

Another good example comes in Jack's encounter with a bottle:

The bottle was half full. He watched the bottle. If I start on that I'll never telephone. I must do it while I'm sober. It's eleven-fifteen. The first rain is into Ballina. The first train has left Castlebar. She has not come. That's the position. Maybe she's been and gone. Maybe she has driven straight to the Adams' house in Corrochan and is still there. I should walk up and see. Three and a half miles to Corrochan. Six miles to Belmullet. Is she in Dublin still. What did the fucking gardener tell her? Maybe she never left. Did she have an accident? Maybe I should go there. I can't make Dublin now unless I hitch. Sometimes if you get up and go and don't think about it, you can do it. If I have to hitch, I mustn't drink. (*A Goat's Song* 15)

The use of parataxis and empirical details of time and space in Jack's thought processes serves to illustrate the state of mind he is in, and more specifically, to describe a form of anxiety associated with the loss of control he has over time and reality. The abrupt switch from third-person narration to a first-person account of his thoughts creates a break in the flow of the narrative. A sense of stasis is created by the shift in focus from the bottle to the realisation that he has something more important to do. The heightened awareness of time and sequencing in the order of events is relatively striking, from the first instance when he has the awareness to check for the time, to the more ambiguous gauge of the time he needs to travel to Dublin. As Jack observes how "[t]he first rain is into Ballina" and "[t]he first train has left Castlebar," there is the suggestion of how a new beginning is expected, but the most important event has not taken place: "She has not come," and this means that things will likely remain the same. Despite the attention paid to time and specific measurements given in terms of spatial distances, the narrative does not progress.

The introduction of disparate details such as the respective distances for travel highlight a certain need for order and organisation not just in terms of physical movement, but in terms of the narrative as well. The specificity of distance—“Three and a half miles to Corrloch. Six miles to Belmullet”—followed immediately by a series of questions emphasises the limitations of empiricism, that the information he possesses is insufficient to piece together a complete narrative due to his inability to retrieve certain details that are beyond his reach. This sense of helplessness is not a singular event. Later, Jack discovers an urgent need to chronicle all that is around him. While the writing process is largely functional and therapeutic, there are times when “there were no words [...] He no longer had any language in which he might contemplate the world, but only stinging asides from his past with Catherine” (70). Lastly, the confession that his “[h]is memory was impaired” is a clear sign that even if he did have the vocabulary to describe the narrative, it would already be the subject of imposition or distortion. In Healy’s words, “[w]hat happened is a wonder [...] memory is always incomplete, like a map with pieces missing. But it’s all right, it’s entered the imagination, and nothing is ever the same” (Healy, *The Bend for Home* 33). Like the “distilled distance” which Catherine holds herself from him, the memory of his past will always be partial, never the complete one he hopes for. Unfortunately for Jack, there are numerous examples of this. Consider the reading of the letters with their “tone, sound, the hesitations, the acrimony, the exaggerations [...]” (74); “[culling] of old notebooks written in Belfast [and] record of their day-to-day life” (76); “footage of their previous encounters” before Jack and Catherine meet briefly (80).

This inability to piece together a complete picture of the memories with Catherine returns to the earlier point raised about trauma. While the focus of this dissertation is not specifically on trauma narratives, it cannot be denied that time, memory and narrative are all properties which

play integral roles in the narration of traumatic experiences. After all, *A Goat's Song* is a tale of tragedy as its title infers. There are many signs that Jack is not in the right state of mind, and the effects may not be solely caused by alcohol, but an ailment that cripples him from an internal wound. As Laurie Vickroy explains,

[t]rauma narratives go beyond presenting trauma as subject matter or character study.

They internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures. They reveal many obstacles to communicating such experience: silence, simultaneous knowledge and denial, dissociation, resistance and repression, among others. (*Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* 3)

These traits are unstable and volatile, and at times contradictory, which align with Jack's anxiety at having lost control over time and reality. This may also explain his heightened awareness of time, and also of how every movement and gesture is described in such methodical detail as though there is an urgent need to make sense of the reality around him.

One such episode take place on the bus Jack takes to Ballina:

He had lived in his body and now it was the wrong body. His body, errant and sickly, was what controlled his mind, and ultimately the language that mind expressed itself in.

For the first time, after all the sleepless nights, he considered the word illness, which led to the word disease, which led to the phrase failure of the imagination. For the first time in his life he had a slight insight into what the word imagination might mean. To live on in a different world, to transcend, to enter a new story. As they passed through

Crossmolina he realized it was not going to happen.

I am diseased, he thought. (*A Goat's Song* 27-28)

The statement “[t]o live on in a different world, to transcend, to enter a new story” will appear again, just before Jack transits into his imagined world in the second half of the novel. The moment of prolepsis aside, what is more important is the distancing of his consciousness from his physical body, and the sudden intense sense of discomfort. That it is the wrong body “now” refers to the disconnect between Jack’s body in the physical realm and the body he visualizes himself having in his mind, which reveals an incoherent perspective of himself. This sense of incoherence can be a consequence of irreconcilability between his physical and mental state, as well as his past and present selves. The fact that Jack was more comfortable living in his body in the past before changing his mind indicates that things have changed, implying that the present state of affairs is unsettling and he may have desires to return to the past in order to escape the pain of the present.

It is also possible that this negative portrayal of his physical self is Jack’s excuse to escape from a physical reality he refuses to accept, and into his past memories where he can indulge in past moments of hope and perhaps fantasies. However, the word “diseased” has deeper implications than just physical ailments from his drinking. It is an overt reference to the state of his mind, where he is bordering on derangement. A reason for this state of instability revisits a point made earlier about Jack’s longing for the past, and this reinforces the notion that there is the presence of an obsessive desire to preserve whatever memories he has left of Catherine so that she may still have a place in his life. According to Christa Schönfelder, “[t]he obsessions with memory and with trauma reinforce each other, a mania for memory is particularly likely to arise at moments of crisis, at times when memory comes to be felt as fragile and threatened – a frequent after-effect of trauma” (*Wounds and Words* 28). In Jack’s case, his traumatic experience comes in the form of break-up, and unfortunately, it sets him in a dilemma

because he is unwilling to accept this unpleasant reality. This results in an impasse where he is neither able to forget the past, nor move forward in the present, a predicament that aligns with Cathy Caruth's definition of a traumatic memory, which is "a history that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood" (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 153, original in italics). An incoherent perception of self, which is arguably due to a distorted perception of time, thus explains the state of disorientation Jack finds himself in.

Jack's fixation with time resurfaces in the next part of this episode in a lament about the unstable state of his identity:

And he felt – my God – how vulnerable people are, how short their stay in consciousness really is, and how the self they think they know they take for granted. He was maddened by the other passengers, how their identities remained comfortable and intact while his careered around him. Everything he did seemed a betrayal of the truth, while they surveyed the world, uninhibited, sure of themselves, without a hint of the fact that consciousness was something visited on people. (27-28)

The reference to identity is another telling sign of an individual who has lost place in the physical world he inhabits. In this case, he is consciously aware of how his identity is shifting with the passing of time. Adopting an approach that is described as both phenomenological and hermeneutic when it comes to the concepts of identity and time, Paul Ricoeur's claim that identity is ultimately shaped by time comes to mind here, in particular how the fragmentation of time affects self-perception. Looking at the people around him in the bus, Jack's observation of "how short their stay in consciousness really is" reflects what is happening to him – that he remains conscious much longer than these fortunate souls around him. The emphasis on duration

here is important, because Jack implies that the other passengers' "identities remained comfortable and intact", which, when taking into consideration how time is supposed to shape reality, naturally implies that these passengers have a concrete sense of self because they are not conscious of how time is passing, and therefore, not aware of how their identities are actually in a constant state of change. In contrast, his situation is less linear and organized precisely because he is constantly aware of his internal perceptions of time deviates from the external measurements of time in his physical realm, which leaves him in a strange position where past and future experiences may be laid in out in an incoherent way. According to Patrick Crowley in his examination of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur addresses this phenomenon in *Time and Narrative*, arguing that that "[n]arrative [...] mediates the aporia of change and permanence through a process of "emplotment" that organizes the contingencies of existence into a coherent whole" ("The Concept of Narrative Identity" 2). Defined generally as a series of historical events that have chronological order, Ricoeur's reference to "emplotment" implies that Jack's loss of a concrete self comes from two reasons; the first is his inability to forget his past due to the impact of the traumatic event, and secondly, the constant feeling that "[e]verything he did seemed a betrayal of the truth" because he seems to have lost a sense of which reality he belongs to.

Indeed, Crowley summarises Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity as "a response to the question of how an identity can bespeak both change and permanence" (Crowley 2), which in turn helps explain the unstable state of Jack's current sense of identity, to the point where he begins questioning his very existence:

I exist, mumbled Jack. I can pray.

We can't say we don't exist, for we do. Each stronger in the other's mind than in my own. But that was the mind on a good day. The distant cure, the harmony we seek as lost

souls. But on the bad days? It was getting difficult for him to stay long in his body. To carry it around normally. To reach out for things. To know his body belonged to him. That when habit said sit, his body would sit. That if he looked to his left it would be for a reason. And when he'd look he must know the reason why. Yet there was always some perverse self-consciousness that made the simple command unreasonable. Every move he made he questioned. He was fighting against a lifetime's habits. Every thought he had was suspect. He felt all his actions were false, masks behind which he imitated and observed normality. That meant he was false, playing to an audience. But the chief member of the audience was missing – Catherine. (*A Goat's Song* 28)

The sudden shift from a singular self to “we” is confusing, given that the narration so far exists only in Jack's own mind. A possible explanation could be his attempt to make his personal struggle a universal one as a way of self-comfort. It could also serve as a reference to how every person houses a multiplicity of selves, including the various ways which others perceive them in society. On the same note, Jack's sense of self-disembodiment is not a sense of repulsion towards his own physical body but more accurately, an aversion towards his physical reality which his current state of consciousness exists in. From the very detailed series of observations of every gesture and expression made by his body, it is clear that Jack is trying to distance himself from the reality he is in, and instead, occupy a space removed from his physical reality, where he observes as a separate entity. This “perverse self-consciousness” is in reality the splitting of self that is done through temporal dislocation – a self that first does the action, and a secondary one that observes and judges. This is not to say that time must elapse between both gestures for this to take place, but rather, quite clearly delineates the different spheres between the external and internal worlds that Jack simultaneously inhabits.

The appearance of Catherine at the end of this episode is not unexpected. Her presence, even when unspoken for long periods of narration, remain persistently in the backdrop as an invisible spectre. The pattern becomes obvious after a while; Jack makes a desperate attempt to recalibrate his life, but the moment reality comes into focus, Catherine resurfaces almost immediately. At times, this predicament appears to be confused with its own existence. While the memory of his lost love is a painful one which he attempts to escape from, Jack is simultaneously desperate to keep the memory because of unresolved feelings. According to Schönfelder, “[t]he obsessions with memory and with trauma reinforce each other, a mania for memory is particularly likely to arise at moments of crisis, at times when memory comes to be felt as fragile and threatened – a frequent after-effect of trauma” (*Theorizing Trauma* 28). This problem comes when the need for self-preservation becomes more pronounced as the very damage caused by a traumatic experience creates a sense of self-doubt when it comes to other details and events in the same time period. Obsession then becomes Jack’s expected reaction, given that a necessary amount of attention needs to be invested to stabilise any reality that is left, and this explains the fixation with details with every experience he has. As Jack confesses, “[e]very move he made he questioned,” revealing a sense of self-doubt that threatens to compromise any possibility of living life normally, that the fact that “[h]e was fighting against a lifetime’s habits” shows a desperate attempt to alter how he has lived life so far. If every detail demands a form of revisiting or questioning, duration is naturally extended to accommodate all the various thoughts and considerations, prolonging the pain in the process.

If memory is required to hold an identity together, then a traumatic memory creates an impossible situation. In the scenario that Jack chooses to remove Catherine from his memories, it would mean taking away a significant portion of his past life. In this case, time can be measured

in terms of years, months and days. What is left after the removal of all these memories is a gap that cannot be bridged, which in turn compromises the identity that Jack has built for himself over the years. The alternative solution would be to live with these painful memories, which constantly remind him of what he has lost and is missing from his current reality. As Caruth explains, “[t]he ability to recover the past is thus closely and paradoxically tied up, in trauma, with the inability to have access to it” (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 152), which explains the predicament that Jack faces. As he is constantly plagued with memories of her, Jack is simultaneously forced to confront the fact that he can never return to that particular frame of reality in time, which, in Caruth’s words, is “the inability to have access to [the past with her].” The word “access” has two possible implications – to return physically to the past so that he can be with her again, or to hold on to her memories so he retains the possibility of reconciliation. Both are products of wishful thinking, yet the struggle here is necessary to maintain his sanity, at least long enough so that a remedy can be found.

The fictionalisation of time thus appears to be a necessary defence mechanism against the horrors of trauma, or in more cynical terms, a route of escape for an individual who is unable to accept how relentless and unforgiving the passage of chronological time can be:

The physical sickness was itself a reprieve. This will be soon over. It will soon end. And another voice said, Never. You will have to live with this. Forever! The doctrine of endless torments. The unseen world where his misgivings began. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. He felt his face to see whether all his features were still in place. But touch would not reassure him. He needed to see. His eyes needed to see. His eyes needed to see themselves. And yet he longed to rest from this ceaseless activity of

naming the parts of the mind. He wanted to close his eyes and let his body be free of this constant surveillance. (29)

The description of “physical illness” as a favourable alternative to thinking about Catherine, as well as the word “reprieve” that carries with it the connotation of temporary delay, offers us a glimpse of how severe the state of trauma Jack is in, and how painfully aware he is of how slowly time is passing. The only consolation he can offer himself is that an end is in sight, even if “soon” is ominously ambiguous. Yet, the emergence of another voice, which we can assume to be a more pessimistic version created from his unstable state of mind, quashes these hopes with the threat that his crisis may extend beyond what he can tolerate. This results in yet again another state of heightened anxiety, and the process of self-disembodiment takes place once again, reflected through the short, repetitive sentences describing Jack’s urgent need “to see.” At this moment, it is quite clear that Jack is losing control of his senses, given that all his attention is focused on the memory of Catherine. More accurately, he is attempting to remove the memories with her from his mind.

The effort to escape the torment of his memories pushes him to the point of doubting his own physical existence, going to the extent of “[feeling] his face to see whether all his features were still there.” But the fact that even physical touch cannot provide him any assurance indicates that Jack’s mind is so far removed from physical reality that it operates in a totally different dimension altogether. Describing how his mind moves ceaselessly without any respite, the sheer amount of activity taking place elongates time. Even though this excerpt may have taken place in all of ten seconds, the descriptions of every single detail and thought makes it seem much longer than it actually is. However, this period of fictional time is clearly no less important than the reality that Jack has tried to dissociate himself from. Indeed, time in this

specific sequence of Jack's physical reality does not move. Unlike the earlier parts of the novel where there were time-stamps to indicate the passing of time, there are almost no references to clock time or the physical environment here.

The fictionalisation of time in narrative offers an arguably more authentic representation of trauma and its presence in reality, revealing quite clearly how the different strands of time in one's consciousness removes the ability of the individual to move past the traumatic memories. After a series of events which do not get him anyway nearer his goal or further from his hurt, Jack confesses that "as long as he loved her he could not begin writing again" (*A Goat's Song* 79). The act of writing here is a metaphorical reference to the act of continuing his life, functioning as a self-reflexive gesture that reminds us that there are multiple diegetic realities present within the text. At this point, Jack acknowledges that a confrontation is necessary, "a trial of nerves that had to be gone through" (79). Without settling these unresolved issues, "[h]e was not ready to consign the real living Catherine to the world of imagination." Yet, even before the event materialises, Jack has already started to visualise all the details, including what street he would meet her on, what she would be wearing and the respective things they would say. Here, Jack's mind is already moving ahead in time, taking leave of his present reality to source for any trace of hope left in order to push himself forward. Given his state of mind so far in the novel, unconsciously scripting distorted versions of future events is an expected move on Jack's part, and it is not surprisingly when reality turns out to be a very different proposition.

Finally mustering up enough courage to put an end to this torture, Jack takes the bus to where the theatre is, but in a manner that is fraught with fear and trepidation:

He caught a bus to Ballina. He had been sober some time but he took his phial of Librium with him. He hurried through the wet streets that were rampant with hallucinations. He

caught the afternoon train. He went round Dublin terrified of walking into her, and yet craving to see her. He turned into the street where the theatre was. (79)

The lack of transitions between sentences reflects the anxiety that clouds Jack's mind, and this short paragraph of description is narrated from action to action, without any sense of flow and continuity that is expected of a reasonably fluid reality. Any perception of time, then, is reduced to the narration of any specific thought or action, removing any unnecessary details that take place in between. An instance of this is when he mentions his fears of seeing her, and very abruptly "turned into the street where the theatre was" without any clear sense of time passing in between these respective events. Whether it is the after-effects of trauma or a heightened sense of anxiety, the stress that Jack's mind undergoes is sufficient to cripple his senses to an extent that he is only able to focus on completing one action or thought at any point in time, or in this instance, any one sentence.

As he approaches the venue where the play takes place, it becomes unclear at times whether this is even the physical reality that Jack is in, or whether he is actually reliving an old memory. As he is walking outside the walls of the theatre, his focus is not on his physical surroundings, but the "[f]ootage of their previous encounters [that] passed swiftly through his mind while he imagined some heroic encounter" (80). Even in this very crucial moment just before meeting her, Jack is unable to remove past images from his consciousness. There is something poetic about how he stands across the theatre that is performing a play that he has written about Catherine, to the point where it seems almost too conveniently scripted to be true. As it is, every sequence seems to be paced according to what he has imagined, [e]very aspect – sound, light, taste – [which] was exactly as he expected" (80), leading us as readers to question whether it is really *déjà vu* as he claims.

Here, the exclamation “This was the time” is a *kairic* moment that is interesting for different reasons. One possibility is the alignment of both his imagination and actual physical reality, which could have (and should have) been written in present tense. The fact that it is written in past tense seems to suggest that it is no different from the past sequences of narration, which makes it difficult to differentiate the different diegetic realities that are at work. In addition, Jack states explicitly just before that “with a shock he realized that this was the street where for so long he had imagined he would meet her” (80), which reemphasises how the amount of fixation he has had over this particular scene. In this conflation of desires and reality, things are further complicated because the focus of the narrative is situated predominantly in his mind, and the lack of temporal markers in his external reality reduces it to an episode from his imagination rather than an event that is actually taking place.

When Catherine finally makes her appearance after all the extended build-up, it seems that Jack is given the opportunity to change his plight and rewrite the narrative... except that everything does not go according to plan. His detailed, methodical script ends at the point where Catherine turns around. Unlike the previous pages of frantic, fragmented thoughts, time slows down in this very short exchange, and every word is recorded:

When she stepped out he approached her from behind and said: “Catherine.”

She turned and froze. For a second, just as she heard his voice, she had been about to smile in greeting. Then despair descended over her face. She stood there fighting to control herself, then she walked off. (*A Goat’s Song* 80)

There are certain moments even in this short excerpt that suggest this could be a scene imagined in Jack’s mind, although it is not immediately clear why he would create a pessimistic outcome. The observation that “she had been about to smile in greeting” is a thought accessible only by

Catherine herself, and the mention of it here suggests that Jack has a way of overseeing the entire scene. The other possible interpretation would be that the scene is actually happening in reality, with little moments of imposition by Jack's deranged state of mind. Regardless of either possibility, it is clear that time moves at a slightly slower pace as every small detail is captured, from the moment she considers smiling, to the despair that takes over, and finally, to the brief moment of struggle as she stands there, "fighting to control herself." All this should technically take place in a very short period of time, yet it feels longer because our protagonist is deeply involved with the potential implications of this exchange.

The third possible interpretation reveals itself here: that this is an event that has already taken place, and Jack is, in one of his many dreams and memories, reliving in the moment, as he states explicitly just before meeting Catherine how the experience was similar to how "[f]ootage of their previous encounters passed swiftly through his mind" (80). As Caruth explains, "the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time," which raises the possibility that this is just a memory that is revisited in a space within his consciousness. Caruth explains further that there is "belatedness" involved in the traumatic moment: "the traumatic experience is not fully registered in the first place, but experienced as trauma only belatedly and someplace else when and where it re-surfaces in a fragmented form as traumatic flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and repetitive re-enactments" (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 153-157). In other words, the constant disruption to the Jack's perceptions of time and space results in an epistemological crisis that compromises any sense of reality he may possibly have.

The possibility of "some final heroic encounter" is thus another desire that is recycled through multiple recollections, all beginning with the same trickle of hope, and eventually

ending with the same disappointment. The process of narration may have seemed theoretically useful as a tool to help process Jack's traumatic experience, but this episode is a stark reminder of how it can amplify the pain instead. After a brief but ultimately tragic altercation with Catherine, Jack loses yet again a sense of time:

He walked through Dublin, drinking coffee, in cafes and bars filled with the European tourists of early spring. The coffee drinking continued all that evening. He knew that he should leave, go home, be elsewhere, but he moved from pub to pub like a sick dog because there was always the chance he might run into friends who might speak on his behalf to her. Who these friends were he didn't know. He didn't drink. Not because he had chosen not to, not because of any great sense of discipline, but because he had forgotten about drink. He had forgotten that drink might ease the pain. And yet those mad laps of the city had the hallmarks of a binge. The coffee was making him insane. (*Goat's Song* 81-82)

This does not extend beyond a day, but whether time progresses does not matter much anymore. For Jack at this point, any meaning of his narrative in this story world has effectively ended. Time has no bearing, no consequence in a reality that holds no meaning and hope. There is the brief mention of how "[t]he coffee drinking continued all that evening", but it serves nothing more than a vague estimation of time, as the activities within this space of an evening are left unmentioned. Drinking coffee this time, instead of alcohol, does seem extremely odd in the conventional sense, but may be Jack's attempt to prolong time by staying consciously awake, hoping for a miracle that a drunken stupor cannot provide. If the excuse that he had forgotten how "drink might ease the pain" is to be taken seriously, it is then clear that the pain of losing Catherine, whether it is for the first or final time, has distorted his senses beyond the point of

logical reasoning. An intensifying of the trauma that already exists further disrupts his sense of time and consequently, destabilises the very story world in which he exists in.

Jack's obviously deranged state conveys the argument of objectivist thinking, that "in the absence of reason the self would eventually collapse into solipsism, with the result that its relationship to the external world would be badly deformed" (Gasiorek, *A History of Modernist Literature* 9). Eventually, this leads to a form of derangement that extends beyond the confines of his mind:

He tried to put her by but she would not have it. She was stubborn in his recreation of her as she was in real life. In her absence he felt her physical presence even more profoundly than that moment when she would actually be there in front of him. Everywhere he went he caught hints of her imminent return. He saw her expression in certain women as they approached him from a distance. Overheard her laugh on a street. (*A Goat's Song* 8)

This presents many of the problems faced by Jack, particularly the inability to detach or even distant himself from the spectre that haunts him. There is a strange, almost wilful touch given to the figure of Catherine, both in terms of autonomy over her own actions and control over his as well. Yet, there is the conscious admission that this female figure of desire is a copy, and the attachment of character traits does not remove the need for comparison between what is perceived as the original and the imaginative recreation of its double. At this juncture, it is not even clear which is the original and which is the counterfeit, given how little distinction is created between them with the common usage of "her." Likewise, the notion of a physical presence does little to convince or reassure us that either reality is one that can accept on an authentic level. Physical form, it seems, guarantees only an image for verification and nothing close to attachment or recognition.

By debunking the possibility of authenticity even through physical reality, Healy's further attempts to articulate how experiences and knowledge may overlap and conflate comes in the form of an intertextual reference to *Hamlet*, where the Leitrim man strangely takes the persona of the Shakespearean character Hamlet. The reference to Hamlet is an interesting if not unsurprising choice, given the similarities that are shared with Jack in their respective states of existential aporia. In Derrida's words, Hamlet is a man confronted with the challenge of "learning to live [in a] time out of joint" (*Specters of Marx* 18), and although he is one obviously confronted with weightier issues than Jack's obsession with his love, the two are essentially troubled because of their dislocation in time. Like how Derrida quotes Nietzsche and relates the Dionysian man to Hamlet, Jack is trapped in a similar situation of inaction as the trio "feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion" (*Philosophical Writings* 37). The irony here is that this knowledge that Jack has of Catherine will soon be constructed on premises that are incomplete, but it is perhaps also this lack of knowledge that is preventing him from moving forward. As the "Hamlet" version of his self says, "there's always an awkward silence when a crowd of alcoholics are collected in one room" (*A Goat's Song* 50).

Given that each individual there is struggling with his or her own worlds and realities, it is not surprising why Dermot McCarthy calls Jack a "manifestly Dionysian protagonist" ("Recovering Dionysus" 136):

The repeated, almost ritualistic descriptions of Jack's drinking, drunkenness, and hallucinations parody the elements of ecstasy and mysticism found in Dionysius cult and the connection between tragedy and god informs the motifs of alcohol and alcoholism throughout the novel [...] Just as the god is torn apart by revelers who manifest his own

spirit, Ferris is torn apart by his passion for Catherine, the obsession-addiction which is behind his drinking. Ferris's story is a Dionysian lamentation, a lament for the dying god within him... (136)

Jack's rebirth, according to McCarthy, "takes place through the goat's song and the narrative poiesis that produces it" (136), where he is able find an alternative method of escapism that offers more solace than alcohol. However, the interesting parallel that is being drawn here is that of the "dying god," and the novel's reference to "a false author [that] dwelt within him" (65). Both descriptions suggest the existence of a self that is beneath the exterior, offering the promise of resurrection through an alternative, fictional world of imagination.

On the surface, the constant experiences of dreamlike states that Jack finds himself in—due to alcoholism and grief—prevents these selves from ever emerging. Yet, there are instances where a different personality seems to take over. In one of his daily excursions, there is a sudden shift from the third-person narrator to the more instructional voice of a second-person narrator, instructional voice when describing the process of walking:

Walking, along the same path if necessary, walking with eyes down and intent, walking without sympathy [...] stopping to listen, stopping as if there was another following you as you followed someone who wasn't there, walking, sometimes in slippers but mostly going back to the boots you wore the first day you came into the hospital. (*A Goat's Song* 56)

In Jack's case, resurrection does not come in the form of a new body in the current state of reality, but through the reimagining of his presence in the past. After the extensive creation of Jonathan Adams' past and the childhood of Catherine, Healy paves the way for Jack's introduction of himself, "ventured idly" by Catherine's sister Sara:

“I met a man raking seaweed into the clumps below at low tide. He was very handsome.

‘Are you local?’ I asked him. ‘No, Leitrim,’ he replied. ‘We’re all mad in Leitrim.’ Then he broke into a merciless laugh.” (181)

The awkward moment of self-appraisal aside, the progression to this moment is relatively natural, with little signs of an artist at work here. At this point of time, there is distance maintained between the two main characters, given that the account of Jack is given by Sara, and not immediately through direct contact. After hearing about her sister’s brief encounter with the Leitrim man, Catherine compares Jack to “the single red bloom of the geranium down in the porch,” and confesses that she “can’t bear to look at it without feeling sad and wanting to run away at one and the same time” (181). This sense of foreboding is instigated by Jack as the narrator of his fictional world, and the relatively quiet entrance of himself as a fictional character is both part of a fond memory, or a newly constructed past with no claims to authenticity.

Strangely enough, Catherine’s trepidation exists also because of certain slippages of memory from the narrator, who may have unwittingly imbued her with the knowledge of future proceedings. This is more evident in her encounter with the Irish teacher, where a sense of familiarity is shown to a person she has not really met: “You would have expected, she told Jack Ferris years later, an Irish teacher’s bum to be warm” (184). Here, there is already the sense that the apparent linearity of the narrative so far is merely an illusion, and these characters are merely playing roles that have been clearly marked out in their consciousness. Jack has not appeared, yet the mention of his name ahead of time is already a proleptic move that forces the reader to question the extent of knowledge and the amount of experience that has been metaphorically written into Catherine’s consciousness.

The word “mercilessly” thus comes across as an expression of ironic self-mockery, that there was actually a time when Jack could choose to be merciless in thoughts and deeds, compared to the shell of a man we observe in the present. And the Leitrim man here, described in ambiguous fashion by Sara, may already know how the narrative will unfold, rendering this possibility of being “merciless” meaningless in the first place. As Luigi Cozzato remarks, “[u]ltimately, it is fiction against its fictionality and the possible fictionality of reality” (*Metafiction of anxiety* 29). Just as how the novel begins with Jack on the new bridge reading his letter, the conclusion has already been written before the moment.

THE SECOND HALF – PARTS 1.5 AND 2

And then he realized with a start what she had done; she had saved them from each other. He saw the smile that had partly formed on her lips as she heard his familiar voice behind her. For an instant it was there, her old longing. Then he cringed as he heard the sound of his loathsome plea. He saw her turn, with wild eyes, towards him on the street. Her sadness, her loveliness. For a moment it could have begun all over, but it didn’t. She had struggled against the disillusionment. She had seen what was coming.

Now he had to live on in a different world. To transcend. To enter a new story. She must be imagined. He opened a spiral-bound notebook and thought, Here it begins. (Healy, *A Goat’s Song* 83–84)

Before the second half of the novel begins, Healy makes it clear that Jack has already begun his path to delusion. By trying to re-enact the *kairic* moment of supposed indecision, Jack projects his desires onto the figure of Catherine, imagining her thoughts and decisions in a manner which offers an ideal account of a struggle. There are hints of how he is aware of these projections: the

careful insertion of spatial awareness that his familiar voice is “behind” her, to hearing his own “loathsome plea”, both of which are assumptions made of her emotions.

The short sentences in this excerpt give away the level of desperation felt by the protagonist, and the inclusion of commas intensifies the pace and sense of urgency. According to Paul Simpson in his essay “What is Narrative Urgency,” “the ‘onset’ of urgency is signalled by a compositional shift to one-clause structures that are normally presented either as stand-alone orthographic sentences or as clusters in asyndetic coordination” (7). These elements are rather explicit in Jack’s narration. From the quick movement forward from “it was there” to “her old longing,” there is an attempt to shift the details in a way that is quite different from a literal expression, to mask any potential elements of doubt that the longing was anything more than his own imagination. The removal of conjunctions breaks the flow of thought, showing the lack of consideration and continuity beyond base instinctual reactions. It is interesting to note as well that one would expect this moment to be prolonged by additional layers of details, creating a sense of authenticity to reinforce the state of delusion Jack is in. From another angle, this particular choice of narration is meant instead to illustrate how fleeting the moment actually was. In other words, this midst of self-delusion contains the paradoxical presence of self-realisation, forming the very torn, conflicted personality that exhibits the trauma our protagonist presently faces. The timestamp of “Now” marks the first initial split in the narrative, but it is one that feels both poignant and empty at the same time. For the reader, it offers insight into the Jack’s mind as he makes the critical decision to take leave of reason and the reality he cannot accept. For Jack, it seems to mark the beginning of the very first time that he has any measure of control of his fate. The choice of the word “transcend” offers a tinge of optimism, and the new story he speaks off, self-written as it is, provides the realm of respite that he needs.

Interestingly enough, the different usage of conjunctions provides contradictory effects, both highlighting the sense of urgency Jack feels, while simultaneously (and paradoxically) showing attempts to slow time down in order to illustrate the authenticity of the moment and live in it a little longer. Firstly, the lack of conjunctions between different feelings in the same sentences signals the constant break in terms of thoughts, as the quick shifts in narrative illustrates his fervent desire to escape his torment. The pacing which takes place in the short description concerning how he “saw her turn, with wild eyes, towards him on the street” shows the quick shifts in movement, yet the level of specificity in the details create the illusion of time passing due to the sequencing and ordering of events, with the insertion of conjunctions such as “[a]nd”, “[t]hen” and more overt instances of “[f]or an instant” and “[f]or a moment”. One of the obvious effects of this is that time seems to slow down, as each event is given a pause of consideration. Here, it is evident that Jack is experiencing some sort of existential dilemma. While he seeks to escape from his situation as soon as he possibly can, there remains a tacit acknowledge of the fact that the mental state he is in now requires meticulous handling, revealing a sense of fragility which compromises our reading of the reality he is in.

Indeed, the capitalisation of H in the middle of the sentence is where the Jack takes leave of his present reality and shifts into his plane of imaginative reality, but how this narrative fissure does not begin as an isolated sentence as one would expect provides interesting interpretative possibilities. Beyond the grammatical inconsistency, it is also a symbolic display of temporal disjunction within a metafictional narrative, where the beginning of an event takes place concurrently in the middle of another. This split in the narrative is at once both an isolated event of grave magnitude, as well as a personal struggle which is trivialised by the fact that it belongs to a reality no one else can relate to but himself. Again, Jack’s thoughts are scattered,

fragmented. At any rate, this leap into fiction is a form of closure, an acknowledgment that all his attempts at reconciliation in this particular diegetic reality have failed. And in a therapeutic sort of way, there is hope that he will find peace in re-examining the details of what has transpired so far.

Dermot McCarthy describes Ferris' action as a form of reformation "through the art of storytelling: he constructs both himself and Catherine as characters in order to re-construct their relationship" ("Recovering Dionysus" 135). Utilising the psychodynamics of grief theorised in Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" as a point of reference, McCarthy sees the transformation of Catherine from a real character into a fictional one as an attempt to "fill the absence left by the former" (135):

[...] Ferris's use of storytelling to recover his sense of self-worth evokes another myth relevant to this therapeutic narrative: the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, a consoling myth about grief in which death is defeated through the recovery of the lost one in the figure of memory, the orphic singing of absence into presence and presence out of loss. (135)

McCarthy's likening of Jack to Orpheus is rather melodramatic given the circumstances, but there are similarities in the respective treatments of their muse. Like Eurydice in her form as a shade following Orpheus, Catherine's liminal presence leads Jack to constantly question his sanity. Like Orpheus playing a mourning song and calling for death so that he can be reunited with his loved one, Jack finds solace in the recreation of a new reality to house his desires. However, this process of reconstruction carries with it a sinister undertone. Although Catherine's departure from his life can be "defeated" by reimagining her in his new reality, this relief is

temporary. What Jack craves is the physical relationship they once had as a couple, and the relationship that is created is now an inauthentic one that fills a void, but does not heal it.

Indeed, it is interesting how Jack begins the reconstructed narrative from a point that is temporally distant from where he had left off: a relatively gruesome description of a suicide that is narrated with Catherine as the main witness:

Catherine was thirteen the day that Matti hanged himself from a tree midway between the Catholic chapel and the Presbyterian church. She was first down the steps of the church to face his contorted visage.

At the beginning she did not realize what had happened.

He was like a climber reaching out for the next branch, or someone hiding up a tree, but then she saw that his two boots were resting on nothing. She had left the church because religious gatherings often made her sick. Now, filling her lungs with air, she saw Matti Bonner's face. She came forward a bit. The right hand, that lacked a middle finger, seemed to stir imperceptibly. Behind her an organ played and a choir was singing a hymn. (*A Goat's Song* 87)

Recalling the last few lines from the previous chapter, it seems strange for the story to begin like this, given the respective discrepancies that immediately spring to mind. Firstly, Catherine's age is listed clearly, and that age is a little too distant from Jack's present-day situation. Secondly, given that this is an isolated incident for which Jack in all likelihood was not present, his knowledge of these details most likely come from her telling him, even while the level of detail suggests the vantage point of a narrator as opposed to a witness. In other words, this is already a narrative which Jack has imagined for himself.

Further questions arise. Why this moment, of all the events in Catherine's life? Why is this a special event? Again, the level of detail is evident in the sequencing and ordering of events. Catherine is the "first down the steps of the church," and her thought process, from the initial curiosity and cluelessness with regard to what has actually transpired, quickly transforms into horror as she fully understands the gravity of her situation:

The first time she lay tight against Jack Ferris she remembered the Catholic bachelor silently hanging from the tree and again imagined his member standing softly out of his navy-blue trousers. It was not true, it had never happened in reality. But it did happen in her dreams. The erect penis meant death by hanging. Often in years to come she would jump awake covered in sweat to recall that a second before she had been making love to a disembodied penis. It was the penis of someone who wasn't there. Only this male member jammed into her. She'd reach out to hold the person only to find him missing.

The shock would bring her awake. (*A Goat's Song* 95)

This is from Catherine's perspective, and evidently from a different reality. In a frame that jumps forward many years, it is not clear which diegetic reality is the primary one. Are the events earlier recollected from the recesses of one's memory, with Catherine as the rememberer trying to put the pieces together? Or is this part of Jack's imaginative process, as he tries to create a scene of his memories using a familiar scene (of himself and Catherine in that posture), while trying to make sense of what she is thinking about? Moreover, there is a further complication in the phrase "[o]ften in years to come," with the future tense once again drawing attention to the fact that this is a frame narrative that is currently unfolding. This also means the existence of another vantage point from which all these points are currently observed, given that all the events would have to unfold in order for such a statement to exist. And even in these multiple events of

apparent recollection, Catherine is still very conscious of time. The reference to her awareness that the dream just took place “a second before” draws an imaginary line between the different states of consciousness, and, moreover, that the distinction between her waking and sleeping hours is as vague and arbitrary as the lines delineating the existences of separate realities.

This is just one of the many moments in the novel that is extremely time-sensitive, showing how Catherine’s sense of her present reality is never really just situated in one reality, but shifts between selected memories and instances of imagination. Subsequently, the fleeting appearance of Jack as a spectre-like recipient resurfaces at the end of chapter ten, as Catherine observes the existence of “words that years later used to send dizzy tremors of desire through Jack Ferris” (*A Goat’s Song* 113). The presence of “later” here as an adverb is an overt foreshadowing of events yet to come, but at this instance it occurs as a confusing insertion here because of two obvious discrepancies. The first comes in the form of information she is not supposed to have at this stage of her life. As a reader who is reading the second half of the novel with the first few chapters in mind, it is quite evident that this is another accidental (or perhaps deliberate) surfacing of Jack’s consciousness, perhaps again due to the emotional significance of the moment. On the other hand, “used to” seems to refer to how this event took place in the past, carrying with it a familiar, habitual reference. In other words, this supposedly random sentence has its roots simultaneously in both the past and the present, creating what Gérard Genette refers to quite aptly as a narrative “fissure.” By evoking an imaginary onlooker that emphasises the gap between the point of narration and the point of experience, this instance of disjunctive temporality is once again evidence of Jack’s inability to fully distance himself from his original diegetic reality and immerse himself into this newly created one where he is, strangely enough, creating and watching this new world unfolding.

These instances of authorial intervention are not infrequent. As such, they have the potential to compromise the authenticity of the narrative world, and to Jack the therapeutic reimagining of reality that he seeks. Indeed, these moments can be even less subtle and arguably desperate in terms of forcing a certain mindset:

Along with geese and apples and Catholics, Maisie Ruttle brought fiction into Jonathan Adam's life. On the mantelpiece, leaning against a clock shaped like a windmill, were copies of Dickens, Thackeray, Balzac – novels belonging to an earlier generation on Maisie's side. Jonathan Adams was a widely read man, but unlike his wife or daughters he did not read fiction. Fiction contained inaccuracies, untruths, generalizations, assumptions. The real world was a poor metaphor for what might happen in the hereafter, but at least it was more true than fiction. (*A Goat's Song* 114)

The role of Jonathan Adams here is intriguing, given that Jack never really meets him. On the other hand, his appearance does make sense, given that the story begins when Catherine was at a young age, which meant that a narrative which tries to be authentic will have to accommodate her family and influences as well. But because Adams passed away before Jack can meet him, the characterisation of Adams is a work of fictionalisation. The overt references to how fiction was never really part of his life only adds to the layer of irony that already exists in the narrative – that Jack's desires for authentic narrative manifests itself in the characters. In a way, Jack seeks to convince himself that this historical recount is not an imagined one, and given how fiction “contains inaccuracies, untruths, generalizations, assumptions,” the fact that this story is further from it makes the paradox even more pronounced. Even while he labels the real world as “a poor metaphor”, it becomes increasingly obvious that these self-reflexive moments are references to the supposed artificiality of the narrative.

As this deliberately constructed narrative continues, Jack is first introduced as the man from Leitrim. In the first part of the novel, a mysterious persona called the Leitrim man appears sporadically to speak to Jack in his drunken stupor, in moments that seem atemporal given how their exchanges take place in a space outside the primary diegetic reality he is in. Yet, the understanding that Jack himself is the man from Leitrim seems to suggest, once again, a chronological dysfunction which exists within the narrative. That Jack is speaking to himself as a separate piece of his own consciousness brings about the possibility that the earlier part of the narrative may also not be real, which in turn destabilises the entire framework of the narrative:

[...] Before this they had always faced the outside world together. Now Catherine pored over books alone. And it was not just a matter of losing herself – this she could do, but when she'd emerge she would feel transformed. A new dimension had been added to her consciousness. The characters existed more strongly in her mind than real people did.

According to their emotions and their standards she measured her life and her worthiness as a woman. The afterglow would make her anxious – anxious enough to read the same book again. Finishing a book was something she never wanted to do. And it was not just being steeped in the character or plot – it was a fright to her that a feeble story could contain a truth that assembled far from the meaning of the actual words.

She moved inside the characters' bodies. She spoke with their voices. When they died or were hurt in love it might as well have happened to her. By reading her father's books she mourned for him. These were the pages he had turned and relished. The print and smell were his. A conjecture in the corner was written in his hand. A small pressed flower that had accompanied him through the pages, now followed her through Palgrave's Golden Treasury, nestled at night amid Hardy's poems, or peeped out from Crime and

Punishment. It sat in the dark of Huckleberry Finn. When she lifted any new book in her life ahead it would fall open at that flower. It was the place where father had lain down to die. Where the voice he had been listening to had stopped. It marked the place where the story was suspended. It marked the place where it would be taken up again. (*A Goat's Song* 219-220)

This episode is metafictional in its structural delivery, given how disjointed its placement is in the timeline of the narrative. Indeed, the description of Catherine's transition into different diegetic realities is a direct mirroring of Jack's own experience. In a moment of cross-diegetic realities, the reader is shown the very process of what takes place in Jack's consciousness, albeit as an extended description. Jack's own transition is relatively short: "Now he had to live on in a different world. To transcend. To enter a new story. She must be imagined. He opened a spiral-bound notebook and thought, Here it begins." Here, Catherine describes her experience vividly in terms of how she detaches herself from her original diegetic reality. By emphasising how "characters existed more strongly in her mind than real people did," the moment echoes the exact state of mind Jack was in during the first part of the novel, voicing out what he leaves literally unspoken.

At the same time, the same fears are projected on the figure of Catherine. By explicitly citing how "[f]inishing a book was something she never wanted to do," the allusion to how Jack never wants his relationship with Catherine to end is another direct reference to his heightened awareness of how the past is slipping away. Similarly, the very notion that a story can be "suspended" only for it to be continued on command is another extradiegetic reference to Jack's desire to stop time in the narrative and gain a measure of control, just as how he has stopped time in the first part of the novel in order to create the fictional reality that he currently resides in. This

reflects once again how one's perception of reality is dictated by time, given how episodes and events that are absent from our consciousness will only reappear when remembered and "taken up again."

At this point, it is important to revisit Jack's state of mind as he first created this fictional world from his imagination. One strange factor that has not been mentioned so far has been how lucid the details are in Catherine's world, which is strange to say the least, as Jack was obviously drowning in alcohol and sorrow. As Roberta Geftter Wondrich observes, the narrative expands from "the psychological inwardness and claustrophobia of the opening sections" ("Islands of Ireland" 69), becoming "panoramic in scope" (Adair). Elaborating on this point, Wondrich goes on to comment on how the "dialogical inclusiveness of the novel is further enhanced by a narrative technique which alternates from omniscient third to implied first person; in the latter case turning Jack into a kind of distressed authorial alter ego, with an overall effect of tragic irony and empath" (70). In other words, there is a very distinctive shift in the composition of the narrative in terms of tone and focus, one that is arguably jarring in how abrupt it is from an overemphasis on an individual's thoughts to an entire world that traverses between past memories and present realities.

With this shift comes certain complications that involve the diegetic frames of realities and the temporal awareness associated with the protagonist's state of consciousness. If Jack is aware that the details give his constructed narrative some semblance of verisimilitude, it is only natural for him to continue the same approach of including historical references and descriptions of the physical environment they reside in. Indeed, there are several postmodernist strategies at work here. Given that part of *A Goat's Song* is a recollected narrative, there are elements of historiographic metafiction. By giving an account of what is Catherine's "history," Healy is

inviting the reader to scrutinise every detail of this created reality and decided whether it is sufficiently authentic enough to stand on its own, for both the characters in the work of the fiction and the readers outside the novel to involve themselves in this fictional realm. According to Linda Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction “simultaneously exploits and questions notions of universality, totalization and closure that are part of the challenged metanarratives, and casts doubt on the possibility of any fixed guarantee of meaning and of the possibility of knowledge granting any authoritative and final truth” (Hutcheon 55). It is thus strange to trust any account of Catherine’s history, given that the person recollecting that history is an individual who does not have access to her childhood at all, resulting in a fragmented and distorted narrative.

One problem with questioning the written history here, besides Hutcheon’s warning that we are fundamentally “epistemologically limited in our ability to know the past” (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 122), lies in the fact that we had begun this chapter fully aware that we are at the mercy of Jack’s imagination. The totalisation associated with our knowledge that it is ultimately Jack’s imagination we are dealing with only serves to destabilise matters further given how readers are expected to engage a fictional world crafted from a fictional premise. The systems of language, in terms of semiotics and semantics, thus serve merely as tools to interpret this illusory world on a temporary basis without any possibility of authentication. In this conflation of both imagination and apparent recollections, Patricia Waugh’s work on the realm of metafiction seems to resonate with the situation here. Commenting that “‘history’ like ‘fiction’ is provisional, continually reconstructed and open-ended” (*Metafiction* 125), the process of obscuring the lines drawn between history and fiction offers a similar perspective as Hutcheon’s understanding of historical narratives. Indeed, Jack’s intrusive presence at times, whether it is the insertion of random empirical evidence or as a character at the edges of the narrative, displays

metafictional elements which follows Waugh's description of a narrative "constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion" (6).

At this juncture, it is imperative to separate what Healy as an author is trying to do, and what Jack as the writer of his imagination is striving to achieve, given how they may be in direct opposition. As a text, *A Goat's Song* makes it explicitly clear that this is a fictional extension of a reality that is already a fictional world, giving it its metafictional element. Jack's position should be in line with that of Healy's... except that it is not. Indeed, the very gaps that are supposed to be more overt in a self-conscious narrative are less obvious, and instead, it is the attempt to remove any traces of Jack as a narrator that is very clear. The framing from the first part of the novel becomes obscured. As Waugh observes through a series of questions, a frame can refer to many parts of any novel, notably what "separates reality from 'fiction'" or whether it is "more than the front and back covers of a book, the rising and lowering of a curtain, the title and 'The End'" (*Metafiction* 28), which becomes very problematic when it comes to separating the different diegetic realities. In retrospect, the frames were already absent in the first part of the novel as a consequence of Jack's own declaration of his drunken state.

Waugh's work on self-consciousness in fiction raises still more questions. Can Jack as a character be determined to be "always ontologically indeterminate, always uncertainly awaiting completion" (106)? One's first reaction is that this question does not hold much importance, given that Jack's own existence has never been a major concern of his, unless it involves a shared reality with Catherine present as well. This becomes more problematic when we consider the use of third person narrative even though the events are witnessed through his perspective, which suggests that his experience of time belongs to the same ontological frame as the

characters he has created. Waugh describes this gesture as the Real Author “[stepping] into the fictional world” and “[crossing] the ontological divide” (131). However, she considers it a series of attempts to “exaggerate authorial presence in relation to story or information” (131), which is logically what Jack seeks to avoid. An exaggeration of his hand in Catherine’s narrative would immediately reduce it to a fictional account and revert to the very reality he is trying to escape from. As such, a more accurate assessment of this scenario is the presence of an inherent and unavoidable contradiction: the very world that Jack shapes with his conscious mind is also the very same plane of reality he tries to engage without inhibition.

This brings a certain degree of irony when we recall Healy’s own words of how he would “try to stay out of it and let the reader take over” (Healy, “Dermot Healy: ‘I try to stay out of it and let the reader take over’”). It then becomes intricate as to when Jack decides to make his appearance, as his arrival would inevitably lead us question whether it is to be interpreted as a forceful form of intrusion to shape these memories into what he desires, or part of what really took place in the past of his fictional world, affecting the entire framing of the narrative in the process. With the exception of authorial interventions, the timelines of the narrative are still largely chronologically in line with the recollected reality that has been created. When the figure of “Jack” arrives, the same feeling of indeterminacy reappears, as these frames of sequence and order have to accommodate multiple versions of the same character all at once. The destabilising question of where the main source of consciousness resides is even more difficult to answer, as the multiple diegetic realities synthesise temporally into one illusory scene.

However, hints in the novel that this is not the only sequence of time that one need adhere to becomes especially strange when Jack’s own memories seem to defy his own control, or when

there are moments and events which reference the very premise of the novel. The very title of the novel provides one such episode, with a relatively witty reference to writing for good measure:

This made her pause. “Writing,” she said disbelievingly. “What sort of writing?”

“Plays, I’m interested in plays.”

“What kind?”

“I pen songs of the buck. Billy tunes.”

“I’m sorry?”

“Goat songs.”

“Is that so?”

“That’d be the height of it.”

Catherine looked at him. “That’s all very interesting. But I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Tragedies. Tragos – goat. Oide – song. From the Greek.”

“I never knew that.”

“There you go. Every time you weep in the theatre you’re listening to a goat singing.”

“You jest.”

“Not at all. In the early days the Greek goatherd used to put the bucks on one island and the nannies on another. Then when the nannies were on heat their smell would come on the breeze to the bucks who rose a mournful cry.”

“The poor things.”

“That’s what I thought.”

“And why didn’t they just jump in the water and swim across, if they were so frustrated?”

“Ah, but that’s the crux of the matter,” said Jack Ferris. “You see, goats can’t swim.” (*A Goat’s Song* 227)

The casual exchange of how the title of the very novel came about carries with it references to the metaphorical nature of time, and the struggle faced by our protagonist to reach his love and echoing Waugh’s words describing his inability to “cross the ontological divide” (130). The distance between the bucks and the nannies can refer to the separation of two individuals by the difference in their respective perceptions of reality, or in Jack’s case, the gap between an individual who is trapped in the past and the other who has already moved on. The poetic insertion of the definition of a goat’s song feels a little too deliberate to be coincidental, coming across more as a projection of desire given how it mirrors the sentiment which Jack feels. More intriguing is perhaps how this short exchange provides one of the rare instances of extended dialogue. From the description of internal thoughts to external fragments of the surrounding environment, most of the prose in *A Goat’s Song* is relatively lengthy, which gives a sense of time extending beyond a chronological framework.

This rare pause in the pacing of the narrative thus sets it up as a still moment on its own. Short responses that vary from three to five words, to longer sentences of definitions and explanations, push the narrative forward, giving it a mild sense of urgency as both parties approach the most important line. Yet, it is impossible for a reader to divorce completely from the overt, extra-diegetic references in the dialogue. The very notion of Jack writing a play should not surprise us, given that we already know that he is a playwright in the first part of the novel. It is also supposed to be explicit how this exchange is very much still in the realm of Jack’s memories, or arguably a product of his own desires and imagination. Herein lies, to quote Jack’s wise words, “the crux of the matter”: the blurring of lines between fiction, history and

imagination, in addition to the conflation of past memories and present realities, has seemingly removed the presence of time from the narrative.

One effect of this phenomenon becomes especially pronounced when time stamps or expressions of time appear in the narrative to indicate where the narrator is (supposedly) in time. As a concept, the general notion of time is meaningless when one considers how futile it is to measure via the clock, given how any semblance of a collective, chronological time frame has already been distorted by this imagined reality. An attempt at the personification of time can be argued to be an attempt to reduce its essence to an entity which can be understood on human terms. However, Healy's attempt at personifying time renders the comprehension of this notion all the more difficult instead. By describing how "Time would blow coldly into the room, make Maisie turn, and tip a spoon to her mouth and send her miles away," it is quite clear that Maisie is temporally dislocated, either in the internal workings of her mind in that particular diegetic reality or in Jack's imagining of her mental state. Indeed, what the metaphor actually means remains open to interpretation, and utilising time as the main subject when other terms such as nostalgia and memories may have more sense only confuses this scenario further. What it does instead is to further emphasise the very difficulty of measuring time, even if a metaphor offers more semantic possibilities than an understanding based on spatial terms.

Assuming that any metaphor related to time has to be conceived through the medium of individual experience, this reinforces the argument that time is constructed through subjective perception of movement, as opposed to relying on the hands of clock time. Research by Dedre Gentner, Mutsumi Imai and Lera Boroditsky, in a paper titled "As Time Goes By: Evidence for Two Systems in Processing Space-Time Metaphors", provides a definition of this equation, beginning with their observation that "[t]emporal language is often couched in spatial

metaphors” (537). Description of movement is essential when it comes to setting the parameters of time, given how measurements in clock time are inherently problematic due their explicit nature as human constructs. Given its nature, “the abstract domain of time [...] can be organised and structured in terms of the more familiar and readily observable domain of space” (540), in terms of tense, sequencing and aspect.

What happens then, when the only details relating to space, if they can even be considered at all, are abstract ones which defy being situated in tense, sequencing or aspect? Healy’s metaphor here seems to be making this very point – that human experiences can defy any definition positioned by time and space. The conditional nature of the verb “would” is already a small rejection of qualification, given that it already constructs the premise of an imagined event. At the same time, “would” is also the past of “will”, which gives it a sense of sequencing and order, even if it is temporarily (and temporally) a rather flimsy one. In addition, the only spatial detail in “miles away” serves more to add on to the layers of ambiguity shrouding this specific episode, giving us a sense of time being extended literally in terms of distance rather than clarifying when it takes place in Catherine’s reality, or even Jack’s consciousness. Other questions are raised at this juncture: Does this event take place on more than one occasion? How long does it actually take place, in terms of both the isolated incidents or the exact point when the first occurrence takes place and when it ceases? More critically, why use time as the subject when it would have been clearer and possibly more poetic to use a term like “memories”, which already carries with it a more distinct link to Maisie’s state of mind? These are the same questions that were posed earlier in the heated exchange between Susan and Cruso in *Foe*, and much like this situation with Maisie, seems to suggest that memories are more likely constructed than remembered. As Cruso reminds us, “[n]othing [he] has forgotten is worth

the remembering” (*Foe* 17), which reflects how the control that Jack has over his reality is nothing more than a delusion.

These observations add to the sense of timelessness, or more specifically, discombobulated time, and it is precisely at these junctures that we begin to wonder how long it will take to reach the point of Jack’s desired scenario. There are different implications as a result. As Paul Ricoeur observes, the reader’s “expectation that some kind of consonance will finally prevail [...] implies that not everything will be a peripeteia, otherwise peripeteia becomes meaningless, and our expectation of order would be totally frustrated” (*Time and Narrative* 2: 25). In a way, one can argue that the dislocation of where and when peripeteia takes place is what keeps the narrative’s essence and drives it forward, as the Jack’s fictional world is held together by the hope that the very absence of time in his imaginative reality is ironically what buys him time and control.

The larger part of Ricoeur’s argument is that even if time in the novel does not follow the same chronological form we can measure on a collective level, it “cannot help but be configured in terms of new norms of temporal organization that are still perceived as temporal by the reader, by means of new expectations regarding the fiction of time” (25). What happens then when temporal organisation does not follow any new norm, but ceases to exist, ironically due to its very nature of multiplicity? An episode of love-making forces an examination of these questions:

And slowly she told him, as if in a way she was repeating one of her dreams. The only difference being that in this case he knew he would remember every detail. She was shocked, as he was himself, by how easy he was taking her confession once she had begun. He sought out each salacious moment. He interrogated her until her lovemaking was as familiar to him as if he himself had been there.

“There’s no more,” she said, “unless you want me to start inventing things?”

“I wish you would,” He said hopelessly.

Then at last she said: “How did you know? It’s like you’ve been reading my mind.”

“I’ve always suspect you.” (*A Goat’s Song* 304)

“I’ve always suspect you” is a phrase that is grammatically incorrect, yet it is a compelling assessment of the situation, or rather, of Jack’s perception of Catherine regardless of whichever reality she is presently in. In this scene, there are very clear hints that there is a certain vantage point taken by Jack as he observes his own interactions with Catherine. On the other hand, it is unclear whether it is simply an event that has repeated itself too many times, such that it has become a ritual. Once again, it is this sense of indeterminacy that permeates the novel on many fronts, and which destabilises the narrative on many levels. The emphasis on how it “slowly” takes place comes across as more of a torturous and traumatic experience rather than a slowly paced one, which suggests emotional involvement not just as a character, but a narrator who reminisces about past events.

The trope of repetition here is very similar, once again, to Nietzsche’s Eternal Recurrence. According to Nietzsche,

The greatest weight. – What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even

this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!”

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.” If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, “Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?” would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? (*The Gay Science* 273)

This is the dilemma which Jack feels in his imaginary interrogation of Catherine. Whether it is Nietzsche’s warning that every emotion and feeling will be relived without change, or the realisation and acceptance that he will never get the answer he yearns for, Jack is trapped in this state of non-movement. The pursuit of his version of truth is relentless in its urgency: “[h]e sought out each salacious moment”, even “interrogat[ing] her until her lovemaking was as familiar to him as if he himself had been there”, all showing clear signs of an obsession with a past he cannot bring himself to accept. It is ultimately reduced to a whimper of helplessness, as Jack realises how Catherine’s version of events can never be aligned to what he deems as acceptable.

How these events are viewed with such clarity suggests that they have been replayed in his mind multiple times, and the fact that it is being replayed even now indicates that the conclusions derived from such excursions have, also, continued to be the same. McCarthy has a similar observation about this particular phenomenon:

The ending is a paradox of form: if Parts II-IV are read as a self-contained narrative, the ending is open and comic—Catherine’s return is imminent; but if we read the ending as ending the whole narrative, then it is closed and tragic, and the story-within the story is a bitter repetition of the original disappointment that set the poesis going in the first place, reminding us that art is the more or less desperate delusion Freud said it was.”

(“Recovering Dionysus” 135-6)

Poiesis, which in Greek means “to make”, brings into being a reality that did not previously exist, indicating the ontological paradox that resides in this space when one considers how this temporary reality is based on imagination (which in itself does not offer a concrete platform of consideration) and memories (which can be rendered inauthentic given the subjectivity of recollection). In other words, this is a uroboric cycle of endless repetition. This closed narrative loop resembles the existential crisis experienced by Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, where they are made to go through the process of waiting for a mysterious entity, without ever knowing whether the experience of waiting is anything more than an illusion, or whether meaning can ever be derived at all from their excursion. Following the absurdist philosophy of Albert Camus that “[t]he absurd is born out of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (*Myth of Sisyphus* 28), attempting to create meaning in an inherently meaningless world is a futile endeavour, just as how making sense of why certain events take place or why certain memories are formed do not lead to constructive outcomes. To those who believe in autonomy against a deterministic reality, the element of choice in the absence of agency may still be deceptively important. As McCarthy puts it explicitly, the lack of continuity associated with the end, assuming that it is effectively the end of the entire narrative, removes the possibility of a different, spontaneous ending. This means

that Jack is doomed to the “desperate delusion” Freud warns us against — that no matter how close a work of art can be in replicating reality, it ultimately remains an imitation of what has really transpired. As an independent and dissected portion of reality, any links to the original narrative becomes inconsequential, further emphasising the tragic state of delusion in which our protagonist finds himself in.

Catherine’s question of whether she should “start inventing things” is a moment that fragments the reality of the novel into the few diegetic realities it actually exists in. When one considers the possibility that this tale is almost entirely a figment of Jack’s imagination, Catherine’s words seem to be a projection of Jack’s own fears that he is, in actuality, inventing a reality to house her. Herein lies the gulf of Jack’s trauma created by the absence of time. The *kairic* moment he experiences before making the decision to reimagine the past of his lover is not dissimilar to the moment of aporia Hamlet experiences in his famous line “to be or not to be,” the soliloquy which expresses uncertainty about the next course of action, but more importantly, the next step which creates movement in time. In this case, it is apparent that Jack cannot move on from this episode because he has made the decision not to. Perhaps there is some hope that one of the multitudes of repeated episodes will produce a moment where he is satisfied with the answer, or provide some relief so that he can move on.

Indeed, a more positive reading of eternal recurrence yields a vastly different outcome. According to Philip J. Kain in his journal article “Nietzsche, Eternal Recurrence, and the Horror of Existence”, the demon mentioned by Nietzsche does not provide a nihilistic reading, but rather, a positive one. In Kain’s view, “the demon forces us to look over our present life, reflect on it, test our attitude toward it, and assess the degree of positiveness we have toward it” (54). More importantly, “[w]hat is relevant here is how we feel about our present life at the present

moment” (55). Unfortunately, Jack cannot see the present. His view of the present is laced with layers of the past, which clouds his ability to see beyond his emotions. In other words, Jack has fallen for the temptation of an alternative reality, and is thus forced to reimagine this new existence with the constant awareness that the collective reality he shares with Catherine is vastly different.

This reaction to the trauma that lies within his consciousnesses destroys any sense of continuity that Jack may have, estranged from those around him who cannot even begin to understand. Robert D. Stolorow asserts that trauma “devastatingly disrupts the average-everyday linearity and “ecstatical unity of temporality,” the sense of “stretching-along” from the past to an open future”:

“Experiences of emotional trauma become free-framed into an internal present in which one remains forever trapped, or to which one is condemned to be perpetually returned through the portkeys supplied by life’s slings and arrows. In the region of trauma all duration or stretching along collapses, past becomes present, and future loses all meaning other than endless repetition. In this sense, it is trauma, not, as Freud would have it, the unconscious, that is timeless.” (“Phenomenological-Contextualisation” 62)

Lawrence Langer argues that “a trauma survivor shifts back and forth in time and continues to experience the trauma as a contemporaneous moment, even if that moment is long past.” This means that “the event takes on greater and greater significance after the fact, as time is essentially out of joint and the trauma survivor is often unable to set it right” (Langer from Worthington, “Trauma Autofiction” 128). These traits help explain why the concept of time is such an important factor in understanding Jack’s plight, and how his current state of non-movement is caused by memories of traumatic events. In the first chapter, Jack’s drunken stupor

and constant references to Catherine and his past shows how his daily routines have been interrupted, and he is left spiralling down the same path over and over again. The sharpening of focus and attention to the most trivial of details are of the same images, which means that there is no possibility of continuity — he is distanced from everything, isolated in his self-perceived misery, and desperately searching for ways to alleviate the pain.

As the traumatic event resurfaces repeatedly in his consciousnesses, Jack's reaction can be summarised by Mary Worthington's observation that "survivors often attempt to narrativize it as a way to make meaning from the apparently meaninglessness of their experience, to impose order on chaos" ("Traumatic Autofiction" 128). The fact that he remembers every single detail, coupled with how he seems to be repeating the dream, brings us to the devastating conclusion that this may not be the first time this is taking place. Jack knows all the details; he is merely repeating them because he cannot forget them. Indeed, Jack's reaction can be seen as a display of a reaction to past trauma — he traverses the same point without moving forward, focusing excessively on moments which he cannot accept. The lack of continuity, at least from his perspective, thus creates unbridgeable gaps in terms of a narrative that remains unacceptable to him, and this state of incoherence breaks his realities apart. In this same discussion with Catherine, there is surprisingly a lack of time stamps. Between the first question and the last, there is no sense of time passing, and the timelessness associated with this episode is rounded up with a relatively vague conclusion. "At last" suggests that a length of time has passed, but once again, there is no need to qualify time in one's consciousness. These framed narratives have no coherence, because the framing devices were built on illusory premises, embedded narratives.

In other words, the very act of writing his imagined reality is a necessary move to possibly realign and recalibrate, and consequently, resituate one's sense of self in a life that is

still moving inexorably forward in a collective, chronological timeline. Just as how Jack is unable to visualise a life without her, it is also quite clear that he cannot accept the fact that it is impossible visualise himself in Catherine's life without control of the narrative. To relieve himself of the trauma experienced after the separation, writing allows a form of escapism while also providing an opportunity to pick up the pieces.

With this purpose in mind, Michele Crossley's introduction to narrative psychology, which she defines as a recognition of "the central and constructive role played by language in the formation and structuring of self and identity" (10), offers valuable insight to assist us in deciphering the purpose and effect of Jack's actions. Part of her reasoning involves our understanding of time and the significance of understanding how perception plays an important role in determining purpose and meaning in our lives, which is aligned with the fundamental premise discussed thus far in this paper. In her study of narrative and the conception of self, Crossley makes a strong claim that "[e]verything experienced by human beings is made meaningful, understood and interpreted to the primary dimension of 'activity': this incorporates both 'time' and 'sequence'" (10). More importantly, she touches on the point of storytelling, and how the very act of painting a new narrative has a therapeutic purpose, emphasising how "[o]f particular importance to the formulation of a narrative psychology approach is recognition, derived from social constructivist approaches, of the central role played by language and stories in the process of self construction" (*Introducing Narrative Psychology* 2). Crossley quotes Miller Mair as well on this point:

Stories are the womb of personhood. Stories make and break us. Stories sustain us in times of trouble and encourage us towards ends we would not otherwise envision. The

more we shrink and harden our ways of telling, the more starved and constipated we become. (Mair, *Between Psychology and Psychotherapy* 2)

There is obviously more at stake here than a simple fairy tale. By giving Jack an outlet to create hope, he is granted a metaphorical second lease of life, even if it is just merely prolonging the inevitable pain that will eventually come. According to Crossley, there is

the development of a phenomenological understanding of the unique “order of meaning” constitutive of human consciousness”. One of the main features of this “order of meaning” is the experience of time and temporality. An understanding of temporality associated with the human realm of meaning is entirely different to that encountered in the natural sciences. This is because the human realm of meaning is not related to a “thing” or a “substance” but to an “activity”. Everything experienced by human beings is made meaningful, understood and interpreted in relation to the primary dimension of “activity” which incorporates both “time” and “sequence”. In order to define and interpret “what” exactly has happened on any particular occasion, the sequence of events is of extreme importance. Hence, a valid portrayal of the experience of selfhood necessitates an understanding of the inextricable connection between temporality and identity. (2)

If Crossley’s points capture precisely the experience that Jack is going through, this would explain his fascination with time stamps and the precision of times and dates. Indeed, meaning is derived through an awareness of time and sequence, and Jack’s struggle for a concrete form of identity is based on “the inextricable connection between temporality and identity” (2). Time gives shape and structure to his reality; more specifically, memories from the past and anticipation of the future all come together to frame his life experiences, echoing Ricoeur’s

assertion that “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1: 52). Unfortunately for Jack, his problem lies in the fact that an event, or a person, has consumed his existence. The obsession with Catherine had led to the fragmentation of this world-view, and subsequently, his entire conception of selfhood.

From the discussion so far, we see that stories and narrative coherence are necessary components when an individual is dealing with trauma. According to Crossley, “[r]esearch into the experience of chronic and serious illness illustrates the way in which our routine, ‘lived’ sense of time and identity is one of implicit connection and coherence” (*Introducing Narrative Psychology* 10). The expression “lived sense of time” is the important one here in our reading of Jack as a disjointed character, given that “[t]his sense is severely disrupted in the face of trauma and it is in such contexts that stories become important as a way of rebuilding a sense of connection and coherence” (10). The source of Jack’s desire to reinvent Catherine in his own narrative can thus be a necessary move to preserve his sanity. Due to the void left behind by her absence, as well as the empty spaces where the loss of memories and the breaks in logical comprehension, this entire second half of the novel can be seen as an attempt to seek closure by making sense of the entire life event, a move that cannot be done with the gaps unfilled. Whether these measures retain any sense of authenticity therefore becomes of secondary importance. From this perspective, psychotherapy constituted an exercise in “story repair”:

Freud made us aware of the persuasive power of a coherent narrative - in particular of the ways in which an aptly chosen reconstruction can fill the gap between two apparently unrelated events, and in the process, make sense out of nonsense. There seems no doubt but that a well-constructed story possesses a kind of narrative truth that is real and

immediate and carries an important significance for the process of therapeutic change.

(Spence from Crossley 10-11)

In a tragic way yet objective way, Jack's narrative may appear to be nothing more than nonsense to the people around him. They are unable to share his thoughts or see the fragments of his memories and imagination, much less empathise with what he is going through. As established in the earlier parts of this paper, much of Jack's incoherence comes from not only the influence of alcohol, but also his inability to separate several distinctly different states of minds. To complicate matters further, these different states of mind involve episodes and characters from different timelines. The figure of Catherine he yearns for exists only in his memories or the pages of his written work, with her personality and characteristics altered with new experiences and changes in perspectives. Likewise, the selective omission of unfavourable details makes it difficult for certain gaps in the narrative to be bridged. According to Jack's musings, Catherine's main reason for leaving him seems to be his struggle with alcoholism, yet it is not an admission from her lips. Indeed, it is also left uncertain as to whether *any* figure in his narration is not a figment of his imagination. The brief encounter with Catherine could have been a moment of hallucination, her words a reflection of his guilt and fears more than actual exchanges. The ending of this novel is fascinating for similar reasons, but will be discussed more in the conclusion of this dissertation.

CHAPTER FOUR — REWRITING HISTORY IN TIME: FICTIONALISING THE PAST IN JULIAN BARNES'S *THE SENSE OF AN ENDING*

In those days, we imagined ourselves as being kept in some kind of holding pen, waiting to be released into our lives. And when that moment came, our lives—and time itself—would speed up. How were we to know that our lives had in any case begun, that some advantage had already been gained, some damage already inflicted? Also, that our release would only be into a larger holding pen, whose boundaries would be at first undiscernible.

— Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*

If one were to summarise the whole of *The Sense of an Ending* in terms of its basic plot lines, it would not be excessively complicated. There is the protagonist-narrator Tony Webster, who offers an extensive recollection of his time in school, meeting his friends and a short-lived relationship with an ex-girlfriend in the first part of the novel. The second half of the novel involves the suicide of one of his friends, Adrian Finn, and the re-emergence of this particular ex-girlfriend Veronica, which leads Tony to spend the rest of the narrative tracing and piecing together fragments of the past and present in order to find out what really took place between them, and how his personal involvement may have sparked an unlikely chain of events. Beyond the tragedy of Adrian's suicide and the inexplicable twist in the storyline, Barnes's novel does not seem to possess any ground-breaking theories and experimentation with form which can be said of the two writers preceding him in this paper. Borrowing a line from an infamous review in the *New York Times* by Geoff Dyer, it is a Booker Prize winner that is not “laughably bad,” but “is averagely written: excellent in its averageness.”

However, as Fredrick M. Holmes points out quite wisely, to follow Dyer's standpoint in believing that Barnes deliberately appropriated a celebrated work of narrative theory without taking into consideration the writer's own intention and craft would be to dismiss “a higher aim in mind than just to flatter those who are well-informed enough to make the connection” (27). Dyer's statement is probably premised on the comparison made between Barnes and previous

Booker Prize winners such as John Banville and Kazuo Ishiguro, who, like Barnes, sought to explore the relationship between fiction and reality. Unlike his contemporaries, Barnes's approach is far more subtle, especially compared to previous writers who adopt radical approaches of experimentation when it comes to shaping the reality of their narrative frameworks. As raised previously in the Introduction of my dissertation, Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* is one such example, and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* is another prominent novel that shows how our perception of time can be distorted in extreme ways. Barnes's novel does not reverse time to alter the novel's chronological framework as Amis does; neither does he create the kind of multiple diegetic realities that span across centuries in *Cloud Atlas*'s fictional world. Indeed, the level of fragmentation in Barnes's novel does not go to the extent of removing the central plot like some postmodernist works do. Nor does it violate basic laws of physics in the physical reality of its story world. Nonetheless, *The Sense of an Ending* reaches similar ends as these novels, examining the problems inherent in our recollection and narration of past events, and how this consequently problematises our understanding of time and reality in ways that are no less profound.

Instead of narrative techniques that are overtly subversive, Barnes is recognised for the use of generic fabulation in his approach. Generic fabulation, in Barnes's own words, is "convincing ourselves of a coherence between things that are largely true and things that are wholly imagined" (*Conversations with Julian Barnes* 63). Described by David Lodge as "fiction's opposite literary direction to realism" (Lodge from Childs 7), Robert Scholes 1967 study *The Fabulators* offers an interesting discussion of fabulation which sheds some light on Barnes's narrative style. According to Lodge, Scholes's fabulators "play tricks on their readers, expose their fictive machinery, dally with aesthetic paradoxes, in order to shed the restricting

conventions of realism, to give themselves freedom to invent and manipulate” (7). All these movements serve to “challenge the notion that history may be retrieved by objective investigations of fact,” which consequently leads to the realisation that history is “readily adaptable to the artifices of daydream and fabulation” (Scholes from Childs 9). In other words, Barnes challenges our conventional ways of reading narratives, whether it is historical or fictional, by making it clear that the proceedings taking place are never as literal or linear as they are made out to be.

The presence of generic fabulation in *The Sense of an Ending* comes in the early and immediate reference to an “ending” for a novel, which, by all accounts, is a rather queer way to begin any narrative. By pre-empting the end of a narrative before it even begins, the potential implication for the reader is that all narratives have already ended, and that the beginning is just an illusory display of what has already transpired. In this respect, Barnes’s novel is different from the problematic beginnings in both *Foe* and *A Goat’s Song*. Unlike how readers are thrust headfirst into the waves or the middle of a drunken stupor, Barnes’s narrator begins in a place where there is no sense of time at all. It is a position from a vantage point that considers all events that have already passed, and the fragments that are left are due to selective moments which are disconnected and severely out of place. This leads to a very important question: How does one begin telling a story that has already ended? If we approach this question from an examination of narrative techniques, it questions the very form and conception of the novel – all novels are essentially narratives that have already ended. Despite our best efforts to create a future, or in this case, a narrative, the very basis of the present is basically an extension of the past. Only references to the past can give it meaning. But what sort of meaning are we getting here? Can this semblance of a meaning be clarified even in the present? These are the questions

that Barnes's novel seeks to address on the surface, which can be clearly seen in the novel's opening lines:

I remember, in no particular order:

- a shiny inner wrist;
- steam rising from a wet sink as a hot frying pan is laughingly tossed into it;
- gouts of sperm circling a plughole, before being sluiced down the full length of a tall house;
- a river rushing nonsensically upstream, its wave and wash lit by half a dozen chasing torchbeams;
- another river, broad and grey, the direction of its flow disguised by a stiff wind exiting the surface;
- bathwater long gone cold behind a locked door.

This last isn't something I actually saw, but what you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you have witnessed. (*The Sense of an Ending* 3)

The series of disparate objects have no connection to each other, containing random images from household appliances to rivers and natural settings, and it is this very random, fragmented nature of memory that Barnes contemplates in his introduction to *The Sense of an Ending*. The expression "no particular order" is a particularly strange comment which only serves to invalidate the very act of remembering – without organising his memories in a particular sort of order, how is it possible for the recollections to make any sense? As it stands, each moment seems to be taken from a random incident or event which left an impression on the narrator. At the same time, the metaphors about the rivers are convenient due to their common association with time and movement, which provides properties associated with movement and fluidity. Are

these references to moving bodies of water necessary, or even authentic? Or, rather, do they only add to the layers of artificiality that already shape the narrative – the narrator is whimsical about the passing of time, and therefore his memories naturally shift towards metaphors which reference time. This hints at the possibility that all these details are fictional to begin with. As it is, the narrative is already less convincing because of how unsure the narrator is of his recollection, even if it is accepted as a tale which begins in retrospective way, with the narrator pre-configuring the way we perceive time and its function as a point of focus in his tale.

To compound matters, the last detail is inserted with a disclaimer; not an uncertain one confirming the inherent unreliability of memory as a whole, but an exact error. For in addition to the obvious logical discrepancy we should only take his words at face value, the line also implies that a huge part of what can be considered “recollected” could have been “reinvented” instead. The level of manipulation and distortion cannot be clearly established. This forces us to reconsider the title – an ending cannot be established if there are too many gaps that are left unfulfilled, and more importantly, an ending without a chronological framework cannot logically exist either. In other words, an ending can reside in a strange space where one part of the conclusion exists, but will always remain incomplete and unsubstantiated. The word “witnessed” adds an additional layer of problematic discrepancies, given that the context and vantage point has not been established for an accurate discernment of the reality.

The inherently problematic nature of the term “witnessed” is not restricted to its literal and physical usage, and the term “postmodern witness” comes to mind. Borrowing the term from Alice Ostriker’s examination of confessional poetry, a poem with a postmodern witness is a “marriage of opposites” which

employs the fragmented structures and polyglot associations originating in Eliot's *Waste Land*, Pound's *Cantos* and Williams's *Paterson*, those epitomes of high modernism. Like them too, it reaches toward the objectively encyclopedic. Like them, it rejects master narratives. It refuses to pretend to coherence. But where high modernism rejects the autobiographical "I", these poets retain it.

[...] it is crucial that the poet is present and located in the poem. The poet is not simply a phantom manipulator of words but a confused actual person, caught in a world of catastrophe that the poem must somehow mirror or transcend. ("Beyond Confession" 35)

There are certain intriguing elements in the first portion that resonate with this dissertation so far, such as the fragmentation of perspective and the rejection of grand narratives that dictate singular interpretations. In addition, acceptance of the autobiographical "I" seems to be an unconventional measure taken to illustrate the subjectivity of individual experience, given that the logical path taken in the search for truth should distance itself from the element of unreliability inherent in first-person narration. Ostriker explains this particular standpoint in the second part of the definition, and this explicit breakdown in terms of what a postmodern witness is strikes a chord given the parallels between her description and Tony's position as the "confused" narrator in Barnes's novel.

While there are other critics such as Amy Robbins who summarise Ostriker's main argument in terms of highlighting "the presence in language of more or less singularly, morally conscious person" (77), the term "postmodern witness" has a different level of significance in Barnes's fiction. Rather than restricting the expression's definition in terms of ethical considerations, how the position of the narrator is situated in the narrative provides interesting intra-diegetic possibilities. Possessing a set of characteristics inherently associated with

postmodern tendencies, this figure is an individual who is ontologically indeterminate in the diegetic reality he or she inhabits. In other words, a postmodern witness is paradoxical in its conception. The term witness already has certain complications when it comes to temporal location: it is a person who provides testimony to an event, either observing from a distance as a random stranger, or as one who is personally involved in the event. What is crucial to this testimony is that it is observed as it is happening. Unlike a historian who looks at evidence of events that have already passed, or even prophets who attempt to predict future events, a witness's account is created as the event unfolds, which also means that we have to take into consideration his or her interpretation of events and understand that this account may change with the passing of time. Indeed, the witness is theoretically powerless when it comes to changing the course of the event as it takes place, but changing how others perceive it based on altering one's narrative is still a possibility. Whether even this matters or not is also a matter for debate, given that there is already an inherent distancing between the witness and the event before the point of conception, and till the very end, there is no resolution beyond the scepticism, or even cynicism, that nothing close to the truth has taken place.

More importantly, a postmodern witness negates the presence of time in the narrative. Because of his involvement in the narrative, all events that take place are immediately associated with a sense of temporal detachment. Tony, in his role as a narrator who is fully aware of his own inadequacies when it comes to his recollection of events, seems to simplify the dynamics of this ontological confusion. However, he is a narrator who is both a participant of the past event, and the main source of recollection. In other words, this postmodern witness occupies a space which exists both internally and externally in a reality that has already conceded its artificiality in terms of construction. He or she is supposed to provide a point of verification, or a person who

can help provide an angle to an event that has occurred. However, such a position is already problematic from the moment it takes place, given that chronological time pushes the moment forward without any permanent register. The truth, if the term means anything at all, has already ceased to be the truth because all possibilities of witnessing the event from another vantage point, or to provide an omniscient viewpoint of the situation, is already denied to us. That seems to be the underlying dilemma faced by each of Barnes's postmodern witnesses. As Matthew Pateman says, Barnes's characters "are all searching for ways of knowing the world [...]; they all have characters who are striving for some way of finding meaning in an increasingly depoliticized, secularized, localized and depthless world" (*Julian Barnes* 2). This describes the profile of a postmodern witness quite aptly, and in retrospect, seems to be a role similarly occupied by Susan Barton in *Foe* and Jack Ferris in *A Goat's Song* as peripheral figures of their own respective narratives.

With the need for interpretation and analysis from an ambiguous vantage point, the role of a postmodern witness reveals certain characteristics that are found in detective fiction. As the novella begins with "I remember, in no particular order," there is a foreshadowing of characteristics belonging to this genre, where disparate pieces of information are left scattered and unorganised. According to James Dalrymple in his article "*The Sense of an Ending* by Julian Barnes: A 'Forensic Memoir'," this beginning "confronts the reader immediately with a hermeneutic challenge that may be described as the 'crisis of the sign', in which we are offered signifiers without any obvious signified, images with no clear representational context" (89). These gaps in the narrative are made explicit by Tony's own assessment of himself as an unreliable narrator, and that he is very much aware of the exact placement and authenticity of events in his recollections. At one stage, he states rather bluntly: "That's how I remember it now,

though if you were to put me in a court of law, I doubt I'd stand up to cross-examination very well" (Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* 119). In fact, Tony's narrative is littered with doubt, with the excessive focus on terms such as "evidence" and "proof" signifying the lack of confidence he has in his own narration without empirical substantiation (39), as well as the need for "witnesses" to verify the truth of his words (59). In other words, the order of events and the exact sequencing of actions are left unanchored in time. This leaves both protagonist and reader in a state of uncertainty as the inability to measure where they stand in time means that any sense of a concrete story world is compromised. In a moment of contemplation, Tony offers a moment in retrospection which summarises this particular conundrum:

But time... how time first grounds us and then confounds us. We thought we were being mature when we were only being safe. We imagined we were being responsible but were only being cowardly. What we called realism turned out to be a way of avoiding things rather than facing them. Time ... give us enough time and our best-supported decisions will seem wobbly, our certainties whimsical. (102)

In this moment, Tony describes time as an entity which can both metaphorically ground and confound us. It does so by providing us with an initial sense of security and reassurance, before revealing itself as a temporary illusion which changes with the passing of time and the addition of more information. Indeed, Barnes's supposed affiliation with detective fiction may not lie in the genre itself, but a subversion of the genre. The emphasis on empirical details and the gathering of factual information serves a temporary purpose, but as Tony puts it cynically, this form of "realism" may just "be a way of avoiding things rather than facing them," given that the narrative is never whole enough for proper assessment. As such, the concerns may be epistemological to begin with, but the essence of their existence is ontologically problematic.

These are traits that would not look out of place in most works dealing with postmodern tendencies.

Indeed, Barnes cuts a rather paradoxical figure when it comes to the postmodern. According to Holmes, Barnes's style of writing can be described as "restless fictional experimentation," which can perhaps be understood as at most nominally postmodernist. However, Holmes also concedes that this only applies to some of Barnes's works, even while much of his works contains an odd mix of realist fiction. Vanessa Guignery points out that "[Barnes] both resorts to and subverts realistic strategies [...] his writing is essentially self-reflexive; and he celebrates the literary part but also considers it with irony" (*The Fiction of Julian Barnes* 1). This references Lyotard's definition of the postmodern condition in his often-cited "incredulity towards metanarratives," which creates a rather paradoxical situation given how Barnes seems deeply concerned with the search for truth. The excessive focus on empirical details, provided by the observations of both the narrator and the characters, unveils an underlying yearning for a narrative that is based on concrete facts and authentic accounts. These concerns seem more modernist than postmodernist in nature as well, especially in terms of how a search for truth still exists, however abstract it may be. By contrast, a postmodern perspective would more explicitly gesture towards the idea that there is no truth. However, strange as it may be, these two standpoints are not mutually exclusive when it comes to dissecting Barnes's approach. Indeed, the protagonists of his novels are definitely on the search for truth, but the difficulties associated with their approach, as well as the absence of any meaningful conclusion, point to postmodern tendencies.

When dealing with this particular subject of being a postmodernist writer, Barnes himself convolutes the term and denies any participation within it. In an interview with Rudolf Freiburg, he points out his problems with being associated exclusively with postmodernism:

Well — I once got into trouble in Italy where I was at a British Council evening — I don't know how many years ago but it was certainly after *Flaubert's Parrot*, possibly after *History of the World* — and so the whole question of postmodernism came up, and the question of literary theory. And someone from the audience was asking the question and I said, "well actually, you know, I haven't read any literary theory," and everyone laughed — because they knew this was the British sense of humour — but then I said, "no, actually I really haven't, you see," and they suddenly began to realize that I was serious and a terrible chill fell over the audience because many of them had worked in universities and devoted several years of their lives to theory and liked to fit my novels into some constructed grid. But at the risk of offending you in turn, I would say that I have never read any literary theory. I've read a few pages of Derrida, I've occasionally been sent theses on my work where there would be a paragraph of quotation from me, in which my purposes seemed to me self-evident and self-explanatory; and then two pages of a sort of Derridaish prose which seemed to me to make the whole thing much less clear than it was in the first place [laughs]. To answer your question straightforwardly: in my case there is no continuing dialogue between writing fiction and literary theory. I'm deliberately unaware of literary theory. Novels come out of life, not out of theories about life or literature, it seems to me... I think that when literary theory drives literature, the danger is you get something fundamentally arid as the *nouveau roman*. ("Do You Consider Yourself a Postmodern Author?" 52)

I would argue that Barnes's take on his personal writing approach does not take away the fact that his novels do possess various postmodernist tendencies, and to some extent, the relatively frequent references to literary figures and their philosophical utterances seems to suggest a more calculated approach than he admits. From Adrian Finn's fixation with theoretical utterances in *The Sense of an Ending*, to Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot*, to his latest novel *The Only Story*'s Paul Roberts, each of these protagonists are fixated with the problems related to memory and truth, and more often than not, are themselves intrigued by philosophy and theories with regard to how life should be perceived. The immediate assumption that can be made from this is that Barnes's denial of any philosophical or postmodern tendencies is more tongue-in-cheek than a genuine reply. One can also assume that Barnes is denying a deliberate attempt to be overtly postmodernist in his approach, in the sense that his works are novels first and foremost, and that the postmodern elements emerge naturally from his discussion of his perspectives with regard to life. Through each of his characters, Barnes places their individual narrated accounts in a space outside the collective narrative of the novel to illustrate the subjectivity of perception and one's sense of time and reality. This is why labelling his protagonists as postmodern witnesses may be apt, but perhaps excessive given that all their stories are reflections of what may take place in reality.

When we consider the plight of Barnes's protagonists, most of their problems and internal conflicts are built upon an inability to differentiate between the different versions of history and truth that thrown upon them. Worse still, these pieces of information come separately, which leaves gaps that only one's imagination can fill. Thus, it can be seen how the metafictional element that is inherently present in fabulation can reveal the artifice that plagues all historical accounts in general, which can be even more pronounced when there are multiple

perspectives of the same event that do not cohere. One of Barnes's works addresses this supposed scepticism towards history in a very direct way. Perhaps reflective of his attitude towards history and recollections in general, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* provides enough discrepancies within its very title to highlight the problematic nature of history and storytelling. As Richard Locke comments, the book's

comic grandiosity is apparent from its aggressive title. A history, then, not fiction; divided with confident precision into chapters, though we note the humorous, if whimsical precision of '10½.' The title suggests a book that will flaunt genres, categories of communication, numbers that don't neatly conform to our devotion to the order of ten. This self-advertising title is a boast that mocks itself by calling attention to its literary and cognitive form. (Locke from Moseley, *Understanding Julian Barnes* 109-110)

Arguably one of Barnes's most overt attempts to address the very structure of history, Locke points out quite sharply that the self-mockery present within the title calls attention to the failure of empiricism to ever present the truth in an authentic and accurate way. Indeed, the title *History of the World* contains its own self-description: "The history of the world? Just voices echoing in the dark; [...] stories, old stories that sometimes seem to overlap; strange links, impertinent connections" (*A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* 242). Arguably, half a chapter provides a few possible interpretations. Peter Childs comments that the term "half-chapter" "provokes comparison with other expressions: a half-truth for example, or the choice of whether to understand a glass as half-full or half-empty" (74). This brings to mind Kermode's observation that history "is a fictive substitute for authority and tradition, a maker of concords between past, present, and future, a provider of significance to mere chronicity" (56), and how "[e]verything is relevant if its relevance can be invented" (56). With their respective references to the idea of

invention and distortion, these are all useful ways to understand the concept of incompleteness beyond the obvious interpretation that history is never a complete narrative.

The emphasis in these analogies comes from the emphasis on the importance of perception in the process of discernment. This conforms to Barnes's definition of a novel, or rather, what he defines as "an extended piece of prose, largely fictional, which is planned and executed as a whole piece" (Sexton, "Still Parroting on About God" 42). It suggests his stand that every piece of fiction has nonfictional elements that help frame the story world, in the very same way that every supposedly nonfictional account has elements of fiction which compromise any promise of an entirely objective account. Merritt Moseley puts it more succinctly, labelling it as "a reminder that almost every novel contains material that is fictional, not just in the trivial sense in which people are renamed and introduced into novels; no, almost every novel contains things that actually happened and places that actually existed" (*Understanding Julian Barnes* 111). In other words, the reality that is woven for any story world requires the borrowing of a chronological framework.

As Barnes explains in an interview about one of the chapters in *History*,

I suppose the point at which — "Parenthesis" comes in is the point at which I've given a series of alternative narrations, dislocated in time and place, and it seems to me as a writer, at that point, that it is time to say something on my own part, on my own behalf. And at such a point, the reader would be quite justified in saying to the writer — "Well, what do you think about it?" So, that part is mainly about love and truth, but it's also against part of what the book has already been doing, which is undermining traditional history. It's saying: It's no good just lying back and saying — "Well, we'll never work it out" and it's no good saying — "Of course we understand history, all we have to do is

apply the following theories or the following principles of Marxist ideology, whatever.”

What we should do eventually is believe that truth is obtainable. History may not be 56 per cent truth or 100 per cent true, but the only way to proceed from 55 to 56 is to believe that you can get to a hundred. (*Conversations with Julian Barnes* 56)

Raising percentages in the discussion is quite evidently a gesture that refutes discussions based entirely, or even primarily on empiricism, given how such numbers are arbitrarily constructed. After all, “[d]escriptions of the world vary with the writer’s world-view, their standards of rationality and their practical interests in the subjects of their description” (McCullagh, *The Truth of History* 14). In a way, this suggests for all its noble excursions in the search for truth, history is ultimately “a series of alternative narrations, dislocated in time and place,” and ultimately at the mercy of the historians’ interpretation. What is interesting here is that Barnes admits that he seeks to undermine traditional history in his novel, yet he claims that his other main intention is to push harder for the truth. In other words, while history is arguably unattainable, it is Barnes’s contention that this sentiment is ultimately one we can make in the present and not the unknowable future.

MAKING SENSE OF TIME

When discussing these slippages in reality in the novel in relation to memory and history, time inevitably becomes an even more important element in Barnes’s writing. Given their respective roles in the discussion, it is only natural that fabulation’s metafictional features will lead to the emergence of multiple diegetic realities, each with its own conception of time. When we revisit the opening of *The Sense of an Ending*, it is clear that each of the details belong to a different point in time, which implies a differentiation of diegetic realities. More importantly, each of

these moments are very conscious of time as a measurement of reality, which is really strange when they are simultaneously distanced from time as well. Take for example the expression “bathwater long gone cold behind a locked door.” There are indicators of time in how hot water had been hot just minutes or hours earlier, while the locked door provides another specific detail of an action that had previously taken place which may be crucial to the plot development of the narrative. Yet, how and when this event takes place, and whether it relates to any of the main characters in a significant way, are questions that cannot be answered when it first emerges. We find out later that it takes place in Veronica’s place much later, but the reason why it has to be raised right at the beginning remains a mystery.

In reality, these episodes may not even be accurate due to the inherently problematic nature of memory, and any discrepancies are amplified by the gaps in between different time periods. Tony does not even attempt to deny this, and instead claims that it is not the actual events that matter, but how they have shaped his way of thinking:

I’m not very interested in my schooldays, and don’t feel any nostalgia for them. But school is where it all begun, so I need to return briefly to a few incidents that have grown into anecdotes, to some approximate memories which time has deformed into certainty. If I can’t be sure of the actual events anymore, I can at least be true to the impressions those facts left. (*The Sense of an Ending*” 3-4)

Taken literally, this short excerpt can be read as a confession of how he is in denial, by first dismissing its own level of authenticity, before emphasising how he has selected to interpret these facts according to his “impressions,” albeit as truthfully as he can. The adjective “grown” carries with it the same implication as “changed” or “transformed” in a way that invalidates any possibility of an exact re-enactment of events. Likewise, the expression “to some approximate

memories which time has deformed into certainty” is hardly a quote to inspire confidence when it comes to understanding Tony’s school days, given how tentative and imprecise the language is. The odd situation wherein a deformed account of events is the only certainty that is left provides the clearest indication that the only certainty provided by memories over time is uncertainty, and this irony reflects a certain paradoxical characteristic about the process of recollection — Jean-Paul Sartre’s observation that “as being fades into appearance at all degrees, it seems that the real is something melting, that it is reabsorbed when touched. In these patient fakings, appearance is revealed at the same time as pure nothingness and as cause of itself” (*Saint Genet: Actor and Matyr* 30). In other words, the supposed memories of events that one has is actually nothing more than just a front of appearances and impressions, reducing any possibility of veracity.

Another significant example, which is repeated later in the narrative, offers the same random detail which seems out of place:

Another detail I remember: the three of us, as a symbol of our bond, used to wear our watches with the face on the inside of the wrist. It was affectation, of course, but perhaps something more. It made time feel like a personal, even secret, thing. We expected Adrian to note the gesture and follow suit; but he didn’t. (Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* 6)

There are odd shifts in the narrative when the focus on time stamps becomes almost obsessive in its attention to detail, and others where the passing of time seems to be more of an afterthought. This random thought is brought up later in the story, but at the moment serves to emphasise the narrator’s fixation with time. The significance of moving the watch faces inside the wrist suggests a naturally counter-intuitive move which negates the function of wearing a timepiece in

the first place, which Tony confesses to be a pretentious gesture. Yet, it is important all the same because of how conscious Tony is of time, which helps make sense of why he plays with the description of events in a way which highlights this obsession with how “personal” or “secret” it is. The confirmation that Adrian “didn’t” follow them suggests that Tony already knows it will never happen, a detail which concludes this brief recollection with another relatively atemporal sequence.

This atemporal sequence has a relatively significant effect on how the rest of the episode is read. In relatively quick fashion, the narrative pushes on into the afternoon, where there is a sense that every minute and hour that passes is scrutinised. Although the statement “[l]ater that day – or perhaps another day” seems a little too careless to be taken seriously, it is also almost too deliberate to be taken as such. Immediately, how the events proceed on to “[t]hat afternoon” means that the strand of time has taken root temporally in order for the events to proceed. This contrasting shift from the previous proleptic atemporal moment to a sequence that deals with temporal markers signals the movement between diegetic realities, from the contemplative recollection of the narrator, back to his memories of the events. Any notion of how time can be measured chronologically is thus removed, which dissolves any trace of realism and authenticity that these accounts may seem to possess before. Indeed, this is a reason why even though *The Sense of an Ending* is an easy read in terms of language, it can be difficult to understand because of these frequent shifts, which take place at almost every part of the novel.

Besides the obvious allusion to historical events, Barnes’s removal of our measurements of time in these episodes is telling as an assessment that truth is intricately tied to the notion of time. Truth, when told at the wrong time, becomes an untruth, given that timing dictates the placement of context, as well as understanding. In other words, whether it is due to deliberation,

unintentional recollection or just lack of information, the inherently problematic nature of timing reduces most, if not all narratives to the state of temporary truths until more information reveals itself. In Tony, Barnes creates a figure who is both a perpetrator and a victim. As an active participant in the narrative, Tony often gives the impression that he is as befuddled as the readers who witness the same fragments of information slowly reveal themselves. Part of what creates this effect comes in the form of first-person narrators who utilise free indirect discourse to push the narrative forward. According to Holmes, Barnes “makes masterful use of free indirect discourse to generate both sympathetic understanding of some of his characters and irony at their expense” (“Divided Narratives, Unreliable Narrators, and *The Sense of an Ending*” 17). By allowing access to his thoughts and concerns, the difference between a character’s expectations of events and what actually does take place becomes even glaringly obvious, while the difficulty of separating one’s sense of time from that of others is more pronounced when conflicts and misunderstandings take place due to different versions of the same event. Whether these disputes take place between the protagonist and other characters or between the selves within, free indirect discourse offers a vantage point to observe these temporal shifts.

While the majority of Barnes’s protagonists are first-person narrators; free indirect discourse is typically utilised with a third-person narrator, where there already is a form of confusion because the subordinate clauses are omitted, and there is no clear delineation between the narrator and the characters’ thoughts and actions. What happens then when the narrator takes on the first-person perspective? A moment of contemplation by Tony/narrator allows us a look at such an episode:

I was probably looking more impressed than Dixon thought healthy.

“Webster, enlighten us further.”

“I just thought it was a poem about a barn owl, sir.”

This was one of the differences between the three of us and our new friend. We were essentially taking the piss, except when we were serious. He was essentially serious, except when he was taking the piss. It took us a while to work this out. (*The Sense of an Ending* 7)

Tony’s role in this exchange is a perplexing one. Besides the obvious fact that the narrative is governed by a narrator recollecting his thoughts, it is possible for him to be the narrator recollecting the event, or a passive participant reading the narrative the same way a reader would. “I was probably looking more impressed” is not the same as “He looked more impressed,” as the former appears to suggest that his memories may not be clear enough to provide specific details, while the latter would be what is expected of a third-person narrator. Yet, these chronological frameworks are subverted by the dialogue in present tense, before the narrator quickly switches back to the mode of recollection and continues the story. According to Gérard Genette, a novelist must select between two modes of narration, either “to have the story told by one of its “characters,” or to have it told by a narrator outside the story” (244), and the constant shifting between timelines reminds us that this recollection is ultimately one version based on a subjective perspective, and that the narrative has unfolded much more than this moment reveals. When Tony in the role of narrator comments that “this was one of the differences” between the group of friends, it implies automatically that he knows of at least a few more differences, so the view of these events from his perspective is likely to be already distorted. The last bit of acknowledgment that “it took [them] a while to work this out” is another time indicator that remains vague in terms of measurement.

Taking “a while to work this out” carries with it another layer of significance, with the proleptic moment one of the few littered across the novel, signalling that Tony already knows what has transpired and is deliberately withholding information in order to build a sense of suspense or dramatic irony. According to Currie, it is “difficult to keep the concept of dramatic irony apart from the question of time, because questions about what we know and do not know in fiction are inextricable from questions of what is going to happen and what we think is going to happen” (*The Unexpected* 137). The use of prolepsis is a relatively common technique used when examining the role of time in narrative. According to David Herman in his analysis of prolepsis functions as a literary device, “proleptic storytelling, by eliminating or reducing narrative suspense, requires an interpretive reorientation on the part of readers” (217). Tony’s line of self-reflection forces a reorientation of how this whole episode should be read. Given that it is all written in the past tense, the question becomes how far in the past each episode belongs to, and which self is narrating which event. While there could be additional levels of temporal diegetic reality, the two most obvious would be the character narrating the event, which then shifts quickly to the narrator reviewing the event from a distant future.

Functionally, proleptic moments reflect a certain level of self-consciousness in the narrative, in a way that can also be seen as performative prolepsis, a term used by Currie to describe the narrative’s involvement with “an imagined future which produces the present, and a present which, thus produced, produces the future” (*About Time* 44). This would seem to apply to Tony’s narration, where oftentimes it is unclear whether he is pre-empting a possible future scenario, or shifting between past and present temporalities. This is further complicated when it involves the reader in the same diegetic space. Currie points out the fact that narrative is “generally retrospective in the sense that the teller is looking back on events and relating them in

the past tense, but a reader or listener experiences these events for the first time, as quasi-present” (30), which in a strange way applies to Tony as a witness of his own memories as well.

This is where a closer examination of Barnes’s novel reveals an entirely new level of complexity when dealing with narrative time. Currie provides a quick summary of the problems we associate with Tony’s mode of storytelling:

But the narration of a memory is not quite the same thing as the narration of the past in the sense that it is not the past itself that is the object of narration but the subjective act of recall belonging to a character. The narration of a memory is not strictly speaking an anachrony, since the event of recalling might belong in the temporal chain of the first narrative, and yet memory is normally considered to be the predominant mode of analepsis. (*The Unexpected* 137)

Can Tony’s narration be considered the narration of memories, or the narration of the past? At first, Currie’s statement is confusing given the seemingly logical conclusion that any recollection of memories is already a narration of the past. However, there is a critical difference as Currie points out – the inherent subjectivity associated with memories as compared to the supposed authenticity of a past in the diegetic reality of a fictional realm. The act of recollection can be intradiegetic in nature, a gesture of a character in the narrative that may even be aligned chronologically in the same plane of reality. When Tony narrates the memories of his childhood, it is, strictly speaking, not a narration of the past from an impartial omniscient position, but a narration of his memories as he often reminds us. This reiterates the point that the whole of the novel is, at times, shifting between the fictional present and analeptic episodes, as well as occasionally pre-empting future events, which leads one to remain in the constant state of temporal uncertainty.

When Tony looks back at all his parents' concerns earlier on in the novel about the young men's sexual escapes, he offers a strangely prophetic sentiment: "How far their anxieties outran our experience." This is a line that may be simply dismissed as a casual anecdote one usually expects on the issue of parental concerns. Yet, as mentioned earlier, this is not the first time such a moment has occurred, and it is significant precisely because of how casual the narrator reveals a possible insight into the future. If this line is read literally, the term "outran" in the past tense is very much different from the use of "would outrun," which would have indicated a claim or prediction made in the fictional present. But to use Currie's expression, prolepsis is "the anticipation of retrospection" (*About Time* 29), which already implies an extension of consciousness beyond the present moment, and subsequently creates "an objection, or a resistance, from the reader to the strategies through which it constructs its world or advances its perspectives" (*Postmodern Narrative Theory* 153). In other words, these proleptic moments from the narrator are calculated ones, aimed at destabilising the diegetic realities within the narrative. Consider another example: when Tony muses about how envious he is of his friends who have liberal sexual tendencies, it is quite clearly a moment of quiet contemplation by the young Tony in the past. But the sudden insertion of the statement "[b]ut then, no one told the whole truth about truth. And in that respect, nothing has changed" shows clearly that the narrative has been pushed forward. In this moment of retrospection, the quick transition from a past observation into a timeless moment of resignation subverts the basis of narrative temporality that defines and explores the way we experience and understand reality.

Barnes allows the realisation that characters are malleable, with their thoughts denied to not only the readers, but also the narrators when it comes to subjectivity and experience. Whether it is passing in the diegetic realities of the story world or the readers' sense of reality,

time becomes an artificial measurement of change. The narrator, whether it is Tony's present self-recollecting the past or, Tony's past self-informing the readers in the present, seeks a form of control at times by determining which chronological timeline we should adjust to. However, Tony himself is found wanting at times when it comes to understanding particular situations, and it is revealed either in the very moment of the event, or when the incident is observed in retrospection. Both methods display an acute sensitivity towards the importance of time. A particularly poignant moment comes in an exchange with a master at school. Adrian (or Finn as Tony calls him) makes a remark that the only thing one can "say truly of any historical event [...] is that 'something happened'". It is a remark which is important not just for its analysis of an important thematic function in the novel, but also because of what follows:

At the break, I sought out Finn. "I'm Tony Webster." He looked at me warily. "Great line to Hunt." He seemed not to know what I was referring to. "About something happening."
"Oh. Yes. I was rather disappointed he didn't take it up."

That wasn't what he was supposed to say. (*Sense of an Ending* 5)

There is a faint echo of Finn's thoughts in the last line, because it could have easily been a continuation of his previous expression of disappointment. More importantly, however, is the examination of this failed attempt at friendship as a simple exchange which ends in a relatively complex manner. When the line "[t]hat wasn't what he was supposed to say" appears, the absence of inverted commas suggests that it is Tony's thoughts and feelings at that point in time of narration. From a narrative's standpoint, the tone is a wistful, almost contemplative one, showing how Tony is disappointed that Finn did not offer something more friendly in exchange. Yet, the use of past tense is confusing when we consider the circumstances. Is Tony showing his disappointment at that moment in the narrative? Is he actually reflecting on his disappointment

from a vantage point in the future? In that split of the moment, it is left unclear which diegetic reality this moment should be situated within. The immediacy of the moment that the narrator “sought out Finn” at the next break suggests that the narrator is temporarily in the diegetic reality of his memories. Yet, there are reminders that this is ultimately a recollection, as emphasised earlier when the narrator comments how he “needs to return briefly to a few incidents that have grown into anecdotes, to some approximate memories which time has deformed into certainty.” What we are witnessing right now is just one of the “impressions those facts left,” leaving us once again in a state of uncertainty that was experienced with Cruso’s thoughts in *Foe*. Susan’s agitation and anxiety at that point thus makes even more sense, given how Cruso’s confidence that he can remember everything “worth the remembering” is nothing more than an arrogant and empty assertion (*Foe* 17). Indeed, it is likely that his memories have “deformed into certainty,” thus leaving out crucial parts of the narrative and (un)intentionally shaping others.

Barnes addresses this in one of the exchanges between Finn and the master Old Joe Hunt at school. While debating the origins of the First World War, many points are conveniently raised that are relevant to the issue of historical accuracy. Many of the students were labelled as “absolutists,” and therefore preferred to settle the discussions of facts in overly simplistic ways by attempting to situate the entire cause of an event on a singular factor. There is also the presence of a supposed anarchist who “argued that everything was down to chance, that the world existed in a state of perpetual chaos, and only some primitive storytelling instinct, itself doubtless a hangover from religion, retrospectively imposed meaning on what might or might not have happened” (*The Sense of an Ending* 10-11). As general as they may be, these statements offer an overview of the different perspectives of history, which reveal how problematic interpretations of history can be. Finn subsequently raises a point that conveys one of the main

arguments Barnes has on history: “The question of subjective versus objective interpretation, the fact that we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us” (12). It is a claim that resonates with the reader because it is the very same struggle which one has to consider when reading Tony’s narrative. Again, there is a subtle reference to time right before this assessment. Tony observes how Finn “left one of those slight pauses in which we again wondered if he was engaged in subtle mockery or high seriousness beyond the rest of us” (11-12). It is this attention to detail in terms of the temporal sequences that lends Tony an illusion of authenticity.

Unfortunately for Tony, this illusion of authenticity does not last for very long, as they are consistent ontological disruptions to the narrative. As a character who occupies a space in the narrative where he can refer to himself as “I”, Tony’s function is a rather complicated one. While he does participate as a character, he is a character who is conscious that he belongs to multiple diegetic planes of reality. On the other hand, he is also never really more than an observer of the events taking place. Consequently, we have a narrator who has constructed a story world for us to reside in, which he shifts in and out of, almost like a passive conductor who moves the narrative forward when necessary, but who is more than willing to pause it when there are moments for the reader to contemplate. It is thus also possible that these events are not the spontaneous memories that we are led to believe, but selected carefully in order to direct the narrative in a certain way. In these selective moments of recollection, Tony is personally involved in his friend’s story, all the way from the first meeting to the end of the novel. One such event which takes place is Adrian’s discussion of a classmate’s suicide. According to Tony, Adrian’s “provocations were somehow welcomed as awkward searchings after the truth” (17), which is an overt reference to the primary thematic concerns of the novel:

“It’s a historical event, sir, if a minor one. But recent. So it ought to be easily understood as history. We know that he’s dead, we know that he had a girlfriend, we know that she’s pregnant—or was. What else do we have? A single piece of documentation, a suicide note reading ‘Sorry, Mum’—at least according to Brown. Does that note still exist. Was it destroyed? Did Robson have any other motives or reasons beyond the obvious ones? What was his state of mind? Can we be sure the child was his? We can’t know, sir, not even this soon afterwards. So how might anyone write Robson’s story in fifty years’ time, when his parents are dead and his girlfriend has disappeared and doesn’t want to remember him anyway. You see the problem, sir?”

[...]

Was this their exact exchange? Almost certainly not. Still, it is my best memory of their exchange. (*The Sense of an Ending* 17-19)

Even as Tony is observing Adrian’s discussion, there is a sense that many of the points raised can be directed at his own narrative. There are many subtle references to the unstable nature of history and how it has flaws which render it inherently unreliable. Firstly, Adrian establishes that it provides a credible reference point for discussion, albeit with a casual jab that it is “recent” and thus more easily understood. This sets the tone for his stand on the subject, as he quite clearly asserts that empirical evidence is woefully inadequate when it comes to understanding the event in its entirety. Secondly, the series of questions about Robson’s state of mind and intentions behind the suicide are rhetorical ones which have no answers. Pointing out how only his family members will remember the details of his suicide is another pointed fact about how historical events only exist insofar as they are remembered or actually written down properly, circumstances both denied to Robson given his lack of importance in the story.

From this episode, we can see that Adrian is a character who is very precise with language – not only in terms of semantics, but in terms of sequence and pacing. This is almost the opposite of Tony, who readily admits that it is “almost certainly not” certain that it is their “exact exchange.” For an imprecise memory, the details are extremely clear, and Adrian’s argument is remarkably coherent. Interestingly enough, time becomes a part of his analysis. The necessity of documenting the event, while arguably a futile exercise given the lack of information, is also subjected to the passing of time and the strength of one’s memory. Yet, it is the very precise nature of Adrian’s attention to detail, as well as his sensitivity towards time, which makes him ironically a very capable historian who possibly undermines his own line of work at every turn. The expression “[b]ut recent” shows his awareness of how every moment that passes by can affect the reading of an event, a level of sensitivity that is reflective of his academically-inclined personality. Likewise, “not even this soon afterwards” is a clear admission that even if time is passing, the duration in between events is relative and possibly irrelevant in terms of how the events unfold, emphasising the epistemological uncertainty that plagues any attempt to record a historical event. These careful, methodical examinations of intuitive time are just some of the signs which eventually leads to Adrian’s famous observation that “[h]istory is the certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation” (17).

It is necessary at this point to address Frank Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending* and the links between narrative theory and the novel. Frederick M. Holmes makes an assessment of these two texts with the same title, observing that both texts “speak” to each other: “both Kermode and Barnes explore the extent to which the concord-producing and time-resisting stories we create can withstand “the dialogue between credulity and scepticism” (Kermode 18), the tension

between our need to be consoled by narrative paradigms and our expectations that they falsify a less comforting and more chaotic reality (Holmes, “Divided Narratives, Unreliable Narrators, and *The Sense of an Ending*” 27). Barnes builds on Kermode’s assertion that humans have a persistent “need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and an end” (4), which is a clear assessment of how our lives only make sense in relation to how they are measured with and against time. Using the metaphor of the ticking clock, Kermode explains how the human need to impose perception on time seeks to add a sense of order when and where there is none:

Let us take a very simple example, the ticking of a clock. We ask what it says: and we agree that it says tick-tock. By this fiction we humanize it, make it talk our language. Of course, it is we who provide the fictional difference between the two sounds; tick is our word for a physical beginning, tock our word for an end. We say they differ. What enables them to be different is a special kind of middle. We can perceive a duration only when it is organized.

[...]

The clock’s ‘tick-tock’ I take to be a model of what we call a plot, an organisation which humanises time by giving it a form; and the interval between ‘tock’ and ‘tick’ represents purely successive, disorganised time of the sort we need to humanise. (44-45)

Barnes shares a similar view with Kermode that time is given shape by language, just as language derives its meaning from our understanding of reality, and therefore, of time. There are two main perceptions of time in this reference to the ticking of the clock – the first is how chronological time is dictated by manmade devices to measure time, and the assurance it provides due to its ability to locate on temporally in any given reality. The second is Barnes’s

description of “time’s malleability,” which quite obviously follows Bergson’s concept of the *durée*. This awareness of how time works is not a new one—the bigger question comes in the timing of its appearance, which in turn leads to a few more questions—why are these sentiments, usually viewed in retrospection, voiced out so early in the narrative? What purpose would it serve for us to first perceive a protagonist to be concerned with time before even knowing why he is so concerned in the first place? Is this variation of a flashback chronologically in line with what one would usually expect from a recollection, given how our view of the situation and commentaries are from a narrator who is uncertain of everything he is dealing with? Barnes’s own version of this metaphor of the clock echoes this thought process, as Kermode’s concerns are reflected through Tony’s thoughts:

We live in time – it holds us and moulds us – but I’ve never felt I understood it very well. And I’m not referring to theories about how it bends and doubles back, or may exist elsewhere in parallel versions. No, I mean ordinary, everyday time, which clocks and watches assure us passes regularly: tick-tock, click-clock. Is there anything more plausible than a second hand? And yet it takes only the smallest pleasure or pain to teach us time’s malleability. Some emotions speed it up, others slow it down; occasionally, it seems to go missing – until the eventual point where it really does go missing, never to return. (*The Sense of an Ending* 3)

As Holmes observes, Barnes structures Tony’s life in a way that mirrors Kermode’s argument that we “make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle” (17). The scrutiny of a clock’s movement and the rhythmic sounds reveals a desire on the protagonist’s part for some kind of structure on which to base his perception of reality. However, the linearity

provided by a simple ticking of a clock is an illusion. Even if time is supposedly moving forward in terms of chronology, the repetitive nature of the clock ticking matters only in terms of the intervals separating one moment from another. It does not structure reality in a way that can be understood, while sequences and the general sense of order become arbitrary descriptions. Indeed, another one of Kermode's quotes seems almost too perfect for a discussion of Barnes's novel, given how it captures the main thematic function that the whole story is based on: that the novel's plot is "based on an initial deviation of attention which causes a temporal gap between the original apprehension of what the situation signifies and the final understanding that its significance was other" (53). This is rather clear in the case of Tony, who finds his understanding of past events subverted by the influx of new information.

At this point, it should be clear that Barnes and Kermode share more than just the title of their books. Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* examines the concept of the apocalyptic as a means of framing our lives and the difficulties of finding coherence between a narrative's beginning, middle and end. Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* is built on this very framework of "peripeteia", with the unexpected plot developments subverting the readers' expectations and the protagonist exhibiting the crisis of one who lives in the "middle" of time. Indeed, Tony's realisation that he can no longer continue to consciously (or unconsciously) revise his own life narrative reveals the inadequacy of retrospection, described aptly by Kermode "to be a condition attaching to the exercise of thinking about the future that one should assume one's own time to stand in an extraordinary relation to it" (94). The problem with "living" in time, addressed cleverly by Kermode as "Clerkly Scepticism" (93), revisits the earlier claim of my dissertation that time can sometimes be more authentic when observed rather than lived, which will be further discussed in the rest of this chapter.

FIRST/SECOND-PERSON NARRATION AND THE SHIFT IN TENSES

As expected of a semi-autobiographical narrative, *The Sense of an Ending*, like quite a few of Julian Barnes's novels, is written from an individual's perspective and is mostly narrated as a first-person using the pronoun "I". Adopting first-person narration produces many of the issues that have already been discussed in the previous sections on Coetzee and Healy, and Barnes's narrator is no different in terms of how self-conscious he is of the problems at hand. Like the narrators of the other novels, Tony has made it clear that his recollection of events is far from perfect, and the sudden occasional shifts into second-person narration underline the state of his anxieties as he attempts to convince an imaginary audience of his reasons that he is either maligned and absolved of any wrong doing, or at least pure in terms of intention when committing mistakes. For Tony, the tone of this particular mode of narration can range from pleading to outright defensive, or even instructive and demanding, depending on his focus or mood. One particularly confusing example comes when Tony tries to propose different ways to interpret his situation:

You might think this is rubbish—preachy, self-justificatory rubbish. You might think that I behaved towards Veronica like a typically callow male, and that all my "conclusions" are reversible. For instance, "After we broke up, she slept with me" flips easily into "After she slept with me, I broke up with her." You might also decide that the Fords were a normal middle-class English family on whom I was chippily foisting bogus theories of damage; and that Mrs. Ford, instead of being tactfully concerned on my behalf, was displaying an indecent jealousy of her own daughter. You might even ask me to apply my "theory" to myself and explain what damage I had suffered a long way back and what its

consequences might be: for instance, how it might affect my truthfulness. I'm not sure I could answer this, to be honest. (*The Sense of an Ending* 44-45)

This is a very confusing excerpt as far as the chronological framework is concerned. While second-person narration is usually written in present tense as we can see here, the use of the verb “may” in the past tense is strangely situated in a position of narration taking place in the future, a vantage point of retrospection. It indicates that this doubt as to whether Tony has maligned Veronica has already happened, yet it is difficult to situate precisely when it has taken place. In this description of an event that has happened in the future, this removes any trace of the realism that would accompany a chronologically stable narrative. In a way, this conflates both past, present and future, which would suggest that the time that shapes any diegetic reality has inherently non-linear properties. That the narrator cannot answer whether it will affect his truthfulness, even with this supposed knowledge of how the narrative eventually ends, leads to only two logical conclusions: either he is lying, or he is simply dismissing the validity of having even a truth to lie about in the first place.

Barnes's insertion of such second-person narratives, sandwiched between the different narratives of recollection, complicates how the novel unfolds. According to Monika Fludernik, second-person narrative

introduces great combinatorial complexity by the fact that both the narrator and current addressee of the narrational act can become involved on the story level, with the narrator's past self-participating in the you-protagonist's experiences and the you-protagonist surviving into the time and situation of the narrative act. For this reason, second-person fiction destroys the easy assumption of the traditional dichotomous structures which the standard narratological models have proposed, especially the

distinction between homo and heterodiegetic narrative (Genette) or that of the identity or non-identity of the realms of existence between narrator and characters (Stanzel)”

(“Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology” 169).

Fludernik’s breakdown of second-person narration addresses the complexities that are present in *The Sense of an Ending* from the beginning. Ironically, it is these complexities that serve to explicate the problematic nature of Tony’s temporal dislocation in the narrative. While the bulk of the narrative proceeds in first-person narration, there are moments of ambiguity when it came to locating which diegetic plane the narration belongs to. According to Evgenia Iliopoulou’s explanation of second-person functions in autobiography, such a mode of narration “enables the author to bridge the temporal distance between narrated time and narrating time, corresponding to different versions of the self and enabling [one] to make them part of the narrative” (*Because of You* 116). In other words, second-person narration as an approach already concedes the possibility that there are more than two diegetic realities, and that they can exist simultaneously in a space that is outside the main diegetic reality of the story world. Borrowing the discussion from Michel Butor, Iliopoulou goes on to explain that second person narration as a “dialogic form of narrative [...] addresses the division of the self into sub-selves marked by different pronouns as distinct instances and reveals the temporality of the self as a sum of individual synchronic instances and not as a single, continuous diachronic unit” (116). This is precisely one of the possible readings of Barnes’s novel, and it is this clear dissection of the technicalities that allows a clearer understanding of how fictional time can be more complex than just a simple constructed measurement of reality.

These discussions are extremely useful when it comes to understanding these sudden insertions of second-person narration, which draws our attention to Tony’s role as a peripheral

narrator-protagonist. Indeed, there are questions of whether he is referring to an external individual in the narrative, or whether he is convincing a past self, which suggests that it is what Fludernik terms “second-person interior monologue, [...] which foregrounds its mediacy, fictionality, or [...] narrativity.” (Fludernik from Bal, *Narrative Theory: Special Topics*, 29). What it does is problematise the issue of framing in the narrative, which leads to an understanding that *The Sense of an Ending* is built on the premise that perceptions of the present are never really just in the present, but always conflated with past memories and moments of contemplative timelessness. Just as how Fludernik, Iliopoulou and Butor have pointed out, realities that are ultimately determined by perception are fundamentally governed by intuitive rather than chronological time, while the presence of multiple diegetic realities cultivated from one’s perception can only lead to the creation of multiple selves, or “sub-selves.” Being conscious about temporality serves to compartmentalise and segment events and memories more clinically, especially with the assumption that some matter more than others.

The uncertainty in the narrative becomes more pronounced with the paradoxically random yet methodical insertion of material that changes our perception of the matter present. This problem is not unexpected, given that the use of second-person narration creates a universal problem by addressing the reader (or himself). The distance between reader and narrator can arguably be widened when we are reminded of how artificial the narrated recollection is, except that in this instance, the gap is narrowed because of how the narrator prompts us to stand in his shoes, and understand things from his perspective:

But here’s the first problem. If this is your only story, then it’s the one you have most often told and retold, even if – as is the case here – mainly to yourself. The question then

is: do all these retellings bring you closer to the truth of what happened, or move you further away? I'm not sure. (*The Only Story* 1)

A crucial element that is missing from this philosophical musing is the measurement of time that has elapsed between the occurrence of the event in question, and subsequent sequences of recollections and reinterpretations that have yet to take place. However, as with all the other epigrammatic excerpts in the narrative, these moments are discussed in a space where there is a sense of timelessness. Even if time does flow chronologically on in the fictional world of the narrator, this pause highlights how one's sense of time can be slowed down to accommodate the question Tony has. Again, it is this careful manipulation of our sense of time, even in a simple second-person narrative, that reemphasises the fictionality of the construct itself.

In these shifts between first- and second-person narration, tense becomes a point of focus. Most of the narrative in *The Sense of an Ending* is written in the past tense, which is not surprising given how it is based off a narrator's memories of his past. Given the rarity of their appearances, narration done in the present tense becomes even more compelling, especially in terms of how it impacts the presentation of reality in the narrative. Consider the following passage:

I'm retired now. I have my flat with my possessions. I keep up with a few drinking pals, and have some women friends—platonic, of course. (And they're not part of the story either.) I'm a member of the local history society, though less excited than some about what metal detectors unearth. A while ago, I volunteered to run the library at the local hospital; I go round the wards delivering, collecting, recommending. It gets me out, and it's good to do something useful; also, I meet some new people. Sick people, of course;

dying people as well. But at least I shall know my way around the hospital when my turn comes. (*The Sense of an Ending* 55-56)

This shift to present tense is done with a leap forward almost forty years from when Tony and his group of friends were first students. Inevitably, various questions arise. Did Tony begin his recollection of the entire story that came just before at this point in time of the narrative? What is the significance of the word “now”, given that the narrative moves on almost immediately after and thus situates it almost instantaneously in the past? Indeed, “present tense should be understood as an adeictic tense which would typically not be aligned with a speaking subject” (Fludernik 252). According to Fludernik, texts written in the present tense “practise such deliberate refusal to situate the act of narration,” which removes any temporal “point” from which the narrator is supposedly situated (*Towards a ‘Natural Narratology’* 189). For instance, “[a] while ago” indicates a fixed point of a consciousness where time comes to a standstill long enough for the narrator to look back and realise the need for temporal markers such as before and after. The continuous tense is also slightly misleading because of its conversational tone, and grammatically, “have been delivering, collecting, recommending” makes more sense given that it is something that is not happening immediately, but has, rather, been going on for some time. The same thing applies to the claim “I meet new people”, which suggests that it is in the very moment of the fictional present that the event is taking place.

According to Dorrit Cohn, “one cannot realistically ‘live’ the story and narrate it at the same time, or, even, tell what one is currently experiencing as a story” (Cohn from Fludernik, *Towards a ‘Natural Narratology’* 188), which summarises the problems with the above passage quite nicely. While it does not possess excessive diachronic elements which classify it as an unnatural narrative, the chronological framework of the narrative is deceptively linear, when it is

actually closer to being circular. Even such a simple detail as meeting new people becomes a fleeting event that does not have any continuity, as Tony summarises their presence as just sick or dying people without any additional developments. On a more important level, narrating the account of his own personal affairs in the first-person creates a significantly disruptive narrative as a whole. While there were occasional insertions of philosophical musings, this shift towards a specifically personal voice forces a recalibration of how chronology functions in the narrative. As Jan Alber and Rüdiger Heinze point out about first-person narrative fiction, “the main character has a voice with idiolects and personal characteristics, and this voice may interfere in the presentation of the narrative just as the characters’ voices may interfere in the presentation of the narrative in the heterodiegetic mode” (Jan Alber and Rüdiger Heinze, *Unnatural Narratives*). In other words, this short excerpt of Tony’s current state of affairs is the sudden creation of a central character in the place of a previously passive observer and shadow philosopher that we have grown accustomed to.

Before that, the voice of the narrator is considered a relatively more impersonal one, which fits Alber’s description that “[i]n so far as an impersonal voice is narrating, it is not saying more or less than it knows – it is inventing and creating a world including the first person and his knowledge and lack of knowledge” (*Unnatural Narratives* 75). Right now it is no longer an issue of paralepsis or analepsis, but a case of disjunctive temporalities. Another obvious sudden shift away from recollecting the past to referencing the present takes place when Tony introduces his “solicitor”:

So I phoned Mrs. Marriott again, and asked for the contact details of Mrs. Ford’s other child, John, known as Jack. I called Margaret and asked for a lunch date. And I

made an appointment with my own solicitor. No, that's putting it far too grandly. I'm sure Brother Jack would have someone he refers to as "my solicitor." In my case it's the local chap who drew up my will; he has a small office above a florist's and seems perfectly efficient. (*The Sense of an Ending* 68-69)

Tony interrupts himself abruptly in this process of narration to describe T. J. Gunnell, and the self-consciousness he displays in chiding himself for "putting it far too grandly" lends the self-deprecating moment a touch of sincerity. For his deviation from this ongoing narration to take place, the narrator is evidently quite conscious of the fact that the act of recollection is a temporal process, freezing the moment for a lapse into the fictional present. On the other hand, to consider it a disruption of the chronological flow would be quite strange, given that it is a self-confessed piece of recollection of events that have taken place. These conflicting timelines that take place at the same time create a temporary flux, reminding us that the shift in tenses from past to present is an illusory construct that reflects the abstract nature of time. The emphasis on a "fictional present" has important implications as well. Fludernik comments that the use of present tense in narrative "significantly departs from the traditional schemata of the real-world temporality of storytelling" (256), and for a good reason; it potentially subverts any possibility of believing that there can be any stable story world with a reasonably consistent sense of chronology. By describing Gunnell's situation in the present, this point of time in the novel seems to suggest that the narrative is ongoing from the perspective of the narrator; in other words, this brings the narrator's diegetic reality to the forefront, while leaving what was supposed to be the primary story world hanging in the background.

Alan Singer's interpretation of the "present moment" lends an interesting angle to this discussion, observing how "[t]he present moment prompts us to consider how the novel—among

many other art forms—has long harbored a notion of character that resists characterization insofar as it is responsive to the circumstances of presentness” (*The Self-Deceiving Muse* 14). Mutability is a characteristic observed not only in characters, but can be reflected in our understanding of time as well. While Tony has never explicitly defied being “characterised”, Singer brings to our attention Tony’s references to the changes that time can bring. The most obvious instance is when an explicit explanation of time takes place:

We live in time, it bounds us and defines us, and time is supposed to measure history, isn’t it? But if we can’t understand time, can’t grasp its mysteries of pace and progress, what chance do we have with history—even our own small, personal, largely undocumented piece of it? (*The Sense of an Ending* 60)

Tony, or perhaps Barnes in this case, laments how time is essential when it comes to shaping reality, which further complicates how we understand the workings of reality given how time is also an abstract subject. These epigrammatic moments not only occupy a space outside the temporal reality of the story world, but encourage a makeshift philosophical discussion of how time operates in the novel. The self-reflexivity at this moment openly concedes that Tony’s recollection is very much aware of how events are fictionalised. This means that the various references to time are less useful when we consider the element of change that takes place, altering our perspectives of events that are narrated from previous accounts.

Indeed, Tony’s observation that “enough time” will render “our best-supported decisions [...] wobbly, our certainties whimsical” feels particularly on point here:

When we’re young, everyone over the age of thirty looks middle-aged, everyone over fifty antique. And time, as it goes by, confirms that we weren’t that wrong. Those little age differentials, so crucial and so gross when we are young, erode. We end up all

belonging to the same category, that of the nonyoung. I've never much minded this myself.

But there are exceptions to the rule. For some people, the time differentials established in youth never really disappear: the elder remains the elder, even when both are dribbling greybeards. For some people, a gap of, say, five months means that one will perversely always think of himself—herself—as wiser and more knowledgeable than the other, whatever the evidence to the contrary. Or perhaps I should say because of the evidence to the contrary. Because it is perfectly clear to any objective observer that the balance has shifted to the marginally younger person, the other one maintains the assumption of superiority all the more rigorously. All the more neurotically. (*The Sense of an Ending* 60)

It is quite evident here that Tony (or Barnes) is speaking in a space that exists outside the narrative. As Brian Richardson explains, the exploration of “we” beyond the typical first-person narration reflects a movement “from the psychological novel to more impressionistic renderings of consciousness to the dissolution of consciousness into textuality” (13). As Tony the narrator makes an attempt to distance himself from a personal plight, he turns this situation from an individual’s musing into a pseudo universal form of truth.

Nonetheless, it is still important to observe how a narrator’s overt musings about time appears at this point in the narrative. While Tony’s assessment that everyone lives in time serves as a repeated and repetitive reminder that reality is ultimately shaped by our perception of time, the following comment that “time is supposed to measure history” is much more loaded in its implications. The one temporal marker beyond the age groups that is empirically measured in this excerpt is an arbitrary number of “five months,” where the assumption is that more time

passing is equivalent to the amount of knowledge and experience accumulated. On the other hand, the examples of age groups and categorisation are, once again, points of measurements according to which time is a fictional construct that shapes the boundaries of our reality. While it is written as an action or realisation that is taking place in the moment, the process of enlightenment begins from a point of ignorance in the form of a flash-back, before confirmation comes in as a form of flash-forward later in the same sentence.

As Tony points out, “time finds you out,” even if it is not immediately clear at the moment:

“So, for instance, if Tony...” These words had a local, textual meaning, specific to forty years ago; and I might at some point discover that they contained, or led to, a rebuke, a criticism from my old clear-seeing, self-seeing friend. But for the moment I heard them with a wider reference—to the whole of my life. “So, for instance, if Tony...” And in this register the words were practically complete in themselves and didn’t need an explanatory main clause to follow. Yes indeed, if Tony had seen more clearly, acted more decisively, held to truer moral values, settled less easily for a passive peaceableness which he first called happiness and later contentment. If Tony hadn’t been fearful, hadn’t counted on the approval of others for his own self-approval ... and soon, through a succession of hypotheticals leading to the final one: so, for instance, if Tony hadn’t been Tony. (*The Sense of an Ending* 88-89)

Adrian’s use of ellipsis to conclude his statement withholds a critical piece of the narrative.

Whether it is meant to pre-empt an additional explanation or, rather, holds some other significance will remain unknown, given that it is not known then whether another piece of the diary will surface at the point which the fragment is revealed. Nonetheless, the ellipsis that

concludes such a pivotal moment does not simply condense time, but denies us the continuity with which we piece reality together. Adrian may have simply found himself unable to continue his writing as language has failed to articulate the horror he feels at that point in time, where raw emotions have taken over what remains of his ability to stay rational. Regardless, it offers an abrupt break in the story. By omitting such a crucial piece of the puzzle, the narrative is forced to take in directions which will only move us further away from the actual event. In other words, what is mistaken for an ellipsis is actually a paralipsis, which breaks the narrative and suspends the continuity of time. In a possible move to make sense of Adrian's words, Tony tries to justify how "the words were practically complete in themselves and didn't need an explanatory main clause to follow," even as he continues to speculate about what really took place, resulting in him taking a third person's view of himself as a character going through the motions. The last sentence, "if Tony hadn't been Tony," represents the self-loathing he feels and the immense regret he has for his words and actions, and perhaps a little bit of shock at how such a seemingly innocuous gesture made in the spur of the moment can erupt into such a state he faces today.

WHERE THE NOVEL TAKES OFF

When Tony runs through the events of his meeting with Veronica, they are compiled in sequence which provides a semblance of order:

It puzzled me that she had suggested a meeting. Why not use Royal Mail and so avoid an encounter which she clearly found distasteful? Why this face-to-face? Because she was curious to set eyes on me again after all these years, even if it made her shudder? I rather doubted it. I ran through the ten minutes or so we had spent in one another's company—the location, the change of location, the anxiety to be gone from both, what was said and

what was unsaid. Eventually, I came up with a theory. If she didn't need the meeting for what she had done—which was give me the envelope—then she needed it for what she had said. Which was that she had burnt Adrian's diary. And why did she have to put that into words by the grey Thameside? Because it was deniable. She didn't want the corroboration of the printed-out email. If she could falsely assert that I was the one who had asked for a meeting, it wouldn't be a stretch for her to deny that she had ever admitted arson. (*The Sense of an Ending* 94)

There are a few references to time in this passage which are significant because they provide a sense of structure while simultaneously revealing structure to be an illusory concept. What Tony has here is a series of thoughts that he has placed chronologically: the first is the running through of the ten minutes that they spent together previously, which does not give away how long he spends pondering the issue. Likewise, “[e]ventually” is a relatively timeless word which does not provide any specific indicators, again emphasising how subjective one's views of time can be. More importantly, Tony's anxiety is reflected through the use of short sentences, which can be seen either through the framing of his questions or the listing of specific details that he believes are clues that shed light on the issue. In doing so, Tony is slowly crafting a mini-narrative that helps explain how he arrived at the current state of affairs. By doing so, he is assuming that such an order provides a kind of logical flow, which in turn allows him some measure of control over the event.

However, when Tony's letter to Adrian and Veronica emerges, everything that we know previously of Tony is thrown out of the window:

All I could plead was that I had been its author then, but was not its author now. Indeed, I didn't recognise that part of myself from which the letter came. But perhaps this was simply further self-deception. (97)

There is a dreadful irony in the letter's lines includes – "I can't do anything to you now, but time can." The common expectation that time can erase past wounds and memories is denied, but the opposite takes place here when an artifact from the past reveals effects that were previously denied to us. While the harsh words of the letter are obviously directed at Adrian and Veronica, Tony feels the venom from these are harsh lines as well. As a person in the fictional present that no longer possesses the same vindictiveness as his younger self, this creates a dialogue that exists between past and future selves. As Tony puts it clearly in his own words: "My younger self had come back to shock my older self with what that self had been, or was, or was sometimes capable of being." The need to mention "had been" and "was" is an interesting reference to Tony's recognition that he is no longer fully aware of who he is as a person. As an entirely redundant statement, the lament that "[i]f only this had been the document Veronica had set light to" provides a stark contrast to the confident persona which existed just prior to his reading the letter, which once again indicates the swift transformation of personalities that time can bring about.

This brings into focus Frank Kermode's use of the term "peripeteia." Frederick M. Holmes uses the term to describe how its "shattering [emergence] accompanies his recognition that significant events in his life do not have the same meanings he has self-servingly ascribed to them" (27). Currie points out Kermode's stance that peripeteia is often "understood as a temporalisation of irony" (*The Unexpected* 139), given how events may appear in a way which

aligns with expectations, but change drastically over a period of time due to a shift in perception of reality. According to Kermode,

[p]eripeteia depends upon our confidence of the end; it is a disconfirmation followed by a consonance; the interest of having our expectations falsified is so obviously related to our wish to reach the discovery or recognition by an unexpected and instructive route.

(Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* 18)

Kermode's claim builds on his other point that "[m]en in the midst make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (17). In Kermode's view, this is why "the image of the end can never be *permanently* falsified" (17, original in italics). In other words, this addresses the basic premise that a narrative will not stay stagnant in this particular moment of shock, nor, especially, during the process of picking up the pieces and reconfiguring one's reality once a certain period of time has passed. Unfortunately, this definition further complicates our notion of what constitutes a definitive ending to any story, simply because an instance of peripeteia may signal the climax and conclusion of most realist narratives, but may just be one of the many that may come. As we see in Barnes's novel, new information and different twists of perspectives can immediately change the course of the narrative, making it difficult to determine which is the final one unless we factor in the physical frame of a novel in terms of a final page, forcefully ending the story at a particular point and, as a consequence, favouring a particular perspective over other possibilities.

One of Tony's own observations about the narrative process comes to mind here: "Does character develop over time? In novels, of course it does: otherwise there wouldn't be much of a story. But in life? I sometimes wonder" (103). This seems like a strange question, one that has

been asked before in *Foe* and *A Goat's Song*. Given that the chronological timelines of the novel are not exactly linear, Tony faces the same issue that Susan and Jack faced earlier when they tried to make sense of why their counterparts behaved in ways beyond their comprehension. However, references to a constant state of can address the fluidity of time, emphasising how reality cannot be confined to linear forms of understanding, much like how our perceptions in life do not stay the same. This is aligned with what Barnes seems to be proposing, that an individual's fundamental essence does not stay the same, given that experiences shape perspectives and provide new insights on matters that had perhaps been unclear previously. Also, as Brian Richardson asserts, "it is important to observe that the reader's customary expectations of an unambiguous causal framework can be mirrored by characters themselves struggling to discover the causal laws of the world they inhabit" (*Unlikely Stories* 15). If the characters in that fictional world are unable to comprehend fully what is going on, it may be even more difficult for readers to do so, even with the benefit of a vantage point overlooking the entire novel. This lends further weight to the argument that a novel, like the reality of life, is mutable and never linear.

As he sinks deeply in to a state of contemplative despair after reading the letter and having whiskey to reduce the pain, the word "witness" appears once again, as Tony is reminded of how he had only "recently [...] been going on about how the witnesses to our lives decrease, and with them our essential corroboration" (98). Unfortunately, these witnesses do not only include the other characters in his life, but all of his past memories and selves as well, drawing the reference made earlier to the concept of a postmodern witness. It is evident at this point that Tony has stretched the limit of what we might expect of a "postmodern" character, given how he is alienated even from his own memories in a reality that is increasingly chaotic. As such, time as

a concept takes on a personified status; as Tony observes, “time was not telling against them, it was telling against him.” The letter becomes the object of witness, even as Tony is forced to reconsider his position as a witness of his own history and memories. Consider, moreover, his use of “underestimated” and “miscalculated” in his assessment of time’s influence. In a strange way, this serves as a subtle reference to Tony’s narratorial, or even authorial control, or, rather, to his lack of it, given the absence of control he has over the situation.

At this juncture, another postmodern witness emerges: Adrian’s diary. To be chronologically on point, the diary has always been lurking in the shadows. Even at the very end, its contents are not revealed, while the only possible people who have read it are either dead or otherwise inaccessible. To Tony, its functional purpose beyond that of a personal artifact is obvious: “The diary was evidence; it was—it might be—corroboration. It might disrupt the banal reiterations of memory. It might jump-start something—though I had no idea what” (77). At the very least, a diary promises the possibility of providing additional information about the story which can help address certain gaps or uncertainties. However, as with the previous examples of postmodern witnesses, the diary may be a physical object in the story, but the confirmation of its true existence is denied to us because the actual object never finally materialises for Tony. More importantly, the diary’s contents are ontologically indeterminate in terms of where they stand in time. When certain entries were written and why they were written can be given concrete dates, but how this information is to be interpreted when revisited by the writer himself in a different point in time is a separate matter altogether. If a writer’s view of his own entries can be subjected to change, this renders any interpretation made by readers even less accurate, given that they have neither the experience of the personal event nor the additional information needed to contextualise the content. Without the original writer’s personal review of these entries, the

information gathered can only paint a partial account of the events and experiences, which can be potentially more misleading than before. In Tony's case, the diary becomes a double-edged sword – while he gains more information about the past event, the additional information may complicate rather than clarify, leaving him in a more confused state than before.

The appearance of Adrian's diary produces certain interesting functions which interrogate the veracity of perception and representation of time and memory. As with any recorded journal, a diary contains the thoughts of the writer at that point in time, or more accurately, a recollection of events based on the current thoughts at that point in time. The first mention of a diary did not belong to Adrian, but to the boy who committed suicide much earlier in the narrative. The absence of Rob's narrative presents the same conundrum that Tony faces right now trying to locate Adrian's recollections. "But nothing can make up for the absence of Robson's testimony, sir," Adrian voices out in that moment, blissfully unaware that others will be asking the same question of him years later. When he commits suicide, the search for the missing fragments of Adrian's thoughts continues for an important reason: without the witness account of the diary, Adrian's death is no different from Robson's, and all the philosophical talk that takes place earlier in the narrative will lose their levels of significance. And the witness is one of not just an observer on the side, but an entity with the clearest and most authentic view of Adrian's own thoughts and motivations – himself.

In the moments of reading a diary entry, time is compressed as the events that are selectively written are actually insertions of temporal spaces, occupying diegetic sequences of realities created within an embedded narrative. At certain junctures, a diary can serve the role of a silent narrator, as its metafictional properties intrude into the narrative space, creating a sense of distance between the written memories and an external reader. Paradoxically, a diary can also

becomes an artefact which bridges time zones, between points in time in the past and the present moment of reading. Mark Currie describes the experience of reading a diary as “witness[ing] a collision between time and truth” (*The Unexpected* 137). As he holds the last shred of the diary in his hands, Tony observes that it is a strange text “set out in numbered paragraphs,” made even less authentic to a certain extent because it is a copy, a “version of a version.” Like a diary, a photograph provides the grounds for the anticipation of retrospection, given how it captures and preserves a moment, encasing a frame of time in the past. In Adrian’s case, what motivates him to write down his thoughts in a diary entry comes from a point in the future, providing references for his future self to reflect and contemplate. In other words, the second temporality created in a diary entry or a photograph is what creates the present temporality of capturing the present moment in the first place, creating a temporal loop in which the future creates the present, leading to Currie’s suggestion that the “structure of supplementarity is the structure of prolepsis” (137).

These issues are even more abstract when it comes to Adrian’s diary entry, given how it is laid out in a supposedly fragmented manner:

5.4 The question of accumulation. If life is a wager, what form does the bet take? At the racetrack, an accumulator is a bet which rolls on profits from the success of one horse to engross the stake on the next one.

5.5 So a) To what extent might human relationships be expressed in a mathematical or logical formula? And b) If so, what signs might be placed between the integers? Plus and minus, self-evidently; sometimes multiplication, and yes, division. But these signs are limited. Thus an entirely failed relationship might be expressed in terms of both loss/minus and division/reduction, showing a total of zero; whereas an entirely successful

one can be represented by both addition and multiplication. But what of most relationships? Do they not require to be expressed in notations which are logically improbable and mathematically insoluble?

5.6 Thus how might you express an accumulation containing the integers b , a_1 , a_2 , s , v ?

5.7 Or is that the wrong way to put the question and express the accumulation? Is the application of logic to the human condition in and of itself self-defeating? What becomes of a chain of argument when the links are made of different metals, each with a separate frangibility?

5.8 Or is “link” a false metaphor?

5.9 But allowing that it is not, if a link breaks, wherein lies the responsibility for such breaking? On the links immediately on either side, or on the whole chain? But what do we mean by “the whole chain”? How far do the limits of responsibility extend?

6.0 Or we might try to draw the responsibility more narrowly and apportion it more exactly. And not use equations and integers but instead express matters in traditional narrative terminology. So, for instance, if Tony (*The Sense of an Ending* 85-86)

The first thing that comes to mind is how this entry is unlike any conventional diary, given the absence of dates and timings of specific events. One possible reason could be how it is a portion of a longer entry, and that Tony is given this information with the other details deliberately withheld, making it difficult for him to position it in a timeframe. Segmenting the columns based on this level of organisation is a clear representation of how Adrian’s brain functions, with his ability to compartmentalise and categorise according to sequence and level of detail. The spaces between each column are meant to separate the subcategories, with the main number “5” implying that it belongs to a specific moment of contemplation, while the switch to “6” signals a

new train of thought, rendering the incomplete sentence even more intriguing. More importantly, these numbers do not give any sense of how much time has elapsed between each category, which deprives this sequence of any context that shapes meaning. The way that Adrian's diary is structured arguably reflects the novel as a whole. Like the numbers which indicate progression and sequencing, Tony does provide brief descriptions of the transitions between the episodes in his life which helps us follow his narrative. Yet, like the numbers in the diary, these transitions offer an illusory semblance of structure which eventually bring no closer to a complete, coherent narrative.

The mathematical discussion in 5.5 raises a point that can be used to dissect or interpret what we term as "the fictionalisation of narrative time." Mathematical signs, whether multiplication or subtraction, are as Adrian says, "limited." Humans and feelings cannot be represented by integers, given how assigning such numbers is arbitrary in nature. Neither can a successful relationship be measured by "positive" mathematical signs. For an individual of Adrian's intelligence, it seems odd that it would take him this much time to realise that the assurance provided by mathematics in terms of fixed structures and formulas cannot be utilised to measure human relationships. Such an illogical way of using mathematical logic to calculate and measure the indeterminate seems to arise out of desperation; a need to structure reality in a way that makes sense, especially in times when it seems beyond one's control. Even though Tony eventually associates the symbols b , a_1 , a_2 , s , v with who he feels are related, they make very little sense at this juncture. The "link" here, described by Adrian as a false metaphor, was meant to bridge the gaps that are left behind due to the lack of information and inability to establish proper connections, from the full story behind Veronica and Adrian's relationship, to Adrian's suicide, and back to this point in the novel as Tony attempts to decipher the meaning

behind Adrian's diary entries. But to reduce the fluidity of reality to singular connections is too simplistic and even naïve. The line wondering about "a chain of argument when the links are made of different metals, each with a separate frangibility" reveals how the variables that need to be taken into consideration seem to increase not just exponentially, but in a rhizomatic way which extends in different directions, making it even more difficult to contain the equation given the ever-increasing number of factors. Language, both in terms of the written form and mathematical numbers, is thus reduced to a medium which cannot hope to create meaning on its own without establishing a basis and means of interpretation.

Indeed, reading Adrian's diary entry brings to mind Roy Pascal's argument that "[i]t is Sartre's main theme, formulated in a more systematic and dogmatic form by Barthes (*in Le degré zéro*), that the formal structure of the novel, like that of historical narrative, falsifies the very essence of reality as we experience it, since it establishes connexion and coherence whereas in reality events, even psychological events, are random and inscrutable" ("Narrative Fictions and Reality" 46). What Tony expects from Adrian's diary entry are answers which will fill up certain gaps that are missing from his version of events. What he receives instead is more information; that is arguably, even more specific than whatever knowledge he had before, but which leaves him more confused than ever, a reflection of what Pascal terms "[living] in a jumble of pure contingency" (46).

The question of "accumulation", which will be raised again at the end of the novel, is first mentioned in this brief snippet from the diary. The difference between Tony and Adrian's definitions of accumulation is that Adrian raises it as a question, but all we have is the process of him trying to resolve it mathematically. Tony engages it first on Adrian's terms while struggling to apply it to his own life:

Had my life increased, or merely added to itself? This was the question Adrian's fragment set off in me. There had been addition—and subtraction—in my life, but how much multiplication? And this gave me a sense of unease, of unrest. (*The Sense of an Ending* 88)

Tony's life has certainly increased in terms of chronological human years, but the idea of "increase" here is an obvious reference to meaning and experience, while the mathematical signs addition and subtraction references to people and relationships. However, such a crude way of taking stock of one's life is flawed because any measurement of time and experience cannot be reduced to numbers. Adrian's "question of accumulation" seeks to understand the concept of time on its own terms. In some cases, the effects of certain events are amplified, magnifying their importance in the larger scheme of things, while other less important moments are glossed over or forgotten altogether. Yet, Adrian may have faced the same problem that Tony faces now; in the sense that it is theoretically reductive to even attempt a measurement of experiences on an empirical scale. The uncertainty that Tony feels now at this point of the excerpt above also comes from his unspoken fears that there is much more he does not know, and these facts may change how entire events are perceived. In other words, the urgent need to ground reality into an entity that can be controlled and understood is a futile, while the "sense of unease, of unrest" that Tony feels now remains the same even at the end of the novel.

Ironically, what comes to shed even more light on the issue is a piece of evidence that belongs to an even more distant past, resurfacing in an unexpected manner in the mode of Kermode's peripeteia. In a small twist of events, Veronica sends a letter to Tony, the very same one which Tony had sent to Adrian many years earlier soon after having heard from Adrian that he is now seeing Veronica. It is a toxic letter, full of anger and ill-intent, which is understandable

as Tony feels betrayed at that point in time, having broken up with Veronica under unceremonious circumstances and having to deal with the awkward scenario that his ex's new suitor is close friend. Tony immediately feels remorse after reading his own words and in a desperate attempt to relieve himself of any responsibility, he offers a weak explanation that "[he] had been its author then, but was not its author now." In this moment of great regret, Tony tries to gather his senses by structuring his thought processes. This is done by the sequencing of his main concerns, beginning with "[a]t first", followed by "next", "then", and lastly "finally", of disparate events that may be linked in theory, but certainly not in the order he has laid out. Given how each of these thoughts (his own mistakes, Veronica's situation, Adrian and the postcard) are interlinked, it is difficult to believe that Tony's frame of mind is clear enough to distinctly separate out these separate cases. Despite the supposed authenticity of his grief and despair, what takes place is another moment of retrospection. The usage of the past tense, while fulfilling the requirements of narration in the novel, are more distinctive in terms of temporal placement because of the contrast provided by the past instances of present-tense narration.

In a way, the comment on "time's many paradoxes" is reflective of the novel's inherent paradoxes as well. Besides the few melodramatic observations about youth and experience, an unspoken paradox lies in how events can be at their clearest when time has passed and all possible means of authentication are exponentially less useful. Time only seems to matter when it no longer exists, or, to quote Kermode, "[t]o be really free of time we should have, perhaps, to be totally unconscious, or in some other way indifferent to what we normally call real" (57). Barnes's underlying message here seems to be playing on the main paradox associated with time: as much as Tony wants to go back in time to change his actions and create a better future, the

narrative which gives rise to this desire would not even exist if he were to succeed in doing so, creating a temporal paradox with no resolution.

In his urgency to locate the truth, the pacing of the narrative changes rather abruptly. From a slow, contemplative examination of both external surroundings and internal thoughts, Tony's narrative picks up in pacing, moving across weeks in a matter of paragraphs. While the previous events took days (and pages) to cover, events in this space of time are not described in detail, but instead granted brief and vague mentions of remembering that pubs were closed to "the following Friday", and then subsequently on to "the second Friday." Although Tony reassures himself (and the reader), "[t]ime was on [his] side," it is evident that he is so careless with the use of time not because he has an abundance of it, but because he is hoping for the arrival of answers to his questions. After these specific time stamps, the narrative eases into a sort of timeless reality; Tony confesses that he "no longer counted the hours," before a vague arrival at "one early evening." Without any explicit foreshadowing, Tony finds himself face to face with Adrian's son, a possible key to all the puzzles that he has not been able to explain. Reacting in a spontaneous way, Tony introduces himself as "Mary's friend," and for reasons that are not yet clear, incites a relatively confused and panicky response from the young man. All this takes place very quickly in the moment, with no extended observations or details to slow down the narrative and highlight his anxiety. In the space of a few lines, an exchange takes place between the Tony and a character who we can only assume to be Adrian's caretaker:

She looked at me, as if trying to assess my motives and my truthfulness. "Then you'll understand," she said quietly, "won't you?"

"Yes, I do."

And the thing was, I did. I didn't need to talk to the badge man or the male carer. Now I knew. (*The Sense of an Ending* 137)

Unlike most of the other proleptic moments in the story, Tony's affirmation of how he knows what had happened is relatively confusing. Ironically, one of the main reasons is because of its inaccuracy, a fact which we only know in retrospection after reading the entire novel. We are made aware, for instance, of how just baseless his confidence is when what he claims to know is not verified by the carer. Indeed, Tony does not even notice that the carer's question is not "do you" but "won't you", which changes the context of his agreement entirely.

Perhaps the most perplexing aspect of the exchange are the words "Now I knew." Without prior knowledge of how the narrative has experimented with our perception of time so far, this may be read as a simple reemphasis of his thoughts, or even an expression of relief that he finally has a full grasp of all the events. However, the adverb "now" becomes considerably more misleading when we consider how it could be a proleptic moment that is even further in the future than the affirmation before. In simplified terms, Tony's statement ("the thing was, [he] knew") belongs to the narrator's state of mind when recollecting the specific event, which means that he has not yet learnt what has really taken place in its entirety. When he says "Now," we are not entirely sure whether it is in the fictional present of the recollection, or an extended space outside the recollection as an omniscient narrator, who already truly knows how the narrative will end, even its final twists. In retrospect, this applies to all the proleptic moments that came before as well.

THE FINAL TWIST

When the final plot twist takes place at last, it is disturbing how it takes less than three pages to craft an entirely different narrative, while the previous three hundred pages serve as a confusing and ambiguous build up with no actual significance. Time, it seems, serves as an inadequate measurement of significance in this case. While the previous pages and narrative development may have been crucial building blocks for this pivotal moment, the impact it has on the reader pales considerably in terms of degree and importance. Since the last episode with the carer, the only indicators of time passing are a vague expression of “[m]y life continued” and “just like that”, with the sense of time in the narrative remaining fragmented and unstructured as he attempts to live his life as normatively as he can. As Tony occupies his time with meaningless activities, time flows onwards in the narrative without any pauses, reflecting his own admission that he had made very little happen. Veronica’s cold reply to his email prompts a short paragraph of confusion, as her refusal to reveal more information or help him understand leaves him in a state of unease. Beyond this discomfort, the story seems to be heading towards a mundane conclusion which focuses on the protagonist’s internal turmoil and guilt. There is no build-up to what is going to happen, and the pace at which it takes place adds to the element of surprise that comes.

The final moment of reckoning which takes place seems almost a coincidence, as Tony finds himself walking into the same pub he has frequented many times before when looking for Adrian’s son, this time as a random visit. Coincidentally, Adrian’s son enters the pub with his friends soon after, and this second encounter provides a level of discomfort for the younger man. Tony does not think much of this as he is obviously still clueless about what has truly happened, and any conjectures that he may have at this point in time do not indicate any possible hostile

reactions. After an uncomfortable exchange of glances, a young man from Adrian Jr's entourage approaches Tony to clarify certain matters. Tony's state of mind at this juncture has already unwittingly conflated past memories with the present, and his emphasis on the word "ever" when he apologises is confusing for Adrian Jr's friend. Tony's physical self is quite evidently in the same diegetic reality as Adrian Jr's friend is, but when we consider what both parties know respectively, it is evident that they belong to very different worlds based on what they know of the situation. When Tony tries to make his account sound "factual rather than pathetic," it makes little sense to the young man because of how flimsy Tony's summary of his and Adrian Jr's relationship is, with too many details omitted for the sake of conserving time, and also how their narratives differ in terms of their respective experiences with Adrian Jr.

It is almost unsurprising then, when one major piece of the jigsaw helps bridge both realities, if only for a brief, cruel moment in time:

"If you were a friend of his father's—"

"And his mother's."

"Then I think you don't understand." At least he put it differently from others.

"I don't?"

"Mary isn't his mother. Mary's his sister. Adrian's mother died about six months ago. He took it very badly. That's why he's been ... having problems lately." (*The Sense of an Ending* 148)

The sense of vertigo due to a sense of timelessness can only be expressed in terms of mundane actions, which allows a very small pause as the narrative seems to come to a still:

"Automatically, I ate a chip. Then another. There wasn't enough salt on them. That's the disadvantage of fat chips. They have too much potatoey inside. With thin chips, not only is there

more crispy outside, but the salt is better distributed too” (148). The automatic action of eating one chip, followed by another, serves to sequence his actions. More importantly, it slows down the narrative completely as time is removed from the moment. The focalisation on chips and salt at takes us away from the narrator’s thoughts, if there are any, while denying observers information about the amount of time that elapses before Tony comes to his senses. It is quite clear that this moment can be extended if so desired, but it seems that the conscious mind is limited in terms of what information it can deliver in a moment of emotional turmoil.

Any delay does not take away the horror of this very moment, as the narrative constructed by Barnes up to this point has been torn apart. Mark Currie describes how this ending “invalidates the whole of building, updating and modifying... our mental models of the fictional world” (*The Unexpected* 173), and it is not difficult to see why he would say this. The extent of this emotional turmoil extends to the next conscious moment, and the first line of that interval provides another example of how fictional representations of time can address the imperfections of recollections at a fundamental level. On the surface, it looks like a rather short and simplistic sentence: “And later, at home, going over it all, after some time, I understood.” However, the presence of two time stamps, “later” and “after some time”, reveals that much more time has passed, even if there are no specific numbers in terms of hours and minutes.

Indeed, the domino effect from a few simple words that are not even mentioned again at the end is haunting to say the least. As Tony struggles to deal with “the chain of responsibility,” what takes place is an abject, overly simplified summary of the entire novel. With this overwhelming twist in the narrative, the reading at the last climax of the novel with the integers can be revisited and reinterpreted various of ways. The slightly more optimistic reading is that time has revealed all that needs to be known, and Tony finally has a clear view of the entire state

of events, from the minute details to the whole picture. How such abstract symbols can make sense can only be, quoting Adrian, a case of “accumulation.” What is missing, however, takes place in the second possible reading. Based on what is known of Tony so far, there is a high probability that these abstract symbols are nothing more than mathematical equations, scribbled down in a moment of impulse.

This highlights perhaps Barnes’s gravest message with regard to the fictionality of time – the terrible understanding that more time cannot bring meaning to what remains unknown. Given that the measurement of intuitive time extends as much as one’s perception allows, it gives the illusion of hope that questions can be answered and problems can be resolved as long as there is still time for changes to take place. But as Tony feels so acutely, time has stopped moving the moment he realises that the truth he has known all his life no longer holds up. “It was obvious now” is a statement that has enormous ironic potential, with the time stamp of “now” relatively problematic. Tony has no other option but to relapse back into meaningless, abstract musings:

You get towards the end of life—no, not life itself, but of something else: the end of any likelihood of change in that life. You are allowed a long moment of pause, time enough to ask the question: what else have I done wrong? I thought of a bunch of kids in Trafalgar Square. I thought of a young woman dancing, for once in her life. I thought of what I couldn’t know or understand now, of all that couldn’t ever be known or understood. I thought of Adrian’s definition of history. I thought of his son cramming his face into a shelf of quilted toilet tissue in order to avoid me. I thought of a woman frying eggs in a carefree, slapdash way, untroubled when one of them broke in the pan; then the same woman, later, making a secret, horizontal gesture beneath a sunlit wisteria. And I thought of a cresting wave of water, lit by a moon, rushing past and vanishing upstream,

pursued by a band of yelping students whose torchbeams crisscrossed in the dark. (*The Sense of an Ending* 149-150)

This series of thoughts, each one making less sense than the one that came before, illustrates the fragmentary nature of one's memories, especially of the entirety of one's life. The statement "the end of any likelihood of change in that life" refers to the removal of *kairic* moments where events can alter the course of one's life. In other words, the discussion is an examination of resignation. What is important here is not the events that have been recalled, but the analysis of why Tony has resorted to such a thought exercise. Most of these events have a reference to time, emphasising how the moment is an ephemeral one that should be encased in one's memories, such as how a young woman is dancing "for once in her life," or two events involving the same woman taking place at different points in time. Even at this moment of sullen contemplation, it is worth nothing that Tony cannot resist poetising the last moment. The last description of a "crested wave of water, lit by the moon [...]" hearkens to a possibly beautiful moment of youthful exuberance, perhaps a longing for some pastoral past which allows a temporary escape from the horrific reality in which he exists.

The only conclusion that Tony can derive from this series of thoughts is the harsh truth that there is no point thinking about "what else" he might have done wrong. It could have been any of these disparate activities which do not have any visible or meaningful relation to his current plight. The expression "gaps in narrative" takes on a different meaning here. While occasional points of uncertainty are to be expected in any story, the gulf in terms of understanding can never be bridged due to how different the narrator's point of view is from actual state of affairs. There is no clear equation of cause and effect that can be formed, and the *kairic* moments where things could have been changed are too many to follow, and at times, too

subtle to be noticed at all. It may seem easy for Tony to express regret at some of his conduct in the past, yet locating where and when these moments take place in the past can never provide the full picture of his life's events, as specific empirical details are insufficient tools when it comes to examining human thoughts and emotions. Indeed, the fact that these are the memories which are raised when Tony reflects on his past is telling of how he has conducted his life: a fragmentary, almost careless approach more intent on creating a story than actually living in its world.

In a way, *The Sense of an Ending* is an apt title because that is ultimately what we are left with; almost, literally, the “sense” of an ending. There is nothing more to decipher or interpret, unless we choose to ignore Kermode's warning that we may risk mythologising the future and imbuing it with meaning that is a self-serving and imaginary. What Barnes has constructed is a narrative that resembles a poorly constructed labyrinth, with false passages into the unknown and hazy recollections of pathways that may never have existed. Unlike Jack Ferris in *A Goat's Song*, Tony does not possess even the decency to admit that he may have been constructing the entire narrative of delusions based on self-preservation or an appeasement of conscience. Instead, we are treated to a series of philosophical musings about the passing of time and the unreliability of one's memory. It is fitting that the last line—“There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest”—provides the resignation that a narrative is just a consolation for our perpetual inability to understand time and reality, and perhaps the very stories that make up our lives.

CHAPTER FIVE — CONCLUSION

The decisive metaphysical proposition in Roupnel's book is this: Time has but one reality, the reality of the instant. Otherwise put, time is a reality confined to the instant and suspended between two voids. Although time will no doubt be reborn, it must first die. It cannot transport its being from one instant to another in order to forge a duration. The instant is already solitude . . . It is solitude in its barest metaphysical value. Yet an even more poignant solitude confirms the tragic solitude of the instant: through a sort of creative violence, time limited to the instant isolates us not only from others but even from ourselves, since it breaks with our most cherished past.

— Gaston Bachelard, *Intuition of The Instant*

Bachelard's meditation on historian Gaston Roupnel's philosophy of the instant offers an interesting take on this discussion of narrative time, as well as an apt summary of the dissertation so far. According to Bachelard, we restrict our own understanding of time, given how "[t]he human intellect, in its ineptitude to pursue what is vital, immobilises time within an ever-artificial present" (9). Rather than contradict Bergson's concept of *la durée*, Bachelard's intention is to "show how duration can be forged with instants that have no duration" (10). But perhaps the most important and intriguing word that is present in this excerpt is the verb "isolates," given how it captures the essence of my dissertation so far. If lived experience can be reduced to a series of instances, it will lead naturally to the isolation, first from the others who are not able to fully relate or understand an individual's thoughts, or even between individual experiences within his or her own consciousness. Whether it is because of incomplete information or the unfortunate yet inevitable process of forgetting, verifying the authenticity of an event that resides in the past can be ultimately a futile endeavour.

After examining each of the main protagonists' attempt to address existential issues that plague their existence, all three novels have demonstrated that time indeed "offers not only the most difficult but also most important of all phenomenological problems" (Husserl from Brough 504). It is an understatement to say that making objective sense of lived experience is extremely

difficult. Indeed, one of Edmund Husserl's observations is that it is impossible to be conscious of time in the first place, as "[i]t belongs to the essence of lived experiences that must be extended in this fashion, that a punctual phase can never be for itself" (70). The expression "punctual phase" itself presents the inherent contradictions with time that are difficult to resolve, which Paul B. Armstrong observes, "captures the paradox of lived time," given how the "durational width of the present moment may seem a self-evident consequence of time's passing, the present flowing into the future even as it also simultaneously recedes into the past" (*How Literature Plays with the Brain*, 91). This offers a good summary of how problematic the term "lived experience" is even at a fundamental level.

Indeed, the delineation of boundaries between the three loosely defined parts of time serve only as temporary markers to give us a defined sense of lived experience, which is far from the stable, unchanging form of reality that each of the characters seek. Addressing some of Husserl's concerns, Martin Heidegger, and later Paul Ricoeur, established the necessity of utilising hermeneutic phenomenology as a tool to demystify the parameters of subjective lived experiences due to the potential of the disciplines' intersectional possibilities. If phenomenology seeks to "clarify, describe, and make sense of the structures and dynamics of pre-reflective human experience" and hermeneutics "aims to articulate the reflective character of human experience as it manifests in language and other forms of creative signs" (Rosfort, *Abstract*), the novel becomes the site where both approaches are necessary to decipher how lived experience can be formed.

However, to be phenomenologically conscious of time in these moments is an impossibility, even if they are *kairic* ones. If this is true, then making sense of lived experience is even more complex, especially if any instance of lived experience is required to be as authentic

as possible. Neurophenomenologists Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi summarises the predicament with another simple question: “How can we be conscious of that which is no longer or not yet?” To make things even more complicated, how do we know we are conscious of the present, given that present is always moving ahead even before we even recognise its presence? Assuming that the very nature of memory is a hermeneutic conundrum where language can often complicate more than assist with an accurate re-enactment, it is very possible that every event that is recollected is always partially fictional, with the given that a complete narrative never existed in the first place. After all, retaining memories is a mechanism that activates itself based on emotional responses, and finding the right way to describe a past event that is clouded by emotions will always be tainted by subjectivity. As each of the main protagonists in the novels discover in their respective narratives, understanding what takes place in their present is already convoluted and perplexing as it is. Psychologically internalising what potentially has taken place in the past while anticipating what the future may bring further complicates the perception of reality on hand.

This is not a problem if one lives alone on an island like Robinson Crusoe in Daniel Defoe’s imaginative world, where self-deception or delusion can be an effective, albeit relatively unhealthy solution. However, it becomes potentially more challenging when our protagonists want their realities shared and recognised on a collective platform. Coetzee’s protagonist finds herself literally swimming against the tides of historical narratives, attempting to defy possible interpretations of her past in hopes of shaping an identity that allows her to stay in the present. Healy’s protagonist decides that lived experience is too much torture and decides to revisit the past in order to make sense of the present, hoping to alter his current state of reality. Barnes’s protagonist lives in the past as much as he does in the present as he attempts to piece together a

complete narrative of what has transpired. All three share one common denominator — disjointed temporally in their different ways, these characters are extremely sensitive to time. Yet, this heightened sensitivity towards time has not grounded them in any conceivable form of reality, but instead, has distanced them from any semblance of authentic lived experience.

Thus, even if the novel can serve as the site where both issues are approached phenomenologically and hermeneutically, capturing lived experience is far from a coherent process. As Manuel Almagro Jiménez points out, “there is a whole panoply of reflections about the central issues affecting the very mechanics of constructing a text, [namely] the proper way a story should be written, the relationship between representation and its referent in the real, the problem of realism, or the question of authorship” (“Father to my story” 7). These considerations before the conclusion of any narrative are difficult to visualise because of how many there are, and also how impossibly difficult it is to decide which to exclude in order to present the story world in as authentic a way that the author seeks. Of the three main protagonists, Susan Barton and Tony Webster have demonstrated how conveniently ready they are when it comes to the omission of certain important details in their narration. Susan reluctantly acknowledges the existence of Bahia in her memories only after Foe’s extradiegetic character raises it, while Tony’s frequent admission of how clueless he is to his surroundings leads us to wonder whether it is a genuine case of forgetfulness or deliberate deception. On a separate diegetic level, Coetzee and Barnes occupy the authorial position that reflects the role of one’s consciousness in the construction of temporal realities. The former draws our attention to how history can be manipulated and distorted to suit a political agenda, while the latter addresses how making sense of one’s memories is never a singular and fixed narrative.

In view of this, the last chapter of *Foe* does make more sense, where the abstract and surrealistic world represents the reduction of the novel to its bare structures. Constructing a narrative text is, at its core, laying out the structure of events in terms of their order and sequence. Lined next to Jiménez's discussion, Genette's concepts of narratology becomes especially relevant here: the order of events which the narrative is organised; the frequency of how many ways the narrated event takes place; and most importantly, how narrative and discourse time is measured. These considerations form the basis of Jiménez's concerns, and by extension, examines how complex the process of understanding lived experience truly is. From another perspective, "the mechanics of constructing a text" is very similar to how memories are kept within one's consciousness, and how identities and narratives are shaped because of these experiences. Rather than being retained as they originally were where the lived experience took place, every memory has an element of construction involved.

Susan's "presence" in the last chapter of *Foe* has already been discussed earlier, and the case can be made that Jack and Tony both confronted similar metaphorical scenarios when they were going through their struggles and thought processes. The obvious difference is in terms of how the passing of time is described and subsequently utilised to extend their respective narratives. This is more apparent for *A Goat's Song*. Let us revisit these two critical moments side by side:

Now he had to live on in a different world. To transcend. To enter a new story. She must be imagined. He opened a spiral-bound notebook and thought, Here it begins. (Healy, *A Goat's Song* 83-84)

And in *Foe*:

The staircase is dark and mean. On the landing I stumble over a body. It does not stir, it makes no sound. By the light of a match I make out a woman or a girl her feet drawn up inside a long grey dress, her hands folded under her armpits; or is it that her limbs are unnaturally short, the stunted limbs of a cripple? Her face is wrapped in a grey woollen scarf. I begin to unwrap it, but the scarf is endless. Her head lolls. She weighs no more than a sack of straw.

The spiral-bound notebook holds the entire fictional universe that comes after, which is essentially the second half of Healy's novel. This is only something we know after reading the entire novel. At the exact moment when the first chapter ends, literally anything could have taken place after. Yet, when placed in sequence, the transition fits almost perfectly. We have a writer who begins with pieces of his memories, pen in hand, prepared to write out a completely new story world. In this case, Jack is writing about Catherine. To the reader meeting her for the first time, she is literally a mannequin without a history beyond what Jack has loosely narrated. Her face is no different from the figure with her face wrapped in the scarf, as we are given no details about her features. Likewise, the same can be said for the beginning of Barnes's novel, when Tony goes through a series of random, disparate details which resemble leftover parts of an incomplete story world. In this case, these are the fragments of Tony's memories. He remembers them because each of these details meant something to him, a very strong impression left because of how strange and indecipherable that particular moment was, or perhaps how deep a scar was left by a traumatic experience.

Unfortunately, the obvious problem with this seamless transition between the sections of the two novels is that literally *anything* could have been written after Healy's initiation of his new chapter. Ironically, it is how inauthentic these transitions are—in terms of how clean and

abrupt the break was in between the sequences—that displays how making sense of lived experience can never really be a continuous flow of events, and hence, are just as likely to be imagined moments just as they can be fragments of memories. If anything, this moment highlights how any individual's consciousnesses can be equipped with the power of imagination, and by default, is capable of shaping reality according to one's desire. The new beginning, signalled by the words "Here it begins" with an emphasis on the word "Here", is in reality just one of the many new "beginnings," with the point of origin entirely subjected to the individual's choice. To say that this does not constitute authentic lived experience is a bit of an understatement.

To complicate matters further, what happens when the very measurement of reality is already inherently problematic? To revisit the premise of hermeneutic phenomenology, if phenomenology seeks to "clarify, describe, and make sense of the structures and dynamics of pre-reflective human experience" and hermeneutics "aims to articulate the reflective character of human experience as it manifests in language and other forms of creative signs" (Rosfort, *Abstract*), what happens when these forms of measurement are denied to us, or rather, are already tainted or distorted before they can be properly examined? Rather than help make sense of their respective predicaments, it is possible that all three protagonists do eventually discover how time complicates what constitutes lived experience. Time and temporality are ultimately just constructs of human life, illusions that create semblances of meaning. Any time markers that are put in place are imaginary by default, as there are no other means of verification beyond the details in one's internal consciousness. This is demonstrated in the ending sequences in each novel:

But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday.

He turns and turns till he lies at full length, his face to my face. The skin is tight across his bones, his lips are drawn back. I pass a fingernail across his teeth, trying to find a way in.

His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face. (*Foe* 157)

As discussed earlier, it is clear that time does not seem to exist, at least not in any meaningful way in this strange, dystopic realm of *Foe*'s last chapter. This is a strange assessment, as there are still temporal markers which exist in this sequence which is written in the present tense. However, the use of present tense to narrate this scene does not change the fact that it offers very little to distinguish between what J. M. E. McTaggart terms a "tensed" or "untensed" view of time. Taggart introduces the need to distinguish between these two different modes of temporal ordering in his philosophical piece "The Unreality of Time," armed with the main claim that distinguishing different spots of time appear to us as "*prima facie*" — in the sense that there are the positions of "Earlier than some" and "Later than some" as temporal markers (498, capitalisation in original). Between his discussion of the different types of time series, one of his prime contentions was that perception of temporal ordering could be distinguished by whether they were "tensed" or "untensed" — the former requires the temporal point of utterance, while the

latter remains unconstrained by temporal perspective. In this conclusion of *Foe*, the transitive verb “turns and turns” suggests it could be both – while the action of turning implies that change is taking place from a viewer’s perspective, the lack of a concrete, diegetic reality means that temporal perspective may be inconsequential when it comes to determining when it took place.

This serves to show how meaningless any markers of time are. When Friday “turns and turns till he lies at full length,” it does not give us any idea of how much time has elapsed. Every action that is narrated is ultimately in a sequence, but it ends off ultimately in the same way it begins – abruptly. This brings to mind an observation by Peter Brooks: “[i]f the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know to be already in place, already in wait for us to reach it. Perhaps we would do best to speak of the anticipation of retrospection in as our chief tool in making sense of narrative, the master trope of its strange logic” (23). Mark Currie’s reading of Brooks’s quote reveals two abilities of a fictional narrative: “it can ask us to decode events narrated in the present tense as a kind of present, and ask us to view those events as structured in relation to a future which is already there and waiting for us to reach it” (“The Expansion of Tense” 353). But this strange episode with Friday seems to suggest otherwise. There is no future for these events to be structured to, which leaves both the narrator and Friday stranded in a timeless liminal space.

While the *Foe*’s concluding lines were written in present tense, Jack’s last few moments in *A Goat’s Song* are narrated in the past tense, which seems to indicate key differences in terms of approach. *Foe*’s conclusion has an element of timeless immediacy, while *A Goat’s Song* seems to be a recount of events that have already passed. Having said that, I wish to point out here there is actually very little separating this delusional episode from the abstract reality that is in *Foe*. As Brooks as argued, “past tense verbs can be decoded as quasi-present,” which implies

that “there can be no straightforward or precise relation between the tense of a verb and the time to which it refers” (353-354). Currie concludes Brooks’s argument by asserting that “the severing of this relationship makes it possible to live the present in a mode of envisaged retrospect as to experience events tensed as past as a kind of present” (354). In other words, it is fair to say that both episodes are examples of temporal dislocation, even if there are temporal markers to suggest otherwise. Indeed, it is arguable that Jack’s last few moments in the novel are moments of delusion that are even further removed from authentic lived experiences than the strange setting in *Foe*:

He was possessed by a terrible sensation that he was deluding himself. He could not believe it. He searched round in his mind for the signs of insanity, but there were none.

He was in the kitchen of the old light-keepers’ house on Mullet peninsula. It was blowing sand. His world had been magically restored. The nightmare was over.

Jack, she had written, I love you and want to be with you. We have a break this weekend and I’ll be down to see you. There are other people and we could be with them. But we know we want to be with each other. Let’s grow old and sober together.

He saw himself waiting on the new bridge the following afternoon. He saw her alight from the car and begin running towards him. Overcome with happiness he sat there in the December dusk. He hung the cloth out to dry on the line. The bark of a dog flew by. (*Goat’s Song* 408)

All three paragraphs in this very quick sequence could have belonged to very different points in time, leading to the same conclusion that lived experience is very much an illusion. The question of when it actually takes place ceases to matter because of his obsession with the memory of it, and this consequently leads to a conflation of realities: as readers we know that it is a fictional

escapade from the very beginning, so the image of Catherine alighting from the car and running towards him is purely a fantasy created while he sits alone, smiling to himself in the darkness. Whether it is written in past or present tense seems to be inconsequential, perhaps providing a reminder of how “the concept of tense is expanded to articulate the presentification of reading to the depresentification of lived temporality” (Currie, “The Expansion of Tense” 355).

This line of argument suggests that the present is ontologically indistinguishable from both the past and present, given that it is narrative which shapes the perception of time as much as it is time that shapes the narrative, a phenomenon that Paul Ricoeur terms a “hermeneutic circle” given how “reciprocal [...] the relationship of time and narrative is” (“The Expansion of Tense” 355). More importantly, the letter is positioned in such a way that it seems to have an immediate impact in an objective, collective reality. Yet, the fact that it is a fragment of the past means that it could have been easily conceived from Jack’s imagination, or worse still, a letter that was only relevant in the past when Catherine still had feelings for him. In this strange intradiegetic moment, Jack’s struggle with establishing an accurate reading of the letter reflects how “[t]he relation between a written text and the future time of its reading is also a problematic temporal structure with which the novel has always entertained itself” (362); except in this case, it is a letter and not a full-length novel. This attempt “to control the temporal process of reading itself” is more than just a question of accurate discernment. It is an attempt to make sense of his lived experience and a coping mechanism to deal with a reality that causes too much pain.

In the realm of Jack’s consciousness, time has always been fictional. In a way, a split exists in his internal consciousness, mirroring “[t]he impossible interaction between the time locus of the narrator and the real, external time locus of a given reader” (“The Expansion of Tense” 364). This is an apt reflection of the dynamics between an individual’s present

consciousness and the simultaneous attempt to understand his or her past. According to Currie, an “untensed view of time holds that the idea of the present, or the now, is merely psychological and subjective, and that any objective view of time must view all the events in a sequence of time as equally real” (364). This explains how Jack is able to sustain his story world. Even as his physical self may be anchored in the original narrative, his mind exists in an entirely different realm, which makes it difficult to differentiate between what is authentic and what is imagined. This means that any sense of lived experience is likely to be nothing more than an artificial construct.

After the turbulent states of reality in *Foe* and *A Goat’s Song*, *The Sense of an Ending* presents a considerably more mundane conclusion to the story. Just as how the novel began, Tony finds himself entangled in a web of details that do not seem to add up:

You get towards the end of life—no, not life itself, but of something else: the end of any likelihood of change in that life. You are allowed a long moment of pause, time enough to ask the question: what else have I done wrong? I thought of a bunch of kids in Trafalgar Square. I thought of a young woman dancing, for once in her life. I thought of what I couldn’t know or understand now, of all that couldn’t ever be known or understood. I thought of Adrian’s definition of history. I thought of his son cramming his face into a shelf of quilted toilet tissue in order to avoid me. I thought of a woman frying eggs in a carefree, slapdash way, untroubled when one of them broke in the pan; then the same woman, later, making a secret, horizontal gesture beneath a sunlit wisteria. And I thought of a cresting wave of water, lit by a moon, rushing past and vanishing upstream, pursued by a band of yelping students whose torchbeams crisscrossed in the dark.

There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest. (*The Sense of an Ending*)

The question “what else have I done wrong” is too difficult to answer, because it the present perfect tense implies the unknowability of neither the present nor the future. The time marker of “a long moment of pause” does not provide any concrete form of measurement, and more importantly, does not seem to be helpful when it comes to understanding Tony’s perception of lived experience. Finding himself guilt-stricken and desperate for any reprieve, Tony can only reproduce random memories that are no doubt important to him because of emotional impressions, but offer very little beyond that. Even in these moments of supposedly important recollections, there are already signs of imposition. A young woman dancing “for once in her life” has a time marker that does not make any sense. Neither does a woman frying eggs over a span of a few meaningless minutes. In these instances, time arguably complicates matters. The leaps in time between his schooling days and middle-aged present—from Adrian’s definition of history to many years into the future in the café where he meets Adrian Junior—quite clearly operates on the premise that Tony’s search into his past is just as extensive as it is random. Making sense of lived time thus becomes a paradoxical endeavour where it is phenomenologically too complex in terms of its inherent inconsistencies and contradictions to be ever fully understood.

One last interesting way of reading *The Sense of an Ending* lies in the link between the beginning and the end of the novel. In the maze of random incidents and strange details, it is very possible that these two points exist in the same temporality, with all that takes place in between occurring at a pace which is not measured chronologically. As Tony begins the recollection and reconfiguration of his past memories, the entire length of the novel could purely be a moment of

contemplation, an instance of duration that only seemed lengthy because of the accumulated events and exchanges. And perhaps the most significant lesson is the reminder that while Fiction is a simplified version of the social world, even it is often found wanting when it comes to painting a complete story world. Observing brief moments of details in time merely reminds us that there is much more that goes beyond what the eye can see or the mind can comprehend. Coherence, in other words, is an illusion. Perhaps time's relevance to the narrative is understated because it was always, in Roupnel's words, "an artifice of imagination" (14). In retrospect, perhaps time was never meant to be an acceptable measurement of lived experience.

To conclude this dissertation, Heraclitus's famous adage that "you never step into the same river twice" becomes more comprehensible when we consider events not for how they appear in condensed, distorted forms, but in terms of every specific detail that is associated with the very passing of the event. Translated in literal terms, the illusion of continuity that is presented by viewing time as a chronological phenomenon shatters when one recognises how any possible association formed between events are temporary and incomplete even with our best efforts. Lived experience then, in Heraclitus's perspective, remains in a constant state of flux, to be revisited, re-examined and revaluated. Therefore, the formation of one's identity and current state of mind based on past experiences produces an unsolvable paradox — the coexistence of multiple realities involving different temporalities in the same space and time. In a strange, self-isolating way, the protagonists of each of these novels face the same crisis — the refusal to accept life as what it has become.

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