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An Aesthetics of Vulnerability

The Sentimentum and the Novels of Graham Swift

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Abstract

Since the advent of modernism, sentimentality has increasingly fallen from grace as a tenable mode of expression in literary fiction. Originally valued highly, sentimentality has come to be associated with an unrefined sense of taste and with bad faith. In the case of postmodernist fiction, the critical reception of that fiction would have us believe, sentimentality has been finally eclipsed, together with most other modes of affect.

A number of novels by postmodernist authors, however, wed sentimentality as well as other modes of affect with a decidedly postmodernist aesthetics. In this study, I investigate what shape sentimentality may assume, and in what kinds of configurations it may be found, in postmodernist fiction. In the novels I consider, sentimentality is articulated with a postmodernist aesthetics, which involves techniques such as double-coding and reflexivity, but also with a postmodern ethico-spiritual thinking that involves notions of alterity, sensibility and vulnerability. Thus, the novels approach what I call an aesthetics of vulnerability. As a shorthand for the shape sentimentality assumes through this combination of postmodernist aesthetics and ethico-spiritual thinking, I introduce the phrase "the sentimentum".

In uncovering the aesthetics of vulnerability and the nature of the sentimentum, I focus on the novels of the British author, Graham Swift, as these strike me as exemplary for my investigation. Throughout his oeuvre, I argue, Swift approaches a more affirmative vision of a postmodern sentimentality. Thus, Swift's narratives also gradually become more vulnerable in the sense of laying themselves bare to scepticism and criticism, as they display sentimental and romantic notions without qualifying and undermining them.

However, the ambitions of my thesis are both larger and more general than illuminating a single author's oeuvre: I am seeking to alter definitions of postmodernist fiction as well as the terms of its theorization. Hence, in my conclusion, I consider a more general movement toward an aesthetics of vulnerability in postmodernist fiction. I discuss novels by Julian Barnes, Penelope Lively, and Jeanette Winterson in order to show the wider applications of the concepts of an aesthetics of vulnerability and of the sentimentum.

Key words: Twentieth-century-literature, postmodernism, sentimentality, sensibility, affect, emotion, love, ethics, spirituality, the-sentimentum, Swift-Graham, Barnes-Julian, Lively-Penelope, Winterson-Jeanette.

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This book, however, is dedicated to two other women: Astrid Forsten, 1907-1995, from whom I inherited the couch on which much of this thesis took shape, and Karin Winnberg, 1910-1999, from whom I inherited the Buddha that kept peaceful watch as I worked.

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Taste that requires an added element of charm and emotion for its delight, not to speak of adopting this as the measure of its approval, has not yet emerged from barbarism.
—Immanuel Kant

As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older *anomie* of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling.
—Fredric Jameson

. . . Hm . . . Memorable . . . what? (*He peers closer.*) Equinox, memorable equinox. (*He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.*) Memorable equinox? . . . (*Pause. He shrugs his shoulders, peers again at the ledger, reads.*) Farewell to—(*he turns page*)—love.
—*Krapp's Last Tape*, Samuel Beckett

donT geT senTimental. it always ends up dRRiveLLLL.
—"Let Down", Thom Yorke

Introduction

> Once a discourse is thus driven by its own momentum into the backwater of the "unreal", exiled from all gregarity, it has no recourse but to become the site, however exiguous, of an affirmation. That affirmation is, in short, the subject of the book which begins here . . .
> —Roland Barthes

"With the risk of sounding sentimental", Graham Swift said in an interview in 1994, "I have to say that I'm on the side of love against truth. Heart and feeling are important—though that is a point of view that probably won't strike a chord with today's literary critics. I write as a vulnerable human being for other vulnerable human beings" ("Intervju" 30; my translation). Swift would seem to be right: heart and feeling hold few shares in the current critical lingo. They are the poor relatives literary criticism would rather disown, that it feels it has to *condescend* to talk to in their own infantile babbling tongue, but only if absolutely necessary, and typically in passing, whilst discussing "bigger" issues. Moreover, while it is not all that controversial to be "against truth" today, it is uncommon to be on *love*'s side against truth.[1] To claim to be on love's side is to run "the risk of sounding sentimental", and "sentimental" is indeed one of the much-maligned words of the last hundred years or so. From "sentimentality" to "cool": such is the general story of the last few centuries of Western culture, and from the New Criticism through structuralism to deconstruction, literary criticism has followed suit. As the century inaugurated by Nietzsche and Freud progressed, criticism spoke increasingly, and disenchantedly, about "power" and "desire", usually in the same breath. "Love" and "sentimentality", however, have been reserved for historicist discussions of the eighteenth and nineteenth century novel.[2] When it comes to the contemporary novel, it seems

[1] To say that one is "against truth" may mean various things: that one simply does not believe there is such a thing as truth; that one believes that there is no one truth as pertains to an issue, but truths, locally and temporally dependent; or that one acknowledges the existence of truth, but believes that truth is not an end in itself and is not necessarily desirable. Given the epistemology implied throughout Swift's novels, I believe he uses the phrase in the latter sense.

[2] An example of how dominant a signifier "desire" has become is that when Catherine Belsey published her study of *love* stories in Western culture in 1994, she gave it the title *Desire*. Even an older study like Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* ultimately deals with the failure of the American novel to portray adult *sexual desire* and relations. Intimately

impossible to talk about these things. There is no *proper* language for love and sentimentality. One ends up with something undeveloped, embarrassing, primordial, or even obscene, as Roland Barthes suggests in *A Lover's Discourse*: "Discredited by modern opinion, love's sentimentality must be assumed by the amorous subject as a powerful transgression which leaves him alone and exposed; by a reversal of values, it is this sentimentality which today constitutes love's obscenity" (175).

In *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel*, Andrew Gibson makes related observations about the fate of sensibility, a concept historically and semantically closely related, but not identical, to sentimentality.[3] Using the concept in the modified sense, influenced by the ethical thinking of Emmanuel Levinas, of "the power to be affected" (164), Gibson argues that

> sensibility . . . repeatedly turns out to be the problematic other of criticism as will to power, a will that is actually that of criticism itself, but that it insistently descries in the literary work. The advent of theory hardly changes this configuration at all. Rather, the modern subjection of sensibility is precisely completed by theory, not only because of the triumphant prioritization of intellect in the theoretical discourses dominant in the 1970s and 1980s, but because the concept of affect that is dominant in theory—in Foucault, Deleuze and much of Derrida and Lyotard—is of affect as "force" or "libidinal economy", repeatedly theorized in post-Nietzschean, Dionysian, unremittingly virile terms as an active violence, a movement outwards towards an object, rather than susceptibility or openness to the event. (164)

However, Gibson's study, published recently, is itself one of the signs we may now begin to note of unease and discomfort with the expulsion of sensibility, and perhaps also sentimentality (although Gibson prefers a discourse on *affect* to one on emotion and sentimentality), from our critical midst. Notably, we may trace such signs in poststructuralist theory itself, back to the Barthes of the *Fragments* and *Camera Lucida*, as well as the

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connected with the rise in importance of feminist and gender studies, the thinking of desire, or *eros*, has served to preclude a more Platonic and ethico-spiritual notion of love in literary and cultural studies. However, as Danuta Fjellestad suggests, "it is likely that the erotic rhetoric in criticism has reached its point of exhaustion. One of the first signals of it was Kristeva's *Tales of Love* in which she situates the psychoanalytic discourse in the space of love, not, as previously, desire" (204). Lending some support to my ambitions in this study, Fjellestad hazards that "[a] return to issues of love and affection in literature, then, is likely to be the next critical project".

[3] See Jerome McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility* for a thorough discussion of the differences and similarities between the two, as well as their joint historical genesis. See also Fred Kaplan's *Sacred Tears*, especially 16-20.

Derrida of *The Postcard*.[4]

This present study takes heed of those signs. It is animated by my wish to open literary criticism to considerations of what shape sentimentality may take, or in what configurations it may exist, in postmodernist fiction. In my attempt at this opening, I focus on the novels of the British author, Graham Swift, as they strike me as seminal in their blending of sentimentality with postmodernist aesthetics and with a postmodern ethico-spiritual imagination—a blending resulting in what I have chosen to call, in shorthand, "the sentimentum".[5] In postmodernism, I argue, sentimentality is reinscribed in the somewhat different terms of the sentimentum. The various traditional senses of sentimentality persist, but in a new kind of ethico-spiritual and aesthetic configuration. That configuration forms the sentimentum, the nexus of a postmodern sentimentality.

In other words, what I wish to explore in this thesis is what happens to sentimentality when it is placed within the perimeters of the postmodern imagination, with its ethics of alterity and its creed of "indetermanence".[6] One reason for focusing on Swift in this exploration is that his oeuvre forms a capsule history of the development of post-war fiction from modernism through late modernism to postmodernism. As such, Swift's oeuvre lends itself perfectly to a tracing of the emergence of the sentimentum vis-à-vis the two major artistic paradigms of the last hundred years.[7]

More specifically, then, my aim in this study is to read Graham Swift's texts as shaped by a concern with the sentimental, and to investigate how this

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[4] As Diane Elam puts it, Derrida's book "is both larded with philosophical allusions and with explicitly clichéd sentimentality" (149).

[5] I will elaborate my conception of "postmodern ethico-spirituality" in the first chapter of this thesis. For the moment, I will note that by "spiritual" I do not mean religious in the traditional sense—I am rather after the same thing as Ihab Hassan is when he states in a recent interview that "[t]he spiritual extends over a broad band of noetic experiences, from common intuitions to mystical revelations, from aesthetic appreciation to the sentiment of the sublime, from inspiration in science and art to intimations of immortality, and so forth" ("Postmodernism, Etc." 369). Like Hassan, I am "interested in discovering, or rather, rediscovering, the relations between the spiritual impulse of human beings and our daily lives in a culture of irony, kitsch, disbelief" and "particularly interested in discerning the nexus between spirit, nihilism, and language" (369). Cf. Susan Sontag's swift definition in "The Aesthetics of Silence": "Spirituality = plans, terminologies, ideas of deportment aimed at resolving the painful structural contradictions inherent in the human situation, at the completion of human consciousness, at transcendence" (181).

[6] The term "indetermanence" was coined by Ihab Hassan; it denotes a dialogic of indeterminacy and immanence, "indeterminacy lodged in immanence". See "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" (92-93) for an elaboration of the term.

[7] I will restrict myself in this study to Swift's novels, for reasons of space and cohesion, but also because the short stories collected in *Learning to Swim* are seldom aesthetically postmodernist in an obvious way and hence do not bear directly on the discussion of the sentimentum.

concern activates and determines both the themes and the forms of his novels. As this concern structures themes and forms, the texts disengage with the sense of abandon found in the ontological and epistemological play typical of authors branded "postmodernist"; or, to be more precise, the sense of abandon typically identified as postmodernist *by critics*. Through a postmodernist aesthetics that re-examines rather than renounces realism, and that allows sentimental and ironic modes equal prominence, Swift's oeuvre moves toward the expression of the sentimentum and toward an aesthetics of vulnerability. In this way, a reconciliation of realist referential pretences and postmodernist textual play takes place, as well as a reconciliation of sentimentality and irony. Both these reconciliations are integral to the sentimentum.

I describe, then, a temporal transition: throughout his oeuvre, Swift moves toward the fulfilment of what I call an aesthetics of vulnerability, which allows what I call the sentimentum place within a postmodernism typically described as ironic, parodic and marked by what Fredric Jameson has called "the waning of affect". By an aesthetics of vulnerability, I mean an aesthetics which, still governed by a postmodern imagination, discards to some extent the incessant irony and self-consciousness we have come to associate with postmodernist fiction, and which thus risks what has become an impeccable relativism for the benefit of a more affirmative turn. In other words, this aesthetics of vulnerability entails the baring of the text to critical scorn through the text's flaunting of beliefs that in their very moment of affirmation are fragile and vulnerable to scepticism as well as cynicism.[8] This aesthetics also works on a more thematic level, as the text of the sentimentum dramatizes an ethics of alterity that involves the laying bare of oneself to wounding by the other, the making-vulnerable of oneself. Both this aesthetics of vulnerability and the ethics of vulnerability just touched upon are, again, gradually more pronounced and affirmed through each successive installment in Swift's oeuvre.

However, I do not introduce the concepts of the sentimentum and of an aesthetics of vulnerability simply as a means of understanding the works of one single author. My ambition is to bring attention to an aesthetic and thematic configuration that may be found in a number of postmodernist novels. Hence, in my conclusion, I present comparative and complementary readings of novels by Julian Barnes, Penelope Lively and Jeanette Winterson that illustrate the wider application of the concept of the sentimentum. What

[8] This is also the case with Derrida's *The Postcard*; as Diane Elam emphasizes in her discussion of Derrida's text, though, "something more than either an inflated sense of the significance of his own personal life or an unavowable desire on Derrida's part to make himself a laughing stock seems to be at stake here" (149).

interests me in the novels of Swift, Barnes, Lively and Winterson is their reinscription—and reinvention—of an ethico-spiritual vision *from within* the thematics and forms of postmodern discourse, without the result that the sceptical and critical imagination of postmodernism stifles or decentres the ethical, the spiritual, or, indeed, the sentimental.

Once again, though, criticism has not, so far, been particularly awake to this aspect of postmodernist fiction. Hence, in what follows in this introduction, I survey the critical discourses on postmodernist fiction in general and on Swift's works in particular, in order to see in what ways issues of sentimentality, ethics and spirituality have been accommodated in those discourses, and to locate the gaps I wish to fill and the resistances I wish to loosen. This introduction then rounds off with an outline of my argument in the following chapters, which include an elaboration of my conceptions of postmodernism and of the sentimentum, readings of Swift's six novels to date, as well as a conclusion in which I broaden my critical outlook.

Reclamation work: Aspects of the sentimentum in the critical discourse on postmodernism

As I touched upon above, sentimentality, not to say any mode of affect, has been viewed as being at odds with the aesthetics and politics of postmodernism, as have to a large extent the other aspects—if divide them we must—of the sentimentum: ethics and spirituality. While ethics and spirituality have begun to be re-thought within postmodern philosophy in the wake of, for instance, Levinas, Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion, the notion of "the waning of affect" presented by Jameson in his influential essay on postmodernism has pretty much reigned supreme.[9] Jameson's assessment strikes me as unduly facile, though. Juxtaposing Vincent Van Gogh's painting "A Pair of Boots" with Andy Warhol's "Diamond Dust Shoes", Jameson finds in the former the possibility of re-establishing a context for the work and of recreating the work as a socially symbolic act invested with affect, whereas the latter is just a mechanical reproduction and reification, resulting in a fetish devoid of affective charge. Since Jameson wants to extrapolate from this juxtaposition and make a point about modernism and postmodernism in general, the main problem to me here is that Van Gogh's painting is not *the* instance of High Modernism, and neither is Warhol's *the* instance of postmodernism.[10] Rather, both paintings are embryonic in relation

[9] See *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, especially 10-16.

[10] Charles Bernstein conducts a similar critique in "In the Middle of Modernism in the Middle of Capitalism on the Outskirts of New York": "Jameson starts with an overgeneralization: that the

to the respective movements. Furthermore, as Hal Foster illustrates in a recent study, Warhol's images may be read "as referential *and* simulacral, connected *and* disconnected, affective *and* affectless, critical *and* complacent", in terms of what Foster calls "*traumatic realism*" (*The Return of the Real* 130).

Still, while a change seems on the way in the thinking of affect within postmodernism, as evidenced by for example Gibson and Foster, this thinking is still usually marked by a sense of contradiction or anomaly. At any rate, it seldom—if at all—links affect to sentimentality or sensibility. For instance, Brian Massumi, in an essay titled "The Autonomy of Affect", notes that "[t]here seems to be a growing feeling within media, literary and art theory that affect is central to an understanding of our information and image-based late-capitalist culture, in which so-called master narratives are perceived to have foundered", and that "Fredric Jameson notwithstanding, belief has waned for many, but not affect" (221). According to Massumi, "[t]he problem is that there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect" (221). He also suggests that ethics be "a designation for the project of thinking affect" (222). Thus, it may seem that my thinking follows Massumi's. However, Massumi's conception of affect is cast in distinctly Deleuze-Guattarian terms, involving quantum or virtual states, infinite speeds, schizophrenic bursts.[11] It also turns out that "[t]he implied ethics of the project is the value attached—without foundation, with desire only—to the multiplication of the powers of existence, to ever-divergent regimes of action and expression" (227). In other words, Massumi's discourse on affect (rather than *of* affect) becomes one of desire, of power, of action and expression, rather than the one of receptivity and disinterested care that I am concerned with here, following primarily Levinas. It is thus not surprising that Massumi proceeds to think affect along a distinctly political axis, concluding with observations of partisan politics vis-à-vis manipulations of affect via the media, and suggesting that "[a]ffect holds a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology" (235).

Now, while Massumi's argument is fine per se, it serves as an illustration of how I do *not* primarily think the ethico-emotional throughout

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works of the modernists are completely assimilated by the culture and now seem to artists 'like a set of dead classics' [p. 56]. He then describes the 'deconstruction of expression' as evidenced in the movement from 'high-modernist' (?) Vincent Van Gogh to '*the* central figure in contemporary visual arts', Andy Warhol (a kind of postmodern hyperbole that sacrifices critical distance for dubious leveling)" (92).

[11] Cf. Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What Is Philosophy?*. In the latter, Deleuze and Guattari champion "the concept", which is the product of philosophy and "is *infinite through its survey or its speed*" (21), above "the function", which is "a freeze-frame", "a Slow-motion" (118), the petrified object of science.

this study: through desire, power, action, speed. Rather, I think it through receptivity, vulnerability, disinterestedness, slow-motion (which is not the same as freeze-frame). Thus, I arrive at the postmodern form of sentimentality and of sensibility involved in the sentimentum.

However, I am indeed also interested in traces of a more traditional sentimentality, mainly involved in discourses of love and mourning, and in how that sentimentality attains a quality tenable or plausible in our postmodern clime—and in postmodernist fiction. Critical interest in this aspect of postmodernism and of postmodernist fiction has been scarce, as evidenced by the fact that when I carried out combined searches of the *MLA Bibliography* for "postmodernism" and "love", "emotions", "feelings", "affect", "sentiment" and "sentimentality", I came up with, respectively, eight, three, three, two, zero and zero entries. Subsequently checking all the *MLA Bibliography* entries for a number of British authors of roughly the same (postmodern) generation as Swift,[12] I came up with eight hundred and seventy-seven articles, but only one that clearly deals with love. It is an article on Ian McEwan's fiction, and it is symptomatically called "The Absurdity of Love: Parodic Relationships in Ian McEwan's 'Reflections of A Kept Age' and 'Dead as They Come'" (Slay). As we can see, then, if talked about at all in conjunction with contemporary literature, love is absurd and relationships are parodic.

This ousting of love from the postmodern temple is not surprising, however, if we recall Umberto Eco's famous definition of postmodernism in his *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*:

> I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, "I love you madly", because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly". At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this, she will have received a declaration of love all the same. Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated, but will consciously and with

[12] The authors were, besides Swift, Peter Ackroyd, Martin Amis, John Banville, Julian Barnes, Angela Carter, Bruce Chatwin, Jenny Diski, Kazuo Ishiguro, Ian McEwan, Timothy Mo, Ben Okri, Caryl Phillips, Salman Rushdie, D.M. Thomas and Jeanette Winterson.

> pleasure play the game of irony . . . But both will have succeeded, once again, in speaking of love. (67)

Thus, Eco is simultaneously one of the few to discuss postmodernism in terms of love, and the one to elaborately establish "genuine", unabashed love as, if not untenable, then unspeakable in that same postmodernism.

In her discussion of British postmodernist authors in the chapter of *Desire* called "Postmodern Love", Catherine Belsey adheres much to Eco's notion of postmodern love as ironic double coding. However, she also suggests that loving in postmodernity may amount to fantasizing against better knowledge: "To the degree . . . that postmodernity . . . represents a radically sceptical attitude to metaphysics, a fundamental questioning of presence, transcendence, certainty and all absolutes, the postmodern condition brings with it an incredulity towards true love" (72). Love, in Belsey's account, is first and foremost erotic, desirous, passionate; that is, while it may be as much "of the soul" as "of the flesh", love in Belsey's discussion of postmodernist fiction does not denote the true ethical moment in the Levinasian sense, nor does it denote the more traditional and perhaps less radical notion of *agape*. Rather, Belsey's argument vacillates somewhat confusingly between the terms "love", "desire" and "sexuality": "[D]esire is more voluble than ever before . . . It produces a proliferation of knowledges: therapies, sexologies, arts of love. . . . And above all desire tells stories—at the cinema, in the popular press, on television ('every other night, on TV, someone says: *I love you*')" (76). To me, there are two problems with Belsey's discussion: first, it does not problematize, complexify and multiply the meanings of "love" and "desire", and second, it stays with the desiring subject which is bound up in itself, that is, the modern self. I would, contrastingly, like to privilege a notion of love not as desirous, but as disinterested, the offering of oneself to and for the other.

Nonetheless, Belsey has many good points about love/desire in postmodernist fiction. She refers to the postmodern ironies and indeterminacies of Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* and *Talking It Over*, Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* and *Written on the Body*, A.S. Byatt's *Possession* and Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, and notes these novels' simultaneous inscription and subversion of the romance paradigm. Postmodern love, Belsey concludes, is "at once sceptical and idealizing, and therefore restless, unsatisfied, dis-placed and, in the last analysis, solitary" (91). This could indeed be an assessment of Bill Unwin, the narrator of Swift's *Ever After*, but to me Belsey's conclusion is unduly overstated: at once sceptical and idealizing, yes; necessarily unsatisfied and solitary, no. I would maintain that both satisfaction and a genuine romantic bond are

possible in postmodernism, and in postmodernist fiction.

Considering such a possibility, but also reminding ourselves that love is intricately linked to loss, we should note Brian McHale's grand gesture of concluding that postmodernist fiction is primarily about not only love, but also death (*Postmodernist Fiction* 219-32). However, McHale's discussion of love and death in the postmodernist novel focuses quite exclusively on formal aspects of narrative and does not engage with broader ethico-spiritual issues. Thus, although his argument is largely convincing as such, McHale does not quite approach the kind of discourse on love and death that I am interested in here. To begin with, McHale identifies love with "erotic love" and the "'romantic triangle' of desire and rivalry" (222). Describing "[t]he author's relation to his or her characters, too . . . as a form of love", McHale does invest that relation with more than eroticism when he points to the condition "where the author respects and takes delight in the characters' independent existence". Turning next to the relationship between text and reader, however, he speaks again of "the erotic relation" and of narratives as seductive, "in the sense that they solicit and attempt to manipulate relationship". What McHale is primarily interested in is love as "metalepsis"; that is, "[i]f authors love their characters, and if texts seduce their readers, then these relations involve violations of ontological boundaries". Of course, "these metaleptic relations are permanent features of modern western literature", but whereas "'traditional' fiction keeps them more or less in the background, out of reach of fictional self-consciousness . . . postmodernist writing systematically foregrounds them" (222-23). Postmodernist writing does this, McHale argues, chiefly by recourse to the second-person pronoun, "you", directly addressing the reader. This one-way communication is often even abusive, something McHale reconciles with the notion of love by asserting that the abuse of the reader "may function as a seductive strategy, a 'lover's quarrel' deliberately staged as the prelude to a tender reconciliation" (226). McHale concludes his discussion by stating that "[i]t should be clear now what I mean when I say postmodernist writing is 'about' love. I am not so interested in its potential for representing love between fictional characters, or for investigating the theme of love . . . , as in its modeling of erotic relations through foregrounded violations of ontological boundaries" (227). Once again, eroticism and violation are the terms of love for McHale, which suggests that he is actually operating with decidedly *modern*, profane notions of love.

More rewarding for my purposes in this thesis—that is, the projection of the sentimentum and the location of its various aspects in postmodernist fiction and in the discourse on postmodernist fiction—is McHale's discussion of death. McHale begins the discussion by noting how the deathbed scenes of

eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction are transformed in modernist fiction, "turned inward", into the device of the deathbed monologue (228). In the deathbed monologue, "life has been equated with discourse, death with the end of discourse and silence". The classical forerunner of this position is of course Scheherazade, who has to continue telling her stories in order to literally survive. Postmodernism takes this awareness one step further, bringing it into the foreground. In postmodernist fiction, the narrator must continue to speak in order to *literarily* survive; that is, the narrator only exists in terms of the fiction s/he is producing, and at the point the production of discourse ends, the narrator ends. Notable in this respect are, in McHale's view, texts by John Barth, Steve Katz, Maggie Gee, J.M.G. LeClézio and Raymond Federman, with Laurence Sterne as a forerunner.

Postmodernism not only foregrounds this attempt at escaping death, however. Some "postmodernist writers have attempted to imagine transcendence; filibustering fate even beyond the supposedly ultimate limit of death itself, they project discourse *into* death" (230). McHale cites texts by Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, Flann O'Brien, Guy Davenport, Stanley Elkin and Russell Hoban as examples of this attempt at transcendence. (I may add Swift to that list; in *Out of This World*, Harry Beech's dead wife Anne narrates one chapter, and in *Last Orders* Jack Dodds, whose ashes are being carried to the sea, does the same.) Following Gabriel Josipovici, McHale ends up with the fruitful notion of postmodernist fiction, especially in its most metafictional form, as a dress-rehearsal for death: "the shattering of the fictional illusion leaves the reader 'outside' the fictional consciousness with which he or she has been identifying, forcing the reader to give up this consciousness and, by analogy, to give up her or his own, in a kind of dress-rehearsal for death" (231).

As in the case of love, though, McHale does not enter into any elaborate discussion of the spiritual or the ethical. McHale is interested finally not in the possibilities and actualities of death as a theme in postmodernist fiction, but in its metaleptic function: "[p]ostmodernist writing models or simulates death; it produces simulacra of death through confrontations between worlds, through transgressions of ontological levels or boundaries" (232). Hence, McHale's concluding claim has a somewhat hollow ring, as he writes that since "[w]e have all but lost the *ars moriendi* . . . [p]ostmodernist writing may be one of our last resources for preparing ourselves, in imagination, for the single act which we must assuredly all perform unaided, with no hope of doing it over if we get it wrong the first time"; it seems to me unlikely that anyone would find the basis and strength for dying well by reading *Lost in the Funhouse* or *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Nonetheless, McHale's suggestions must have had an influence on the only existing full-length study of love in postmodernist fiction: *Postmodern Discourses of Love* by Mira Sakrajda.[13] Sakrajda's thesis contains analyses of works by Pynchon, Barth, Coover, Gass and Barthelme, that is, the literary tricksters of the first wave of American postmodernist fiction. Sakrajda "seeks to demonstrate that postmodernism should be viewed as intellectually and emotionally ambivalent rather than totally liberated from the 'constraints' of Western cultural tradition which embraces such principles as center, value and meaning" (1356A). In her reading of Pynchon, she "focuses on three works in which the theme of caring and human connectedness vis-a-vis [*sic*] entropic disintegration is most relevant" and shows "that in Pynchon's fiction 'continuities' and 'humanist essences' are not simply inscribed and then subverted—they linger on amidst what appears to be a holocaust of value and meaning". Obviously taking the cue from McHale, she then reveals in her discussion of "the literary appropriations of love in seminal metafictions by Barth, Coover and Gass" that "although all autotelic writing shifts the problematics of love onto the problematics of discourse, individual works differ considerably in how they negotiate their relation in the world". The examination of Barthelme's short fiction "traces Barthelme's effort to 'enspirit the spiritless', at whose basis is his assertion of the primacy of personal love that spills over to the affirmation of love in general". Sakrajda's concluding remarks "concern the possibility of reinventing spirituality within the parameters of postmodernism". She thus covers a lot of the ground I wish to cover in the present thesis, albeit with a focus on five authors who are somewhat different in their (postmodern) temperament from Swift.

If we broaden our discussion to include the more widely encompassing signifier "emotion", the most interesting book on postmodernism to appear is surely the volume titled *Emotion in Postmodernism* (Hoffmann and Hornung, eds.). A collection of papers from a symposium on the subject, the volume does however not deliver anything like the affirmation I am striving toward, and which I intend to show in this thesis that Swift and other postmodern writers are striving toward. Although the preface states that "these articles demonstrate the necessity of re-evaluating the role of emotion in our postmodern times to move beyond Fredric Jameson's schematic position about the waning of affect", the opening sentence of the circular announcing the symposium reads: "It is hardly surprising that displays of emotion appear to be absent from postmodern art and postmodern discourse" (qtd. in Bertens

[13] Written as a dissertation under the name Miroslawa Kozyra-Sakrajda, *Postmodern Discourses of Love* is in the process of being published by Peter Lang. I must make do here with the entry in *Dissertation Abstracts International*.

25). The articles duly view emotion in postmodernism as a problematic anomaly, or as something to be sought out in hitherto untrod ways and places.[14] Even those sceptical toward the notion that postmodernism self-evidently precludes emotion are at a loss when trying to find counter-evidence. Significantly, this holds for the field of literature too: in his essay on emotion in postmodernist fiction, Hans Bertens states that "I have no quarrel with the claim that emotion is largely absent from postmodern art (literary art, that is). What I take exception to is the idea that this is hardly surprising" (28). That is, Bertens takes it for granted that emotion *is* absent from postmodernist literature, but does not believe that emotion must *necessarily* be absent from postmodernist literature. Indeed, as one reads on in his article, one finds him observing that "[it does] not necessarily follow that the deconstruction of character that we see in a good many postmodern novels should inevitably lead to an absence of emotion. . . . One can agree that postmodern characters lack stability but such a lack of stability does not preclude emotion; it is, on the contrary, a wellspring of—usually contradictory—emotions" (28). Bertens cites as an actual exemplar of that wellspring of emotions the character Bloch in Peter Handke's *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* (*The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*). However, and this is where things get very interesting, Bertens concludes that "yet, while the postmodern dismissal of autonomy and the subsequent turn towards agency does on the theoretical level not at all exclude emotion, as Bloch's example illustrates, *one hesitates to call Bloch postmodern exactly because he displays powerful, even if confused, emotions*" (29; emphasis mine). This hesitation on the part of Bertens seems to me highly indicative of the anxiety and reluctance among critics as regards the accommodation of

[14] I will restrict my discussion here to the article by Hans Bertens. Let me, however, give a few brief quotes to show the tenor of other articles: "[In postmodern fiction] integrating feelings like joy, anxiety, or pain often lose their clearcut contours, are diffused if they are registered at all into what one might call 'mood', which itself does not necessarily have a definable cause, but is rather marked by indecision as to its reason and its target" (Hoffmann 188); "[E]motions in postmodernity . . . do not represent an inner self or a core of existence. Rather, they have a shallow character" (Vester 241); "[Postmodernism] has led to an overloading of aesthetic distance, to a point where emotion is shunned and cannot be rendered any more without being immediately ironized, or at least relativized and questioned" (Grabes 335); "[T]here has been an unmistakable return of emotion, both in art and in literature, since the mid-Seventies. . . . Yet one has to say that even there the manner of representation is throughout distanced and cool, as if the narrators were observing animals in a laboratory" (Grabes 341-42); "Postmodern literature arouses neither emotions nor tears" (Keitel 350); "I think that remnants or residues of an emotional involvement with the literary text do indeed surface in reading postmodern texts. Here, however—as opposed to conventions in the Victorian novel—the traces of affective involvement in the reading process are converted into *unspecific* reactions" (Keitel 352). I am not suggesting that these statements are necessarily wrong, but that they are *over*statements or only hold for certain instances of postmodernist fiction.

emotion within the perimeters of postmodernism.

After having made his conclusion about Bloch, Bertens enters upon an extensive discussion of postmodernist vis-à-vis modernist visual art that eventually yields Bertens's actual notion of what constitutes postmodern literary art:

> Postmodern visual art continues modernism's discursivity in radicalizing the anti-representationalist impulse that is latently present in modernist art while it adopts a figuralism that is wholly at odds with visual modernism. Postmodern literary art only radicalizes that anti-representationalist impulse, its ironical perspective leading to an intellectualism that leaves no room for such worldly matters as emotions. (34)

This may be true of the, interestingly very few, examples of American postmodernist fiction that Bertens cites: Pynchon's *Vineland* and Doctorow's *Ragtime*. As I argue, however, it is not patently true of many other, particularly British, postmodernist works of fiction.

An explanation of how Bertens reaches his conclusion—that is, that emotion is absent from postmodernist fiction—is found if we turn to the premise of his essay, stated at its beginning: "[I]n postmodern times James Joyce's Molly Bloom would not be in bed, between waking and sleeping, and reserve her thoughts, if we may call them thoughts, to herself, but would instead offer them to the world on the Oprah Winfrey show" (25). Since Bertens is unable to locate this juxtaposition of Bloom and Winfrey, or a similar juxtaposition, in postmodernist fiction, he concludes that "postmodern fiction can only ironize and caricature [contemporary] culture. In spite of all claims that postmodernism has closed the gap between élite and mass culture it emphatically has not and one can safely predict that it will not do so either: postmodernism feels indeed free to eclectically ransack it, but its attitude towards mass culture is one of undisguised disdain" (34). As one can infer from this assessment, another of Bertens's premises is that in postmodern times emotion is categorically public, televised, hyperreal; hence the need in an accurate postmodern portrayal of emotion to have it spoken and acted out in front of a live studio audience and, beyond the cameras, a multi-million TV audience. Indeed, Bertens goes on to refer to the Baudrillardean and Jamesonian notion that "with the disappearance of the real it has become impossible to have emotions that engage an authentic reality" (34). However, Bertens's point is precisely the one I would make: that Jameson and Baudrillard have overstated the disappearance of the real; to which I would add that emotions that have as their subjects and objects, as it were, the simulacrum or the hyperreal are still emotions. All the same, although

Bertens claims that postmodernist fiction need not necessarily be emotionally bereft, he finds that it actually is. Interestingly for my purposes, Bertens finally reveals that such is the case with British postmodernist fiction as well: "Unfortunately, virtually all postmodern writers would seem to subscribe to this bleak and hopeless vision of lost authenticity—and not just in the U.S. In her recent study of English fiction since the 1960s Patricia Waugh tells us that over the last thirty years English writers, too, have been busy packaging unrelieved gloom in postmodern wrappings" (36).[15] Needless to say, I do not agree with this assessment, and will offer ample evidence to the contrary in my readings of Swift in chapters two through four, and with reference to other authors in my conclusion.

It transpires, however, that Bertens would argue that the kind of emotional structures and representations that I have in mind are not what postmodernist fiction ought to deal with were it to portray postmodern culture and society as they now stand: "Postmodern fiction does not deal adequately with emotion because its implicit and rather élitist humanism has no way of coping with the public display of emotions that day after day ravage our television screens" (37). Yet, look at Bertens's choice of words: "ravage", indeed—Bertens betrays his own distance from, and dislike of, those public displays of emotions, just like anyone who is able to identify the mechanisms and stakes involved in those displays would. Bertens seems to suggest that the closing of the gap between élite and mass culture would entail a *complicity* with contemporary popular culture on the part of postmodern art. I fail to see why this should be the case, however. As theorists like Charles Jencks and Linda Hutcheon have observed, the characteristic and resourcefulness of postmodernist art lies precisely in its double coding, in its simultaneous inscription and subversion. Hence, it is expected that postmodernist fiction inscribe mass culture and subject it to a critique—as long as it also subjects élite culture to a critique, and not least subjects itself to a critique, ultimately subjecting those critiques in turn to a critique, and so on, in a revolving spiral of, not dialectic, but dialogic, reasoning.

Staying with the issue of affect, or emotion, I would like to turn now to Cristopher Nash's recent book, *The Unravelling of the Postmodern Mind*. The blurb for the book is promising: "Instead of looking at the world through the filter of philosophical abstraction, [Nash's book] is expressly and radically about affect. About what it feels like to (want to) be postmodern". However, Nash does resort to what constitutes an abstraction and a kind of master narrative of postmodernism, as he sets himself the task of showing

[15] Bertens is referring to Waugh's *The Harvest of the Sixties*, which, incidentally, does not present as unnuanced a view of English literature as Bertens suggests.

how postmodern philosophical tenets and postmodernist aesthetic practices correspond to the psychological and behavioural profile of clinical narcissism or "narcissance", as Nash chooses to call it in order to mark a difference from the popular connotations of "narcissism". By way of analogy, postmodern notions of the decentring or death of the subject, of the death of the author and the end of originality, of self-consciousness, of self-reflexive and intertextual artistic practices, of the pluralization of, and oscillation between, beliefs and perspectives are explained as the symptoms of a narcissant frame of mind. As a result, Nash's argument is not very pluralistic itself. It stays with the emotional register of the narcissant, which entails "a shallowness of emotional life in relation to others and a shunning of intimacy", "extreme depression and feelings of emptiness alternating with manic hyperactivity and elation" and "a chronic need to damp-down deeper-running emotional affect" (61). The lengthier section of the book that focuses on affect is called "Emotional Resources: Depression, Mania, Paranoia, Apathy", which indicates, somewhat ironically, that postmodernism is *not* very emotionally resourceful. Indeed, any notion of sentimentality, for instance, is reserved for Nash's argument that postmodernism "has been especially effective in attacking the slick glamour-shielded-and-wielded 'clean' *sentimental* middle-class conformism that first inspired a generation growing up in the 1950s and 1960s to postmodern revolt" (204; emphasis mine). Now, Nash may be right to a large extent: narcissant traits and their increase in recent years may account for the formulation of postmodernism and the successful dissemination of its theories and practices. However, I doubt that this is the whole story. In tracing the persistence of the sentimental in postmodernism and in locating an ethics of alterity at work in postmodernist fiction, I establish an alternative or complement to Nash's "postmodern world picture".

Refocusing my discussion onto said ethics of alterity, I may note that the same people who organized the symposium that yielded *Emotion in Postmodernism* put together, only one year earlier, a symposium on postmodernism and ethics, papers from which were collected in the volume *Ethics and Aesthetics: The Moral Turn of Postmodernism*. However, the discussions in the two volumes seldom overlap or enter into dialogue with one another. Hence, they do not begin to establish the convergence of emotion and ethics that I am interested in. Still, the discussions in *Ethics and Aesthetics* do, as the title signals, establish a connection between ethics and aesthetics, and many of the articles do engage Levinas, Bauman and a few other of the philosophers of postmodern ethics which I lean on here. Yet, they do not bring the full resources of postmodern ethico-aesthetics to bear on postmodernist fiction. As with *Emotion in Postmodernism*, this is much

due to the various scholars' narrow notions of what constitutes postmodernist fiction.

For instance, Christopher Butler's aim is "to describe some of the moral dilemmas which arise within much postmodern art and theory, given its inadequate conception of the person (and of moral sentiment)" (69). To Butler, "[t]he point of the [postmodern] work seems to reside in our grasp of the epistemology behind its aesthetic strategy, rather than its human content, and it too often carries little more than a (political) message about the circumstances of its own production" (69). Butler leaves to a footnote his qualification that his "arguments also apply . . . to much of the work of Apple, Barth, Barthelme, Brautigan, Calvino, Davenport, De Lillo [*sic*], Federman, Gass, Handke, Michaels, Robbe-Grillet, Sukenick and Von-negut . . . [*b*]*ut not* . . . and marking a significant difference, to Abish, Barthes, Beckett, Borges, Butor, Carter, Fowles, Gray, Hawkes, Kosinski, Ondaatje, Pynchon, Rushdie, . . . Simon, Sorrentino, Spark, and others" (71, n.6; emphasis mine). Although Butler admits, then, that there are postmodern authors who do not solely deal in a somewhat dispassionate, aloof self-referentiality, it would have been interesting to learn exactly how DeLillo and Vonnegut are significantly different to Hawkes and Pynchon, and that to the disadvantage of the former. Nevertheless, using Robert Coover's *Gerald's Party* as his illustration, Butler concludes that in postmodernist fiction, "[t]he focus has shifted, from emotional attitudes which imply the perception of an autonomous *person* toward an 'intellectual' focusing of attention, devoid of sympathetic moral sentiment" (73). However, while Butler's general argument, about the dilemmas of postmodern moral philosophy and the inadequacy of much postmodern art in presenting characters that elicit sympathy, is well-sustained and raises many important questions, his assessment of postmodern fiction is ultimately not convincing, in that it glosses over the variety of said fiction; Butler does not acknowledge the accumulating breadth of postmodern thought and art over the last two decades. Butler faults postmodernism in general for not formulating a communal vision that accommodates the individual within the grid of interpersonal relations and vice versa. However, we do not have to look long for texts that manage to articulate such a communal vision in a decidedly postmodern language, either in philosophy (Bauman's *Postmodern Ethics*) or in literature (Swift's *Last Orders*).

We have to look to Gibson's *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel* for an elaborate account of what a postmodern ethics might entail vis-à-vis postmodernist fiction. Gibson refers quite extensively to B.S. Johnson, Robert Pinget, Beckett, Jean Rhys, Rushdie, Ishiguro and Winterson, making a case for the literary imagination as the site *par excellence* for working

through and maintaining alterity. Indeed, Gibson's conception of ethics owes a lot to Levinas, to whom Gibson attributes "a relevant, sophisticated, many-sided, non-foundational ethics" (16). However, it is with reference to Drucilla Cornell that Gibson establishes his sense of the power of the imagination:

> The power in question . . . is not the moral power of the imagination as understood by humanism. It is not a power of "deep comprehension" of what is already there, but rather one of speculation and adumbration, a power to break up the given, to admit and elaborate the possible. The imagination is crucial in producing what, with Adorno in mind, Cornell calls the "redemptive perspectives" that "displace and estrange the world", so that "we are made aware that we are in exile". (16)

Most importantly, Gibson comes closer than anyone else in establishing a link between ethics and affect akin to the one I wish to make myself, as he considers in the final section of his book "how far a non-cognitive, Levinasian ethics of fiction might also be an ethics of *affect*, with reference to two key, related concepts, *sensibility* and *receptivity*" (17; emphases mine). I do not wish to suggest by this statement that affect and affectivity are synonymous to sentiment and sentimentality, or that Levinas's notion of sensibility is in sustained accordance with the classical sense of the term; nor would Gibson suggest any such thing. Rather, Gibson develops his sense of sensibility in relation to the historical uses of the term while arguing that "radically rethought", sensibility "may now take on an ethical significance" (162). If the eighteenth century saw "sensibility as a disposition to refined or delicate emotion, including compassion" (162), and the subsequent modernist revolution meant the subjection of sensibility to cognition, intellect and form as propagated by T.S. Eliot, then sensibility, after its rethinking in a postmodern culture, is now "to be understood as distinct from cognition in that it does not direct itself at an object with the intention of mastering it, but is rather characterized by a mode of openness and attentiveness. It might effectively be thought of as a capacity for being mastered, a receptiveness which even precedes cognition and makes cognition possible" (162). As Gibson observes, the twentieth century witnessed "a decisive triumph over and subjection of sensibility, a modern transformation, intellectualization, even professionalization and thereby a comprehensive derogation of sensibility" (163). Sensibility did retain "something like its older sense", but as such it became "a negative term, designating a power of feeling that remains after the fall, after the cataclysm of dissociation, an altogether cruder and more negligible faculty" (163). As we saw Gibson point out above, throughout the twentieth century sensibility increasingly became "the

problematic other of criticism" (163). It is against this backdrop that Gibson seeks "to explore the persistent, ethical significance of sensibility in Levinas's work, connecting it with a similar persistence in Bataille" (164). Neither Levinas nor Bataille, as Gibson points out, are wholly opposed to calculation or systematization, but they both offer alternatives in the form of expenditure and openendedness. By positing sensibility "before cognition and ontology alike . . . Levinas reverses the *modern* formulation of sensibility as it appears in Eliot and Leavis" (164-65). Similarly, "for Bataille, expenditure is prior to accumulation and production, prodigality or generosity to calculation, the general to any restricted economy" (166). In modernity, contrarily, impulses have been directed by an imperative to withhold, to calculate and to detach oneself. As Gibson concludes, "[i]t remains for a postmodern ethics to reassert archaic sensibility within the rational economies, to put the sensibility back into sense" (167). With an eye on feminism, Gibson finds this ethics struggling to get through in novels by Jean Rhys and Anaïs Nin. In his subsequent development of an ethics of reception and receptivity, Gibson pursues that ethics with a view on cultural identity in novels by Timothy Mo, Kazuo Ishiguro and Salman Rushdie. Gibson thus shows how a postmodern ethics may be inflected by, or brought to bear on, gender and cultural identity as they are represented in narrative.

A perspective on narrative that has many points in common with Gibson's is found in Mark Ledbetter's *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative*, which contains readings of such acclaimed works of post-modernist fiction as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* and D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*. In the very first sentence of his book, Ledbetter wipes the literary critical slate clean of disinterestedness and detachment, as he writes: "Reading and writing about literature are my acts of confession, and they are the ways I begin my ethical understanding of how I live in the world" (ix). He continues with what reads as a distillation of current ideas in literary criticism, such as that of Derek Attridge, and philosophy, such as that of Adriana Cavarero:[16]

[16] See Attridge's "Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other" and Cavarero's *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*. Attridge tries to work out how best to respond to the narratives of others, and to narratives as others. Response and responsibility are inseparable in Attridge's thought: "[A] full response to the otherness of the text includes an awareness of, a respect for, and in a certain sense . . . a taking of responsibility for, the creativity of its author" (25). Cavarero deals with the notion of identities as narrative formations. She argues for the possibility of each individual's formation of one unique life-narrative that would serve as an answer to the question "Who am *I*?", bracketing the question "Who/What is *Man*?". Thus, Cavarero aligns herself with the postmodern resistance to universalism and generalization which we find in, for instance, Levinas and Lyotard. I must admit to some consternation, though, when Cavarero writes that "[u]nlike philosophy, which for millennia has persisted in capturing the universal in the trap of definition, narration reveals the finite in its fragile uniqueness, and sings

> What it means to be human, to be ethical and to be narrative are very similar issues. As Bakhtin suggests, to be human is to enter into conversation with myriad narratives from which we gain an understanding of ourselves and of the world in which we live. These narratives may be the diverse and interesting lives of human beings who occupy our global surroundings. These narratives may be the creative writings, misnamed fictions, which represent one of the many constructive and artistic exercises by humans to gain some understanding of what it means to live in the world ethically. (ix)

While Ledbetter's focus is on the violence perpetrated by the body politic on bodies gendered, raced and classed, and on the suppression of victims in, or exclusion of victims from, narratives, he adds that his argument "could/should easily be expanded" and that "there is always another person, group, and voice to be considered" (xii, n.3). This statement strikes me as being of great virtue, and there is also too great a virtue in many of Ledbetter's points for them to be restricted to discussions of political acts of victimization; Ledbetter poses many questions and draws many conclusions that are of the utmost importance for the study of narrative *tout court*, as, for instance, when he asks:

> Could it be that an interruption in the text, where the story line appears broken and our own expectations for the narrative are not met, is the narrative's most profound and defining moment? Could the story be calling us to a closer look at its failure to clarify, conclude or justify an issue that is simply too complex and ambiguous to be settled by simple description and narrative consistency? I am convinced that such "problems" in narrative serve an interpretative purpose of pointing us towards a narrative ethic. (2)

Instead of our tendency to "avoid narrative's interruptions, in particular if they call into question existing understandings of how we are to live in the world" (3), we thus ought to cultivate vulnerability, opening ourselves to wounding by the otherness of the narrative. "Wounding" is of course a bodily metaphor, and bodily metaphors are important to Ledbetter's critical project, as he views a break with the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy as decisive for

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its glory" (3). True, this resists a universalizing and generalizing impulse, but it still caters to programmes of revelation and finity that would sit uneasily with a Levinasian or Lyotardian ethics. Moreover, the positing of one unique life-narrative still rests on some amount of monistic thinking: where, in this account, is plurality and the acknowledgement of the elusive quality of each lived second?

an engagement with others in their specific incarnations. Thus, body metaphor is a way of approaching the actual bodily ways human beings have of existing in and relating to their world.

This insistence on a holistic view of mind and body is of some importance to my project, as the mistrust of the body goes hand in hand with the mistrust of sentimentality in our culture: as Ledbetter points out, "[o]ur culture has a history of phrases which suggests that the body, as the home of the emotions, is not trustworthy and is not dependable. 'You are thinking with your heart and not your head.'" (11). Contrastingly, "[w]hen we choose a language that is physical and emotional in our attempt to know—know anything—we speak an act of embodiment. Body metaphor celebrates the senses and says *no* to any Cartesian split that makes our bodies second class citizens to the mind" (12).[17] Importantly, as Ledbetter is quick to observe, "seeing the world in this way becomes an invitation to hurt and discomfort. Those things/events/persons to whom we are willing to attach ourselves intimately, with our bodies, are those things/events/persons we endow with the abilities to cause us the most pain" (12). In this way, suffering, wounding and agony enter what I would call a sentimental relation to the world.

And thus, we find Ledbetter formulating an ethics and a hermeneutics of vulnerability much akin to the one I wish to explore in this study. In Ledbetter's view, "[b]ody metaphor becomes an ethic when it seeks to know and to describe what it means for the body to be wounded, physically and/or *emotionally*, and furthermore to describe the extent of recovery from the wound, while maintaining a sensitive awareness of the wound's remnant, the scar" (15; emphasis mine). Suffering attains a kind of universality that has both banal and profound aspects: "From the smallest scar on our knees which reminds us of a fall in childhood, to the large scar on our hearts which reminds us of the death of a parent or spouse, we are persistently defining who we are in relation to violation" (16). At this point, one may find that Ledbetter's perspective precludes the possibility of redemption and that it lacks an acknowledgement of the ways in which we define ourselves in relation to our triumphs, our encounters with tenderness and our will to love. But Ledbetter's point is precisely that in order to be responsible and ethical we must bracket the healthy body and focus on the wounds, the scars and the violations. And so the critic too must look beyond the healthy surface of the

[17] Marianne Noble similarly suggests—in relation to eighteenth and nineteenth century theories of sentimentality, but also in relation to the Barthes of *Camera Lucida*—that "[t]o know sentimentally is to know with the body, to privilege a primary gut response to cognition over a secondary intellectual one" (77). This is too straightforward and binary, I think, as it sets up a division of sentiment-body/intellect-mind that renders the latter supplemental, instead of neutralizing the binarism under the heading of, I would suggest, "senti/mentality".

text to uncover its ruptures and wounds, and must also aspire in his/her readings not to closure, but to open and vulnerable readings: "The critic's comments on the substance of any narrative ethic must be stated from a posture of suggestion and *vulnerability*, asking to be argued with and shown to be wrong and not from a posture of confidence and certainty" (20; emphasis mine).

With and through the question of affect vis-à-vis ethics, especially in the Levinasian sense, we enter the question of a postmodern "spirituality". For, does not an ethics of alterity rest on traditions of self-transcendence, of *kenosis* and of profound unknowing that all fall under the heading of "spirituality"? Indeed, in the wake of Levinas and Derrida, Mark C. Taylor has developed a postmodern "a/theology" and an "altarity", Edith Wyschogrod has written on "saints and postmodernism", and John D. Caputo has considered "the tears and prayers of Jacques Derrida" and has co-edited *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, featuring papers by Derrida, Wyschogrod and Jean-Luc Marion.[18] In their introduction to those papers, Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon set the scene by observing that

> [m]uch to the horror of the secularizing deconstructors, the notorious "free play of signifiers", which frees us from the shackles of the transcendental signified, and the famous saying, "there is nothing outside the text", which set off a Dionysian dance on the grave of the old God, has taken the form of a *kenotics of faith*. The deferral of presence turns out to imply messianic waiting and expectation, and the deconstruction of presence turns out to be not a denial of God but a critique of the idols of presence, which has at least as much to do with Moses' complaint with Aaron as with Nietzsche. (5)

However, the most thorough and wide-reaching investigations yet into postmodernism and spirituality are found in *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion*, edited by Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick. The essays in this volume are not concerned so much with the world religions or with religiosity per se, as with precisely the shadows or, more accurately, traces of spirituality in postmodern discourses. Whether the writers are agnostic, a/theological or religious, the inseparability of ethics and spirituality is usually clear from their papers. Yet, the only works of literature touched upon in the volume are the Bible, Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. In other words, in this volume on postmodernism and spirituality, only three works of literature are referred to all in all, of which

[18] See Taylor's *ERRING: A Postmodern A/theology* and *Altarity*, Wyschogrod's *Saints and Postmodernism* and Caputo's *The Prayers and Tears of Derrida*, respectively.

only one is properly postmodernist. One should of course note that the volume's contributors are not literary critics but philosophers and theologians, but still one may wonder what happened to the notion of literature as a temple for secular spirituality.

This question is, somewhat unexpectedly, raised by Martin Amis in an interview in *BOMB* in 1987: "In fact, I've never understood why the idea of literature as religion was demolished so quickly. It seems to me that would be a tenable way of looking at it" (196). The possibilities of that "way of looking at it" are investigated in the recent collection *The Novel, Spirituality and Modern Culture*, edited by Paul S. Fiddes. In this collection of essays, eight novelists, among them Donna Tartt and Jill Paton Walsh, write about their craft in relation to spirituality. Most of the novelists think spirituality along eschatological and divine lines—Tartt, for instance, is a devout Catholic—and so conclude that the novel, as a secular art form, is inhospitable to expressions of spirituality. In his introduction to the collection, however, Fiddes discusses the relation between spirituality and literature with reference to the complications of postmodern philosophy and criticism, and suggests that if one is to find spirituality and indeed God in the novel, one should perhaps not think them eschatologically or in terms of presence. As Fiddes points out, "it has been a mark of so-called postmodern literary criticism to point out that the end always 'bursts open'", and, as he further observes, if Karl Barth is right in his insistence "on the 'secularity' of the Word of God", on God's choosing "worldly objects through which to reveal himself", then "God is bound always to be veiled in the very act of unveiling" (6). Consequently, Fiddes argues that "while the novel as a whole may embody characteristics of our present culture, there is a kind of 'spiritual deconstruction' possible, in which characters, descriptive passages and turns of plot may at least hint at another reality which transcends the material and mundane, and which may offer traces of the supremely Other" (10). In the very least, Fiddes would seem to suggest, literature may follow Levinas in "finding in the face of others a 'trace' of the supremely Other, of the absent God who has always just 'passed by'" (15). This, I would argue, is the kind of spiritual expression we may find in postmodernist fiction. Yet, there are few references to postmodernist fiction in the essays of the collection; we find brief and vague invocations of Jorge Luis Borges, Anthony Burgess, Angela Carter, William Golding, Russell Hoban, Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie and Jeanette Winterson. Postmodernism as a whole is seen by most of the authors as adverse to spirituality and to any attempt at resolution; for instance, Sara Maitland claims that in postmodernism "there is no possibility of even imagining that there might be something called truth" (88), and that "postmodernist reading strategies create a distracting haze around fictional

texts which makes them even less able to carry the examination of significance and divinity to which we might like to have literary access" (89).

A corrective to this view is found in Edith Wyschogrod's formidable and daring *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*. Wyschogrod seeks to formulate a postmodern ethics by reference to the lives of the saints and to the philosophies of Levinas and Derrida, among others. To Wyschogrod, Levinasian ethics is saintly because it requires patience and *kenosis*: "A postmodern altruism must appeal to radical saintly generosity, to a benevolence that will not be brought to a close. Such saintliness is not a nostalgic return to premodern hagiography but a postmodern expression of excessive desire, a desire on behalf of the Other that seeks the cessation of another's suffering and the birth of another's joy" (xxiv). Fiction has a central place in Wyschogrod's study (not least hagiographies, of course). There are fairly elaborate readings of James's *Wings of the Dove* and Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers*. Besides Genet, late modernist and postmodernist literature is touched upon more briefly, yet effectively: there are illustrative references to Beckett, Burroughs, Calvino, Duras and Potter. It is interesting to note that Wyschogrod, a philosopher proceeding from the notion of a postmodern spirituality and a postmodern ethics, finds illustrations in postmodernist fiction, whereas most literary critics, proceeding from postmodernist fiction, are unable to extract from it any spiritual or ethical vision.[19]

Reclamation work: Aspects of the sentimentum in the critical discourse on Swift

Now, having seen the resistance, but also the openness, to aspects of what I mean by the sentimentum in the discourse on postmodernism and on postmodernist fiction, the reader may of course wonder whether the specific critical reception of Swift has hitherto been exceptionally attuned to the display in Swift of those aspects. The answer is negative. The unease in the discourse on postmodernist fiction regarding aspects of the sentimentum is also apparent in the specific discourse on the fiction of Graham Swift. The unease is often due to the clash between the values currently viable in academia and those adopted by Swift in his novels. For most critics writing

[19] Patricia Waugh's *The Harvest of the Sixties* is an exception to some extent: in a chapter entitled "Keeping Our Metaphysics Warm: Sacred Impulses in a Secular Age", Waugh discusses the fate of spiritual issues in British literature since the sixties, with reference to the revisions of religious notions brought on by psychoanalysis, existentialism and deconstruction. However, Waugh's discussion does not engage in any sustained fashion with the interrelations of postmodern spirituality and postmodernist aesthetics.

about Swift, the sentimental moments in his fiction are also problematic to reconcile with his own alleged postmodernist sense of style. For instance, Alison Lee poses the image of a clear split without contact points, a dual personality text, as she notes the particular double bind of Swift's texts when discussing *Waterland*: "Unlike many metafictional texts . . . *Waterland* does not at first appear to foreground its structure. It presents itself as what Roland Barthes calls in *S/Z*, a *lisible* (readable) text rather than a *scriptible* (writable) text. . . . The story is so engaging and the manipulation of affect so intense that it can certainly be read (if naively) on this level" (42). One of Lee's presuppositions here seems to be that if a text intensely manipulates the reader's affect, the reader will somehow be "naivized" and lose his/her sense of narratological distinction. My suggestion would rather be that, as the reader juggles the sense of awe and the intense state of affect (indeed, the interest in this "engaging story"), on the one hand, and the sense of postmodern play and the "baring of the device", on the other, a certain sublime sense (or sense of the sublime) is attained that otherwise—with a less prominent *lisible* element, with less manipulation of affect—would not have been possible.

In an argument that bears similarity to Lee's, Peter Widdowson observes the "tension" in *Out of This World* between nihilism and romantic make-believe. Widdowson quotes some particularly sentimental passages and stops to wonder: "Is this just a slip in stylistic decorum on the part of a most poised writer, or is the mawkish and meretricious language of sentiment here a sign of authorial disavowal?" (16). Having difficulty reconciling the nihilistic and the romantic, or sentimental, in the novel, Widdowson is moved to doubt Swift's integrity and control as a writer: "[W]hether the novelist or novel is conscious of this self-deconstructing sub-text I do not know" (15). This doubt is particularly interesting as, a few pages earlier, Widdowson has referred to Swift as "the *most self-conscious* and *sophisticated* writer of what I may, perhaps, be now forgiven for calling 'fictory'" (11; emphases mine). If Widdowson had wanted to avoid contradicting himself, he might simply have accused Swift of surreptitiously smuggling sentimentality into his simulacral wasteland. The true problem, though, with Widdowson's question is that he does not clarify exactly what the "authorial disavowal" would be *of*, that is, what it is that Swift would seek to disavow by means of "the mawkish and meretricious language of sentiment": would it be Harry, the narrator, made suspect through his sentimental discourse; or would it be precisely the world-weary, nihilistic world-view of the novel, checked by the discourse of infatuation and make-believe? My answer would be that neither is the case; rather, Swift is simultaneously positing a scarred, traumatized world and a

charmed, romanticized world.[20] There is nothing very unusual or radical about this movement—most people, of the Western world at least, I would hazard, perform it everyday; it is how they survive.

The everyday activities of Westerners notwithstanding, in reviews, too, Swift's fictions have met with the unease of critics faced with the language of sentiment and with the suspension of received beliefs. Ben Okri, for instance, wrote in his review of *Learning to Swim* (in *New Statesman*) that the stories collected in the volume were "full of perverse sentimentality" (Okri, Online). That the sentimentality is deemed perverse is not surprising, considering Okri's complete lack of sympathy for the characters in the stories: "One unmistakable thing is that they [the stories] are about moral cowards and spineless individuals collapsing within the insidious pressures of evaded responsibilities, evaded vision". However, Okri does not ultimately assume critical responsibility, which he would by explaining or qualifying his notion of "perverse sentimentality". One can deduce from his assessment of the characters in *Learning to Swim*, and from the tenor of his own novels, though, that Okri does not appreciate the role and function of the anti-hero. Indeed, the lack of such an appreciation would make the reading of any of Swift's works quite unbearable.

However, reviews traditionally have a register different to that of scholarly papers, which makes reviews more apt to accommodate at least the affective aspects of the sentimentum. Precisely because the review admits such overt displays of subjective evaluation as those of Okri quoted above, the review is also more hospitable to emotion per se. So, we find Linda Gray Sexton writing in her review of *Out of This World* (in *The New York Times Book Review*) that

> [t]o write with passion—but without pathos—about people who mourn is a formidable task. To write simultaneously about individuals who, transcending the burden of the past, reconnect with others and resurrect their own lost selves represents another magnitude of difficulty entirely. Such an undertaking requires talent and courage, and the British novelist Graham Swift demonstrates an ample supply of both in his fifth [*sic*] novel, *Out of This World*, an evocative portrait of a family once fragmented and now in the process of healing. (Sexton, Online)

I wish to stay with Sexton's review, as it is most exemplary in its

[20] As Pamela Cooper points out, "Swift's fiction works between possibilities, within and against tensions, maintaining a poised and thoroughgoing oscillation of opposites. Despair and hope are both parts of his work, as they are of the work of the tragedians he recalls; to emphasize only one is to distort the whole" (66).

acknowledgement of the affirmatively sentimental side of the sentimentum. Reading on through the review, we find the following assessments: Sophie, one of the narrators and main characters, is "wry, vulnerable, sensitive, . . . characterized without cliché"; *Out of This World* is "about the aftermath of personal struggles and epiphanies: the ravages of love gone awry, the white silence of estrangement, the risk involved in daring to care for someone in a precarious world". To me, this appraisal succinctly formulates the impact of the novel. *Bearing testimony* to the novel, Sexton practices what Ihab Hassan has occasionally striven for and called "criticism as a kind of mimesis, empathic paraphrase" (*Rumors of Change* 1). Such empathic paraphrases, I hasten to add, should of course not entail the eclipse of critical distance, but should nonetheless be attempted and set as the point of departure for any critical endeavour.[21] I make that attempt in my readings of Swift in this study, with the result that the tenor of my discourse congenially and somewhat provocatively becomes more affirmative and indeed sentimental as Swift's novels become so.

In previous scholarly criticism on Swift, however, there are only glints of an affirmative appraisal of aspects of the sentimentum such as that found in Sexton. The scholarly affirmation of the sentimentum is barely observable in *en passant* remarks. For instance, David Leon Higdon notes, in his discussion of the quality and function of novelistic endings in Swift, that in *Out of This World*,

> [t]he reader . . . never witnesses this reunion [of Harry and Sophie], but rather leaves Sophie suspended somewhere above the Atlantic as Harry recalls an incident from the autumn of 1928 when his father took him on an airplane flight from London to Paris and back for an Armistice Day celebration, "a piece of public play-acting but a genuine, faltering attempt at fatherliness" . . . Once again, Swift makes a heavy symbolic investment in a scene only tangentially related to the main action, . . . but how appropriate a scene it is. The reunion of

[21] Not all reviewers are willing to face the otherness of a narrative, to perform a phenomenological turn of sorts by bracketing prejudices and expectations and meeting the characters of the story with radical respect. We may turn to J.L. Carr's review of *Out of This World* (in *The Spectator*) for a specimen of the unempathic critic who shuns alterity. The mode of Carr's review is one of irony and sarcasm: "Harry (Winchester, Oxford, ex-wartime intelligence who—God help him—took a RAF camera course) immediately drives you into a corner and obsessively goes on at you. Sophie just grumbles away at her New York psychiatrist" (Carr, Online). This is not simply a crude assessment, but is entirely incommensurable with the actual novel. And while Carr may be more entitled to the following personal response to the novel, it hardly bears witness to an ethical and affective imagination: "Now and then, as the pair tried to unload their little burdens of guilt upon me, I resentfully felt sorry for myself".

> Sophie and Harry is an armistice, an end to their ten years' hostilities, and it is framed by the loving action of one father, foregrounding his child, to affirm his child's importance, worth, and independence. We need not see the actual reunion, because it has been played before us almost parabolically. ("Double Closures" 94-95)

This passage, at least implicitly, acknowledges the redeeming force of nostalgia and of sentimental reunion. The phrase it quotes from the novel is as obvious an example as any of the novel's juxtaposition of cynicism and sentimentality: "play-acting", but "genuine"; hence, "faltering". Higdon even hazards emotion in the form of enthusiasm: "how appropriate a scene it is" (the exclamation mark is not printed, but audible).

A more thorough focus on aspects of the sentimentum, and a sign of change perhaps as pertains to the accommodation of sentimental aspects of postmodernist narratives, is found in Adrian Poole's essay "Graham Swift and the Mourning After". Poole argues that Swift "creates complex fables of bereavement in which mourning takes forms that are spirited, heartening and sociable" (150). He goes on to suggest that "[m]ourning is a condition and an action that we suffer alone and share together", which "suggests a special kinship with telling stories, or rather with the modern form of story-telling in which the sense of solitude and community is most mysteriously mixed" (152). Thus, "[n]ovels reproduce the conditions of modern mourning in the West in ways that distinguish them from other forms of story-telling. Theatre, film, television and newsprint gather more closely together in time their tellers and listeners and viewers. They do not permit or promote the special kind of gregarious solitude created by novels. They require spectacle, revelation, limelight" (152). Poole, then, reverses the claim of Hans Bertens that it is necessary for postmodernist fiction to mirror the frenzy of the media in their portrayal and expression of emotion. Rather, Poole observes, postmodernist fiction expresses mourning (and, I would add, other modes of affect) in a form of ethico-epistemological complication:

> [T]here is more to be mourned than an isolable figure. There is a residue that can never be recovered because that figure once filled a time and space from which it cannot be separated. Hence the double sense the reader gets at the end of *Waterland* and *Last Orders*, that we are left both with a knowable pattern, an action completed, a coherence achieved, and with everything that such knowledge and completion and coherence must omit and can never recover, all the memories, desires and stories. (164)

Further connections between thematics and aesthetics are made by Poole as

he notes that "[t]here is also a sense in which Swift's novels could be said to mourn some of their own literary antecedents. . . . Swift's novels obviously look back, through all sorts of modernist and postmodernist lenses, to some great nineteenth-century predecessors, from whom one would single out in particular George Eliot and Thomas Hardy" (164-65). However, Poole notes, "there are several ways in which Swift's fiction is bound to measure its own distance from such nineteenth-century predecessors. Where they could still mourn the passing of certain religious, mythical and metaphysical justifications . . . Swift's fiction is left to mourn the impossibility of such mourning" (165). In what amounts to yet one paraphrase of part of my thesis, Poole concludes that our time and our condition require "forms of story-telling correspondingly more shattered and more self-distrustful, *within which there may survive a cautious but obstinate little belief*, in the need at least to go on telling stories" (165; emphasis mine).

In another recent article, "Melancholic Modernity and Contemporary Grief: The Novels of Graham Swift", Wendy Wheeler concurs with Poole, as she writes that "Swift's work offers an exemplary case of the artist who attempts to come to terms with, and to represent, both the possibility and the difficulty of really mourning modernity's losses" (64). These losses, Wheeler argues, "might be seen as the loss of traditional forms of knowledge with the advent of the absolutely new, and the loss of the solaces of a personally revealed God" (65). In response to these losses, Wheeler suggests, "Swift's novels explore the failure of romantic conceptions of meaning-fulness—whether in Hegel's story of history as the gradual unfolding of spiritual knowledge towards the perfect and mutually recognising community, or in romantic art's conception of aesthetic knowledge as offering a moment of healing transcendence in the mystery of symbolic unity" (65).

As Wheeler's article is in congruence with many of my ideas about Swift's work and about postmodernism, I would like to dwell on it for a while, thus pointing forward to my argument in the chapters that follow. Wheeler's argument bases itself on Freud's conceptions of mourning and melancholia, in which mourning is a response to loss that entails gradually letting go of the past and of the lost object and forming a new future, and melancholia is a response to loss that consists in not letting go and in internalizing the lost object, thus freezing time and precluding healthy development. On a cultural level, as Wheeler points out, melancholia has been identified as the mode of modernity and modernism. What Wheeler wishes to show, however, is that "[t]he task which Swift sets himself is that of discovering how the self-destructive melancholias of modernity can be turned into the healthy mournings of something that we might call

*post*modernity" (65). Here Wheeler comes upon a view of postmodernity that is very much the one I will present in the next chapter, as she observes that "what we call the postmodern seems to consist in the struggle between melancholia and mourning—between nostalgic turns to the past, and a masochistic sense of social fragmentations, on the one hand, and the attempt to imagine differently reconstituted communities and selves on the other", and that thus "we might say that the *outcome* of postmodernity, seen as the attempt to live with loss and uncertainty as a permanent condition, might be the discovery or invention of ways of being in the world which move beyond the harsh individualism of utilitarian modernity, and towards a different way of accounting for and valuing human needs" (65). At this point, Wheeler gets back to Swift's work and states that "[i]t is this problem, the problem of inventing an aesthetic form capable of telling us something about the invention of new cultural, social and political forms—a '*new* modernity' or 'second Enlightenment'—which drives Swift's work" (65). This strikes me as an enthusiastic overstatement—I could think of other problems that drive Swift's work—but it is indeed an important point and one that Wheeler makes very effectively. I am in full agreement with Wheeler's view that Swift is concerned with "the aesthetic imagining of cultural mourning as a form of erotic (that is to say lifeful and loving) and, in the end, *communal*, not individualistic, labour in the world" (65-66). And like myself, Wheeler argues that "Swift only finally achieves this full communality of working voices in his latest novel *Last Orders*" (66). Since Wheeler's argument moves through brief readings of *The Sweet Shop Owner*, *Waterland*, *Ever After* and *Last Orders*, I will return to it in my own readings of those novels. For now, I will content myself with noting its acknowledgement of themes of mourning, suffering and death, as well as of communion, redemption and love, in Swift's work.

Most often, though, scholarly critics do not even touch upon the issue of the sentimental, emotional, spiritual and ethical as regards Swift, or, indeed, as regards postmodernist fiction in general. The general tenor of studies in the fictions of postmodernist writers of Swift's generation is narratological or psychosexual, with an interest in formal aspects of historiographic metafiction, in desire, in "the grotesque", in identity formation and in identity politics. This is all very well, and those may all be issues of an extreme urgency, but I do feel—yes, feel—that scholarly criticism may learn something from the more emotionally receptive and charged language of review criticism, and that a truly ethical criticism—ethical because it seeks to accommodate alterity—would have to be, to paraphrase Andrew Gibson, an ethical criticism of affectivity, of sensibility and of receptivity.

In other words, this type of criticism would involve a hermeneutics of vulnerability to match an aesthetics of vulnerability that Swift has himself formulated:

> I think there is an awful lot of writing which in its cleverness, in its insistence on formal virtuosity is only defensive and hiding the writer. . . . There is a lot of attention given to form and style, a lot of heavy self-consciousness about style . . . which again I think is defensive and protective. It's like somebody putting on a suit of armor to keep in the things that matter rather than to show them. And then there is the kind of writer who tends not to do that, and how you don't do that, I don't really know, but I hope I am one of those people who doesn't defend. Vulnerability—that's the thing. . . . I am desperate to avoid a sense of the power derived from form. I don't want to say "Look at me being clever!" instead of "Look at me as someone like you!" ("Interview" 229)

In what follows, then, I seek to formulate a sense of both the aesthetics and the hermeneutics of vulnerability, as well as an elaboration of my sense of the sentimentum. Since I am proposing that certain elements that have been deemed foreign to postmodernism and postmodernist fiction may in fact be effortlessly symbiotic with it, I begin the next chapter by briefly sketching my understanding of what "postmodernism" signifies. After my general sketch of postmodernism, I discuss the more specific issue of "postmodern realism", which is of some importance to my notion of the sentimentum. Thus, I close in on the subsequent, more detailed discussion of the sentimentum. Throughout my elaboration of the various aspects of the sentimentum, I relate those aspects to Swift's fictions.

Subsequently, in chapters two through four, I present my readings of Swift's six novels to date, showing how each of them may be seen to engage the sentimentum at the same time as I show a gradual development throughout Swift's oeuvre toward something resembling an affirmation of sentimentality; an aesthetics of vulnerability.

In the conclusion that rounds off the argument, I look briefly at a few novels by Julian Barnes, Penelope Lively and Jeanette Winterson, to offer some further, and different, examples of how postmodernist fictions may engage the sentimentum. Subsequently, I engage with issues of gender(ing), but also of class and cultural identity, which are more or less bracketed in my readings of Swift, Barnes, Lively and Winterson. Finally, I suggest a few more British, but also postcolonial and American, novels that may fruitfully be read in terms of the sentimentum. Having read Swift, I propose, we are

moved to re-read postmodernist fiction. Yet, my reading of Swift presented here is itself a re-reading, informed by a reconsideration of the social, philosophical and aesthetic, as well as the ethical and affective, dimensions of postmodernism—a reconsideration that may be glimpsed in the preceding pages, but which I hope will come into focus in the pages that now follow.

1
Postmodernism and the Sentimentum

> History, I take it, moves in measures both continuous and discontinuous. Thus the prevalence of postmodernism today, if indeed it prevails, does not suggest that ideas or institutions of the past cease to shape the present.
> —Ihab Hassan

> [T]he past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently.
> —Umberto Eco

As I said at the end of the introduction, I am proposing that certain elements that have been deemed foreign to postmodernism, such as an ethical consciousness, expressions of affect and spiritual concerns, may in fact be quite effortlessly symbiotic with it. This proposition rests on a certain notion of postmodernism, which was implied throughout the introduction but which it is now high time to spell out. This spelling out proceeds through the three sections of this chapter: a general sketch of what I take to characterize postmodern society, postmodern philosophy and postmodernist aesthetics; a brief discussion of the fate of realism in postmodernism; and finally an elaboration of the sentimentum as a postmodern concept. My sense of postmodernism subsequently emerges in finer detail in my readings of Swift's novels, and in the readings of novels by Barnes, Lively and Winterson that round off this study.

Postmodernisms: society, philosophy, aesthetics

The first thing to note about the term "postmodernism" is that, unqualified, it signifies both that which has somehow gone beyond the modern—that is, socio-economic, political, scientific and philosophical modernity ("post-modern/ism")—and that which has somehow gone beyond cultural modernism ("post/modernism")—that is, the revolution in the arts in the first decades of the twentieth century. While this ambiguity may lead to agonizing debates, it also reflects the fact that postmodernist cultural practices respond

to postmodern society and are, to varying extents, awake to postmodern philosophies and postmodern politics. Still, I suggest that we try, for reasons of clarity and to the extent that it is possible, to distinguish between aspects of society and philosophy, using for those the words "postmodern" and "postmodernity", and aspects of artistic production, using for those the words "postmodernist" and "postmodernism". I will try to stick with this distinction in what follows.

The second thing to note about the term "postmodernism" is that, no matter what definition one attaches to it, it denotes a critical construct rather than a self-pronounced cultural ethos that precedes our scholarly abstractions.[1] As Brian McHale points out,

> the referent of "postmodernism", the *thing* to which the term claims to refer, *does not exist* . . . precisely in the way that "the Renaissance" or "romanticism" do not exist. There is no postmodernism "out there" in the world any more than there ever was a Renaissance or romanticism "out there". These are all literary-historical fictions, discursive artifacts constructed either by contemporary readers and writers or retrospectively by literary historians. And since they are discursive constructs rather than real-world objects, it is possible to construct them in a variety of ways . . . . (*Postmodernist Fiction* 4)

Still, as McHale also notes, "[j]ust because there are many possible constructions of postmodernism . . . this does not mean that all constructs are equally interesting or valuable, or that we are unable to choose among them" (4). For instance, while there is nothing inherently wrong about Jean-François Lyotard's use of the term to denote an unceasing avant-garde programme that seeks to go beyond modernism by renewing and radicalizing modernist impulses, I think it is more useful to reserve the term for aesthetic practices that seek to reconcile modernism with tradition and to reconcile experimental with conventional forms.[2] However, "modernism" itself must be viewed as equally constructed and continually vexed, a fact that more recent studies of the concept—particularly Astradur Eysteinsson's *The Concept of Modern-*

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[1] Architecture is an exception in this regard. For instance, Charles Jencks's polemical *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* is an explicit postmodernist manifesto, in which Jencks suggests that "the fact that many so-called Modern architects still go around practising a trade as if it were alive can be taken as one of the great curiosities of our age" (23). Conversely, as Jencks observes in *What is Post-Modernism?*, there has been an outspokenly modernist crusade against postmodernist architecture (see *What is Post-Modernism?* 27-28).

[2] Indeed, Lyotard has himself indicated that the term does not name his suggested project in the most effective possible way—in *The Inhuman*, he suggests that we speak instead of "rewriting modernity" (24-35).

ism—bear witness to.[3] This realization of the tentative nature of our critical conceptions should also keep us from describing the relation between postmodernism and modernism, or between postmodernity and modernity, in terms of a radical break. Continuities and overlappings need to be stressed; the more rigid a distinction we set up between modernism and postmodernism, or between modernity and postmodernity, the more we will find ourselves sacrificing exceptions and particularities to generalizations and abstractions.[4] Indeed, we should note the caution that Ihab Hassan places after his much-debated and oft-quoted table of binary oppositions between modernism and postmodernism in "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism": "Yet the dichotomies this table represents remain insecure, equivocal. For differences shift, defer, even collapse; concepts in any one vertical column are not all equivalent; and inversions and exceptions, in both modernism and postmodernism, abound" (92).[5] This caution must be kept in mind, whether we are discussing postmodernity or postmodernism.

My focus in this study is of course on the latter. However, as I stated above, postmodernist art cannot be separated from postmodernity or from postmodern philosophies. Moreover, theories of postmodernity and postmodern philosophies have a direct bearing on my formulation of the sentimentum. Before turning to the more specific issue of postmodernist literature, I would therefore like to briefly discuss what Lyotard has termed "the postmodern condition". In order to define the postmodern condition, we need a working notion of the "modern condition", or modernity. I will establish such a working notion by means of a narrative the neat internal consistency and linearity of which somewhat belies the insights of postmodernism—at the same time as this self-conscious remark heeds precisely those insights.[6] In other words, I do not wish to suggest that the

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[3] Eysteinsson's study indeed examines constructions of postmodernism as well, with the goal of teasing out the notions of modernism those constructions rest on. There is also a full-length study of the concept of postmodernism the critical stance of which is similar to Eysteinsson's: Hans Bertens's *The Idea of the Postmodern*.

[4] Perhaps no critic has argued more forcefully against the notion of a postmodernist break than Patricia Waugh, whose *Practicing Postmodernism/Reading Modernism* sets postmodernism up as the apotheosis of an aestheticizing impulse that may be traced back through modernism to romanticism. As Waugh is quick to point out, her "aim in arguing against a radical break theory of the relation of Postmodernism to earlier aesthetic practice and theory is not to fall into the opposite error of a naive evolutionism, but to consider continuities *and* discontinuities and the possibility of perceiving new relationships" (4).

[5] Hassan's list of binaries include such oppositional pairs as form/antiform, purpose/play, hierarchy/anarchy, totalization/deconstruction, presence/absence, hypotaxis/parataxis and determinacy/indeterminacy ("Toward" 91-92), the first term of each pair being modernist and the second being postmodernist.

[6] For more thorough accounts of both the historical period of modernity and the merits of the concept of modernity, I refer the reader to the four volume *Modernity: Critical Concepts*, edited

characteristics of modernity that I enumerate below constitute a hegemonic structure that leaves no room for voices of dissent—on the contrary, modernity entails precisely the (relative) emancipation of thought and discourse.[7] The characteristics attributed to modernity below are, rather, those that have now, especially from the vantage point of so-called postmodern critiques, emerged as problematic. Indeed, as Hans Bertens points out, even as pronounced a defender of the modern project as Jürgen Habermas would grant that "under the regime of 'capitalist modernization' the empirical-theoretical, or cognitive-instrumental, rationality complex has so clearly come to dominate and marginalize other modes of knowing. It has, moreover, more and more developed into a mercenary means-end rationalism. It is this rationalism, Habermas agrees, that fully deserves the poststructuralist charges" (Bertens, *Idea* 116). In Habermas's view, though, "to equate modernity with such a narrow means-end rationalism is to seriously misread its project" (116). At the same time, one might argue that the continuation of modernity in the project of communicative reason that Habermas envisions ultimately falls back on that very means-end rationality, which, *pace* Habermas, thinkers such as Zygmunt Bauman insist is the *sine qua non* of modernity.

However, that means-end rationality is not the only characteristic of modernity as a historical period or as a *modus operandum*. Its beginnings usually traced back to the Renaissance, modernity is ultimately mobilized by the more idealist and visionary Enlightenment belief in the emancipatory and progressive powers of reason, rationality and technology, in absolute objectivity and in the transparency of reality to scientific and artistic representations.[8] Hence, modernity begets positivism in science and naturalism in literature, and hence its socio-economic legacy is one of industrialization, urban planning and social engineering. Ushering in an age of secularization and individualism, modernity also breaks up traditional

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by Malcolm Waters, as well as to Matei Calinescu's *Five Faces of Modernity* and Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*, *Modernity and Ambivalence* and *Intimations of Postmodernity*; these works form the basis of my brief account here.

[7] Bauman would seem to hold a bleaker view of the possibilities of dissent in modernity, as he argues that "whoever questioned the modern wedlock between absolute truth and absolute power could only speak in the name of unreason and chaos. Dissent had been discredited and delegitimized even before it was spoken—by the very absoluteness of the dominant syndrome, the universalism of its proclaimed ambitions and the completeness of its domination" (*Intimations* xiv). In my view, though, this assessment sacrifices nuance for the benefit of rhetorical effect.

[8] These beliefs are what Lyotard refers to as the "'metanarratives' . . . that have marked modernity: the progressive emancipation of reason and freedom, the progressive or catastrophic emancipation of labour (source of alienated value in capitalism), the enrichment of all humanity through the progress of capitalist technoscience" (*The Postmodern Explained* 17).

social orders, thus enabling an unprecedented social and geographical mobility, which in turn facilitates the harnessing of an increasingly affluent and increasingly large middle-class to a consumer culture that promises the fulfillment of all desires. Blind to its own specificity as a Western project situated in particular historical and cultural circumstances, modernity furthermore accords itself universal validity, in keeping with Hegel's influential theses on history and with the vulgarizations of evolutionary theory in "social Darwinism", thus legitimizing Western imperialism and colonialism.

However, through two world wars and with the advent of a cold war, with nuclear anxiety and increasing urban alienation, with rampant instrumentalism and optimization, and with spiritual starvation, the whole modern edifice begins to crumble. As the horrors of the Holocaust, of Stalinism and of colonialism become apparent, all modern Western states and ideologies become suspect. At the same time, philosophers, theorists of science and historiographers advance critiques of notions of objectivity and transparency, heralding the eclipse of positivism. In addition to this, as Jean Baudrillard is so fond of noting, by a peculiar reversal the modern mapping of reality turns into a realization of the map: scientific models and media narratives begin to precede and influence what was conceived of as an independent and impeccable reality.[9] Modernity bites its own tail, as it were.

Thus, the West enters the postmodern condition, which does not so much entail the end of all that modernity stands for as a critical and sceptical attitude to many of its outspoken tenets, underlying assumptions and sociocultural effects.[10] This attitude is, above all, the result of the failure of modernity to realize its ideals of undisrupted progress and emancipation, whether those ideals have a liberalist or socialist bent. Lyotard chooses the name Auschwitz for this failure, but there are other equally fitting names: Gulag, Hiroshima, or, more recently, Bosnia.[11] In the words of Charles

[9] This state of affairs is what Baudrillard refers to as "hyperreality" or "the third order of simulacra". Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality was first presented in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* and animates all his subsequent works, including his latest, *Impossible Exchange*.

[10] Craig Calhoun's "Postmodernism as Pseudohistory" offers a nuanced discussion of how new the aspects of our society labelled "postmodern" really are. Calhoun argues that "[t]hough changes are real and major, they do not yet amount to an epochal break" (188). However, this seems to me to miss one of the points of postmodernism, that is, the end of the desire for, or of the possibility of, the epochal break. In the words of Malcolm Bradbury, "[b]y a peculiar paradox, we live 'after' the modern, in what we call 'postmodern' times, very much in its shadow but without a clear and strong vision of what now lies beyond" (*Modern British Novel* 450).

[11] Lyotard recognizes this multiplicity of failures as he writes that "the project of modernity (the realization of universality) has not been forsaken or forgotten but destroyed, 'liquidated'. There are several modes of destruction, several names that are symbols for them. 'Auschwitz' can be

Jencks, "Auschwitz refutes the idea of universal history and progress, just as the Salman Rushdie affair refutes the idea of universal Islam; and the Christian inaction in Bosnia refutes its own notion of the universal brotherhood of mankind. Who can believe that the State, or humanity in general, or any historic religion is a worthy focus for belief?" (70). Consequently, a waning of the belief in linear progress and ultimate emancipation, paired with a mistrust of claims to universality, objectivity and transparency, characterizes postmodernity. As Bauman, who has himself written extensively on the deep complicity between modernity and the Holocaust, puts it,

> [t]he postmodern mind does not expect any more to find the all-embracing, total and ultimate formula of life without ambiguity, risk, danger and error, and is deeply suspicious of any voice that promises otherwise. . . . The postmodern mind is reconciled to the idea that the messiness of the human predicament is here to stay. This is, in the broadest of outlines, what can be called postmodern wisdom. (*Postmodern Ethics* 245)

Accordingly, outspoken postmodernists such as Lyotard, Bauman and Hassan set pluralism and irresolution against totalizing and universalizing claims and final solutions. However, there are also a number of thinkers who have been notably reluctant to claim the word "postmodern" for themselves whose ideas fit the postmodern programme: Foucault, with his sceptical investigations of reason and power, Derrida, with his demonstrations of the openendedness of all discourse, Baudrillard, with his fatal strategies for challenging a hegemony of rationality and objectivity, and Deleuze and Guattari, with their championing of rhizomes, or paratactical structures, over and against roots and trees, or hypotactical structures.

The postmodern programme is not, then, as it has often been portrayed, simply a matter of negative theology, ironic nihilism and immobilizing uncertainty translating into a *laisser-faire* stoicism. Indeed, in the last ten years or so, the creative, constructive potential of postmodern thinking has become more generally visible, due to, for instance, Derrida's shift toward political and ethical issues in books such as *Spectres of Marx* and *Of Hospitality*, Bauman's formulation of a postmodern ethics following the post-phenomenology of Levinas, and Lyotard's restrained, earnest search for meaning in our condition in his last book, *Postmodern Fables*, which he prefaces with the words: "Futility suits the postmodern, for words as well as

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taken as a paradigmatic name for the tragic 'incompletion' of modernity" (*The Postmodern Explained* 18).

things. But that doesn't keep us from asking questions: how to live, and why? . . . You're not done living because you chalk it up to artifice" (vii).

Thus, a postmodern frame of mind is emerging that is interested in salvaging, or rather constructing a new sense of, the social, the communal and the intersubjective; but in doing so, it seeks, as Levinas's ethics does, to reach out into infinity rather than to establish a monolithic totality.[12] It also acknowledges that it is postmodern precisely because it has come through and out of the modern; in other words, it cannot stage a return but must work on the situation at hand. As Jencks observes, "[t]he three Ms are one-way doors: once you have gone through technical modernisation, social modernity and Cultural Modernism there is no going back. . . . You cannot unlearn Newton, Darwin and Freud any more than you can repeal the global marketplace, Nietzsche and Ford" (12). Working from, but also on, modernity, postmodern thinking, or "postmodernism", as Jean-Pierre Mileur puts it, "registers in an ironic, self-reflexive fashion . . . the paradoxical nature of modernity. . . . [I]t registers the fact that the modernist projects of, for example, bringing about the end of metaphysics or romanticism, or of stabilizing and rationalizing the play of revisionism, cannot be assayed without being reappropriated to metaphysics, romanticism, or revisionism" (200). This notion is of some importance to my project, and I keep it in mind, and hope the reader keeps it in mind, throughout this study. Postmodernism, I maintain, does not entail the uncomplicated and wholesale renunciation of metaphysics, of romanticism, of humanism or of modernism itself. Such a renunciation would in fact amount to the most extreme form of modernism. Rather, what, in my view, merits the name "postmodernism" is a perpetual vacillation between, or dialogue of, humanist and post-humanist modes of knowing, being and expression. A confrontation of modernism, humanism and, indeed, sentimentality with what lies beyond, beside or beneath them, a deconstruction rather than a destruction, or more to the point a de/reconstruction, a sustained disruption from within, is what ensues in the wake of the critical investigations of Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari. In other words, with one eye on the horizon, expecting that which is yet to come and which by definition one cannot know, and the other eye on one's cultural heritage, lest it stab one in the back, as a postmodernist one chooses neither futurist oblivion nor preservationist nostalgia. In the words of Hassan,

> [*f*]*or the time being*, we can not, *must* not, choose between the

[12] Indeed, Hassan noted as early as 1987 that "[t]he time has come . . . for provisional reconstructions, pragmatic remythifications. Even in France, the deconstructive mood has turned" ("Making Sense" 204).

> One and the Many, Humanism and Deconstruction, Community and Dissemination. We can only reopen such terms to constant negotiations, perpetual transactions of desire, freedom, and justice, mediated by authorities we need as much to reestablish as to reinvent. Meanwhile, heterodox, heteromorph, heteroclite, and indeterminate withal, we live in one human universe and astonish each other with our assents. (*Postmodern Turn* xvii)

Postmodernist literature, for all its troubled relation to representationalism and straightforward realism, reflects this creed of indeterminacy and may even reflect the day-to-day realities (the plural needs to be emphasized here) of the postmodern world. But what may ask whether there is room for sentimentality in that world and whether there is room for sentimentality in postmodernist fiction. For most people, including literary scholars (as we saw in the introduction), postmodernism in the arts still signifies precisely absence of emotion, incessant irony and superficial play—aspects that would be considered at odds with any kind of sentimentality. There is more to postmodernism, however, than the pop-cultural phantasmagorias of Pynchon and the blatant hyperrealism of Warhol. Such aesthetics of overt play and pop collage may be the origins of postmodernism, but over thirty odd years it has matured into an ever subtler, ever more varied and plural, ever more all-encompassing cultural ethos that defies accusations of superficiality, brutal irony and complicity with corporate languages and unreflective pop images. In other words, we have moved from a culture in which a somewhat monolithic conception of postmodernism might have worked to a culture in which we would be better off speaking of postmodernisms.

Indeed, the case is the same when it comes to modernism, the movement we most immediately define postmodernism in relation to. As Malcolm Bradbury points out,

> [w]hat we have behind us are many Modernisms, and according to the location we stand in . . . we will see its story and meaning as being very different. . . . Modernism was a pattern of international and polyglot transactions and, often, misapprehensions, deriving from the remarkable internationalism of the period and the emigré and expatriate movement of many of its participants. As it was polyglot, it was also polygeneric and eclectic, assimilating irreconcilables and incorporating these gradually within its own aesthetic self-definition. ("Modernisms/Postmodernisms" 317)

Still, we may adopt a panoramic view that enables us to see what unites the

different schools and individual artists of modernism and also what ties them to modernity: their emphasis on newness, on continual experimentation, on the inherent value of pushing forward and on the bankruptcy of past modes of artistic expression as well as the vulgarity of contemporary popular forms of expression. Thus, their creative output constitutes the artistic fruition of the ideals of progress and invention that animate modernity. At the same time, modernism carries within it the seeds of disenchantment with that very modernity: with its urbanization, its alienation, its *petit-bourgeois* values, its secularization, and its capacity for mass-destruction as witnessed by the First World War. True, some modernisms, most notably futurism, sing the glory of modern technological society and reject the past utterly, but most of them, such as the poetic modernism of Yeats and Eliot, approach the lament and the apocalyptic.[13]

Ironically, though, modern society moves on through a second world war and a cold war without meeting with a cataclysmic end and leaves modernism, or at least what we know as High Modernism, behind. Modernism itself, the jubilation of the new, leads finally to exhaustion.[14] At this point, stutters, near-silences and (anti)dramas of inertia set in, such as the endgames of Beckett, but there also appears a new playfulness that results in blendings of popular genres with epistemological and ontological explorations, such as the labyrinthine pastiches of Borges. The former we may, following Charles Jencks, call late modernist, the latter may be considered the threshold of postmodernism.[15]

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[13] As Charles Taylor points out, "we find the modernist writers and artists in protest against a world dominated by technology, standardization, the decay of community, mass society, and vulgarization. There was, indeed, a minority, like the futurists, which took a positive stance towards technology and wanted to celebrate its creative potentialities; *but they too were appalled at the passivity and ugliness which they saw as the actual consequences of mass industrial society*" (456; emphasis mine).

[14] Cf. John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion". I may also refer here to Umberto Eco's brief history of the avant-garde in his Postscript to *The Name of the Rose*: "The avant-garde destroys, defaces the past . . . Then the avant-garde goes further, destroys the figure, cancels it, arrives at the abstract, the informal, the white canvas, the slashed canvas, the charred canvas. In architecture and the visual arts, it will be the curtain wall, the building as stele, pure parallelipiped, minimal art; in literature, the destruction of the flow of discourse, the Burroughs-like collage, silence, the white page . . . But the moment comes when the avant-garde (the modern) can go no further" (66-67).

[15] See Jencks's *What is Post-Modernism?*, especially 43-49. Jencks proposes that we "redefine as mostly 'Late' what Davis, Goldberger, Foster, Jameson, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Krauss, Hassan and so many others often define as 'Post'. It is mostly 'Late' because it is still committed to the tradition of the new and does not have a complex relation to the past, or pluralism, or the transformation of Western culture, or a concern with meaning, continuity and symbolism" (46). I find Jencks's argument largely convincing, although it is not wholly fair to those critics and theorists which he refers to disapprovingly. Jencks's argument also owes much to his field of speciality, architecture, and it is not all that clear how postmodernist architectural aesthetics

Postmodernism, then, is constituted by a recharging of artistic batteries, this time without the pretences of newness and the disdain for past and/or popular forms. There is replenishment; a new kind of bastard hope, a *credo quia absurdum*.[16] Once again, though, just as there are modernisms, there are postmodernisms, diachronically and synchronically distributed. Or, to be more precise, there are a number of aesthetic practices that may be *thought of as* postmodernist. In literature, for instance, the relentless, overt metafiction of the sixties and seventies, such as John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* and Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, gives way to the more subtle historiographic metafiction of the eighties and nineties, such as Graham Swift's *Waterland* and Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. The latter, somewhat reconstructive postmodernism is a necessary development of the former, more deconstructive postmodernism; as Leslie Fiedler noted in 1982, "such terminal fiction could not be written over and over without becoming an intolerable bore to its writers as well as its readers" ("Deaths and Rebirths" 229). Yet, these two stages of postmodernist fiction share a metafictional impulse and a sense that the elitism and the avant-gardism of modernism are no longer viable.[17] Indeed, as with the various modernisms, we can discern a few basic traits that all literary postmodernisms share to varying degrees, and that reflect the postmodern critiques of universalism, of objectivism and of the belief in transparency. For instance, whereas the modernists sought new ways of representing the world, ways which they deemed more accurate than those of conventional realism, postmodernists stress the conventionality and provisionality of *all* modes of representation, consequently either revisiting representative modes deemed obsolete by the modernists or leaving representationalism behind to construct new worlds with unique properties, thus tending toward the popular genre of science fiction.[18] Moreover, as postmodernists can neither grant privilege to modernist techniques nor discard them, they typically blend modernist and pre-modernist forms, as well as elite and popular forms. Thus, postmodernist

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translate into a postmodernist poetics. However, a fine attempt at such a translation is made by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, which modifies Jencks's model by articulating it with the poststructuralist theories that Jencks is somewhat dismissive of.

[16] Cf. John Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment".

[17] As Fiedler argues, "[t]hough a novelist like John Barth is clearly indebted to the example of James Joyce, he uses Joycean techniques terminally; that is to say, though a work like *Giles Goat Boy* may seem at first glance merely one more late Modernist Art Novel, it is in fact an anti-Art Novel, a kind of autodestruct device. Read properly, it serves to undercut the posture of the novelist as elitist 'artist', as well as the reader's sense of himself as a self-congratulatory connoisseur of what is unavailable to the popular audience; so that finally it blows up the very notion of *avant-garde* experimental fiction" ("Deaths and Rebirths" 228).

[18] This view of postmodernist fiction has been elaborated by Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction* and *Constructing Postmodernism*.

fiction may also blend historical and contemporary popular languages of sentimentality with a modernist sense of self-consciousness and irony, importantly without letting the former succumb to the latter, playing a game of both-and rather than either-or.

In other words, what generally characterizes postmodernism is "double coding", a term championed by Jencks and adopted by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Politics of Postmodernism*. Jencks explains double coding by reference to his field of speciality, architecture:

> [D]ouble coding—the combination of modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects. The point of this double coding [is] itself double. Modern architecture had failed to remain credible partly because it did not communicate effectively with its users . . . and partly because it did not make effective links with the city and history. (*What is Post-Modernism?* 29)

Jencks clarifies what double coding would mean more generally—that is, for instance, in literature—by saying that "[t]o simplify, double coding means elite/popular, accommodating/subversive and new/old. . . . In a word . . . double coding confirms and subverts simultaneously" (30). This doubleness is what Hutcheon builds her poetics of postmodernism on: postmodernist art, in Hutcheon's view, is "both intensely self-reflexive and parodic, yet it also attempts to root itself in that which both reflexivity and parody appear to short-circuit: the historical world" (*Poetics* x). As Hutcheon puts it, "[t]here is no dialectic in the postmodern" (x), but rather a will to be suspended in contradiction: "Wilfully contradictory, then, postmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time. . . . All it can do is question from within" (xiii). Another set of discourses and practices that postmodernism proceeds from within is indeed modernism itself: postmodernism remains with the self-reflexivity, irony and re-examination of representation that were established by modernist artists. At the same time, through the practice of double coding, postmodernism breaks with the elitism and inaccessibility of High Modernism, and with the Adorno-Horkheimerian dichotomy of an accomplished, refining high art and a decadent, demoralizing mass culture. Postmodernism thus also reawakens, in order to problematize, the contextualization and referentiality that especially modernist architecture and painting generally discarded in favour of autonomy and abstraction.

Postmodern realism

Jencks's and Hutcheon's notions of what constitutes postmodernist aesthetics leads, in my view, to an appreciation of what Amy J. Elias has called "postmodern realism". Notably, Elias poses the issue of postmodern realism as a problem: her article is called "Meta-*mimesis*? The Problem of British Postmodern Realism". Elias argues that the

> opposition between British "Realism" and "experiment" (or postmodernism) seems secure until one considers such novels as Graham Swift's *Waterland*, Bruce Chatwin's *Utz*, Nigel Williams' *Star Turn*, David Lodge's *Small World*, Martin Amis's *Money*, or Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*. These works seem different from "straight" Realism—harder, more metafictional, postmodern. (9)

Significantly, Elias turns to the example of Swift as she proposes that "[n]ovels such as *Waterland* might in fact call into question the binary thinking (antithetical to a postmodern mindset) that separates Realism from postmodernism, experiment from tradition" (10). Pointing to the notion of realism as an ongoing project changing over time, a notion found for instance in George Levine, Elias invites us to consider "whether this new postmodern Realism upholds a mimetic aesthetic goal while paradoxically recognizing the demise of the Real" (10).

Similar ideas are expressed by Catherine Bernard in her article "Dismembering/Remembering Mimesis: Martin Amis, Graham Swift". As we can tell from the title, Bernard also views mimesis as a troubled concept, and also focuses on Swift's fiction. Bernard argues that Amis's and Swift's novels, whereas they "foreground the necessary reassessment of the epistemological link between the world and words . . . are not detached acknowledgements of the evasiveness and provisionality of reality and of the conventional and culturally determined modes of interpretation which condition our very apprehension and experience of things" (122). Rather, those novels "subvert literary conventions from within, by using and abusing their logic, an excess of coherence generating eventually incoherence and a rhetoric of excess" (123).

These views of Elias's and Bernard's are congenial to those of Hutcheon, to whom they both refer.[19] As Hutcheon suggests,

[19] Significantly, Wendy Wheeler also uses the phrase "postmodern realism" in her discussion of *Last Orders* (77).

> what we might find [in postmodernism] is less a destruction than a productive problematization of the entire notion of the relation of language to reality—fictive or historical. Historiographic metafiction both underlines its existence as discourse and yet still posits a relation of reference (however problematic) to the historical world. (141)

Postmodernism, in this view, is as interested in the promises and possibilities of old forms as in the deconstruction of those forms and their re-combination into new forms. This view of postmodernism would seem to be in line with Lyotard's notion of postmodernism as constant re-examination, although Lyotard may certainly be read as advocating a more decisive departure from realist aesthetics in favour of what is essentially a modernist avant-gardist project.[20] Setting a radical process of re-examination against a *laisser-faire* economy of received values, Lyotard concludes that "[t]hose who refuse to reexamine the rules of art pursue successful careers in mass conformism by communicating, by means of the 'correct rules', the endemic desire for reality with objects and situations capable of gratifying it" (*The Postmodern Condition* 75). However, it would be all too easy to say that the so-called "reexamination of the rules of art" has itself fostered a mass conformism governed by its own "correct rules" for several decades now. In the words of Hassan, "[t]hought blends into hype; words writhe; stereotypes become as transparent as the stereotypes they once repugned" ("Negative" 306). The endemic desire for that reality which Lyotard seems to throw out with modernity's bathwater, and without defining it at any length,[21] may thus itself turn into the province of the avant-garde, or of the re-examination and renegotiation of art.

Indeed, the title of a recent study by Hal Foster would seem to support this view of the coming of a realist avant-garde: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. In this study of contemporary art, Foster cites a notion of Craig Owens's which I find generally accurate, and which wholly corresponds to Hutcheon's notion of postmodernist art: "Modernist theory presupposes that mimesis, the adequation of image to

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[20] To Lyotard, "postmodernism" signifies a continuous renewal within the perimeters of modernism: "A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Thus understood, postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but in a nascent state, and this state is recurrent" (*The Postmodern Explained* 13).

[21] This is what Lyotard has to say about this intricate issue: "Realism, whose only definition is that it intends to avoid the question of reality implicated in that of art, always stands somewhere between academicism and kitsch" (*The Postmodern Condition* 75). Taking recourse to a rhetoric of categorical statements ("whose *only* definition *is*", "*always stands*") and of implied negative connotations ("academicism", "kitsch"), Lyotard does all he can to express his aversion, but not very much to describe its object.

referent, can be bracketed or suspended, and that the art object itself can be substituted (metaphorically) for its referent. . . . [T]his fiction has become increasingly difficult to maintain. Postmodernism neither brackets nor suspends the referent but works to problematize the activity of reference" (qtd. in Foster 88). This "realist" turn must not be understood in terms of nostalgia or simple retrospection, though. As John Barth puts it, "I deplore the artistic and critical cast of mind that repudiates the whole modernist enterprise as an aberration and sets to work as if it hadn't happened; that rushes back into the arms of nineteenth-century middle-class realism as if the first half of the twentieth century hadn't happened" ("Replenishment" 202). To Barth, "[a] worthy program for postmodernist fiction . . . is the synthesis or transcension of these antitheses, which may be summed up as premodernist and modernist modes of writing" (203). Both more general and more theoretical, Pierre Bourdieu points out that

> because the whole series of pertinent changes [in the field of cultural production] is present, practically, in the latest (just as the six figures already dialled on a telephone are present in the seventh), a work or an aesthetic movement is irreducible to any other situated elsewhere in the series; and *returns* to past styles . . . are never "the same thing", since they are separated from what they return to by negative reference to something which was itself the negation of it (or the negation of its negation, etc.). (60)

That is, the whole history of the field up to any given point is immanent to the functioning of the field at that point, and therefore producers must possess that history to meet the demands of the field with any success. This has never been more evident than in postmodernism, especially as Jencks and Hutcheon recognize it: a reworking of the past, a working-through of the past, a kind of internal affairs investigation of culture by culture after it exhausted itself and—almost—died. Thus, a truly postmodernist art, and a truly postmodernist criticism, would not follow the logic of the avant-garde in the strict sense, which is based on modern notions of time and progress and on the belief in the inherent value of the new, but would, following the logic of vertical time (as in Dante's *Inferno*; no further comparisons intended), give equal attention to the past and the now; indeed, to the *reality* of the past and the now, knowing that that reality is always part product of our desires, part geared toward demeaning them.

Regardless of where we may find "reality", and how we would like to find it, it has faded from view in most of the discourses on/of postmodernism. It is the impact of those discourses that Martha Nussbaum must have in mind

when she notes in *Love's Knowledge* that for quite some time it has been "assumed that any work that attempts to ask of a literary text questions about how we might live, treating the work as addressed to the reader's practical interests and needs, and as being in some sense about our lives, must be hopelessly naive, reactionary, and insensitive to the complexities of literary form and intertextual referentiality" (21). Taken as an assessment of the general sway of literary studies, Nussbaum's statement does not at this point in time ring quite true, but it is still a fairly accurate reflection of the state of studies of postmodernism. However, Nussbaum's work does not, to my mind, constitute a tenable corrective to the alleged ills of literary studies in general or of studies of postmodernism in particular.[22] Andrew Gibson, on the other hand, points to more viable critical perspectives on the representational impulse, as he observes that "[r]epresentational assumptions have continued more or less subtly to pervade most work in the fields of literary and cultural studies" (*Towards* 70). He persuasively argues that *mimesis* has faired quite well in postmodernism, with "feminist and postcolonial valuations of representation", with Hutcheon's view of historiographic metafiction, and with Jameson's shift from "'textualist' ideology to . . . comparative 'realism'". He concludes that in postmodern criticism "[r]epresentation thus reappears in a double figure, in the imitation of imitation, the simulation of imitative form" (70-71).

Furthermore, if there is still a widespread disregard for the mimetic impulse in certain camps, Christopher Butler mounts a perceptive critique of that disregard, referring to "what Hutcheon calls the 'de-doxifying' impulse in postmodernist literary theory":

> This "de-doxifying" attack worked with the notion of *stereotype* and the ideological conformity it encouraged, in such a way as to

[22] I find it hard to come to terms with the fact that *Love's Knowledge* is hardly animated at all by the elaborations and modifications of existentialism, phenomenology and poststructuralism in the last few decades. For instance, Kierkegaard and Levinas are not engaged at all, the only view of Heidegger we get is the dismissive comment "She probably reads Heidegger too, heaven help her" (321), and Derrida is expended with in a quite summary fashion (see 171), whereas the one recent book that resembles Nussbaum's own the most, namely Wayne C. Booth's *The Company We Keep*, is discussed somewhat hagiographically for fifteen pages (230-44). In short, a book on ethics and literature published in 1990 that does not engage with postmodern issues at all, but dwells extensively on Aristotle, amounts to a curious display of nostalgia. See Gibson, *Postmodernity* 8-12, for a critique of Nussbaum along similar lines. Cf. chapter two of Eaglestone's *Ethical Criticism*. See also Schrag, 141-43, for a succinct critique of Aristotle's ethics. Contrary to Nussbaum's view Schrag argues that "the ethical and moral theories of both Aristotle and Kant, and the teleological and deontological traditions of ethical theory construction more generally, come up short in guiding one through the stages of life's way" (143).

> further undermine our confidence in mimesis. It became common to assert that the work of art does not depict life; but life as it is represented by ideology. This is a common slogan (which presupposes the very difference, between knowledge of life, and of life as represented by ideology, which it wishes to deny). But even were it to be true, it would be trivially so—for even if all representations are affected by ideology, we would still need to appeal to other standards, like those of rationality, in order to ask which representations were more accurate, better supported by the relevant evidence, better open to testing by an attempted falsification, and so on. Such detailed considerations are all too easily avoided by a general distrust (of "bourgeois" thinking), which has encouraged postmodern artists to defend against detailed mimetic considerations. (78)

Indeed, as Andrzej Gasiorek points out, "[o]ne need not subscribe to a belief in the isomorphism of sign and referent to be a realist" (187). Gasiorek furthermore shows that if we look at postmodernist fiction such as that of Swift, Barnes and Rushdie, we will find that what is taking place in postmodernism is not necessarily a rejection of realism, but a diversification and multiplication of realism into realisms.

The reason why I am discussing the issue of realism at some length is that I see some degree of realism as integral to both the full expression and the appreciation of the sentimentum. I think that if literature is to illustrate the incommensurability of the other and the limitations of, and violations by, representation, it is best served by staying with realism and interrogating and interrupting it from within. Once again, this is not to suggest a notion of authenticity or one-to-one correspondence, or a preclusion of "ex-centric" modes of representation, but to suggest a respect for and an approximation of common experience and the forms of representation sanctioned by the vast majority of cultural consumers (at least in the West, the cultural history of which is my concern here)—what in by now classical terminology goes under the name of *vraisemblance*.[23] In other words, if postmodernism is about simultaneously inscribing and subverting, it will have to take *vraisemblance* as its point of departure if it wants to critique those notions with any wide success.

Indeed, Graham Swift's novels would seem to follow this post-

[23] In *Structuralist Poetics*, Jonathan Culler explains the concept of *vraisemblance* by referring to Tzvetan Todorov: "Todorov offered three definitions: first, 'the *vraisemblable* is the relation of a particular text to another general and diffuse text which might be called "public opinion"'. Second, the *vraisemblable* is whatever tradition makes suitable or expected in a particular genre . . . And finally, 'one can speak of the *vraisemblance* of a work in so far as it attempts to make us believe that it conforms to reality and not to its own laws . . .'" (138-39).

modernist programme. As John Banville has suggested, they stress the importance of *ordinary* days.[24] There is no child without a brain (as in Jenny Diski's *Like Mother*), no mystic island and imaginary characters taking real shape (as in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*), no characters called Oedipa Mass, Dr Hilarius or Pierce Inverarity (as in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*), no Palace of the Peacock (as in Wilson Harris's novel of the same name), and none of the flirting with science fiction and cyberpunk which Brian McHale characterizes as typically postmodernist in his *Constructing Postmodernism.* The setting of Swift's fictions is usually London, sometimes America or southern Europe, that is, geographically and culturally recognizable places, and the characters fit the categories of "the man in the street" or "the girl next door". Still, Swift's novels often have a mythical and magical tinge, but of a kind that we may all perceive in more or less ordinary days. Swift's novels betray their anti-representationalist stance more subtly, through what we saw Catherine Bernard call a "rhetoric of excess", through a self-conscious play with literary conventions and through a melodramatic mode of excess.[25] This is why Swift's fictions lend themselves particularly well to my discussion.

I should note here too that my appreciation of postmodern realism influences my mode of reading literary texts in this study. While I read characters and situations in those texts as, on one level, precisely fictional, with all the textual contingency and critical distance that comes with such a reading, I also find it inescapable to relate to fictional characters and situations, on another level, as one would to actual, living persons to whom one attributes volition and emotional capability. Actual, living persons, after all, also to a large extent present themselves through narrative or other signifying practices. In other words, I opt for a mode of reading that accommodates, to some extent, my sentimentality and my vulnerability: I am touched by the destinies of fictional characters. My readings thus break with the outspoken modernist mode of reading from Flaubert through James to Eliot, which found its extremification in Ortega y Gasset's *The Dehumanization of Art*: "Not only is grieving and rejoicing at such human destinies as a work of art presents or narrates a very different thing from true artistic pleasure, but preoccupation with the human content of the work is in principle incompatible with aesthetic enjoyment proper" (9).[26] To Ortega y Gasset, "an object of art is artistic only in so far as it is not real" (10). In a

[24] In his review of *Last Orders* in the *New York Review of Books*, Banville wrote that Swift "is, as John Dewey beautifully said of Emerson, 'the sage of ordinary days'" (Banville, Online).

[25] I am leaning here on Peter Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination*, which I return to below.

[26] We may note the affinity between this view of Ortega's and the view of Kant's quoted in the epigraph of this study. For a brief survey of Ortega's, as well as Flaubert's and James's, notions of how art and literature should be constructed and construed, as well as a discussion and critique of such notions, see Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, chapter five.

certain sense, this is a perfectly tenable, not to say trivial, view. In another sense, though, which would seem to be Ortega's, it is a view that holds that true artistry means losing sight entirely of human reality with its smells, its tastes, its passions, its contingencies. To which I would reply, if allowed a moment of polemicism, that anyone can write an entire novel without using any personal pronouns, but only a few can write *Bleak House*, *The Sound and the Fury* or *Midnight's Children*.

However, I wish to stress that neither do I subscribe to a mode of modern criticism in the vein of Leavis, which rests on the assumption "that a novel's ethical power is inseparable from a kind of mimetic adequacy" (Gibson, *Postmodernity* 56). Such criticism, as Andrew Gibson observes, would locate an ethical failure in a novel at the point where the novel reveals its inability to reveal, where the novel acknowledges the limits of representation, and would implicitly or explicitly state that "[c]ertainty in and of representation is the *sine qua non* of ethics in narrative" (56). By discussing Swift's novels under the heading of "postmodern realism", I am calling attention precisely to the ways in which those novels set up the conventions of realism in order to destabilize them, to re-examine them and to call attention to the unrepresentable; but also to the ways in which those novels identify the aporias of not only representationalism, but of anti-representationalism as well. As Gibson himself points out in his critique of representationalism, "we cannot simply move beyond an ethics tied to the mimetic premise, decisively, all at once. For the mimetic premise is so much part of our inheritance that an ethics of fiction that sought comprehensively to set it aside would find it immediately reappearing, if only as the necessary point of reference for the new departure" (55).

Enter the sentimentum

With those things said about postmodernism and realism, it is time to move on to the more elaborate explanation of the terms of the sentimentum. I move on by reiterating: not only do I find Jameson's notion of the waning of affect in postmodernism problematic, but I also claim that affect, at least in the mode of sentimentality and sensibility, is inseparable from ethics and spirituality, which in their turn are inseparable; in the words of Levinas, "[e]thics is the spiritual optics" (*Totality* 78). Indeed, in their eighteenth century genesis, sentimentality and sensibility were not just about letting feelings loose, but about being virtuous and doing good, about caring for the other and, ultimately, about being a good Christian. Even a secularized sentimentality cannot free itself of the traces of a more arcane spirituality; as Peter Brooks notes in his study of melodrama, a genre which shares

conventions and tenets with sentimental literature, "[t]he melodramatic mode in large measure exists to locate and to articulate the moral occult" (5). What Brooks calls the moral occult "is not a metaphysical system; it is rather the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth. It bears comparison to unconscious mind, for it is a sphere of being where our most basic desires and interdictions lie, a realm which in quotidian existence may appear closed off from us, but which we must accede to since it is the realm of meaning and value" (5).

Needless to say, an ocean of differences divides our current, postmodern scene from the culture of feeling. Yet, the configuration of ethics, spirituality and affect just described is, *mutatis mutandis*, still in place. Today, in Levinas, we find an ethics of affect which is also a religion, the coming of God to one's mind, and Levinasian ethics may be said to constitute a contemporary mode of sentimentality, with its emphasis on sensibility, on baring oneself to the other and on receiving the other in its bareness, on wounds, on affectivity; Levinas's ethics could even be described as a kind of melodrama in which the struggle between "good" and "evil" has been replaced by the struggle between what Levinas terms "the saying" and "the said".[27] However, Levinas's sentimentality, or any postmodern sentimentality, does not quite have the characteristics of what has become commonly identified as sentimentality, nor is it found in the same sort of philosophical and aesthetic configuration as traditional sentimentality. My discussion thus requires a tentative conception of the postmodern configuration of affect, ethics and spirituality, and a shorthand phrase to denote that conception and, more specifically, the transformation of sentimentality within it. My reasons for choosing the phrase "the sentimentum" are as follows: *sentimentum* is a Latin word, seldom used nowadays and hence relatively free of obvious etymological/semantic or discursive baggage;[28] introducing it as a neologism in English, I wish to

[27] My bringing together of Brooks's "moral occult", a site of Manichean struggle, and a postmodern, Levinasian, ethics of process and becoming surely needs a word of explanation. I believe that both these impulses, the Manichean and the "ethical", dwell in us; history, however, shows the former to get the upper hand most of the time. Levinas's is an attempt, fragile, to make us aware of and make us amplify the latter. What is more, one may argue that Levinasian ethics too is constituted by a dualism, that between "the saying" and "the said", with Levinas vociferously championing the former and unforgivingly lambasting the latter. Embedded in Levinas's great sense of subtlety, nuance and balance lie the seeds of a moralism, and perhaps in all philosophy lie the traces of demonology; in his quest for reason Descartes was driven by his evil demon into the *aporia* that produced the ruse of the *cogito*, and in his quest for ethics Levinas fled the petrifying stare of the Medusa (the gaze of the other that Sartre cannot circumvent in his ontology) to find the sanctuary of a pair of eyes that called him to constant action.

[28] *Sentimentum* is etymologically connected to *sentio*, *sentire*, *sensi*, *sensum*: "notice",

suggest a reference to the modern connotations of "sentiment" and "sentimentality" while indicating a difference. This need for indicating a difference is the reason why I have chosen not to simply use the phrase "postmodern sentimentality"—that phrase would convey too narrow connotations and would also risk conveying the sense of a simple reinscription of the terms of classical sentimentality into a postmodernist aesthetic of irony, pastiche and play. Finally, the definite article of the phrase serves to indicate that it is a specific, albeit multifaceted and plastic, configuration that is denoted. In this way, the term will hopefully escape the kind of free play that "sentimentality" has entered into.

However, before I elaborate further on the specific concept of the sentimentum, an exposition of the shifting meaning and value of sentimentality should be in place. Fred Kaplan offers a lucid history of the term and its cognates:

> The term *sentiment* came into English as early as the fourteenth century and meant (in chronological sequence) "one's own feelings", "physical feeling", "mental attitude (of approval or disapproval)", "an emotion", "a thought or reflection coloured by or proceeding from emotion", "an emotional thought expressed in literature or art", and "a striking or agreeable thought or wish". The words *sentimental* and *sentimentality* were coined in the middle to late eighteenth century to indicate something "characterized by sentiment" and "the quality of being sentimental", respectively. (17)

Importantly, it is the term "sentimentalism", rather than "sentimentality", that was initially used pejoratively: "With slowly gathering force, *sentimentalism* came to denote late in the nineteenth century the misuse of sentiment, 'the disposition to attribute undue importance to sentimental considerations, to be governed by sentiment in opposition to reason; the tendency to excessive indulgence in or insincere display of sentiment'" (17).

This fall from grace of sentimentality, or of sentimentalism, is apparent in an essay by G.K. Chesterton called "On Sentiment", in which Chesterton is critical of the sweeping renunciation of sentimentality that he perceives as typical of his time: "In reading some recent discussions about Victorian fiction I have come upon a curious fallacy about what is called sentiment. It is generally called sentimentalism or sentimentality. The term, in any case, is always applied in a bad sense" (278). Having made this observation, Chesterton proceeds to pick apart the assumptions underlying the antipathy to

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"perceive"; "feel".

sentimentality, arguing that "[t]here is nothing of illusion, or even superficiality, in recognizing the importance of the emotions . . . There is nothing weak about showing such feelings; there is nothing realistic about denying such feelings. The feelings are facts; they are even very fundamental facts" (278). His conclusion is that "[i]t is obvious that anti-sentimentalism is only a rather priggish and a rather snobbish form of sentimentalism. The fastidious person is really preferring feelings to facts" (279). That is, the fastidious anti-sentimentalist is actually putting his unreflected negative emotional reaction to all occurrences that would fall under the heading of sentimentalism before any more sustained distinctions between various occurrences and before any considerations of the basis and the relative merits of various occurrences. In Chesterton's view, "[t]he sin of sentimentalism only occurs when somebody indulges a feeling, sometimes even a real feeling, at the prejudice of something equally real, which also has its rights" (279). This sin emerges "in the attempt to combine a fact and a falsehood in one act of mind", which Chesterton exemplifies by the motif of love in the midst of war: "Soldiers do go to battle and do leave girls behind; and the passions involved are not only romantic but real. But if we then make fancy pictures of war, and refuse to admit that wounds hurt, or that heroes can be killed, or that good causes can be defeated, then we are trying to hold two contrary conceptions in the mind at once" (280).

At any rate, the devaluation of sentimentality *tout court* that Chesterton is contesting was part and parcel of the modernist movement, the emergence of which Chesterton could witness first hand. As Winfried Fluck points out,

> until roughly the middle of the nineteenth century, sentimentality did not pose a problem, but a promise: that of creating a common emotional and cultural bond between text and reader. Modernism, with its emphasis on modes of (often ironic) distancing and its strong interest in increasing the cognitive mobility of a reader conceptualized as a highly individualized being who stands apart from the mass, has changed all that; in doing this it has also relegated the sentimental in fiction to the lower regions of our culture. (15)

Similar observations are made by Jerome McGann in his study of the poetic styles of sensibility and sentimentality:

> [I]nstitutional modernism . . . ordered the academic horizon of writing for most of the twentieth-century and spent much of its energy fighting against the poetic styles I will be examining. The central figure in that campaign was T.S. Eliot, whose defence of a classical tradition, as he saw it, entailed a corresponding

> assault upon the new and decidedly anti-classical styles of poetry founded in the eighteenth century.
>
> But Eliot was not alone. The antipathy to "sentimental" styles went broadcast. Of the imposing modernist writers, only Gertrude Stein kept perfect faith with this line of work. (1)

It is not surprising, then, that Eliot, as the high priest of modernism, sought to exorcise Stein, claiming that if her work was "of the future, then the future is, as it very likely is, of the barbarians" (qtd. in McGann 3). It would seem that Eliot was correct in projecting Stein into the future, a future which sees the resurgence of the mode of sentimentality: "Swept out of the schools, Stein and seven other devils went elsewhere, and perhaps 'the last state of that man became worse than the first'. We now call that state 'postmodernism'" (McGann 4).

Indeed, in recent, postmodern, days, a number of scholars of literature have tried to make a case for using "sentimentality" as a neutral and even positive term, as well as to read modernism on terms other than its own and thus to find the spectre or even the living breath of sentimentality and sensibility not least in Eliot himself. Such is the thrust of the collection *Sentimentality in Modern Literature and Popular Culture*, edited by Winfried Herget, from which I cite here essays by Herget, Winfried Fluck and Dagmar Buchwald. Such is also the thrust of Suzanne Clark's *Sentimental Modernism*, in which Clark reads a number of modernist women writers in conjunction with a notion of the persistence of the sentimental tradition and of its positive implications for feminism. As Clark argues, "[i]n retrospect, no discourse is without emotional appeal and pathos, and so, in retrospect, the sentimentality becomes evident" (19). But I may also refer to Fred Kaplan's contention that whereas "[i]n modern high culture, sentimentality is often thought of as vaguely embarrassing or is condemned for being in bad taste or for being insincere", and whereas "[i]t can, of course, be all these things . . . it need not necessarily be any of them" (3). Even in an essay on Martin Amis and Ian McEwan, two authors seldom discussed in conjunction with sentimentality, we read that "sometimes sentimentality is the closest we can afford to get to compassion. And sometimes it is the only piece of wreckage left to cling to" (Ryan 217).

Still, today the word "sentimental" is most often used pejoratively, and the notion of the sin of sentimentalism identified by Chesterton underlies that use; typically, the word is used about works of fiction that are excessively melodramatic or tear-jerking in their quest to arouse sympathy for unfortunate or victimized characters, or that paint too rosy a picture of the world. But it is also used in the sense seen above of attributing "undue importance" to sentiments "in opposition to reason", or indeed in opposition

to the decrees of *Realpolitik*, as in the exclamation: "You sentimental fool!" In both these senses, the sentimental stands in opposition to the reasonable, the informed, the sophisticated and indeed the nihilistic and the cynical.[29]

While "the sentimentum" retains these senses of "sentimentality"—importantly with a positive slant—the phrase is meant to signify a sentimentality that traverses a spectrum of ethico-spiritual states of being, in their affectivity and emotional expressions, which are ultimately governed by a relatively recent postmodern ethico-spiritual imagination.[30] In the postmodern condition, which fosters that imagination, subjects are open to condition*ing* by all possible fragments of beliefs simultaneously; subjects flicker in and out of traditionally conflicting games of belief, whether they be archaic or modern, arcane or rationalist, religious or secular, spiritual or nihilistic. As Calvin O. Schrag observes in *The Self after Postmodernity*,

> [t]he project of sketching the portrait of the human self after postmodernity invites difficulties that many deem insurmountable. There is first the obvious truth that we are dealing not with a single, unitary, sharply defined portrait, but rather with a portrait that is itself curiously diversified. What thus appears to be at issue is a multiplicity of profiles and perspectives through which the human self moves and is able to come into view. The insinuation of diversity and multiplicity across the spectrum of human affairs is indeed something that we have learned from our postmodern experience and that itself needs to become a topic for discussion. (1)

Schrag's conclusion is that "[i]f one cannot rid oneself of the vocabulary of self, subject, and mind, the most that can be asserted is that the self is multiplicity, heterogeneity, difference, and ceaseless becoming, bereft of origin and purpose. Such is the manifesto of postmodernity on matters of the human subject as self and mind" (8). In postmodernity, then, "the self lives

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[29] I would also here like to refer the reader to part four of Milan Kundera's novel *Immortality*, "Homo Sentimentalis", which offers a critical, but sensible, and comic, but sensitive, account of the emergence of feeling as a value in European culture, starting with the troubadours.

[30] We find this imagination described, explored and indeed developed in Hassan, Jencks, Lyotard and Bauman, among others; see for instance *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion*, which has excellent essays on a number of topics relating to spirituality and ethics. Andrew Wernick, one of the contributors to the volume, adds to the list I just gave, as he writes of "the preoccupation with the mystical, the spiritual and the religious that has surfaced within the new postmodernist . . . theoreticians of the secular intelligentsia. As markers, we may think of Derrida's *Of Spirit*, of the Buddhist conception of (not-)self which can be detected in the work of Foucault and others . . . To these we may add: Lyotard and Deleuze's concern with the sublime, Levinas' and Irigaray's with alterity and . . . the resolutely disenchanted sociologizing of Baudrillard" (57).

through a multiplicity of changing profiles and a plurality of language games in which it holds court" (17). The postmodern self is, in Deleuze-Guattarian terms, rhizomatic rather than hierarchic and dichotomous, as is the relation between the various terms of its being. As Jameson argues, postmodernity involves an "image society, in which human subjects henceforth exposed . . . to bombardments of up to a thousand images a day (at the same that their formerly private lives are thoroughly viewed and scrutinized, itemized, measured and enumerated, in data banks) begin to live a very different relationship to space and time, to existential experience as well as to cultural consumption" ("Transformations of the Image" 110-11). The result of this new relationship to space and time is what Robert Jay Lifton calls "the Protean self".[31] In more negative terms, this self is marked by ambivalence or even schizophrenia: cognitive dissonance. This dissonance seems to be what Bauman has in view when he suggests that postmodernity means "the speed which things change and the pace with which moods succeed each other so that they have no time to ossify into things. It means attention drawn in all directions at once so that it cannot stop on anything for long and nothing gets a really close look" (*Intimations* vii). In positive terms, however, the Protean self enables the liberation of multiplicity, difference, a rhizomatic mode of being: cognitive assonance. Through one's highly temporalized existence, one may productively encounter, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, "oneself as another".[32]

At the same time, as Schrag argues, we are "not without some sense of self-identity" (17). This self-identity may of course still be a ruse. Our sense of self-sameness may well be an evolutionary prank, or our minds' shorthand for an infinitely more complex state of affairs. Nonetheless, we seem incapable of getting around our conceptions of our selves, and indeed incapable of doing without these conceptions. In this way, the destiny, if not *telos*, of postmodernism may be the one described so succinctly by Deleuze and Guattari: "To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 3). Postmodernism, in other words, means living in the "as if": as if there is an I, as if there is an other, as if anything or even everything matters—and minds.[33] Postmodernism thus tends toward philosophical pragmatism. Indeed, Hassan, "the father of postmodernism", has recently advocated this tendency, while Emerson, "the father of

[31] In *The Protean Self*, Lifton, who proceeds from the evidence of his own psychiatric work, locates proteanism precisely in "the multiplicity of varied, even antithetical images and ideas held at any one time by the self, each of which it may be more or less ready to act upon" (8).

[32] See Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*.

[33] For postmodernism as "as if", see McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, e.g. 1, 9 and 218-20.

pragmatism", has offered what is perhaps an apt program for our condition: "Let us treat the men and women well; treat them as if they were real; perhaps they are" (81). The same attitude, I suggest, would hold for emotional states: let us treat them as significant, as epistemologically and ontologically valuable, as if they were "real". This is not to sidestep the whole issue of social construction, of conventionalization and of the fact that emotional states are intricately intertwined with discursive states: postmodern subjects flicker in and out of sentimentality, melodrama, romanticism, cynicism, nihilism and in and out of the language games associated with these modes of affect.

Contrary to Jameson's belief, then, affect (and, indeed, the subject) does not take a path of dissolution in postmodernism, but a path of complexification. Keeping the flickering of this complexity in action, remaining in what Keats called "negative capability",[34] never choosing, but forever postponing judgement and suspending both disbelief and belief, lodging belief in nihilism, indeterminacy in immanence, is to approach the sentimentum. The effect of this approach is an ironic attitude that resists any kind of monism—that resists the final settling for either belief or nihilism, sentimentality or cynicism.[35] Whereas Winfried Herget says of an older mode of sentimentality that "[i]rony, above all, is alien to the sentimental purpose" (7), irony is integral to the sentimentum. However, in the sentimentum, sentimentality is not swallowed up by irony, but lodged in it. What is more, the terms may ultimately be reversed, irony may be said to be lodged in sentimentality. As Mileur bids, "let us consider for a moment that what hides in the language of irony is sentiment and that the history of irony is the history of the sentimental, masked" (205). Admittedly, this is not an unusual consideration. However, Mileur gets more radical as he turns to "exploring the notion that the sentimental is the type of which irony is a more specialized instance" (206). Astutely, Mileur points out "that the presence of an unreflective sense that awareness makes a difference constitutes the sentimental at the heart of irony" (209); that is, irony sentimentalizes awareness. Thus, in a deconstructive move, irony is shown to be dependent on sentimentality—but in a complete deconstructive neutralization, the opposite also holds, and thus it is not possible to finally establish one of the terms as dominant.

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[34] The phrase was coined by Keats in a letter to his brothers; see Hassan, "Negative Capability Reclaimed", for a recent discussion of the merits of Keats's concept.

[35] We find this attitude in the self-conscious narrators of the novels of the sentimentum that I consider in this study: Tom Crick in *Waterland*, Harry and Sophie Beech in *Out of This World*, Bill Unwin in *Ever After*, Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot*, Claudia Hampton in *Moon Tiger* and the unnamed narrator of *Written on the Body*. *Mutatis mutandis*, I would say that we find it in *Last Orders* as well.

Because of this indeterminacy and vacillation, and because of the governing by an ethico-spiritual imagination, the sentiments of the postmodern self transcend the self-indulgence and solipsism of the modern ego and reach an intersubjective sphere of engagement with the other. The sentiments, and the sentimentality, in question are not those of the virtuous ego, victim of, or deliverer from, vice, but of the vulnerable self called into question and called to responsibility. As Levinas puts it, "[t]he subjectivity of a subject is vulnerability, exposure to affection, sensibility, a passivity more passive still than any passivity . . . an exposedness always to be exposed the more" (*Otherwise* 50). The ethico-spirituality involved in the sentimentum is thus one of uncertainty and irresolution, and not one of eschatologically sustained certainty; as the British dramatist, Dennis Potter, put it in his last, televised interview: "Religion has always been to me the wound—not the bandage".[36] Or, as Hassan puts it, somewhat differently, what we might perhaps more plausibly aim for now is "a deeper *agnosticism* verging on the sacred" ("Forum" 1139). In this agnosticism, God becomes a figure for the intimation of a willingness to surrender one's self-interest, rather than a figure for *a priori* strictures. Postmodernist aesthetics uphold this ethico-spiritual imagination by drawing attention to the impingement of the other on the work of fiction itself (through intertextual and metafictional devices) and on the narrator's interpretation (through multiple, parallel narratives of "the same"). These inscriptions of difference and otherness attest to a belief that one, any one, is not sufficient and that the limits of knowledge need not, should not, must not, produce solipsism.[37] The sentimentum, then, is constituted by both communal and differential impulses.

With those qualifications in mind, let me pursue in more depth the various terms used in the brief explanation of the sentimentum just given. By a postmodern ethico-spiritual imagination, I mean an imagination which rejects the modern mind-matter dualism, and which recognizes the other as finally ungraspable, but also intimately connected, to the self; this holds for the other whether it be other people, other species, or that general entity called "Nature".[38] The big equalizer, death, is also the big other, in its final

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[36] Of course, spirituality and religion are not quite synonymous; as Derrida points out, "[d]istinctions are required: faith has not always been and will not always be identifiable with religion, nor, another point, with theology. All sacredness and all holiness are not necessarily, in the strict sense of the term, if there is one, religious" ("Faith and Knowledge" 8-9).

[37] "What alternative to faith, to the blindness and passion of faith, can there be . . . once one confesses the limits of knowledge?", John Caputo asks in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (309).

[38] Derrida offers a corrective to Levinas, for whom the other is typically the other man and, above all, the supreme Other (that is, God), as he explains that "[w]hen I say in French *tout autre est tout autre* . . . [i]t means simply that every other, without and before any determination, any

manifestation of infinity, as the moment of the final gaze of the other. The recognition of these others prompts an ethics of alterity. The true ethical moment lies in the scandal of unconditional love, that paradoxically unreciprocal reciprocity. In their actuality these relations of same and other are woven into a tapestry of sentiments and sentimentality: longing, suffering, love, bliss. The longing and suffering in question are not a result of the failure of the *ego*'s project so much as of the failure of intersubjective *connection*; a connection which, when it succeeds, is the pinnacle of love and may approach bliss.

Indeed, "love" seems to be hyperordinate here, or, rather, to be a signifier capable of encompassing most of what is involved in the sentimentum; that is, if we take "love" in the broader sense of *agape* (not necessarily opposed or hyperordinate to but co-ordinated with *eros*). Love encompasses the relation to and the responsibility for the other, as well as the longing, the suffering and the bliss involved in that relation; and, ultimately, love both avers and is averse to death. Julia Kristeva brings these aspects of love into her opening paragraph of *Tales of Love*, first observing on a personal note how her love memories "relate to an exaltation beyond eroticism that is as much inordinate happiness as it is pure suffering" and then asking in relation to her approach: "[W]hat is psychoanalysis if not an infinite quest for rebirths through the experience of love, which is begun again only to be displaced, renewed, and, if not abreacted, at least collected and set up at the heart of the analysand's ulterior life as an auspicious condition for his perpetual renewal, his non-death?" (1). As Jean-Luc Marion suggests in his "theo-logical" work *God Without Being*, love may also be the paradoxical ~~being~~ of a God without being, a God who, rather than having to be, makes itself known through the gift of love, *agape*, charity.[39] "[W]hat if", Marion asks, "to envisage [God], we did not have to wait for him within the horizon of Being, but rather transgress ourselves in risking to love love—bare, raw" (3).

Love, to put it differently, is the point at which the same recognizes itself, and in recognizing itself, fully, also recognizes its intricate, indeed painful, relation to the other: "As if", Kristeva suggests in *Tales of Love*, "at the very moment when the individual discovered himself to be intensely true, powerfully subjective, but violently ethical because he would be generously

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specification, man or woman, man or God, man or animal, any other whatever is infinitely other, is absolutely other. That is the only condition for the experience of otherness. This sentence is virtually an objection to Levinas, of course, for whom *le tout autre* is first of all God. Every other is infinitely other" ("Discussion" 135).

[39] Interestingly, Marion's argument has a lot of similarities with that sketched by Levinas in the foreword to *Of God Who Comes to Mind*.

ready to do anything for the other, he also discovered the confines of his condition and the powerlessness of his language" (3).

With that last phrase of Kristeva's we also arrive at one of the truly intriguing aspects of the sentimentum: that so many of its aspects—love, death, bliss, suffering, etc.—threaten to stifle linguistic expression.[40] "The ordeal of love puts the univocity of language and its referential and communicative power to the test", Kristeva writes (2). "While suffering is a universal human predicament", Harold Schweizer similarly observes, "it also remains the most unsharable, incommunicable mystery, the very epitome of secrecy and particularity" (1). In another context, Peter Brooks notes that melodrama, supposed to express without inhibition the most climactic sentiments, is often "the text of muteness": "Words, however unrepressed and pure, however transparent as vehicles for the expression of basic relations and verities, appear to be not wholly adequate to the representation of meanings" (56). As modern or modernist literature is seen as increasingly the symptom of trauma (in the face of industrialization, of urbanization, of accelerated capitalism, of the epistemic shock brought on by Darwin, Freud and Einstein and finally of the Holocaust), it is also interesting to recall Adorno's famous statement that after Auschwitz there can be no poetry, as well as Wayne C. Booth's contention that in modern literature "the author and the reader may meet, like Voltaire and God, but they do not speak" (*Rhetoric* 272), and Hassan's appraisal of a late modern "literature of silence". Regardless of whether one means by silence *total* silence (silence itself, absence of sound, absence of *the will to* sound), or, as Hassan does, either *partial* silence (the silence, more or less *present*, of *withheld* language)

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[40] Indeed, as Kristeva and Barthes have noted, love—that is, love in the sense of *agape*, of Platonic love—not only in its specific instances but as a *topic* is threatened by silence. *Eros*, sexuality and desire have been part of critical discourse for a few decades now, and it is also clear that they have somehow replaced and displaced romantic and spiritual love in our culture and society. However, what we call Platonic, "non-erotic" love, or *agape*, may be as passionate, indeed as delirious, as erotic love; the two are of course not all that easy to separate (see Kristeva 139-50 for an extensive discussion of Christian *agape* and its structures and workings). For a number of reasons, in modern society, such passionate, sentimental aspects of friendship are kept in check. (One of those reasons being that the demand for social mobility entails an emphasis on individualism, and hence on an individuation process, which renders even family bonds loose and somewhat suspect.) As Kristeva also notes, however, even in erotic relations, love, in the sense of a transindividual passion and not of a desire for possession, is nowadays suspect: "Under the crossfire of gynecological surgery rooms and television screens, we have buried love within shame for the benefit of pleasure, desire, if not revolution, evolution, planning, management" (5). Similar observations are made by Barthes in *A Lover's Discourse*. "The lover's sentiment is old-fashioned", Barthes argues, and writes further: "Everyone will understand that X has 'huge problems' with his sexuality; but no one will be interested in those Y may have with his sentimentality: love is obscene precisely in that it puts the sentimental in place of the sexual" (178).

or the silencing of *received* discourse, silence indeed marks much of the literature of the last century—up to and including the postmodern, in the rejuvenating yet hazardous light of which the sentimentum basks.[41]

Yet, the text of the sentimentum, akin to the sentimental text at the same time as it sets itself apart from the sentimental text, tries to bridge that silence, tries to show if not to tell, and to establish a link between same and other, between text (and perhaps even author) and reader. As John Wild writes in his introduction to Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, "if communication and community is to be achieved . . . I must be ready to put my world into words, and to offer it to the other. . . . Responsible communication depends on an initial act of generosity" (14). In Levinasian terms, the text of the sentimentum establishes a site of vulnerability, of the baring of one's skin to the caress or wounding by the other, a site for the saying—that which challenges me and calls me to responsibility—rather than the said—that which preserves my self-sameness and complacency. But wedded with the emphasis on alterity in Levinas is a more traditional notion of mutuality. In the postmodernist text of the sentimentum, sensibility in the classical sense comes up against sensibility in Levinas's sense, the former being questioned and modified by the latter, but not sinking into oblivion: there is always a trace, and that trace upsets the current—the current currents—in turn. Hence, what Winfried Herget notes about the sentimental text is true of the text of the sentimentum as well: it "relates author and reader on the basis of shared sentiments to achieve sympathy, and to move the reader from sympathy to compassion" (4). Here we may bring in Swift himself, for this is what he has to say about the task of the author:

> I do think that what I do is deeply moral, if only for the simple reason that all morality, all real morality, rests on doing what a novelist makes a speciality of—that is, attempting to get inside the experience of others, and unless you do that . . . I would be at a loss to know where true moral feelings come from without that. So I think that whatever else novels do, and they may be doing many things, they do fulfill a highly moral function. It is not one people would identify as moral, if their notion of morality is something which can be reduced to rules and discipline, but it is nevertheless the basis of morality. Imagination is the basis of morality. . . . [Writing, morality and empathy are related] because empathy is the beginning of

[41] See Hassan's *The Literature of Silence*. Cf. Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero* and Susan Sontag's "The Aesthetics of Silence". See also Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*, which addresses both the question of "poetry after Auschwitz" and the question of silence in literature.

> sympathy, sympathy is the beginning of compassion, and compassion is where morality really accrues. ("Interview" 224-25)

Swift's notion of the moral function of literature here may seem to simply hark back to traditional humanist ideas of compassion-through-comprehension, but it also certainly conveys a disregard for Leavisite ideas of moral fixity and, importantly, has affinities with postmodern ethics in the vein of Levinas: morality is not "something which can be reduced to rules and discipline". At any rate, we may conclude from this outspoken poetics of Swift's and, more importantly, from Swift's literary works that the one hundred years of submission to the decorum of modernism may turn out to be a parenthesis in the history of sentimentality.

Once again, though, the sentimentum does not entail an unproblematic return of a classical mode of sentimentality. For instance, whereas I think Herget's definition of "the sentimental text as a rhetorical construct whose aim it is to affect the reader, to move the reader—*movere* in the classical terminology—by means of pathos" (4) holds for the text of the sentimentum as well, the text of the sentimentum would distance itself from the classical sentimental text which "uses the story merely as a means for the occasion of the sentiment" and whose "situations, actions and characters, in which the feelings are implotted, are prone to become stereotyped" (5). The sentimentum rather fulfills the potential of sentimentality that Herget suggests: "Sentimentality goes beyond mere indulgence when it appeals to man's responsibility as a social being. The person responding to the sentimental text feels part of the pathetic community which shares suffering as the *conditio humana*; a-pathos—apathy—would set the individual apart from human community" (9). This is true of the text of the sentimentum too, which is about responsibility and suffering, the suffering of responsibility and the responsibility of suffering. Sentimentality is intimately linked to suffering. Indeed, as Marianne Noble argues, sentimentality may be linked to masochism:

> Sentimentalism . . . is closely linked to masochism, historically and structurally. Like masochism, sentimentalism can be read, broadly, as a quest for a state of union, or plenitude. And like masochism, sentimentalism describes a world in which pain is an avenue toward achieving that desired state of oneness. When providential theories of pain are read in the context of sentimental affirmations of sympathetic suffering, the result is an implicit link between pain and a mystical pleasure of transcendent union. (62)

As Noble further points out, "[s]entimentalism does not simply idealize the compassionate observation of another; it offers an intuitive and visceral understanding of the other's fear and anguish. A state of union, then, is achieved through suffering, which is the mechanism enabling one to 'enter into' another person, as it were" (65). At the same time, though, suffering links sentimentality to the unspeakable; we may recall Schweizer's words: suffering "remains the most unsharable, incommunicable mystery, the very epitome of secrecy and particularity" (1).[42] The text of the sentimentum, then, moves from the mystery of suffering, and the suffering brought on by mystery, through an attempt at remedy and union that never loses sight of the incommensurability of the other and the contingency of the self.

The intersubjective, transcendental sentimentality thus involved in the sentimentum breaks with a modern, subjective sentimentality. The resistance to such transcendental sentimentality in modernity is explained by Dagmar Buchwald. In her discussion, in which she interestingly equates "sentimentality" with "kitsch", Buchwald states the following, referring to Ludwig Giesz:

> The discovery that one has been governed by a mood, asserts Giesz, is answered with an "anthropologically important feeling of disgrace", of "deficiency, impotence, passivity, dizziness, surrender". The reason for this feeling of disgrace is that "the possible freedom of existence always resists any surrender to any fixing state whatsoever—and be it bliss itself". (Buchwald 48-49)[43]

As an alternative to this negative existentialist conception—decidedly modern and individualist—Buchwald offers us Otto Friedrich Bollnow's contention that "out of an attitude of 'devoted absorption' might spring 'other and deeper' ways of cognition" in which "the boundaries between subject and object become blurred" (48).[44] Here we must note that a generalized attribution of a positive value to a dissolution of the "I", a devoted absorption, may easily be a sentimental fallacy, a sentimentalizing view of a

[42] Again, Chesterton, though problematizing less, predates the discussion: "The hundredth sunbeam is as bright as the first sunbeam. And the hundredth child murdered by King Herod is as pathetic as the first. King Herod may have come to the end of his pleasure; but the mother has not come to the end of her pain. And her pain is a plain fact of nature, absolutely radical and realistic; as solid as a lump of rock. It has every quality of stone; antiquity, universality, simplicity, permanence" (279).

[43] Buchwald's references are to Giesz's *Phänomenologie des Kitsches* (München: Fink, 1971), 68-69.

[44] Buchwald's references are to Bollnow's *Das Wesen der Stimmungen* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1980), 125.

movement that actually dissolves the responsibility for the other by producing the ruse of merging with the other. Indeed, both Derrida and Levinas would seem suspicious of such a movement.[45] However, as Andrew Gibson notes, Levinas gradually moves toward an appreciation of what he terms "sensibility", which entails, if not a dissolution, then a suspension of the "I":

> As sensibility, "one is always *coram*, disturbed in oneself to the point of no longer having any intention" (*OB*, p. 92). This means that sensibility does not and cannot "congeal into a structure" (*OB*, p. 82). It is irreducible to a state and not conceivable as an entity. It appears as a "for the other" that is "total gratuity", a "breaking of interest" (*OB*, p. 96). . . . Levinas associates it with "uncovering" (*CPP*, p. 146), exposure to wounds, *vulnerability*: vulnerability, however, explicitly construed, not as a passive reception of stimuli, but as a positive "aptitude" (ibid.). (*Postmodernity* 165; emphasis in the original)[46]

Sensibility is here not synonymous with rapture, but there is a *movement toward* intersubjective absorption.[47] Gibson himself identifies sensibility with "the power to be affected" (162), and also refers us to Lyotard's interest in "*passibilité*, a disposition, even, paradoxically, a will to be moved" (161).

Indeed, moments of *passibilité*, or of "devoted absorption", are found throughout Swift's fictions, and those moments are often, even when they are moments of a kind of bliss, moments of suffering. As Schweizer argues, the moment of suffering (just like that of bliss) dissolves boundaries: "In the experience of suffering the ideology of objectivity, the claims of reason and knowledge, are called into question. Philosophical distinctions of body and spirit, sensation and intellect, the universal and the particular, the physical and the metaphysical, no longer apply" (2). This, as I show below, is pre-

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[45] They are not alone in this respect. For instance, in his discussion of the Christian philosopher Jan Patočka in *The Gift of Death*, Derrida observes that Patočka "[s]omewhat in the manner of Levinas . . . warns against an experience of the sacred as an enthusiasm of fervor for fusion, cautioning in particular against a form of demonic rapture that has as its effect, and often as its first intention, the removal of responsibility, the loss of the sense or consciousness of responsibility" (1).

[46] Gibson's references are to Levinas's *Otherwise than Being* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981) and *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993).

[47] "Sensibility", then, does not here quite take on its traditional meanings. Still, the term inescapably carries the etymological baggage most heavily laid on it in the eighteenth century. Needless to say, a tracing of the full, complex genealogy of sensibility is beyond the scope of the present study; I may refer the reader, however, to three recent and excellent studies: Janet Todd's *Sensibility*, G.J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* and Jerome McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility*.

cisely what happens at the end of Swift's *Last Orders*. In his fictional moments of devoted absorption and suffering, Swift to a large extent follows Bollnow in setting, as Buchwald puts it, "faith against doubt, trust against *angst*, harmony against split, absorption against dominance, shelter against exposure, and, as I could add as *advocata diaboli*, kitsch against artistic responsibility" (Buchwald 48). Swift differs from Bollnow, though, in following an ethics that prefers exposure over and against shelter.

Moreover, in the ethical and spiritual turn of the sentimentum, and in the careful formal execution of this turn, Swift is precisely assuming artistic responsibility. While the text of the sentimentum relies on us to renegotiate the mode of irony and distance, it also recognizes the need in our cultural climate to distance itself from "the cult of feelings" and "sentimentalism". To advocate a yielding to affect is not, in the words of Gibson, "to argue for emotivism, a 'culture of feeling' or a return to impressionism. Indeed, the ethical dangers of any celebration of a naive, untutored responsiveness . . . should be self-evident" (162). With this observation, we get back to the notion of double coding. For even if Swift ventures at times into the territory of classical, subjective sentimentality, both that sentimentality and the more intersubjective sentimentality are kept in check by a scepticist and pluralist imagination that is manifested in a number of postmodernist techniques such as irony, relativization and overt intertextuality. As I have already suggested, though, in Swift the stakes involved in this double coding are of an immediacy far surpassing casual "Generation X" ironies. John Mepham puts it well:

> In an age of lost innocence, of incredulity, of indecidability, it is more, not less, important for fiction to return to the investigation of the contours of freedom and necessity, of integrity and betrayal, of commitment and recklessness, of trust and complacency. To say "I love you" ironically is easy. What is it to work, marry, have children, go to war, ironically, with no grand narratives in support? (154-55)

The reasons for asking this type of question are discussed by Jürgen Habermas, who notes that the modern "separation and self-sufficiency, which, considered from the standpoint of philosophy of history, paved the way for emancipation from age-old dependencies, were experienced at the same time as abstraction, as alienation from the totality of an ethical context of life" (51). Here we begin to perceive also a loss of belief in the linear progress of history in general. Ironically, the very knowledge of what has gone before immobilizes and threatens any possible progress: "Modern consciousness, overburdened with historical knowledge, has lost 'the plastic

power of life' that makes human beings able, with their gaze toward the future, to 'interpret the past from the standpoint of the highest strength of the present'" (52). What is worse, we may sense, with Nietzsche, "in the historicist admiration of the 'power of history' a tendency that all too easily turns into an admiration of naked success in the style of *Realpolitik*" (52). We live in "the loss of myth, the loss of the mythical home" (Nietzsche qtd. in Habermas 54), and "[t]he modern time-consciousness, of course, prohibits any thoughts of regression, of an unmediated return to mythical origins" (54). The question of the sentimentum may thus be posed in the following way: what shape may sentimentality assume today, confronted with the absence of mythical consciousness and no longer erected on the assumption of the fundamental benevolence of man? Or: how can one be sentimental after Auschwitz?

This thinking after Auschwitz, this "breaking up of the grand Narratives" in Lyotard's famous phrase (*The Postmodern Condition* 15), is mirrored in Swift's novels. In each of Swift's novels, there is a state of crisis, of emergency. There is a trauma that has to be worked through and worked from. Risking a sense of proportion, we may say that the figure of Auschwitz is present in each novel.[48] In *The Sweet Shop Owner*, it is a rape, but also, and more importantly, the very protocol of efficiency and order that permeated modernity and mobilized the Holocaust.[49] In *Shuttlecock*, it is the trauma and consequent catatonia of the narrator's father. In *Waterland*, it is a murder and a gruesome abortion. In *Out of This World*, it is the terrorist bomb that shatters Robert Beech into pieces. In *Ever After*, it is the suicides of the narrator's father and of the narrator's wife, as well as the suicide attempt of the narrator himself. Finally, in *Last Orders*, it is the monstrous child June, born with neither sense nor sensibility, as both her mind and her body are dysfunctional.

Less dramatically, if we consider the lost appeal of traditions and family bonds, one motif that is conspicuous in its constant return in Swift's fictions is the child—typically the son—who refuses to take over his father's

[48] As Peter Widdowson points out, "[i]t is as though Swift 'dates' his modern world from the catastrophic events of the mass warfare of the Second World War—one which remains in their shadow and in which the destinies of ordinary lives, even in the 1980s and 1990s, are still determined by them" ("Novels of Graham Swift" 214). Thus, in a way, Swift faces the problem of writing after the horrors of the war delineated by Blanchot in *The Writing of the Disaster*.

[49] The seminal text for understanding the Holocaust as intrinsic to modernity rather than as its other, as its failure of assimilation, is Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Quite provocatively, Bauman suggests that "[a]s the promotion of rationality to the exclusion of alternative criteria of action, and in particular the tendency to subordinate the use of violence to rational calculus, has been long ago acknowledged as a constitutive feature of modern civilization—the Holocaust-style phenomena must be recognized as legitimate outcomes of civilizing tendency, and its constant potential" (28).

business, or—typically the daughter—who chooses to reconfigure herself radically in society. Examples of the former are Harry in *Out of This World* and Vince in *Last Orders*; examples of the latter are Dorothy in *The Sweet Shop Owner* and Sophie in *Out of This World*. A related observation made by Lyotard is that "'[i]dentifying' with the great names, the heroes of contemporary history, is becoming more and more difficult" (*The Postmodern Condition* 14). This is indeed a general problem in Swift's fictions, and it is a specific and personal problem for Prentis in *Shuttlecock* and Harry in *Out of This World*, each of whom questions his father's status as a hero. In *Waterland* the very aspiration to heroics is grotesquely parodied, as Dick, who is expected by his (grand)father to be "the Saviour of the World", turns out to be "a potato head". Yet an expansion of this motif is the very questioning of origins, the question of whether one's legal parents are one's biological parents, a problem that is clearly present in *Waterland*, *Ever After* and *Last Orders*.

Similarly, Swift chronicles the change from an economy of local family businesses to the late capitalist stronghold of multi-national take-overs and franchising: both *The Sweet Shop Owner* and *Last Orders* portray the plight of small scale shop owners in the face of anonymous supermarkets and malls. At the same time as Swift tries to salvage the local and the parochial, he does not seem very hopeful: the rural Fens of *Waterland*, where one begets a child through adventurous passion—in a disused mill, nonetheless—are sinking, and in their place rises up a suburbia where one finds one's child in a shopping-cart at the supermarket.

It is against—or, as a somewhat hopeful matter of fact, *within*—this bleak, alienating world that the sentimental impulses of Swift's fictions are set. Significantly, they are done so with rising conviction throughout Swift's oeuvre. In fact, all of Swift's novels share "the prototypical structure of the genre [of sentimental literature]", in which the "plot centers on union" (Noble 64). The "twin conditions" that sentimental literature rests on—"loss of union and drive toward its restoration" (65)—are heeded in Swift's novels, even as they are negated. In *The Sweet Shop Owner*, it is Willy Chapman who strives through the narrative toward the fulfillment of his dream of reconciliation with his daughter, in what amounts to a morbid ironization of the sentimental union, as he wants his daughter to come home and find him dead. In *Shuttlecock*, it is Prentis who seeks to be re-establish both communication with his catatonic father and a romantic relation to his estranged wife, but who ultimately attains this goal only by painting too rosy a picture of the world, as it were. *Waterland*'s Tom Crick has been severed both from his beloved pupils and from his beloved wife, as he has lost his job as a history teacher and his wife has become schizophrenic. In typical postmodern ironic

fashion, his narrative fails to reach a point of reunion. *Out of This World* is more successful both in terms of offering the possibility of reunion and of convincingly narrating that reunion: the whole novel is a kind of dialogue between the abandoned father Harry Beech and his runaway daughter Sophie, leading up to the promise of their reconciliation. However, if we consider Noble's suggestion that "the lost state of unity that is central to the sentimental imagination is so frequently a mother-child bond" and that the mother thus "often functions in sentimental literature as a figure of plenitude" (66), it is interesting to note that Harry's mother died giving birth to him, and thus rather functions as a figure of the void, of an always already absent plenitude. This, then, is one example of how Swift simultaneously takes heed of and negates the conventions of sentimentality. In *Ever After*, matters are even more complex, as Bill Unwin is trying to reconcile himself with his father's suicide several decades earlier, as well as with the deaths of his wife, his mother and his stepfather, but also with the fact that his Victorian ancestor Matthew Pearce had to divorce his wife after becoming a Darwinist. Himself having survived a suicide attempt some months before the narration starts, Unwin still manages to meditate on this hyperbolic melange of loss and perishability with a sense of romance and hope intact. If reunion with the departed is not possible, Unwin is at least able to reconcile himself with the life he has tried to reject. In *Last Orders*, finally, the death of the butcher Jack Dodds becomes a gift of reconciliation to his wife, his son, his friends, and not least his estranged daughter, the mentally and physically challenged June. In the last chapter, Ray, the narrator, standing on the pier at Margate scattering Jack's ashes, experiences a moment of transcendental union with both Jack and the other men on the pier.

From a more aesthetic angle, considering sentimentality vis-à-vis postmodernism, one could offer the following outline of the general development in Swift's oeuvre, although my close readings complicate this outline: *The Sweet Shop Owner*, published in 1980, is a modernist text, marked by alienation and crisis, and offering little in the form of sentimentality, spirituality or an ethics of alterity. *Shuttlecock*, published in 1981, constitutes a move from modernism to postmodernism: there is a tension between alienation and caress, and between truth-seeking and truth-*making*; aesthetically, the text moves toward overt intertextuality and metafiction. *Waterland*, published in 1983, raises the stakes of the sentimentum, pitting nihilist ironies against all kinds of sentimentalities. In its overt presentation of the notions of "the end of history" and of the storiness of history, and its complex intertextual play, it is something of a flying fortress of postmodernism; with its use of the phrase "Grand Narrative", it may be called Swift's "Lyotard novel". *Out of This World*, published in 1988,

is then Swift's "Baudrillard novel", illustrating as well as critiquing the hyperreal, confronting the simulacrum and world-weariness with magic and belief. It is also radically polyphonic in a way none of Swift's earlier works are, thus allowing for a play of difference. *Ever After*, published in 1992, continues the themes of *Waterland* and *Out of This World*, with a return to the more lavish arrangement of *Waterland* and with a skewed mirroring of Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*; at the same time, the novel constitutes a move toward a less defensive display of the sentimentum, and toward an embrace of what the narrator terms "make-belief". *Last Orders*, published in 1996, leaves the defensive aesthetics behind altogether, at the same time as it is Swift's most obvious rewriting of an earlier text, namely Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*.[50] In *Last Orders*, Swift perfects the possibility of subtle double coding, writing a piece of realist fiction thoroughly marked by the sentimentum at the same time as writing a potentially controversial piece of "historiographic metafiction".

The increasingly overt intertextuality or textual mirroring in Swift's oeuvre that I just touched upon, it is important to note, goes hand in hand with the increasing fulfillment of the sentimentum. Whereas modernism was very much about the creation of the radically new, postmodernism is about a more gentle acknowledgement and respect for the already said, an acceptance of the impingement of the past and the other on one's claim to originality; in postmodernism, "originality" becomes "*origin*ality".[51] In this sense, post-modernism is an expression of love, of literature not as the anxiety of influence or as Oedipal drama, but as acknowledgement and respect. In Swift, as in much other postmodernist literature, the Now is written in past forms, or past forms are re-set for the Now. Most conspicuous in this respect are *Waterland* and *Last Orders*. The former is a re-writing, or collage, of *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Great Expectations*, *The Great Gatsby* and *Moby Dick*—in the very least. In the latter, *As I Lay Dying* meets *Canterbury Tales* in contemporary England. Less overtly, *The Sweet Shop Owner* mirrors *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Good Soldier*, *Shuttlecock* alludes to *The Good Soldier*, *Out of This World* is a rehearsal of the mimicking of *As I Lay Dying*, and *Ever After* could be said to wed

[50] Of course, the novel is not, as John Frow argued in the *Independent on Sunday* (9 March 1997), simply a "direct and unacknowledged imitation" of Faulkner's novel (qtd. in Poole 167). Frow's "disclosure" does not so much show that the Booker Prize jury have not read Faulkner and cannot recognize a literary imposture, as it shows that professor Frow has apparently been left nonplussed by the notion of postmodernist pastiche and textual appropriation.

[51] That is, whereas modernists such as Eliot and Pound made palimpsests of literary history and exploded the past with the aim of creating something radically new, postmodernists such as Swift and Peter Ackroyd use the texts of the past more subtly, in a mode of metafictional pastiche that is suspicious of the radically new.

Shuttlecock with *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Significantly, most of the modernist texts which Swift's novels relate to are notable for a kind of subdued sentimentality: *The Good Soldier*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *As I Lay Dying* and *To the Lighthouse* are all testimonies to the waning of an older sentimental mode, but as such they also convey traces of that mode.

However, one may ask whether such a play of mirrors, although I suggested above that it constitutes an acknowledgement of, and a respect for, the already said and for *other* texts, does not also, and more fundamentally, constitute a repetition of the said and a short-circuiting of the saying. One must note that any kind of representation, naïvely realist or self-consciously hyperrealist, precludes the articulation of the saying and reinstates the fixity of the said. In other words, one may ask how a Levinasian ethics may be reconciled with art in general and postmodernist art in particular, especially as art can never quite rid itself of representational impulses. There is, indeed, in Levinas's earlier writing an "antipathy to art"—and particularly to literature, with its clear representationalist impulse and, at least traditionally, its drive toward closure—and it might therefore be the case, as Robert Eaglestone points out, that "[i]f Levinas is as opposed to the aesthetic in general as these writings suggest, a Levinasian criticism will be either impossible or, at best, weak to the point of incoherency" (Eaglestone 99). However, as Derrida has shown in "Violence and Metaphysics", and as Eaglestone himself shows in *Ethical Criticism*, Levinas's antipathy does not hold up to close scrutiny, as Levinas is himself caught up in aesthetics, in literature, in writing, in language—in representation. He can speak of the saying only as always already said, he can speak of the other only insofar as the other is always already within the realm of the same, within the realm of some kind of representation, whatever the extent of the anti-representational pull of the mode of that representation is.

Indeed, Levinas himself responded to Derrida's critique and developed his thinking in *Otherwise than Being* to go beyond the primacy of the face-to-face as presence and hence to approach a site in which representation would be as, or even more, relevant to the question of ethics as the actual face-to-face situation is; as Eaglestone puts it, "[i]n *Totality and Infinity* the 'beyond' was manifest 'within the totality and history, within experience' . . . in the face; in *Otherwise than Being* the infinite, the 'otherwise than being', appears within language" (140). Still, as Eaglestone observes, art is somewhat suspect in *Otherwise than Being*: "A poem, thematised, said, lacks the 'non-assemblable diachrony' which is the fracturing of temporality by the saying . . . Words word, or words only make their essence as words clear in poetry, and do not open beyond. . . . [T]he art work is locked up in the

temporalisation of essence. Art still has no access to the saying" (154). When one brings this view into play with Levinas's general development in *Otherwise than Being*, though, there is, as Eaglestone points out, "a self-contradiction in Levinas's work" (156). There are moments in *Otherwise than Being* in which "the exorbitance of the saying, surpassing the logo-centric constrictions of the said, is clearly understood to occur in art. The saying, the caress of love, overflows through the songs and poems in which it is said. . . . These moments . . . then suggest that a literary art work is, in fact, an interweaving of the saying and the said, and not simply the said resounding" (160).

It would thus seem to be the case that, as Richard Kearney argues, "Levinas's suspicion of images is not directed against the poetic imagination per se but against the use or abuse of such power to incarcerate the self in a blind alley of self-reflecting mirrors" (15). Thus, "[f]or Levinas, not surprisingly, the best poetry is unfinished poetry" (15), something Levinas finds in for instance Celan and Proust. In Kearney's view, this sort of poetry would seem to be currently facing a difficulty, as he speaks of "the contemporary crisis of poetics" (16) and sets out to disentangle de-constructive writing "as ethical irrepresentability", on the one hand, from deconstructive writing "as mere fashionable cant", on the other (18). Though I look at contemporary literature with more trust than Kearney, the attempt at such a disentanglement animates my own pages here: if one turns to "deconstructive" or postmodernist literature, one finds an aesthetics of disruption and inconclusiveness, an ethical poetics,[52] that would fit Levinas's project (which is a project of interminable projects), but one may also find repetition without difference as well as partial deconstruction. Still, as Kearney concludes, "[e]thics needs poetics to be reminded that its responsibility to the other includes the possibility of play, freedom and pleasure" (23).

In connection with this discussion, I should make it clear that I am not writing here as a devout follower of Levinas. Rather, I am using his key concepts, of alterity, of the same and the other, of the face-to-face, of the saying and the said, to open up Swift's texts to readings that may ultimately be in conflict with Levinas. But is not such conflict precisely the point? As Eaglestone points out, "[t]here is obviously no one critical process which embodies Levinas's ideas, no one answer. Rather, the saying can be recognised in all critical approaches which interrupt established under-

[52] As Gibson notes, *pace* Levinas, "[l]inearity and homogeneity are not essential conditions of narrativity, as modernist and postmodernist texts have abundantly shown. It is rather in narrative that particularity may be most insistently recast in a manner that also insistently refines and subtilizes our perception of it" (*Postmodernity* 140-41).

standings, the said" (176-77). And the said includes Levinas's thought as well. What I want to present here are readings that bear witness to the full spectrum of the sentimentum in Swift's novels, rather than neatly framed readings that rid themselves of whatever elements do not fit. Of course, temporal and spatial constraints render inescapable selectivity and exclusion, even blindness, in my readings here. But this acknowledgement of the partial nature of all readings should not, I think, make us lose sight of the (de)regulating idea, formulated by Eaglestone in his conclusion to *Ethical Criticism*, that "[e]ach text requires reading in such a way as that its saying can be heard, that the flaws in the said appear" (176).

I should also make it clear that I am not simply reading Swift's texts through Levinasian goggles, as it were, substituting what would amount to a complexified but still largely moralistic reading for what is now deemed a naïve moralism. It is the internal logic of each given text that is my horizon of interpretation, rather than a preconceived moralism (whether it is a moralism of right in opposition to wrong, or of the saying in opposition to the said). Indicting texts, as regards their aesthetics, their thematics and their characters, from outside, in terms of a preconceived ethics that cannot be detected in the text is not what I am interested in here. I am, instead, trying to show how each novel itself sets up a frame of values within which one may find grounds for a critique of, or a problematization of, various aspects of the text—perhaps in particular the behaviour of its characters. Each of Swift's texts requires great attentiveness to details; it is in specific, singular passages or in details of form that one may find, not a centring or limiting device, a kernel, but a disruption that forces one to renegotiate the seemingly fixed vision of the narrative. In reading Swift's texts in this way, I am not suggesting that a direct influence from Levinas, or any other of the theorists I bring into my discussion, is at work in the texts, but that, on the one hand, an affinity may be detected, and that, on the other hand, those theorists enable an opening up of the texts to certain readings. It is to those readings that I now turn.

2
"Away From the Shore": Toward a Voicing of Sentimentality in *The Sweet Shop Owner* and *Shuttlecock*

> A heartless woman he called her; she never told him that she loved him. But it was not so—it was not so.
> —*To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf

> You will gather from this statement that one of us had, as the saying is, a "heart", and, from the statement that my wife is dead, that she was the sufferer.
> —*The Good Soldier*, Ford Madox Ford

> A happy ending, that is what it works out at.
> —*The Good Soldier*, Ford Madox Ford

Swift's first novel, *The Sweet Shop Owner*, formally exhibits techniques that we know well from modernism: inner monologue, free indirect narration and a kaleidoscopic structure. The novel is barely metafictional, and is also, with the exception of *Out of This World*, the least overtly intertextual of Swift's novels; it thus retains a modernist aura of originality.[1] On a more thematic level, the novel presents a bleak view of Western society and of the modern Western soul. It charts a Prufrockian world of repetition, futility and charade, in which people are incapable of communicating with and touching each other. Somewhat jocosely, one might say that what ails the characters in the novel is that they are in a modernist text. Still, one may argue that in *The Sweet Shop Owner* what faces one is rather a limit-modernist text of sorts; a text that closes the lid on modernism, as it were. To me the novel seems too knowingly allusive not to be characterized as a postmodernist indexing of the

[1] Patricia Waugh suggests that "[t]he examination of fictionality, through the thematic exploration of characters 'playing roles' within fiction, is the most minimal form of metafiction" (*Metafiction* 116). If we accept this definition, then *The Sweet Shop Owner* is indeed a metafictional novel. It is also a novel that attests to Waugh's notion that that most minimal form of metafiction "is a form that can be 'naturalized' ultimately to fit realist assumptions". *The Sweet Shop Owner* belongs to the category of such realist metafictions, which "tend to present characters who are involved in a duplicitous situation requiring the perpetration of some form of pretence or disguise".

history of modernism, from its proto- through its High to its late phases; it is virtually "hypermodernist".[2]

With Swift's second novel, *Shuttlecock*, we enter a different realm of aesthetics: there is some overt intertextuality, as well as the play with ontological boundaries that Brian McHale identifies as a dominant mode of postmodernist fiction. The novel is a perfect example of the sort of novel McHale champions in *Postmodernist Fiction*, as it portrays the gradual breakdown of epistemological mastery of the real and the consequent embrace of pragmatist truth- and world-making, sports a Chinese-box structure with different levels mirroring and overlapping each other, and is a self-consuming or self-erasing text. The novel also easily falls under Linda Hutcheon's rubric of "historiographic metafiction", dealing as it does with the problems of archiving and recovering the past.

What is important for my argument in this study, though, is that in Swift's first two novels the full spectrum of what could be recognized as the sentimentum is only very partially realized. Sentiments and ethical consciousness lurk around, behind, beneath, or above a kind of existential degree zero. God, with or without being, is absent. One may say of Swift's first two novels, as well as the short-stories collected in *Learning to Swim* in 1982, what Kiernan Ryan says of Ian McEwan's earlier fictions: "The protagonists are frequently housed in some suburban deadzone and sealed inside a situation from which the oxygen of emotion has been pumped" (209). *The Sweet Shop Owner* hardly houses the sentimentum at all, as the novel is swept up in the logic of modernity and modernism, thematically as well as formally. There is little sense of irony and of the contingency of identity and of values in the novel, two aspects necessary for the expression of the sentimentum. *Shuttlecock*, on the other hand, is a prototypical

[2] Despite the absence of what I called "overt intertextuality" above, one may easily see allusions in the novel to Joyce, Woolf, Ford and Eliot, to mention a few authors that easily spring to mind. As a novel in which the events are presented as taking place on a single day, it may be seen as a rewriting of *Mrs. Dalloway*, or as a minimalist *Ulysses*; contrary to the protagonists of Woolf's and Joyce's novels, however, Swift's Willy Chapman returns at the end of the novel to an empty house, his Penelope having passed away. As Del Ivan Janik notes, "[t]he novel's abrupt shifting of time and point of view is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's narrative technique in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Swift, like Woolf, communicates a sense of the seamlessness of experience" (75). As Janik further observes, "*The Sweet Shop Owner* is also reminiscent of another early-modern British novel, Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, in that like Ford's it is a story of defective hearts" (75). Swift twists the configuration of Ford's novel, as both husband and wife not only have heart disorders, but actually die from them. What is more important, however, is that, as Janik puts it, "like Ford's characters Swift's suffer more poignantly from an absence of 'heart' in the metaphoric sense" (75). What is more, narrating the death of a shop owner called Willy *Chapman*, Swift's novel cannot but evoke Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (the name of that play's tormented husband being Willy Loman).

postmodernist novel, sporting a self-conscious first-person narrator who presents us with an ultimately indeterminate and interminable narrative. The novel introduces a more thorough element of sentimentality and a more thoroughly ironic aspect. However, the sentimentality and the irony in *Shuttlecock* are never wedded on the plane of narration, since the narrator himself does not ultimately display an ironic imagination. Rather, the narrator and his sentimentality are ironized by the contradictions of the narrative, or ultimately by the reader's subjecting the narrative to his/her critical scrutiny. The novel belongs to a line of literature in which narrators unwittingly ironize themselves.[3] This is one of the reasons why it cannot be a novel of the sentimentum.

In a teleological reading, Swift's first two novels would thus witness the struggle of the sentimentum to break through a somewhat limiting sense of form. It is as if Swift is working his way through the themes and forms of recent literary history to pave the way for the emergence of the sentimentum in his subsequent novels. *The Sweet Shop Owner* and *Shuttlecock* hence provide a contrast by which we may perceive the contours of the sentimentum and understand what it is *not*.

The Sweet Shop Owner: A Kind of Not Acting?

The Sweet Shop Owner narrates the last day in the life of Willy Chapman, a High Street shop owner, who has decided to commit suicide by straining his weak heart. The novel shifts between third-person narration and the first-person interior monologue of Willy, in which he addresses his daughter, Dorothy. At one point, this narrative order is disrupted by what purports to be the voice of Willy's dead wife, Irene, nee Harrison. Now and then, the use of free indirect narration places the point of view with Willy's shop assistants, Mrs Cooper and Sandra. By piecing together these voices, the reader may form what seems to approximate a complete picture.

It is the picture of a sham and a debacle. The marriage of Willy and Irene has been a thirty-five year long shared alienation, Irene's condition for providing Willy with a marital home, a shop and a daughter being "that there

[3] Another novel that belongs to this line of literature is *The Good Soldier*, which Swift's novel explicitly refers to by its title: at the end of Ford's novel the young girl Nancy Rufford suffers from a catatonic condition, which leaves her unable to utter a word except for her repetition of the exclamations "Shuttlecocks!" and "*Credo in unum Deum omnipotentem*". Notably, in Swift's novel there is only the shuttlecock, no Omnipotent Deity. At any rate, like John Dowell in *The Good Soldier*, Prentis in *Shuttlecock* is a radically unreliable narrator who finally comes across as either blind or manipulatively awake to his own contradictions and his implications in the plot. As Malcolm Bradbury says of Dowell, "the story he tells as it were deceives him" (*Modern* 90).

be no question of love" (22). Willy, being a man of few if any aspirations and initiatives, accepts the condition. He soon finds out that Irene suffers from a nervous condition involving attacks of asthma and requiring calm and rest. Willy never learns any reason for Irene's condition, but the reader does: in her brief narrative, Irene reveals that she was date raped by a family friend, and soon after was taken by her family to a Home to be treated for a consequential psychosis. The only thing Irene ever says to Willy, however, is, on the first night of their honeymoon: "'Willy, I'm sorry. I'm not—all I should be. Do you forgive me?'" (30).

Growing up amidst such silence and alienation, their daughter, Dorothy, has in turn become estranged from her parents, escaping into books as a teenager, and then running off to university, where she has found love in the lecturer Michael. After the death of Irene, who, like Willy, developed a heart condition, Dorothy returns one day to claim her mother's valuables. Willy, happening to close the shop early that day, comes upon her and tries to make peace with her. Dorothy, however, declines. These events make Willy take initiative for the first time in his life: he sends Dorothy the £15,000 inheritance from Irene as a token of absolution, and asks her to come and visit him on her birthday. And thus we find him, on his last day as the sweet shop owner, settling things before going home to die in his chair, where Dorothy will find him when—if—she comes.

As we may begin to see, *The Sweet Shop Owner* offers a quite horrifying vision of a modern society caught up in the logic of exchange. Human relations are viewed in terms of bargains and settlements, and each act requires a counter-act in accordance with the law of equivalence. There is no unconditional gift and no unconditional trust, and hence little room for an ethics of alterity. I am referring here to the notion of gift-giving worked out by Marcel Mauss in *Essai sur le don* and elaborated in more postmodern terms by Baudrillard in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* and by Derrida in *Given Time: Counterfeit Money* and *The Gift of Death*.[4] In the view of these thinkers, as Calvin O. Schrag explains, "[a] gift, to be genuinely a gift, is given without any expectation of return. There can be no expectation of a 'countergift', for such would place the giving within the context of a contractual rather than a gift-giving relation" (139). Thus, the gift is that which exceeds or transcends a restricted economy: "This applies not only in the giving of goods but also in the rendering of services, in the helping of a friend in need, in the offering of words of counsel and encouragement, in the paying of a visit through the giving of one's presence" (140). One may add

[4] Notions of unconditional giving may be traced back through Kierkegaard to Augustine; in postmodern thought, however, they are given more widespread prominence and are set in a different kind of motion.

the gift of unconditional love, the offering of oneself to the other, the gift of trust, and, as Derrida suggests, the gifts of time and of death.

No such unconditional gifts are given in *The Sweet Shop Owner*. It is hard to think of a novel in which there is less love lost. The novel is not the site of the sentimentum as much as of its negation, a negation which owes much to a secular, economistic bourgeois order that is apparent from the very first page of the novel, which finds Willy reading a letter from his daughter:

> *Dear Father,*
>
> *I have the £15,000. The bank notified me last week. Thank you for sending it at last. I'm sure this is for the best and how Mother would have wanted it. You will see in the end.*
>
> *I think we can call everything settled now. Don't bother about the rest of my things. You said I should come—do you really think that's a good idea? After all that you say I've put you through, I should have thought you'd be glad to be finished with me at last.*
>
> *Dorothy (9)*

As Willy notes, "there was not even, before that final signature, a farewell, a 'take care', a 'with love, your daughter'" (9); being settled with people means paying them off or being paid off, in strictly monetary terms, and love does not enter into it. However, there is a reason for Dorothy's acting according to this logic of economism and disaffection: she is the child of it. On the very next page, we learn that Dorothy herself is all but a commodity, part of the bargain struck between Willy and Irene. We should note that her name is infused with the spirit of an arcane and archaic order: "Dorothea: God's gift", as Willy notes (112). However, Dorothy is neither God's gift nor the product of love, but a concession. Instead of reconciling and uniting the alienated parts of the marriage, Dorothy is the symbolic coin with which Irene pays Willy for his performing according to her designs:

> He had come, ushered by the nurse, laden with flowers. This might change everything. There was a little thing, wrapped like a gift in a shawl beside her. He had approached the bed with outstretched arms. But she had looked up, immovable, chestnut hair stuck to her forehead, and her eyes had said: There, I have done it, paid you: that is my side of the bargain. (10)

So, Dorothy is not a gift, as a gift would demand no reciprocation, but a payment for services rendered or expected to be rendered. And the service Irene expects of Willy is that he perform the role of the sweet shop owner: "I will buy you a shop, I'll get you a shop. I will install you in it and see that

you have all you need. Then I'll watch. I'll see what you can do. That will content me" (21).[5] As we can see, Irene practically employs Willy, deciding the terms of the employment: "You will be freed, absolved; for the responsibility—don't you see?—will be mine. . . . And all I ask in return for this is that there be no question of love" (22). Not being completely bereft of a sense of proportion, she throws a baby into the bargain; indeed, when Irene gets pregnant with Dorothy, "her face show[s] only the pinched looks of someone labouring to pay a debt" (101).

In fact, the general mode of communication between all the characters in the novel is capital and commodities. Irene notes with some bitter irony that when her family brought her home from the Home, "[t]here were little shows of reconciliation. Father bought me a dress, my brothers perfume . . . They even bought me the house and gave me a settlement, half in cash, half in shares. For their own guilt in disposing of me had to be paid for" (55). However, while Irene sees the fundamental disaffection of such an act of paying-off, Sandra, Willy's young shop assistant, reacts to Willy's giving her a bonus payment on his last day by thinking, "perhaps he did like her; for he'd given her . . . twenty-five pounds" (106). Similarly, when Willy doubts whether Dorothy will actually come and see him, he assures himself by thinking, "I sent you the £15,000. You'll come" (206). Accordingly, when Mrs Cooper gets her bonus payment from Willy, and her face betrays some disappointment, Willy himself betrays his unrelenting, albeit bitter, logic of exchange:

> But she didn't look gratitude. Behind her smile her face pleaded, as if she'd expected something else, something more.
>
> But that was all, Mrs Cooper. Take it. The things you want you never get. You only get the money. (38)

As Willy tersely notes: "She was paid" (39).

This sense of a logic of exchange is reinforced by the imagery used to describe people and their relations in the novel. The few times Irene actually smiles, it is "[a] lovely smile, like a shining seal upon a contract" (21), "a smile, like the scattering of coins" (46), "like a throwing of coins" (30), or "those short, quick smiles that were like small coins thrown without fuss to someone who has done a service" (29). When Irene relates how Hancock date raped her, she notes that "[h]e took me out like a boy on his best behaviour, as if I should reward him in some way", and that when the actual rape occurred, "[h]e pulled up my clothes like a man unwrapping a parcel"

[5] These words are actually Willy's, constituting his inference of what Irene implies by her behaviour. I will elaborate this question of point of view and narratorial reliability below.

(52). Similarly, when Willy comes to the delivery ward, he sees, "in between [the beds], wobbling with little unseen movements, these wicker baskets, like the fruits of some bizarre shopping trip" (102).[6]

Presenting such a bleak vision of a society organized according to the law of exchange, *The Sweet Shop Owner* sets itself up as a literary illustration of the society the arrival of which Marx predicted in the nineteenth century, and which post-Marxists like Baudrillard have analysed in the last few decades.[7] The novel twists its vision of this society into absurdity, though, and thus, the novel would seem to correspond to Adorno's notion of the modernist work of literature as marked by an aesthetics of negativity, whereby the literary work seeks to produce a negative impression of "an ever-expanding, monolithic capitalist society, moving toward a system of total exchange as well as total rationality, which is equivalent to absolute reification in matters of social interaction" (Eysteinsson 41). Importantly, such a negative impression precludes the display of sensibility, and thus of the sentimentum, which depends on what Bataille called "an unrestricted or general as contrasted to a restricted economy" (Gibson, *Postmodernity* 165). As Gibson argues, "[i]n Bataille's terms, Levinasian sensibility is a kind of radical economy of the self that is profoundly distinct from more familiar economies determined by modern Christianity, capital, 'practical judgment' and 'utility'. . . . As, for Levinas, sensibility is in some sense prior to cognition, so, too, for Bataille, expenditure is prior to accumulation and production, prodigality or generosity to calculation, the general to any restricted economy" (166).

Indeed, Irene, being perhaps more damaged by her uncompassionate materialist family than by the rape, is living out a scheme of perverse revenge on a totally rational, perfectly reified world, with Willy as a vicarious agent. Irene has no illusions about the system and determinately plays out its rules, laughing at the irony of it all, acutely obeying the system by getting more shops, more commodities—the more useless the better.[8] Irene is getting, not giving, and if giving, then only to get. Exchange-value has eclipsed use-value; when Willy says of all the crystal and porcelain that Irene buys only to stash away, "They're beautiful", she just replies, "her tired eyes somehow

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[6] This simile turns into tragic actuality in *Waterland*, where the narrator's schizophrenic wife kidnaps a baby sitting in a shopping-cart at the supermarket.

[7] See, for instance, *The Consumer Society* and *Symbolic Exchange and Death*.

[8] The ephemeral quality of modern goods was an object of critique for many twentieth-century thinkers. For instance, as Charles Taylor tells us, "Hanna Arendt focussed on the more and more ephemeral quality of modern objects of use. She argued that 'the reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they are produced'. This comes under threat in a world of modern commodities" (501).

disinterested: 'They will keep their value'" (148). Irene's perverse pleasure in this order of things is nowhere better revealed than in the following scene:

> "We don't have to make money", he said . . . "We have money—now—don't we? So the shop—"
>
> He eyed her over the green baize table-cloth. . . .
>
> "Exactly", she said in a lucid tone. "Exactly, don't you see?"
>
> She held her gaze on him. . . .
>
> And he knew: the shop was useless . . . He was the shop-keeper.
>
> The laughter leapt suddenly from her throat and skipped round the room. (99)

Accordingly, when Irene gets diagnosed for her heart condition, and Willy, seeing a chance to end the charade, is about to ask, "Should we be thinking about selling the shop?", Irene says, "as if to forestall him, 'I think we should get another shop'" (171). And so they acquire the Pond Street shop, which sells more useless things and brings in more useless money. Eventually, Willy learns to appreciate the game himself, musing over the commodities on display in his shop only to conclude: "And none of it—that was the beauty of it—was either useful or permanent" (18). The greatest pride is "his own addition. Toys" (18). Coming home one day in 1962—twelve years before his last day of life—Willy says to Irene, "'Toys. I will sell toys in the shop.' She had looked, and repeated slowly the word—'Toys'—as if rolling round her mouth a morsel of something whose taste she hadn't fixed. And then—the identification was made—the wry smile touched her lips. He'd known it would please her" (18-19). In this way, Willy and Irene seem to act according to the "hyperlogic" described by Baudrillard in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*: "[The masses] know that there is no liberation, and that a system is abolished only by pushing it into hyperlogic, by forcing it into an excessive practice which is equivalent to a brutal amortization. 'You want us to consume—O.K., let's consume always more, and anything whatsoever; for any useless and absurd purpose'" (46).

Nonetheless, the question arises of exactly why Willy puts up with this charade. One answer lies in his own sense of disillusion and fundamental futility. Willy is a Prufrock who has been cooled down to the point of inertia. Like Eliot's anti-hero, who asks, "How shall I presume?", Willy says, "I didn't believe . . . that the future belonged to me. I thought: things come to you anyway" (189); "plans emerged. You stepped into them" (24). Even when he does take initiative, he views himself as "the man from the audience taking the stage" (27). Like Prufrock he is haunted by a sense of numb

repetition: "Every day at the same time the same faces" (10).[9] Unlike Prufrock, however, he is neither Prince Hamlet nor "an attendant lord", but rather wholly the Fool;[10] while he recalls how he "once joked about [the pub] the Prince William . . . I said to Irene: 'The Prince Willy—they named it after me'" (174), what is more conspicuous about him is "his fondness for children, for childishness" (13) and his "fool's posture" (32); ultimately, "[h]e could only play tricks" (32). And so, Willy does not really act—"cause a scene or two"—in the sense of initiative and action, but in the sense of performance and semblance. He is forever suspended by Prufrock's question, "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?"; there is a scene in the novel that illustrates Willy's inability to act and seems a conscious play on Prufrock's lines, "Should I, after tea and cakes and ices, / Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?": "For one moment he wanted to sweep aside the tea cups, to catch her like some wild thing glimpsed in a forest. But her eyes sharpened, held him, as though to save him from stumbling headlong. She balanced her plate on her knee. Let nothing happen."(42-43).

Similarly, when Willy and Irene correspond during Willy's service in the Second World War, "he wondered should he write 'I love you' (for perhaps in this time of war—); though he knew, if he did, it would alarm her, more than war, more than bombs and blackness" (65). Willy's suppressed "I love you" would be the saying that interrupts the said, and so cannot be spoken, as the said governs the logic of not only Irene's, but his own life. Life, to Willy, is always already said: an endless repetition of the same patterns, a kind of suspension between cradle and grave, a series of rituals that are all but interchangeable. Scanning the notices in the newspaper, Willy sardonically notes "the neatness of the columns. Deaths, marriages" (47). At his father's, and shortly thereafter his mother's, funeral, "the white graves in the cemetery sparkle like wedding cakes" (46), and at Dorothy's baptism, "the vicar spoke, who had spoken over Mr Harrison's coffin" (108).[11]

To Willy, then, everything is ultimately a performance, a simulation, and one may as well sit back and wait for history to impose its patterns on one. "I never believed you could have the real thing", he says (184). Even as a schoolboy, he notes how

> the history master was speaking as if his words were turning into print. Henry VIII and his wives were like characters in costume.

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[9] "And I have known the eyes already, known them all" ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock").

[10] "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; / Am an attendant lord, one that will do / To swell a progress, cause a scene or two / . . . / At times, indeed, almost ridiculous— / Almost, at times, the Fool" ("Prufrock").

[11] There is an echo here of Beckett's woman giving birth astride a grave.

> They weren't real, but they didn't know it. History fitted them into patterns. . . . He had laughed then, unheard. . . . So that he didn't mind about his school reports . . . or that his parents were disappointed, or that those others around him in that chalky class-room would get on better than him. Let them go to meet history. History would come anyway. Nothing touches you, you touch nothing. (44-45)

With the last sentence of the quote just given, we begin to approach the heart of the matter—or the absence of heart in the matter. Those words, "Nothing touches you, you touch nothing", are repeated like a mantra throughout the novel, and they attest to a modern revulsion against exposure to the other, as does Willy's (and Irene's) insistence on pattern. Willy may thus be seen as an emblem of the modern self, barricading itself in the said, violating the world by compartmentalization, adhering to what Zygmunt Bauman rubrics "the quest for order" in modernity.[12] It is the same with Irene, who, we learn, "always read her papers . . . not because she liked news . . . [but] to take stock, to acquaint herself, to hold sway over the array of facts and regard them all with cold passivity. And sometimes, indeed, it was as if . . . her head hidden behind the outspread page . . . peered through it, as through a veil, at a world which might default or run amok if it once suspected her gaze was not upon it" (17). Whereas postmodernism entails accepting contingency and difference, and postmodern ethics is precisely about "the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability" (Levinas, *Otherwise* 48), Willy steps into a disguise that means "that though you moved and gestured and the grime of loose change came off on your hands, you were really intact. Nothing touches you, you touch nothing" (44). As he notes, "[Irene] too sheltered behind that same disguise" (99).

And so Willy takes the same perverse pleasure as Irene in repetition, charade and the pointless accumulation of wealth. After he and Irene have met and become a couple, "it was precisely the predictable formula that pleased him: meeting in parks, sitting on benches, his being the humble suitor, buffing his shoes, scrubbing his nails before seeing her" (28). Accordingly, when Irene suggests that they buy the place on the corner of Briar Street, Willy thinks, "Yes, of course—seeing it all fall into place—I will be a shop-owner" (21); "though he knew nothing of shop-keeping, he would get a shop-keeper's coat and adopt a shop-keeper's manner. And in time it would be wholly plausible" (42). Irene and Willy are thus virtually

[12] See *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 1. Cf. Bauman's *Intimations of Postmodernity*, where he discusses modernity under the heading "Modernity, or Desperately Seeking Structure" (xi).

parodies of the modern bourgeois self, which, emerging out of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "stressed the goods of production, an ordered life, and peace" (Taylor 286). This modern bourgeois self, *The Sweet Shop Owner* implies, thus also precludes any invitation of the saying, either as caress or as wounding.

In his quest for order and smooth operation, Willy fortifies the said as he becomes a kind of automaton, his credo "The body is a machine" (19, 194, 205). Alienated from himself, or virtually vacated of a self, he "watche[s] himself fold the papers between his thumb and fingers; ring the till, swop pleasantries with customers . . . Watche[s] himself drive home at night . . . Watche[s] himself construct his performance" (133). Rising on his final day, he sees in the mirror "[s]omeone mimicking himself" (11). Closing up the shop for the final time, he thinks: "Tomorrow they would discover the fraud, the deception: the costume discarded" (212). Looking around the shop for one last time, he "[feels] like a conjuror, amidst his tricks, for whom, alone, there is no illusion" (213). Then "he [turns] his back on the shop and [passes] through the plastic strips. Best to go by the back. Actors slip out by back-exits, leaving their roles on the stage" (215).

The thorough sense of simulation that Willy thus gives voice to is reinforced by the novel's theatric, photographic and filmic imagery. During Irene's and Willy's honeymoon, in their hotel, "[m]oonlight, like some theatrical trick, filtered through the lattice windows and lace curtains", and "every day the pieces of the picture fell into place: the boat trips to Weymouth, the little scenes of themselves arm in arm on the beach or at tables for two, about which the nodding onlookers might whisper, 'honey-mooners'" (30). Similarly, when Willy speaks to a doctor about Irene's worsening condition, "outside the view of the hospital—tall windows, fire-escapes, the black pipes of a boiler-house—lay flat and frozen in a dead November light as if projected on a screen" (126). When Dorothy reveals that she has been seeing Irene's brother Paul, and that he has told her that he is the lover of Mr Hancock's wife, she "blurt[s] out those words as if they were the caption to some vivid and indelible photograph" (152). And this is how Willy describes the scene after the death of his friend, Smithy the barber: "November the sixteenth, 1969. The figures on the pavement who had stopped to look moved on and the traffic in the High Street seemed to resume a halted progress like a film jerking back into life" (165). This imagery reinforces the sense of a world of spiritual, ethical and emotional detachment, a world in which nothing touches you and you touch nothing.

This discussion of imagery also brings me to the explicit theme of photography in the novel. *The Sweet Shop Owner* charts the movement throughout the twentieth century of what Walter Benjamin referred to as "a

sense perception that has been changed by technology" ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" 235), and more specifically of what Susan Sontag terms "the aestheticizing of reality that makes everything, anything, available to the camera" ("The Image-World" 364). This transformation of seeing, which has obvious implications for an ethics of alterity, is portrayed in *The Sweet Shop Owner*. Recalling Irene's and his honeymoon, Willy remembers how he saw "the country cottages, and the honeymoon hotel set back from the road, seen already as if in a frame, as if in a photograph in an album opened many years after" (29). Running against Irene's brother Jack in the mile race at school, Willy notes that Jack has "the kind of body that would wear well and look good in photographs" (196). As we can see, photography restructures perception, the world becomes the always already photographed. What is more, the photograph restructures the relation to time so that people begin to have *expectations of nostalgia*; when Jack and Paul are home on leave during the Second World War, the whole Harrison family, with Willy looking on, gather on the lawn to be photographed: "Figures grouped, regrouped; fussed and posed . . . Mr Harrison bore the camera like a master of ceremonies . . . This deserves a picture, this is something to be kept. And someone leafing through the pages, the school photos, the holiday snaps, would say, '—and there, at Aunt Maud's in their uniforms: what fine boys'" (66). Thus, photography serves to freeze the world in moments of perfect balance and harmony, circumventing contingency and aestheticizing everyday experience.

This transformation of the general perception and conception of the world brought on by the advent of photography is explained forcefully and succinctly by Sontag:

> The mechanical genesis of these images [i.e. photographs], and the literalness of the powers they confer, amounts to a new relationship between image and reality. And if photography could also be said to restore the most primitive relationship—the partial identity of image and object—the potency of the image is now experienced in a very different way. The primitive notion of the efficacy of images presumes that images possess the qualities of real things, but our inclination is to attribute to real things the qualities of an image. ("The Image-World" 352-53)

This is also, as we have seen, the inclination of the characters in *The Sweet Shop Owner*. And this inclination too attests to a revulsion against the other, against the event, against the saying. As Sontag puts it, "[p]hotographs are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible; of making it stand still" (356). In other words, photography is a way of

possessing the singular event, of framing it, mechanically and unreflectedly. However, as Gibson argues, "[t]he other always and definitively overflows the frame in which I would seek to enclose the other" (*Postmodernity* 25). This overflowing is what is constantly denied in *The Sweet Shop Owner*, in which faces are seen not as portals to infinity, but as impenetrable, as mirrors for the same, or simply as something to be avoided. Irene's "face [is] a mask" (30), and hence not "exposed to the other as a skin is exposed to what wounds it" (Levinas, *Otherwise* 49); indeed, Willy feels that "he had not touched her" (30). Moreover, at one point, when Willy looks up at her after resting in her lap, she responds by "moving her gaze at once away from his . . . as though ignoring something, some mystery perhaps too delicate to probe" (56). Similarly, as Willy walks to the Pond Street shop on his final day instead of taking his car as he has always done, he happens upon Mr Hancock in a scene that effectively illustrates the vertigo of the face-to-face: "They stared inertly at each other as if looking into mirrors. Save for Hancock's visits to the shop, they scarcely met, and now that they came face to face in the street it was as if something needed explaining. . . . [Hancock] held out a hand indecisively. It was as if he were about to offer support—or needed to be steadied himself" (176). However, this chance meeting does not yield engagement, but only the unsettling dizziness of an alterity that needs to be immediately circumscribed.

This question of alterity brings me to the more general question of representation in the novel. As Sontag notes, "'[o]ur era' does not prefer images to real things out of perversity but partly in response to the ways in which the notion of what is real has been progressively complicated and weakened, one of the early ways being the criticism of reality as façade which arose among the enlightened middle classes in the last [i.e. the 19th] century" (354). The notion of reality as façade suggests a belief in depths and origins, rather than in infinities, behind surfaces and images; this is the epistemo-ontological creed of modernism, in which access to the truth behind appearances was thought highly problematic but still possible—or, Truth and the Real were deemed agonizingly elusive, but their existence was not doubted. As in the romantics, access to truth and to the true reality behind appearances was thought to be provided by epiphanic moments, although in modernism the epiphany itself becomes somewhat more fragmentary and particular than in romanticism; we need only think of Pound's "[p]etals on a wet, black bough".[13] Those epiphanic moments are, nonetheless, often what

[13] As Charles Taylor puts it, in romanticism "[t]he epiphany which will free us from a debased, mechanistic world brings to light the spiritual reality behind nature and uncorrupted human feeling. Epiphanic art can take the form of descriptions of these which make this reality shine through, as Wordsworth and Hölderlin, Constable and Friedrich do, each in his own way. But

brings closure to many modernist texts; the most famous example of this kind of epiphanic closure is probably Lily Briscoe's vision and completion of her painting at the end of *To the Lighthouse*.[14] Indeed, *The Sweet Shop Owner* establishes a dialogue with Woolf's novel. On the first night of the honeymoon, Willy thinks, in an echo of Lily Briscoe, that "the picture was incomplete" (30). However, unlike Lily Briscoe, he has no illusion of completing the picture; when, a few days later, Irene suffers an attack of her psychosomatic asthma, all his hope vanishes: "he knew now the picture would never be complete" (33). He is right; while the novel ends with the actual death of its main character and narrator, there is no revelatory closure. The novel almost parodically sets itself up from the very beginning as geared toward finality, as it begins with Willy puzzling over Dorothy's letter: "'In the end.' 'In the end'? What did she mean—in the *end* he would see?" (9). This beginning invites the reader to a journey toward closure. However, the reader, following the course of the narrative, comes to realize that neither s/he nor Willy—and Willy perhaps even less so—will see in the end, will arrive at closure.

And here the reader may also realize that the continual reference to photography in the novel serves as a subtle metafictional signal. As Sontag points out, "[i]t is not reality that photographs make immediately accessible, but images" (357). Rather, "[w]e make of photography a means by which, precisely, anything can be said, any purpose served" (364). Thus the photograph becomes the free-floating signifier *par excellence*. And thus photography and movies provide metaphors in fiction of the free-floating nature of the text itself; these metaphors, then, serve a metafictional function, bringing attention to the vagaries and ruses of representation. As Willy notes, the picture is never complete; representation is not a transparent film laid over an immovable reality. Narrative patterns are indeed imposed, as those of the history master shaping Henry VIII and his wives into a sensible story. As Willy observes, recalling how Irene reluctantly posed with her family for photographs, "under the composure there was discomposure" (71), and indeed the photo album housing those pictures would not present a faithful narrative, as "[t]hey didn't want him in their photographs" (67). These observations serve to draw the reader's attention to the selectivity and subjectivity of the narrative of the novel, and to make the reader ponder the

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this recourse is no longer available in the twentieth century, at least not in this direct way—for a host of overlapping reasons" (457).

[14] We may also note, for instance, Molly Bloom's "Yes" that closes *Ulysses* and the "Shantih shantih shantih" at the end of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. For a thorough discussion of the place of the epiphany in modernism, see the chapter in Taylor's *Sources of the Self* called "Epiphanies of Modernism".

reliability of Willy as a first-person narrator and as a focalizer for the third-person narration. It is, after all, his views of Irene and Dorothy that the reader is presented with. All the statements, explicit or implicit, attributed to Irene and Dorothy are actually Willy's impressions and inferences. Those impressions and inferences may not be inaccurate, but they nonetheless take on a specious nature, like the stories people coming into the shop at the end of the war tell, "stories which grew more unreal, more pensive, the nearer the teller got to the end of them" (98). Roaming through the narrative, the reader may feel like Willy does as he walks the streets of a bomb struck London: "[Y]ou seemed to walk (but perhaps you always had) through a world in which holes might open, surfaces prove unsolid" (96). This feeling is reinforced by the graphics announcing the three parts of the novel: for the first part, there is a pattern of circles enclosing the Roman figure "I"—the pattern is almost symmetrical, but a few circles are missing; for the second part, more circles are missing; and for the third part, the symmetry is completely broken, so many circles missing that the figure "III" is not enclosed. A reading in terms of alterity readily suggests itself: the three-part progression of graphics illustrates the effect of the impact of the other who transcends my hold on the world, my delimitation of "all that is the case", my setting up of boundaries around the other. In the words of Gibson, when "the other . . . overflows the frame in which I would seek to enclose the other . . . that means that the frame itself is broken or disintegrates" (*Postmodernity* 25).

Indeed, a hole does open in the narrative and renders the surface established by Willy's voice unsolid, his pattern broken: in chapter seven, there is the unexpected disruption of his voice by that of Irene, an imprint of the past. Notably, it is the imprint of an unusually tender occasion, as Irene's interior monologue proceeds as Willy rests with his head on her lap: "Sit back Willy; drink your tea, rest your head, if you like, on my lap (he did not hear, there in the autumn-evening by the french windows, but what did he ever hear of those inward commands, spoken to soothe her own nerves?)" (49). As we can see, Irene immediately draws attention to the lack of communication in their marriage; "How little you know me, Willy", she says (49), and goes on to disclose to the reader what Willy has never known, the story of her rape and her psychosis. However, the picture Irene draws of herself and her motives does concur generally with Willy's image of her; nonetheless, that image is, to use Irene's own words, "[o]nly an image in a mirror" (55)—a reflection of a surface, a representation of a façade. Willy and Irene, then, are lost in the wasteland of the simulacrum, lost in what Richard Kearney describes as "the postmodern crisis of endless self-mirroring, wherein the face of the other is dissolved into a play of sameness

with itself" (15). The reader of the novel, however, moving on a higher narrative level, becomes aware of the failure, the impossibility, of Irene's and Willy's project of containment; that is, the reader sees "the delusion of the possibility of possession of the other" (Gibson, *Postmodernity* 25).

Consequently, as Willy sits down to strain his heart, neither he nor the reader has seen; neither he nor the reader has been able to unravel the riddle of Irene, and neither he nor the reader has any certainty that his daughter will come:

> He gripped the arm-rests. Metal pain was filling his limbs and welding him to the chair. . . . She will not come. She will come. . . . She would come: he would be a cold statue. . . . She will not come. The lilac shimmered. The garden framed in the window was like a photograph.
>
> All right. All right—now. (222)

As we can see, Lily Briscoe's impressionistic painting has been replaced by the semblance of a quite expressionless and mundane photograph. In his very last moment, Willy still *frames* the world, and he also *times* his own death. There is neither chance nor complex contingency involved: Willy's death is not an event, it is a simulation. For that reason, Willy's attempt at closure and revelation fails. Unlike the modernist *To the Lighthouse*, which ends with the closure and containment provided by an act of artistic structuring that still involves an element of chance and which also affords epiphany—"It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (306)—the mock-modernist *The Sweet Shop Owner* ends by revealing the impossibility of revelation and the inadequacy of attempts at closure; the ending may be paraphrased: "It is not finished. I have not had any vision. Nor is that possible". Indeed, as Lily Briscoe's redemption lies in artistic impression and expression—a notion that, once it is stripped of pretence and grand claims, is not incompatible with postmodernism—it is relevant to note that Dorothy's interest in art and literature leaves Willy nonplussed; recalling Dorothy's school's rendition of *The Merchant of Venice*—with supreme irony, Swift has her play the part of Shylock's daughter—Willy thinks: "What did I know about Shakespeare, Dorry? I'd sat in an uncomfortable wooden chair after a hard day at the shop, while on the stage schoolchildren in costume played the parts of grown-ups and spoke lines I did not understand" (145). Two pages later, he muses further:

> Shakespeare, history books, volumes of poetry. Postcards from art-galleries . . . on the wall; and faded ink-splotched school

> copies of Latin texts, Virgil and the *Metamorphoses* . . . You were doing your project on Keats and over your shoulder I read lines of verse . . . which I didn't understand:
>
> Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss . . . (147)

Willy's stance on art and literature of course befits the mechanical man who prefers that he touch nothing and nothing touch him. In connection with this issue of art, we should also note the perfect absence of any spiritual dimension in the novel; the sole intimation of spirituality we get, if any, is the rather indistinct vicar who speaks over Mr Harrison's coffin and baptizes Dorry.

Yet, for all his Prufrockian world-weariness and cynicism, the question that animates Willy, and which he is unable to answer through his final day, is indeed the question of love, the question of the bold lover who never can kiss. Like Mr Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, Willy spends his life wishing that his wife would say "I love you". Willy, however, would settle for even less: "But if only she would say, 'I love you.' No, not even that, if only she would say . . . 'I know that you love me.' But she wouldn't" (30). Willy returns to this wish: "And if only she would say, not that she loved him, but . . ." (43). As we have seen, Willy, for his part, is equally unable to utter those words, considering them "the words which he was forbidden to speak, that [would break] the terms of the bargain" (102). All of which makes Willy ask the central question: "If the word love is never spoken, does it mean there isn't any love?" (116). For Mr Ramsay, the answer is affirmative: "And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him" (*To the Lighthouse* 185). Willy, however, is alienated from his own feelings in the first place, and the same seems to be the case with Irene; in an echo of *The Good Soldier*, Willy and Irene suffer from heart conditions in both the literal and the metaphoric sense: "With both of them it was heart trouble" (19). Willy's "heart trouble" is apparent in a passage where, remembering the funeral of Irene's father, he wonders: "Why did he weep? Why did he put his head in his hands and feel tears smear his palms, coming back in the car from St Stephen's church?" (79). The scene is redolent of the return of the repressed; faced with the ceremonies of loss and spirituality, Willy's sentiments gush forth, but he does not understand what is happening. Yet, this scene attests to the growing suspicion the reader might have that Willy is actually, for all his claims to fundamental disillusion, quite sentimental.

Indeed, his final act is a violent eruption of sentimentality and melodrama. As he envisions the scene that will take place when Dorothy comes to see him, he projects his own sentimentality onto her:

> She would come—she hadn't said she *wouldn't*—through the hallway . . . past the mirror, the barometer clock, the photographs of Irene and herself on the wall. Her eyes would be moist. She would find him in the armchair in the living-room, by the french windows where he always sat—where Irene had sat with her medicine—still, silent, his hand gripping the arm-rests. She would go down, weep, clasp his knees, as though she were clasping the limbs of a cold, stone statue that stares out and beyond, without seeing. (9-10)

Having read the novel, one realizes the irony of the final phrase: "without seeing". Willy is blind to his own violations, projecting his lack of engagement and of certainty onto Dorothy: "Dorothy, you thought she didn't have a heart. You never loved her. You merely suffered each other. . . . But you never saw that look she gave me. How could you? And you never knew how I understood, then, how much she'd done for me. . . . But you will see" (103). Of course, Dorothy will not see; Willy's whole address, his attempt at an explanation that might have reconciled him with Dorothy, has been an interior monologue, and the only thing Dorothy will possibly see is his death mask. As Wendy Wheeler puts it, the ending shows "that Willy's unreflective romanticism—his attempt, in staging his own death, to force the symbolic unity which will be signified by his estranged daughter Dorry's return home on *her* birthday and *his* deathday—does not work" (67). The novel ends not with a revelation of love, but with the actual stopping of that weak heart which has served in the novel as a metaphor for a general inability to express feelings or even to house them in the first place. Thus, *The Sweet Shop Owner* in effect ends with the death of the modern ego.

Yet, though the novel ends in tragedy, a subdued sense of love and charity may linger in the reader's mind. As we have seen, there is a Beckettian sense of repetition, of force of habit and of maddening pattern in the novel, and so the novel may testify to what Hassan has noted in one of his discussions of Beckett: "If habits, of which language is the deadliest, deaden, only the 'suffering of being' awakens all human faculties to their own irony and their own mystery" ("Joyce, Beckett" 118). In this suffering one might even, as Hassan does in Beckett, detect love: "The relations of Beckett's characters, master and slave, parent and child, husband and wife, certainly reveal bondage, cruelty, autism. Yet these characters suffer, suffer alone and have nothing to fall back upon except each other. I sense a great charity in Beckett, a charity delayed to the end of time yet charity still, and it is akin to love" (119). This is perhaps the charity of Willy, who in his numb lack of engagement still assumes a kind of responsibility for Irene: "He couldn't save her. He owed her eternal service, for he couldn't save her" (31). Still, those

are the words of the third-person narrator, and not what Willy himself expresses.

So what we have in *The Sweet Shop Owner*, in a generous reading, is perhaps a wedding of existential nullity with an unspeakable love, resulting in, to borrow the words Willy uses to describe Irene's and his life in one of his more hopeful moments, "a kind of not acting" (77). However, like the characters of Beckett, Willy and Irene suffer *alone*; they do not engage with each other, open themselves to each other. They remain trapped in the absurd, in the impossibility of reaching out, and as in Camus this entrapment precludes anything but a residual compassion for the other as wholly other and incommensurable, a compassion based on one's identification with the other as *as alienated as oneself*. This is not the alienation of "the self alienated as 'hostage'" (Eaglestone 160), that is, as hostage of the other who calls me into the saying, but the alienation of the self alienated from the other and from the liberation of the saying; the alienation of the self through the modern programme of sameness and the ruse of commensurability. For the characters in *The Sweet Shop Owner*, the only option is to play out or act out the modern programme to the extreme, and escape lies only in death; it is a vision bleaker even than Baudrillard's "fatal strategies" of opposition through symbolic exchange, which still hold on to some kind of hope.

In *The Sweet Shop Owner*, then, Swift's fiction remains in the disenchantment of late or limit-modernism. In other words, Swift's fiction has yet to enter the realm of the postmodern *credo quia absurdum*, or of the postmodern re-enchantment of the world. The modernist or limit-modernist aesthetics of *The Sweet Shop Owner* cannot support postmodern sensibility or the expressions of the sentimentum; we may infer that the characters in the novel suffer a whole deal, and that they may even love each other in some way, but neither suffering nor love is ever *expressed*. This expression would seem to rely on a self-conscious first-person narrator and the employment of the postmodernist aesthetics of double coding. A step in this direction is taken in Swift's second novel, *Shuttlecock*, to which I now turn.[15]

Shuttlecock: The (Un)sentimental Agent

In *Shuttlecock*, the modern ego that was put to death in *The Sweet Shop Owner* is resurrected and set on a path toward postmodern redemption. The

[15] As David Leon Higdon puts it, in *Shuttlecock* "there is a shift from omniscient to first-person narrator, the latter point of view more aesthetically appropriate to the 'unconfessed confessions' here and in later novels. . . . In his second novel, Swift has found his 'voice' in the form of first-person retrospective visions of souls lost in the power of memory and history" ("Unconfessed Confessions" 184). The phrase "unconfessed confessions" is taken from *Out of This World*, 45.

narrator, Prentis, comes to realize that if one pursues the big white whale one will eventually be dragged down by it into the depths without possibility of return, and so comes across as an Ahab who himself has escaped to tell us. The narrator's name suggests the role of the "apprentice", and Prentis is indeed slowly learning something of great import: the virtues of "negative capability" and of a kind of "*sentio quia absurdum*". However, as we shall see, Prentis's redemption is not cast in the terms of the sentimentum; rather, Prentis's narrative as a whole is swallowed up by a radical indeterminacy and a thorough ironization of all the terms of the narrative and of its narration. Thus, irony and play engulf the novel, leaving little if any room for the reversals and the make-belief of the sentimentum. In the final analysis, Prentis is, like the characters in *The Sweet Shop Owner*, a victim of modernity; Prentis is sentimental, but not very sensitive or "sensibil" (as in sensibility). His narrative, however, is the victim of a postmodernist excess—of infinite regress, of ironies of indeterminacy and interminability.

The narrative in *Shuttlecock* is constituted by the diary somewhat sporadically kept by Prentis, who works as a clerk in the "dead crimes" department of the London police. Incorporated into this diary are passages from Prentis's father's memoir, *Shuttlecock: The Story of a Secret Agent.* This memoir is to a large extent what Prentis is trying to come to terms with, to decipher; in other words, the whale that he is trying to get a grip on. Prentis senior's status as a war hero, established to a great deal through the memoir's account of how he escaped from imprisonment by the Germans at the end of the Second World War, is an unbearable pressure on Prentis junior, who feels unable to live up to his father's example. Displeased with himself, he takes his anguish out on his wife and his two sons, through countless and pointless arguments and punishments. Prentis starts his narrative when he is beginning to feel added pressure from his menacing boss Quinn, who delegates seemingly impossible tasks to Prentis and also seems to be deliberately hiding significant files. Prentis's paranoia increases as his current task involves files vaguely connected to his father, but he also begins to discern the possibility of exposing his father's heroism as a myth and a sham, an exposure which would bring him peace of mind.

Thus, in one of the many overlappings of the framing *Shuttlecock* and the embedded *Shuttlecock*, Prentis's tale also becomes that of a secret agent of sorts, as Prentis seeks to uncover the truth about his father by reading between the lines of the memoir and piecing together the information in those files in his office that he suspects are somehow related to that truth. Significantly, Prentis senior himself, or "Dad" as Prentis refers to him, is inaccessible to Prentis's probings, as he has been the mute and semi-catatonic inmate of a mental hospital for the last two years, having had "some sort of

sudden breakdown, as a result of which he went into, for want of a better word, a kind of language-coma" (40). Yet Prentis goes to visit him each week, searching for the phrase that will shock his father out of silence, but mainly using him in the same way he uses the reader: "[B]ecause Dad does not answer back, because he neither hinders nor encourages whatever I say, I use him as a sort of confessional" (43).

Hence, we can see that *Shuttlecock* primarily relates to two genres, one about as old as Western prose literature, the other quite recent: the confessional autobiography and the anti-detective novel. The first is bound up with the spiritual (St Augustine) and the sentimental (Rousseau), as well as with notions of presence, plenitude and authenticity, the second with nihilism, indeterminacy and play (from Beckett and Pynchon to Ackroyd and Auster). Importantly, the second usually contains elements of the first (as in Beckett's Trilogy, for instance): the confession as a thriller without closure. Indeed, Prentis's discourse has traces of the figure of the weakling sinner: "I am essentially a weak man", he tells us (11), and later: "What a weak, what a cowardly man I am" (33). He speaks of his "voluntary confession" and his "upsurge of guilt" (75). But he also tries to exculpate himself by pleading profound confusion: with his father's sudden breakdown comes the incessant question "Why? Why?" (67). Not long thereafter he begins to feel that Quinn is playing "little games to confuse and harass [him]" and at least once he has "this sudden urge to say to [Quinn], in all sincerity: I don't understand. Please tell me. You see, I don't understand at all" (30-31). Consequently, when Marian says to him one night, "It's not like you to bring home work from the office. What's going on?", he can only think to himself, laconically, "Marian, I wish I knew" (111-12). Furthermore, he is haunted by the question, "Why is it my own children don't respect me?" (48). As his paranoia increases, he even finds himself asking, "Supposing they're all in it, all together?" (97).

Prentis, then, is, in his own eyes, a benevolent man who is a victim of sinister, bewildering circumstances: "You see, underneath, I am a soft-hearted man" (13). Like Richardson's Pamela, Prentis constructs himself as a virtuous being who is at a loss as to why everyone is after *him*. Unlike Pamela, though, he is not blind to his own persecutions and manipulations, as we shall see. Thus, Prentis is suspended between a conception of failure (of living up to his Dad's heroism, of confronting Quinn, of making Marian and his sons respect him) and a conception of guilt (for bullying his sons, for abusing Marian, for wishing to dethrone his father). Importantly, the difference between these two conceptions, and between modes of guilt in turn, is one that is fundamental to Levinasian ethics: as Robert Bernasconi explains, in an essay notably titled "The Truth that Accuses: Conscience,

Shame and Guilt in Levinas and Augustine", the question for Levinas is

> how one is to understand [the] inhibition of spontaneous freedom, as it takes place in a being that distrusts itself, puts itself into question, or is critical . . . Does this inhibition take place as a consciousness of failure, arising in the discovery of one's weakness, or is it a consciousness of guilt, arising in the discovery of one's unworthiness . . . ? According to Levinas, the former represents the predominant tradition of Western thought, in which the spontaneity of freedom is only limited and not called into question as such. Levinas proposed the alternative whereby "the critique of spontaneity engendered by the consciousness of moral unworthiness . . . precedes truth, precedes the consideration of the whole, and does not imply the sublimation of the I in the universal" . . . (27)[16]

We may compare the ideas of Levinas presented here to what I stated in my first chapter, namely that the longing and suffering in question in the sentimentum are not a result of the failure of the *ego*'s project so much as of the failure of intersubjective *connection*. The latter kind of failure takes the form of guilt and unworthiness. It is important to note that "in Levinas, neither guilt, nor shame, when he evokes them in developing his own account, are tied to an accusation focused on a specific deed" (Bernasconi 33). Guilt and shame come before one's deeds, and there is no room for self-righteous complacency: "The more I return to myself, the more I divest myself, under the traumatic effect of persecution, of my freedom as a constituted, willful, imperialist subject, the more I discover myself to be responsible; the more just I am, the more guilty I am" (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 112). This view of ethics is in sharp contrast with the traditional, legalistic one, in which "[t]he codes of behavior that direct one how to act, the debilitating sense of guilt that can arise when one obsesses about specific misdeeds, and the good conscience produced by casuistry, all serve to alleviate the fundamental feeling of unease that arises when one is put in question" (Bernasconi 35). Prentis, as we have begun to see, conforms to this latter view: he experiences a *specific* guilt, his suffering is basically one of interiority, and only gradually and by slippage, if at all, does he awaken to exteriority and alterity and to "original guilt".

Prentis's is not an intersubjective sentimentality, then; as I stated above, *Shuttlecock* does not present us with a narrator who is ultimately able to lodge sentimentality in irony—the kind of irony, that is, that decentralizes

[16] Bernasconi's reference here is to Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969), 83.

the desiring, imperialist subject. Rather, Prentis shifts somewhat uneasily but quite unselfconsciously between a sentimentality and a cruelty which he is unable to reconcile. This shifting is clear from the first page of the novel, which amounts to a peculiar sentimental build-up, as Prentis immerses himself in nostalgia over his childhood pet, the hamster Sammy: "Today I remembered my hamster: my pet hamster, Sammy, a gift for my tenth birthday" (5). Prentis goes on to remember (the phrase "I remembered" appears six times in that first page) various characteristics and behaviours typical of a pet hamster, before asking himself: "Why should I have thought of these things? They say you only recall what is pleasant and you only forget what you choose not to remember. Perhaps. But do I say 'remember'? This was not so much a memory as a pang . . ." (5). It is a pang indeed: in the very next moment of the narration, the sense of innocence evoked by reminiscences of childhood and pets is immediately crushed by Prentis's confession, "You see, I used to torment my hamster. I was cruel to Sammy. It wasn't a case of wanting to play with him, to train him, or study how he behaved. I tortured him. . . . [A]t some time after Sammy's arrival I made the discovery that this creature which I loved and pitied was also at my mercy" (6). Still, it turns out that this torturing had a twisted sentimental purpose: "Will you believe me if I say it was all, still, out of love and pity? For love and pity hadn't disappeared. I needed only new means of eliciting them. Love ought to be simple, straightforward, but it isn't. All these cruelties were no more than a way of making remorse possible, of making my heart melt" (6).

Thus, in its first two pages the novel establishes its main polarity, or vacillation: that between "nature" and "artifice", between "straightforwardness" and "new means", between sentimentality and instrumentality. Both Sammy's function as an emblem of "nature" and the importance "nature" has to Prentis are made obvious by Prentis's subsequent recollection of how

> one day Mr Forster carried into the class-room this green cage with a wire-mesh front and something living inside it. And in producing the hamster before us, like a conjuror, he used the words—as if he were revealing to us a fragment of some precious lost treasure—"a part of nature". It was these words, I swear it, and not any sentimental child's craving for a "pet", for a fluffy thing with legs, which sowed the seeds of my desire for a hamster of my own. . . . How jealously I longed to possess a part of nature. (34-35)

This passage is highly charged with meaning. First of all, "nature" is presented as something that needs to be caged and contained—a very modern

notion. Secondly, it is not very natural after all, but rather like the trick of a conjuror. Thirdly, "nature" is something lost, available only in fragments. Fourthly, "nature" is something that one longs to possess, and that one hence presupposes *can* be possessed. Lastly, Prentis's stressing that his was not the "sentimental child's craving for a 'pet'" simply indicates that it was instead a sentimentalizing and awe of "nature" that induced his longing for a hamster of his own. Indeed, Prentis informs us that he "never really thought of Nature as something ordinary and familiar", but rather "as a rare and mysterious commodity", and that "[a]bove all, it was something quite separate and distinct from me" (33-34). Still, "nature" is "a stuff which could be gathered, or mined like gold, if only you knew where to find it" (34).

In other words, the scenario is fairly typical: it is that of modern man—and the choice of gender here is not accidental—who senses an alienation not only from other men but also from the very nature whence he has come, and so wants to reclaim the real, the natural "Nature". Indeed, there are traces of the romanticist view of nature in Prentis's musings and longings; for instance, he notes how "animals, when they meet, sniff each other's arses and nuzzle each other's fur . . . innocently and—who knows?—with affection", whereas people crammed in the Tube "look at each other beadily and inquisitively . . . with suspicion and menace" (25). In a similar vein, Prentis describes his sons' room as "a cybernetical junkyard" where there is "[n]othing simple and down-to-earth" (80), and contrastingly points out that "we couldn't live without trees and grass" (26).

His observations are thus redolent of a commonplace that lingered on from romantic poetry through the Victorian novel: nature (and the rural) is benevolent, culture (and the urban) is menacing. However, this trace of romanticism is swallowed up in an alienation profounder than what either Wordsworth or Dickens could dream of: nature is now wholly other, not-human, not-same, and is ultimately accessed indirectly or vicariously, in a cage of one sort or another. For instance, discussing the benefits of zoos with his son Martin, Prentis thinks, "what else can you do these days, if you want to be close to nature, but put it in a cage?", whereas Martin, unimpressed by his father's offer to take him to the zoo, claims that "[t]here are plenty of good programmes about animals—on *television*" (154). So, nature has entered into simulation and hyperreality. And so has Prentis, who reveals that as a child he considered himself "odourless and non-descript—as if I were made from something that didn't exist" (34).[17] Like Willy in *The Sweet Shop Owner*, he views his actions "like a scene in a play . . . perfectly timed and

[17] This statement may serve as a subtle metafictional signal; it resembles the conclusion of the narrator in Martin Amis's *London Fields*: "I feel seamless and insubstantial, like a creation. As if someone made me up" (470).

calculated" (11), and himself as an "effigy" or "dummy" engaged in "hopeless pantomime" (43), as "no more than a puppet" (101). As Prentis nears the end of his narrative, he concludes: "[N]atural and artificial at the same time . . . perhaps this is the way things must be now" (152). That is, we do not experience or know nature as such, but as subjected to our programmes of containment and orchestration, whether actual physical containment and orchestration or containment and orchestration by the image industry.[18] As we have seen, the hamster which is a piece of nature quickly leaves the sentimental imagination and enters the instrumental imagination, becoming the object of tests and surveillance. And thus Sammy is emblematic not only of the plight of his own species at the hands of the cosmetics and medical industries, but of the plight of modern man subjected to his own programmes of mastery.[19]

In the same way that Prentis's love for Sammy is, if not eclipsed, then heavily complicated, so his love for his wife Marian is complicated by a modern code of mastery, control and optimization: "[T]he thing I like most about Marian . . . is her malleability, her pliancy; the feeling I get that I could mould and remodel her . . . , contort and distort her, parcel her up and stretch her into all kinds of shapes" (27). Prentis is referring to their bedtime routines, which have also entered into simulation and hyperreality: love-making according to models, settings and manuals. Some ten pages later we find Prentis "making adjustments to her body and manoeuvring her limbs into one of my favourite positions for love-making. I won't go into exact details; it is something developed over the years which requires a little setting up. Marian is quite accustomed, almost indifferent to these preparations. She lies back, lets me continue and lets herself go putty" (38). We may read this passage in the light of what Bauman writes in his brief history of modernity in the introduction to *Intimations of Postmodernity*: in modernity "perfection could be reached only through action: it was the outcome of laborious 'fitting together'" (xiii). Indeed, Prentis often spends his whole day at the office "planning in meticulous detail [their] activities of the night" (73). As with Sammy, though, all this circumstance serves a profounder, finally more "laudable" purpose: "[W]hen I started to buy certain 'manuals', to get Marian to send off for certain articles from catalogues . . . all this paraphernalia

[18] In "Why Look at Animals?", John Berger argues pessimistically that "[t]his historic loss, to which zoos are a monument, is now irredeemable for the culture of capitalism" (28).

[19] We may think here of Foucault and his studies of modes of subjection in modernity, and of Bauman's description of modernity as an ideology in which "as nature became progressively 'de-animated', humans grew increasingly 'naturalized' so that their subjectivity, the primeval 'givenness' of their existence could be denied and they themselves could be made hospitable for instrumental meanings; they came to be like timber and waterways rather than like forests and lakes" (*Intimations* xi).

wasn't an end in itself, believe me, it was all in the hope of achieving some ultimate thing that always seemed elusive . . . [W]hen, night after night, I conduct my sexual experiments with Marian, for ever modifying the formula, it's with the yearning that one day it won't just be sex, but enlightenment" (73). The phrase is hardly accidental: "enlightenment", the name both of the ultimate inauguration of modernity and of its professed *telos*, its legitimization and master-narrative. Prentis's goal is decidedly modern—the very presupposition of "enlightenment" is—and he pursues it through a modern method of protocol and optimization, but also of consumerism; sexual liberation, as most other things put under the sign of "liberation", is also a commercialization, as Baudrillard illustrates in *The Consumer Society*.[20] Sexuality has also, as Prentis himself notes, replaced religion as "opium for the people": "[Sexuality] compensates for all the excitement and initiative we've lost in other ways. The only true revolution now is sexual revolution, and that is why everything—look around—is becoming increasingly, visibly oriented to sex. Well, if sex is the only true revolution, I don't see why Marian and I shouldn't play our part" (74). As we see, there is an attempt at exculpation here: Prentis is no worse than anyone else, he is simply obeying the programme. In the very next instant, however, he turns to self-denuding, self-denouncing confession: "All right, so you've gathered it by now. My sex-life is really a preposterous, an obsessive, a pathetic affair. A sham, a mockery. Systematically and cold-bloodedly, like a torturer bent on breaking his victim, I am turning my wife into a whore" (75).

Once again, though, Prentis contrasts his own circumstantial behaviour with the image of an uncomplicated "nature", a logos and an originary authenticity.[21] In relation to Sammy, he poses the rhetorical question: "For what else is love—don't tell me it is anything less simple, less obvious—than being close to nature?" (35). Later, with regard to his sophisticated love-making, he elaborates:

> Making love ought to be the most natural thing. This week, in the full flush of spring, I have been watching the sparrows copulating on our guttering—a mere hop and then it's over—and the ducks—more rapacious—on the common. It is so simple. . . . And sometimes that is just how I see it with Marian and me: a little careless, unadorned instant, like the sparrows; a little flutter of wings and hearts: at one with nature. Perhaps it was like that

[20] As Baudrillard argues, "[i]t is the same with the body as it is with labour power. It has to be 'liberated, emancipated' to be able to be exploited rationally for productivist ends" (135).

[21] In an essay revolving around Aristotle's *Physics* and the concept of "nature", Martin Heidegger points out that the Latin "*Natura* comes from *nasci*, 'to be born, to originate . . .' . . . *Natura* means 'that which lets something originate from itself'" (183).

> once, long ago. . . . But now we have to go through the most elaborate charades, the most strenuous performances to receive enlightenment. (73)

There is an obvious strain in this passage: nature, origin, and simplicity are still connected to enlightenment, which is a highly cultural phenomenon or notion and indeed requires strenuous performances of calculations, measurements, repetitions and falsifications.

What is more, enlightenment, as Prentis comes to understand at the end of the novel, is ultimately a ruse, or at least always partial, and also may not be desirable. At any rate, the idea of enlightenment serves "what Levinas calls 'ontological imperialism'", which constitutes a "denial of the ethical relation" and emerges "in the expression of the naive, arbitrary, spontaneous dogmatism of the self which directs the understanding at its thitherto obscure object as a clarifying 'ray of light' (*TI*, p. 44), delivering being out of secrecy . . . and thus neutralizing in encompassing the other" (Gibson, *Postmodernity* 56-57).[22] As John Wild writes in his introduction to *Totality and Infinity*, "[t]he other is not an object that must be interpreted and illumined by my alien light. He shines forth with *his own light*, and speaks for himself" (Levinas, *Totality* 14; emphasis mine). In terms of the metaphoricity of the word, then, to think one has attained enlightenment is to close oneself off from the *other* light (not the other *of* light), or from the light of the other, from the infinity of that unseeable, unbearable light a fraction of which one has drawn into one's own. As Caputo and Scanlon put it, "modernity and its Enlightenment imposed certain restraints upon our thinking, certain 'conditions of possibility', to use Kant's expression, which, like border police, mark off the boundaries and patrol the limits of possible experience" (2). Importantly, though, mastery—the attempt at mastery, the ruse of mastery—of the other in the quest for enlightenment entails not only a closing off of the same, a marking off of the boundaries, but also an active violation of the other in its infinity. This is what we witness in Prentis's subjections of both Sammy and Marian to his schemes of "love" and "enlightenment".

Still, Prentis posits, if not impenetrability and infinity, then an inviolable core and an essence; in his confession of his carnalization and his subjection (which is simultaneously an objectification) of Marian, he reaches a point of sentimentalization: "[B]ut, just as you can work a piece of clay a thousand times but still have left the same piece of clay, she would still, at the end of it all, be Marian. Marian" (27). There is an uneasy tension here between Prentis's likening of his wife to a piece of clay and the sentimental

[22] Gibson's reference is to Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969).

tone resulting from the pause and repetition: "Marian. Marian". More importantly, the positing of an essence and a stable core is precisely what animates "enlightenment" and the quest for truth. The resulting violations of bodies and souls through dissection and interrogation is given a grotesque illustration in Prentis's relation of one of the cases found in the files in the "dead crimes" archives. The case concerns a boy who was locked up with the corpse of his dead father, and who "found a penknife, belonging to the dead man, in one of the bedroom drawers, and with it—for reasons never established, though according to the boy himself, 'to find out what his father was made of'—systematically disfigured and mutilated his father's body" (24).

The boy's dissecting his father, and his objective in doing so, is of course really only an extreme version—an allegory—of what Prentis is doing to *his* father. As Prentis asks himself, "Why do I need to know these things—to eavesdrop on my Dad's suffering? So as to become like one of his tormentors?" (146). Prentis's project of dissection is, however, put under the strain of indeterminacy and uncertainty, as he is faced with the alterity of not only the text of his father, but that of Marian, as well as that of Quinn. But while Prentis has these intimations of alterity and "original guilt", his narrative is not finally ruptured by them; on the contrary, it seeks to contain them by feigning closure, as we shall see when we turn to the ending of the novel.

Indeed, with Marian, alterity actually returns Prentis to his interiority: it is Marian who "sometimes makes me feel (it is a strange thing to say, I admit) that *she* doesn't know who *I* am" (27; emphases mine). Prentis is overcome by "some sense of dreadful loneliness. My wife . . . does not know me" (100). The focus is on "me"; there is no indication of Prentis losing sight of *her*, of his unknowing of her. Congenially, when Prentis seems to realize the virtue of vulnerability, of baring one's skin, this baring is placed with Marian and not with himself: when they first made love, Prentis "was surprised by her passivity and by the way her body became something offered up completely to me. I suppose that is what happens in love: you bare your breast and say, I am in your hands" (150). That is, *Marian* is in *his* hands.

Quinn, however, more clearly challenges Prentis's preconceptions and his selfhood, vexing Prentis's expectations of systematicality and accessibility: "When I first started in our office I must have accepted these anomalies, frustrating, baffling as they were, as part, nonetheless, of a 'system' . . . But I'm sure now, at any rate, that they are not part of any system. They are part of Quinn" (19-20). Almost immediately, though, Prentis questions his own notions: "Could I be wrong? Could I have mistaken

and perverted some quite innocuous truth?" (20). Indeed, recalling an earlier meeting with Quinn, Prentis relates how "as often happens when I'm face to face with Quinn, I found myself hurriedly, and for no apparent reason, revising my impression of him" (30). This is probably the most overtly Levinasian moment of the novel: the face-to-face challenges Prentis with an immediacy and opacity that he can only translate as "no apparent reason", but which nonetheless causes his renegotiation of the other. Final knowledge of the other is impossible; as Quinn stresses, "Good heavens, limited information is why we're here, Prentis" (31). All of which only serves to deepen Prentis's suspicion and paranoia: "Today (Monday) it struck me that Quinn could be inventing everything. Those inquiries. Supposing they are all in some extraordinary way figments of his imagination? How am I to know what's true and what isn't and what really stems from an official directive?" (85). The C9 inquiry, the case Prentis is working on, and which concerns a blackmailing case involving persons vaguely connected to Dad, is "a pattern in which there were large holes and gaps where items were missing from files—so perhaps not a pattern at all" (86). Particularly, File E, which Prentis suspects of holding the key to the whole affair and Dad's implication in it, is wholly missing.

Dad himself is of course most radically other and inscrutable, as he refrains from both speech and gesture; he is "this silent shell" (40), and all Prentis "ever see[s] in his eyes is a filmy gaze, fixed on the distance, which now and then settles on me as on some curious object" (41). Dad is thus both saying and said, both challenge and stasis, both infinite and bounded. Indeed, his code-name as an agent was "Shuttlecock" (49): never at rest, always moving back and forth between two poles. And such is his memoir, the text Prentis has to resort to in the face of his father's loss of face: suspended between fact and fiction, true and false, occupying the excluded middle, like Schrödinger's cat. This elusive quality dawns upon Prentis as he begins to scrutinize his father's narrative, sensing its internal contradictions and its instabilities: "I must have read it a dozen times, and each time I read it, it seems to get not more familiar but more elusive and remote" (51-52). Interestingly, the crucial issue for Prentis in this matter is feelings: "Because Dad doesn't write about his feelings; he describes events, and where his feelings come into it he conveys them in a bluff, light-hearted way, as in some made-up adventure story; so that sometimes this book which is all fact seems to me like fiction, like something that never really took place" (52). Once again, though, there is a peculiar essentialist reversal: the reason Prentis gives for his renewed interest in Dad's memoir is that

> for the first time I realize that Dad is *in* that book. He's in there

> somewhere. It's not some other man, in those pages, with a code-name, Shuttlecock. It's a former consultant engineer, a golf player, a widower, the victim of a mental breakdown. I want to put the two together. Or—put it another way—the book *is* Dad. It's more Dad than that empty effigy I sit beside at the hospital. When I pick it up I still possess Dad, I hold him, even though he's gone away into unbreakable silence. (52)

As with Sammy, then, Prentis's desire is for possession, and as with Marian, he posits an immutable essence and origin: the Dad who wrote the memoir, the Dad whom Dad wrote about in the memoir, and the Dad of latter years are not only reconcilable, but interchangeable, ultimately self-same. Dad has also entered the hyperreal: the representation of Dad *is* Dad, is even more Dad than Dad. The more-Dad-than-Dad of course adheres to the modern code of repeatability: "[t]here are two copies of it in our house" (51). Yet this dissemination of self-same copies also makes possible individual re-inscriptions and amendments: only one of the copies has Prentis's "name in it and 'From your loving father' in Dad's writing—bold and slanting—and the date, September 1957". This difference is not without importance: "I read from either of the two copies indiscriminately, picking up which ever is to hand, but naturally the one I value more is the one inscribed by Dad himself" (57). Indeed, Prentis's waning control over the text/Dad is somewhat farcically illustrated by the following scene: "I keep [Dad's inscribed copy] in our bedroom. That is, usually. For as I sit down now to read the copy from the living-room I discover that at some time or other I have got the two muddled up. The one I have opened has Dad's words in it. '. . . From your loving Father. September 1957" (57-58). The mix-up is evidently significant and unnerving enough to demand mentioning, and it illustrates both the sentimental importance of the inscription and the rupturing of Dad's self-sameness.

Mix-ups notwithstanding, Prentis senses inconsistencies and conspicuous absences in Dad's text, especially in the last two chapters, which narrate Dad's capture by the Gestapo and his subsequent escape: "For one thing, there are the gaps, the hazy areas in those eight days at the Château Martine. . . . [I]t is about the goings-on in that interrogation room, and other, sinister rooms, that Dad is silent, or circumspect. The picture clouds over: a few vague allusions, a hint of the inarticulable ('Here description must be blurred'), a few chilly motifs" (105). At the same time, "[t]hese pages are more vivid, more real, more believable than any other part of the book. And yet, strangely enough, this is because the style of Dad's writing becomes—how shall I put it?—more imaginative, more literary, more speculative" (106-107). Thus, Prentis must "struggle to make it real, to wrest

it out of the story-book realm into the realm of fact" (146). Once again, though, there is a swift reversal: "And yet in these last chapters there is more of the flavour or reality, because there is also more mystery—and more misery" (146). As we can see, there is an unsettling, ever-shifting relation between fact and fiction, between what constitutes the convincing and what constitutes the unconvincing. Chapters 29 and 31 of Prentis's *Shuttlecock* consist entirely of excerpts from Dad's *Shuttlecock*, without Prentis's commentary, thrusting the reader into Dad's narrative (a perfect pastiche, on Swift's part, of the suspense novel), leaving the reader to ponder on his/her own the narrative's consistency or lack thereof, as well as the relation between the two *Shuttlecock*s. Chapter 31 is notably the last segment of Dad's memoir we get to read, and it narrates Dad's escape and, as Dad himself puts it, "miraculous" rescue from pursuing German soldiers by the American Seventh Army (170). This chapter is immediately followed by Prentis's account of his own escape and rescue under the auspices of Quinn, an escape that takes the form of an embrace of unknowing, a realization of the liberation found in turning away from the incessant search for truth to the clearing of a space for harmony.

Indeed, it is when Prentis finally confronts Quinn with his suspicions about the C9 inquiry that Quinn articulates the ethical and pragmatic problem of knowledge: "Is it better to know things or not to know them? Wouldn't we sometimes be happier not knowing them?" (118). Then, after some vague hints as to what his agenda in confusing Prentis has been, he makes a surprising invitation: "You want to know—everything, don't you? Would you care to come and see me, one evening after work—at my home?" (120). Unlike the unforgiving persona he puts forward in the urban office, Quinn is quite amiable in his semi-rural home, receiving Prentis as he tends to "some pots of geraniums on the ledge of the basement window" (172).[23] Quinn also has "a confession—of a kind" to make (174): "I've had File E all along, and I nearly destroyed it. And it's not the only one" (175). Quinn has, as Prentis now concludes, "been withholding—or destroying—information so as to spare people—needless painful knowledge" (176). He has also been testing Prentis: Quinn is going to retire and has suggested that Prentis be promoted to his position, but he has also taken the opportunity to test Prentis to see whether he has the ethics of knowledge required for the job. And so Quinn voices his creed that "if you have any imagination at all . . . the best, the securest position to be in is not to know. But once you do know, you can't do anything about it. You can't get rid of knowledge" (176). The point is not lost

[23] In this respect, the character of Quinn obviously owes a great deal to Wemmick in *Great Expectations*; Dickens's novel has a wider intertextual echo in *Waterland*, though, which takes one of its epigraphs from it.

on Prentis, who goes through a swift turn of redemption: "I thought of Marian—Marian like a stranger in the same bed. All those nights seeking enlightenment" (176). What Quinn proceeds to unravel, however, is something far more complex than the mere question of wanting or not wanting, of being able or not to cope with, truth: as Quinn and Prentis go through the evidence of C9, Quinn demonstrates how the evidence—the truth—itself may be unreliable and/or yield to multiple and conflicting narratives.[24] Quinn cautions Prentis: "Look I want to say at the beginning that what we're dealing with isn't necessarily one hundred per cent proven truth" (182). What Prentis already knows is that C9 concerns the blackmail by X of Y and Z; X died while undergoing trial for this blackmail and both Y and Z were exonerated. What File E reveals is that X, who, it turns out, had been at Château Martine at roughly the same time as Dad, had also prepared and possibly sent a blackmail letter to Dad: "The gist of the blackmail was this: that your father did not escape from the Germans . . . He succumbed under interrogation, betrayed several resistance units and the whereabouts of three British agents operating in . . . France; and in return for this the Germans 'allowed him to escape'" (182-83). Upon hearing this, Prentis has "this strange feeling of release. *I* had escaped; I was free" (183); the evidence of Dad's fraudulence, which he had sought, is at hand. However, Quinn warns him again: "[D]on't jump to conclusions. . . . [E]ven supposing your father did receive the letter and his breakdown was a consequence, it may have been a reaction to a vicious, sudden, but still false allegation" (184). Consequently, Quinn and Prentis spend some time pitting a number of possible truths against each other. When Quinn, prompted by Prentis, furthermore reveals that X's letter to Y contained the allegation that Dad had an affair with Y's wife, another round of guesswork follows.[25] This leads Quinn to conclude that "[p]erhaps uncertainty is always better than either certainty or ignorance" (197), and to propose that they destroy File E. And so they move to the incinerator at the end of the garden, where Prentis has one last doubt: "[S]upposing, in some extraordinary way, that everything Quinn told me was concocted, was an elaborate hoax—if I never looked in the file, I would never know. I read the code letters over and over again. C9/E . . . And then suddenly I knew I wanted to be uncertain, I wanted to be in the dark" (199). When Quinn asks him one final time whether he considers Quinn's actions just and correct, he replies: "'I don't know' . . . It seemed to me this was an

[24] And thus *Shuttlecock* obviously becomes a piece of historiographic metafiction.

[25] Thus, Prentis and Quinn get together like Quentin and Shreve in chapter 8 of *Absalom, Absalom!* and spur each other on in filling in the gaps of history with fiction. Indeed, that episode from Faulkner's masterpiece is McHale's example of the postmodernist shift in modernism, from truth-seeking to truth-making. See *Postmodernist Fiction* 8-11.

answer I would give, boldly, over and over again for the rest of my life" (200). Prentis has escaped the cognitive imperative; he can return home a redeemed man, to tell Marian the good news that he will be promoted to Quinn's position.

Thus, Prentis leaves the downward spiral of suspicion and violation. In the subsequent chapter, six months have passed, and Prentis returns to his memoir-in-process to record his impressions of his new life. At the office, Prentis emulates Quinn perfectly, but he now knows the limits of the position: observing Eric, who now occupies Prentis's former position, he considers "how little he knows if he thinks in his bewilderment, beset by all those misleading files, those gaps in the shelves . . . that the confusions cease, the mysteries stop, when promotion lifts you up into the rarefied air" (209). Thus, Prentis has stopped tormenting his family not because of some new-found sense of power, but because he has learnt to live with ambivalence and vulnerability: "[W]hen [Martin] looks at me . . . [h]e doesn't see a man with power; he sees the same old weakling. The only difference is that I no longer conceal it. And this brings into Martin's eyes . . . the slightest hint of perplexity. For this is something he cannot understand. *But I don't attempt to enlighten him, or to iron out the differences which exist between us*" (210; emphasis mine). Breaking out of modernity, Prentis even seems open to the embrace of myth and magic, as is evidenced by the last chapter but one of Prentis's narrative, which consists entirely of Prentis's question to his wife: "Marian . . . do you believe in the pathetic fallacy? That it's really a fallacy, I mean?" (215). (In his memoir, recollecting hiding in the woods, Dad reveals that "[s]ince then I have come to believe—a blatant case of the pathetic fallacy, no doubt—that the woods and the trees are always on the side of the fugitive and the victim, never on the side of the oppressor" (164).)

Having paved the way for a less troubled sentimentality, in the last chapter, Prentis takes his family on an outing to Camber Sands: "Why Camber Sands? There are other parts of the coast which are shorter and easier drives from our part of London. *Sentimental reasons.* It was here that Marian and I used to come when Martin was scarcely beyond the crawling age . . . to spread a blanket and make warm, airy outdoor love" (215-16; emphasis mine). Yet, Prentis's sentimentality is now not one of prelapsarian origins:

> Don't ask me why, knowing that this spot must be even more spoilt, even more strewn with seaside junk since Marian and I last saw it, I should determine on going there—I who have this hankering for untouched countryside and have often harangued my family with conservationist lectures. Perhaps certain things are inside us and we don't have to go searching for the appropriate setting in order to find them. Or if they aren't inside

> us, then—perhaps we should admit it—they aren't anywhere. (217)

Prentis may seem to return to subjectivism and interiority here, but we must note that he speaks of "certain things", a phrase we are invited to construe as denoting precisely immutable essences and an originary *logos*, and concludes that those things may not be anywhere.

However, the novel ends on a false and contrived note, as Prentis relates how he and Marian make love once again among the dunes:

> We had to be quick, quick as sparrows . . . Need for haste; but none for hinting or persuasion, nor for pointless sophistication. All those laborious bedroom antics, to return at last to burrowing in the sand. The beach-grass waved; the gulls floated, white fragments in the blue above. But this would have been Marian's view. My view was filled with sand, a miniature dune-scape . . . bleached and smooth-contoured . . . And then these same soft-gold hues and gentle contours made me think of the pale, furred creature who was the cause of my beginning these pages, and I remembered the magical words Mr Forster had spoken when I was a boy (Peter's age): "a piece of nature". (219-20)

Prentis offers us a vision of harmony and oneness with nature, a quite prelapsarian tableau after all; but neither the ending nor the novel as a whole is "a piece of nature", but a contrived artifice. In typical postmodernist fashion, the ending sends us right back to the beginning of the novel, to Sammy and to the situation of Prentis's "beginning these pages". Thus, we are all but recommended to re-read or rethink the novel. The first thing one realizes in such a rethinking is that Prentis has foregone the order of events in order to put a harmonic end to things; right before the recollection of love-making among the dunes we get the "actual", more ambivalent, and thus "truer", ending:

> Peter: "What are those rusty metal things over there, Dad?"
>
> Dad: "Oh, they're something left over from the war."
>
> (As Dad and Peter . . . walk out again . . . to the water's edge . . . and Dad thinks, almost for the first time, that day, of his own Dad.)
>
> Peter: "Oh." (Unenlightened, unwilling to display ignorance by asking further questions, but just a little bit afraid, gripping his father's hand, that the rusty metal things might still be dangerous. . . .)
>
> *But this was later.* After lunch, after trips for ice-

> creams . . . and after . . . Marian and I made love in the sand. (219; emphasis mine)

Shuttlecock, then, is a novel that feigns closure. Like Pamela, Prentis is ultimately a Shamela.

Furthermore, not only does *Shuttlecock* constitute a postmodernist loop; it also contains quite an elaborate instance of what Brian McHale considers a prominent postmodernist device: the *mise-en-abyme*, an enclosed narrative that reflects the framing narrative.[26] Dad's memoir's function as *mise-en-abyme* is of course made obvious by the fact that the two narratives share the same title.[27] The similarities go further, however; as Prentis notes: "I can imagine myself in that dark cell, in those passage ways, that courtyard. . . . So that sometimes in my mind . . . it almost seems that Dad and I are one too" (146). Indeed, just like Dad, Prentis is imprisoned below ground (in the offices), but also, as Donald P. Kaczvinsky observes, in his own Château Martine: "Martin's house", to go by the name of his elder son (Kaczvinsky 9); and like Dad he is looking for an escape (from Quinn's torture—but also from his own role as torturer and interrogator; importantly, this is his true escape). But, as one may begin to suspect, Prentis's narrative also shares the inconsistencies and contradictions of Dad's. Like Dowell in *The Good Soldier*, Prentis is a deeply unreliable narrator. In fact, Prentis's is so unreliable a narrative as to be self-erasing; it erases itself as it writes.[28] Peculiarly, at the same time as Prentis tries to preclude any deeper scrutiny on the part of the reader, he invites such scrutiny, just like a master criminal leaving clues in a kind of death wish or paradoxical wish to be found out; the very last thing he writes before the grand denouement of the last two chapters is: "How much of a book is in the words and how much is behind or in between the lines? Perhaps it is best not to probe too deeply into those invisible regions, but to accept on trust what is there on the page as the best

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[26] This is how McHale explains the use and meaning of the term: "A true *mise-en-abyme* is determined by three criteria: first, it is a nested or embedded representation, occupying a narrative level inferior to that of the primary, diegetic narrative world; secondly, this nested representation *resembles* . . . something at the level of the primary diegetic world; and thirdly, this 'something' that it resembles must constitute some salient and continuous aspect of the primary world . . . The effect of *mise-en-abyme*, Gabriel Josipovici writes, 'is to rob events of their solidity'" (*Postmodernist Fiction* 124-25; emphasis in original).

[27] The cover of the 1997 Picador edition of the novel accentuates this aspect by displaying a rendition of the cover of George Prentis's *Shuttlecock*. The cover is thus a double cover, or the simultaneous cover of two different books.

[28] Admittedly, it does this more subtly than, for instance, Beckett's *Molloy*, in which the second part begins, "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows" (99), only to end: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining" (189).

showing the author could make. And the same is true perhaps of *this* book . . . Once you have read it, it may be better not to peer too hard beneath the surface of what it says" (214).

If we do peer, however, we find a number of inconsistencies and destabilizing factors. For example, Prentis is disturbed by the gaps in Dad's narrative ("Here description must be blurred"), but if one looks carefully at his own narrative, it has just these gaps and signals: "[L]et me tell you what passed between us before Quinn mentioned my promotion. We were discussing the report I had brought in, which merely required his approval before being sent off. *I won't bore you with details*" (28; emphasis mine). As Kaczvinsky shows, just as Dad's narrative may be a cover-up for a less flattering truth, so may Prentis's. The reason for producing such a cover-up story is given by Quinn when he and Prentis discuss the reliability of a witness in C9: "A story, Prentis. Why not? We all know that the best way to hide one guilty secret is seemingly to confess to another" (87). As Quinn further notes about Dad's narrative, given that it is a fabrication, it may be that "in writing it he is actually torn between the desire to construct a saving lie and an instinct not to falsify himself completely—to be, somehow, honest. So behind all the 'authentication' of his prison experiences and of the escape, he puts down little hints, little clues" (188). The truth may be that just as Dad blurs description in the case of the interrogations because what they actually produced were negotiations and betrayals, so Prentis chooses not to bore us with details because what actually passed between him and Quinn were negotiations following Prentis's threat to expose Quinn's manipulation of files; Prentis's promotion may be the direct result of those negotiations. Indeed, Prentis himself concedes that "now I sit behind a big desk, with a salary to match, promoted by an *extraordinary stroke of luck* (or, some say, *secret machination*) to a senior rank in my early thirties" (208; emphases mine).

Moreover, there are hints that Quinn may be involved in some way in Dad's fate: as Quinn reveals, he was in Caen at about the time of Dad's escape. This may be taken as a simple coincidence, but when one considers Dad's favoured pastime, at the local golf club, the following observation of Prentis's fuels suspicion: "I noticed that in [Quinn's] conservatory, amongst a collection of various outdoor garments and implements . . . was a bag of golf-clubs" (173).

Thus, *Shuttlecock* sinks into a quagmire of indeterminacy. The novel makes a very complex proposition; I count eight possible truths, neither of which one can ultimately settle for.[29] The Prentis who concludes the narrative

[29] If we let D=Dad's statement, Q=Quinn's statement and P=Prentis's statement, then *Shuttlecock* makes the following proposition, logically formalized: (Dt & Qt & Pt) V (Df & Qt & Pt) V

may well still be the cruel manipulator we encounter in the earlier parts of the novel, his sense of vulnerability a fabrication. And thus, whatever intimations of the sentimentum the novel has worked up to are pretty much gorged by an absolute irony. As we have furthermore seen, even if we choose to trust Prentis's narrative, it does not ultimately adhere to the sentimentum, but slips back, in the end, into the unreflected, unreflexive sentimentality of its beginning. While the sentimentum follows postmodernism in discarding the quest for Truth and in residing in a kind of openended scepticist dialogic, it also follows postmodernism in the belief that you cannot escape the other, responsibility, the tug of the past and the Real, how ever unknowable those are. Prentis, conversely, avoids the reality of his anxiety and the impingement of the other by placing his romantic vision as finality.

And so we leave him in that "shifting and rippling Sahara that was forming and reforming round our blanket" (220). It is fitting that the first of the two novels to which I now turn, and which constitute a further move toward the voicing of the sentimentum and an aesthetics of vulnerability, contrastingly takes place in a waterland.

(Df & Qf & Pt) V (Df & Qf & Pf) V (Df & Qt & Pf) V (Dt & Qf & Pt) V (Dt & Qf & Pf) V (Dt & Qt & Pf). (t=true, f=false, V=or.) Add to this the further embedded propositions (Dad did or did not have an affair with Z's wife, for instance), and the proposition becomes almost impossible to disentangle.

3
"This Strange New Element": Toward the Sentimentum in *Waterland* and *Out of this World*

> Still, the postmodern condition is as much a stranger to disenchantment as it is to the blind positivity of delegitimation.
> —Jean-François Lyotard
>
> Perhaps we should have stopped this hemhorrhage of value. Enough of this terrorist radicalism; enough simulacra—let us have a rebirth of morality, belief and meaning. Down with twilight analyses!
> —Jean Baudrillard
>
> "And now", Shreve said, "we're going to talk about love."
> —*Absalom, Absalom!*, William Faulkner

In *Waterland* and *Out of This World*, the postmodern condition and postmodernist aesthetics are brought more to the fore than in Swift's two previous novels. The postmodern condition is present quite explicitly on the thematic level in *Waterland*'s adoption of phrases such as "the Grand Narrative" and "the end of history", and in *Out of This World*'s discussions of the simulacrum and the hyperreal. *Waterland* signals by its very title its implication in the postmodern condition: the connotations of the title are hybridity and paradox, a solid form of liquidity; indeterminacy lodged in immanence, Hassan's "indetermanence". This doubleness is also aesthetic: as a seminal piece of historiographic metafiction, *Waterland* mixes realist aesthetics with postmodernist destabilization. The aesthetically postmodernist also comes through in both novels in an infatuation with language, which makes the narratives follow the logic of puns, by way of homonymy (both lexical and metaphorical) and analogy. In other words, not only do lexical homonyms serve as the vehicles for what is, ultimately, a ruse of cohesion, but any given metaphor may serve as the vehicle, simultaneously, of different and even incongruous ideas. In this way, *Waterland* and *Out of This World* lay bare the device of language itself, showing that its internal logic, its infatuation with itself, pretty much precludes any aim at clear-cut referentiality. In *Waterland*, this preclusion is heightened by an elaborate

intertextuality that makes one wonder whether the novel is anything but an amalgam of previous texts.[1] The two novels may thus be seen as quite sophisticated echo chambers, or halls of mirrors, of the postmodernist kind.

Yet, the novels move "beyond mere felicity of language", as Linda Gray Sexton puts it in her review of *Out of This World* (Sexton, Online). There are none of the explicit historical anomalies or the violations of ontological boundaries found in many other postmodernist novels, such as Doctorow's *Ragtime* or Thomas's *The White Hotel*. The postmodern realist ethos that I have suggested is integral to the sentimentum is thus maintained. It is hence possible to engage in the two novels, or let oneself be engaged by them, quite in the way one would in more traditional narratives that remain true to a realist naïveté. And it is hence also possible to yield to the sentimental moments of the two novels. There is a new kind of tension and vacillation in the novels between irony and sentimentality, between scepticism and belief, between apathy and pathos. The structure of my readings of the novels inevitably mimics this vacillation—a vacillation through which the sentimentum in all its aspects becomes more pronounced than in Swift's first two novels.

Waterland: Remedy and Redemption at the End of History

Originally published in 1983, *Waterland* is a novel of nuclear anxiety and of a crumbling Thatcherite Britain.[2] The narrator, Tom Crick, has lost his job as a history teacher due to cut-backs in favour of subjects of "practical relevance to today's real world" (22). He has also lost his beloved wife, Mary, to schizophrenia. The scandal of Mary's kidnapping a child at a supermarket, in the belief that the child is a gift from God, is perceived by Tom as a second reason for his being laid off. Before this happens, Tom, challenged by the somewhat eccentric student Price, who believes in imminent nuclear apocalypse and also questions the underlying assumptions of historiography, has begun to shift his history lessons from the topic of the French Revolution to the narration of his own life story, in an attempt to explain his wife's breakdown according to a causal logic. The focus of his story is the events leading up to and following upon the murder of his friend Freddie Parr in 1943, a murder committed by Tom's mentally challenged brother Dick in a

[1] Among the novel's clearly identifiable intertexts are *Moby Dick*, *Great Expectations*, *Hereward the Wake*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. In a way, *Waterland* cancels itself out in this elaborate intertextual play, making one wonder what if anything constitutes originality in the novel.

[2] A revised edition of the novel was published in 1992. My reading here is of that revised edition, which I have taken to be the authoritative text.

fit of jealousy after Dick finds out that Mary, whom Dick has been wooing, is pregnant. Tom blames himself for the murder, since, apparently being the cause of the pregnancy, but fearing the rage of his smitten brother, he tells Dick that Freddie is the father. Following the murder, Mary, sensing the scandal that would result from her prospective adolescent motherhood, goes through a horrible abortion at the hands of the local "witch", Martha Clay. It is this abortion, and Mary's consequent infertility, that Tom identifies as the cause for her breakdown some four decades later.

In the process of establishing a causal chain, however, Tom reaches further back, into the history of his ancestors, in a non-linear narrative that merges here and now and then and there in a Proustian fashion. As Tom proceeds, his aspirations to causal linking and panoramic grasp are increasingly undermined. *Waterland* thus turns into an exercise in indeterminability and pluralism. Its narrator presents several different, conflicting views of the nature of history and the nature of reality. The novel seems to settle, though, for a view of the reality of past and present as always yielding to fiction, or as so much approximating a sublime *nothingness* that they require fiction in order not to equal disappearance or naked terror. Accordingly, one of the underlying questions of the novel is which is worse: the subjection of the singular event to the patterns of fiction and to the selectivity of representation, or the opening of oneself, in vulnerability, to wounding by the unexpected event, the saying. Related to this question is the question of whether one in fact can escape representation: Tom comes to realize that there is no history, but that there are histories, each one formed through selection and exclusion and dependent on its particular point of view. From a view of history as linear progression, he turns to a view of history as a directionless, multidimensional structure.

This is also to a large extent the structure of his narrative, which constitutes the novel. Consequently, *Waterland* may be seen as an approximation of a rhizomatic novel—as rhizomatic as a novel can be, that is. We should note that Deleuze and Guattari, in their account of rhizomatics, do not rule out literature for being inherently linear and hierarchic—on the contrary, they seem to view literature as a potentially potent mode of rhizome-making: "American literature, and already English literature, manifest this rhizomatic direction . . . they know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 25). *Waterland* does precisely these things. It follows the "[p]rinciples of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (*Plateaus* 7). The novel relates what in the rhizome is no longer points or positions, but various flows and lines of flight,

of "history", of "society", of "the self". It follows the "[p]rinciple of asignifying rupture" (9), which still means that although it "may be broken, shattered at a given spot . . . it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (9). If Tom Crick is trying to trace a genealogy, he quickly finds out that "[t]he rhizome is an anti-genealogy" (*Plateaus* 11): history is not reducible to linear schemas, nor is it readable as separate and fixed points—it is a vast flow, liquid and dissolving rather than solid and divisible (a water-land). The same goes for the self, which indeed is the site of the narration of *Waterland*: Tom Crick's self (which is not to be singlehandedly equated with the "I" that enunciates) is the flow of the narrative, is the site of the lines of flight, of multiplication, of the rhizome. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, "the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and . . . and . . . and . . ." (25). Indeed, for all of Tom Crick's attempts to resolve disparate events and entities in a totalizing "whole story", to trace back, his narrative is one of parataxis rather than hypotaxis; it mocks the pretensions of psychoanalysis and dialectics to root, universalize and totalize.

However, this does not mean that radical relativism and nihilism take hold. There is still room for tentative and partial truths, or rather *effects*, whether of history, of therapy, of sentimentality or of ethics and perhaps even morality. Indeed, *Waterland* immediately sets itself apart from Swift's earlier writings by commencing with a moral—if not "the moral of the story", then the moral of *a* story:

> "And don't forget", my father would say, as if he expected me at any moment to up and leave to seek my fortune in the wide world, "whatever you learn about people, however bad they turn out, each one of them has a heart, and each one of them was once a tiny baby sucking his mother's milk . . ." (1)

It is a thoroughly sentimental maxim Tom Crick's father presents, but while its discourse of origin and fundament may be perceived as naïvely sentimentalizing, what it brings attention to is ultimately an ethics of alterity: the judgement of the other should be forever postponed, the other's infinity always projected onto the canvas of engagement. Still, as Tom is quick to point out, those are "[f]airy-tale words; fairy-tale advice" (1). However, immediately after saying this, Tom shifts perspective once again, conceding: "But we lived in a fairy-tale place". Thus, *Waterland* reveals on the very first page what the experience of reading it is going to be like: a dialogical movement between fairy-tale and realism, between belief and scepticism, between sentimentality and nihilism. *Waterland* is an exploded fairy-tale; it inscribes fairy-tale and story in order to subvert them—at the same time, by the peculiar logic of postmodernist double coding, the subversion is imploded

and sucked into that very fairy-taleness it seems to want to discard. Thus, the novel also places responsibility and choice with the reader: the novel provides no stable categories, no ultimate words on any issue. If it begs anything of the reader, it is perhaps that s/he tries to keep in the same critical view both fairy-tale sentimentality and realist "sobriety", not opting for either but for both.

Here is the appropriate point at which to note that while *Waterland* inevitably carries the traces of a more classical sentimentality in its pastiche of Victorian novels as it narrates the fates of Tom Crick's ancestors, those traces are not what will interest me here. Rather, I am interested in the contemporary moment of the novel, what the novel constructs as the now of a postmodern complication that the main characters (the narrator and his wife above all) live through, or in. I am interested in perceiving how sentimentality takes place, and takes time, at "the end of history" and particularly at the end of the novel, which, quite importantly, is not the end of its *fabula*. It transpires that it is precisely in the postmodern, in all its aspects, and perhaps particularly in that most radical aspect posed at the end of the novel, that sentimentality truly accrues and *stands* the ultimate test.

Indeed, the sentimental opening of the novel also constitutes the first of the novel's innumerable postmodernist textual appropriations; it rewrites the opening of a classic novel penned some sixty years earlier: *The Great Gatsby*. For this is how Nick Carraway begins his narrative:

> In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.
>
> "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone", he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." (1)

The intertextual reference here is of some importance: compared to Nick's father's somewhat snobbish observation of fundamental inequality, Tom's father's is a humble observation of fundamental equality.[3] In other words, Swift rewrites Fitzgerald in a mode of communal or intersubjective sentimentality. Thus, there is immediately displayed in the novel both an elaborate intertextuality and an irreducible particularity. The novel hence also begs of the reader to keep in the same critical view both intertextual ruse and individual artistic ambition.

Waterland is thus a text that asks for a vigilant reader. Consequently,

[3] Indeed, Nick says that "I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father *snobbishly* suggested, and I *snobbishly* repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth" (1; emphases mine).

the reader him/herself becomes involved in a central theme of the narrative: the responsibility for and careful engagement with the other, the ideal of watchfulness or vigilance. On the intrinsic plane of the novel, those duties of engagement are very much neglected by the characters; the tragedy of *Waterland* is the tragedy of neglect, the failure of connection. The words "vigilant" and "vigilance" recur throughout the novel as a subtle pointer as to what is actually lacking in the characters. In a terse kind of irony, the words are quite often attributed not to people, but to inanimate objects or to people who have all but lost their senses: Tom's ancestor Sarah Atkinson, who "knocked her head against . . . a walnut writing-table" and "never again recovered her wits" (77), still "retain[s] the paradoxical pose of one who keeps watch—but over nothing" (78) and lives to be "so old yet so vigilant" (94); Tom's wife Mary, having been registered at a mental hospital as she suffers from schizophrenia, "stares, vigilantly and knowingly" (330); on Greenwich Hill, "perched on a plinth, becloaked and tricorned, stands General Wolfe, in bronze" with a "vigilant pose" (128); Tom's half-brother Dick's Velocette motor-cycle is seen "keeping sentinel" as Dick tends to the eel-traps (249), and in the last chapter "keeps guard" over the dredger from which Dick is about to make his suicidal dive (348). Most intriguingly, the novel ends, after Dick has made his dive, never to surface again, and confusion and despair has taken hold of the other characters present, with the sentence: "On the bank in the thickening dusk, in the will-o'-the-wisp dusk, *abandoned but vigilant*, a motor-cycle" (358; emphasis mine). I shall return to this intriguing ending, but now I will turn to the instances of human vigilance, or lack thereof, in the novel.

However, I would first like to note that *Waterland* complicates the issue of vigilance by playing on the ambiguity of the word: vigilance may denote the act of watching for the event in order to embrace it and stay open to it, but it may also denote the act of keeping watch in order to prevent the event from occurring. The character most thoroughly associated with the latter kind of vigilance, it turns out, is Tom's father, Henry Crick, the lock-keeper. Vigilance of course goes quite with the territory if one is a lock-keeper. However, in the metaphorical scheme of *Waterland*, lock-keeping has a more far-reaching significance. In its portrayal of the history of drainage and land reclamation, the novel establishes water as a metaphor of the devious depths of amnesia and terror, and land as a metaphor of the solid ground of history and civilization, always about to sink; Tom, the history teacher, describes the "progress" of civilization as "[a] dogged, vigilant business" (336). Metaphorically, then, the lock-keeper has the rather important duty of tending to the water-levels in order to avoid the flooding of what in more archaic times was called "evil". This is, as Bauman points out,

the very vigilance necessitated by the modern project: "The practice stemming from a conviction that order can only be man-made, that it is bound to remain an artificial imposition on the unruly natural state of things and humans, that for this reason it will forever remain vulnerable and in need of constant supervision and policing, is the main (and, indeed, unique) distinguishing mark of modernity. From now on, there would be no moment of respite, no relaxing of vigilance" (*Intimations of Postmodernity* xv).

Accordingly, when the flooding does come, Henry Crick keeps "tenaciously, vigilantly, in a half submerged cottage, to his post of lock-keeper" (122). After the appearance of the corpse of Freddie Parr in his sluice, Henry walks up and down his tow-path, "[a]nd on his face, as he stares from flat river to flat fields, is imprinted an expression of exaggerated vigilance" (111). Subsequently, when the murder of Freddie Parr leads to the abortion of the fetus that was the cause of the murder, the abortion in its turn leading to the estrangement of Mary, Henry scolds himself: "Trouble upon trouble. First Freddie. And now. But it's a punishment, that's what it is. A punishment for non-vigilance. For neglect of duty" (317). And the flooding that eventually causes Henry's death from broncho-pneumonia is also "his fault. ('His fault for not getting out when he should've', scowls the sergeant.) If he'd taken more care, if he'd been more watchful. He might have saved the sluice. He might have saved the world" (341). Henry's is a defensive, guarded vigilance; he is keeping guard so that the full truth of the murder of Freddie Parr will not surface, which in turn means keeping guard over a whole host of related secrets. Thus, Henry's sin is also really neglect,[4] his failure to be vigilant in the sense of being responsible for and open to the other and to the event.

This kind of vigilance is more or less lacking in all of the characters in *Waterland*; a vigilance that takes heed of one of the meanings of the root of the word, "vigil": a devotional watching. Indeed, what Tom is doing through his narrative is keeping a vigil over his ancestors, over his dead family, over his mentally departed wife and perhaps over his and Mary's unborn child. It is, however, a vigil that is "better late than never". And a vigil too can be a way of avoiding the responsibility of the situation at hand, as when, after the trauma of her abortion and the local scandal it causes, Mary decides "to withdraw from the world and devote herself to a life of solitude, atonement . . . [a] lonely vigil" (41). However, whereas Mary's is a vigil of silence, Tom's is a vigil of overflowing language.

Thus, *Waterland* stresses the importance of telling, of putting into words, of the talking cure—the sin of non-vigilance is also the sin of non-

[4] My use of religious terminology here is partly motivated by the theological subtext established in the novel. See Schad for a thorough discussion of this aspect of *Waterland*.

communication. Suffering demands expression, sentiments must be voiced and offered to the other. Crisis occasions narrative as a means of healing. When things go wrong, Tom argues, from his vantage point late in his traumatic life, human beings have a need for "receptacles for their stock of fairy-tales, of listening ears on which to unload those most unbelievable yet haunting of fairy-tales, their own lives" (7). In fact, the very condition of Tom's narrative is that of a therapy session: in the words of Paul Connerton, psychoanalytic therapy "sets up 'an intermediate realm between illness and real life through which the transition from the one to the other is made'. This intermediate realm consists to a very large extent of narrative activity: the analysands tell of their past, of their present life outside the analysis, of their life within the analysis" (26). In *Waterland*, Tom first creates a situation of transference in the classroom, where his pupils serve as a mostly passive audience. Later, Tom "repeats the stories he's told in class" (331), speaking "to an audience he is forced to imagine" (63). He tells of his past, of his present life outside the analysis and of his life within the analysis; now and then he reflects upon the narrative itself, or, as we just saw, upon the circumstances under which his analysis takes place. This psychoanalytic condition accounts to a large extent for the rambling, stuttering, spirally repetitive structure of the narrative too: "the psychoanalytic dialogue seeks to uncover the analysand's efforts to maintain in existence a particular kind of narrative discontinuity. The point of this narrative discontinuity is to block out parts of a personal past" (Connerton 26). Indeed, Tom admits that he is "[a]voiding in these memory-jogging journeys . . . many no-go areas and emergency zones (you see, when it comes to it, your history teacher is afraid to tread the minefield of the past)" (330). However, Tom's discontinuous plot gradually forms a comprehensible story by returning to and giving explicit accounts of events that are originally related in a more or less vague and summary fashion. This is precisely the method used in psychoanalysis:

> In order to discard this radical discontinuity, psycho-analysis works in a temporal circle: analyst and analysand work backwards from what is told about the autobiographical present in order to reconstruct a coherent account of the past; while, at the same time, they work forwards from various tellings about the autobiographical past in order to reconstitute the account of the present which it is sought to understand and explain . . . [T]he analyst [directs] attention to the past when the analysand insists upon the present, and [looks] for present material when the analysand dwells on the past. One set of narratives is deployed to generate questions about another set of narratives. (Connerton 26)

In the way that Connerton describes it, the structure of the psychoanalytic session bears a startling resemblance to the narrative structure of *Waterland*. The novel's very structure is thus the structure of the remedy of suffering. It is the structure of a narrative process which has as its goal the reconciliation of seemingly disparate events: "To remember, then, is precisely not to recall events as isolated; it is to become capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences . . . [A]n attempt is made to integrate isolated or alien phenomena into a single unified process" (Connerton 26).

Tom does indeed find himself in a situation that calls for narrative remedy and redemption: telling his stories he "sits alone because his wife of over thirty years who no longer knows him, nor he her, has been taken away, and because his schoolchildren, his children, who once—ever reminding him of the future—came to his history lessons, are no longer there" (63). Having lost his job, and hence his pupils, his substitute children, he is also forced to face the fact that he is probably the end of the family line, and hence quite literally the end of history as far as both the Cricks and the Atkinsons are concerned. So it is understandable that the pupil Price's remark that "[t]he only important thing about history . . . is that it's got to the point where it's probably about to end" (7) is what triggers off Tom's therapeutic story-telling sessions; as Tom puts it, "your astounded and forsaken history teacher, prompted as he was by the challenging remarks of a student called Price, ceased to teach history and started to offer you, instead, these . . . Tales of the Fens" (42).

Tom's narrative is also prompted by the media presentation of the local scandal of Mary's kidnapping a baby at a Safeways store, a scandal which has led, in connection with his increasingly unorthodox history lessons, to his being asked to retire. Countering the superficial play of media narratives with his own more profound and complex narrative thus becomes Tom's objective, and *Waterland* thus prefigures the more explicitly Baudrillardean theme of *Out of This World*.[5] It is in this countering that the major ethical move of the novel lies: Tom's narrative is the attempt to account for the infinity of that other which is the past, and to be true to the saying in the face of the said by bearing witness to the complexity and plasticity of past and present truths. At the same time, somewhat paradoxically, Tom is attempting to establish the said by *explaining*, by reaching the centre and the halt of the issue, the *logos*. In the course of his narration, however, he realizes,

[5] In this sense the novel also brings to mind Paul Auster's *Leviathan*, in which the narrator attempts to give his fullest possible account of the life of his now deceased terrorist friend; the novel ends with the narrator handing over the pages of *Leviathan* to an FBI-agent. In *Waterland*, Tom's narrative is similarly prompted by the questions of the police officers at the site of the kidnapping and afterwards.

maddeningly, that this is not possible:

> But he already knows—though he carries on, in defiance of his professional superiors, risking, indeed, his whole career—that it's not explaining he's doing. Because he's already reached the limits of his power to explain, just as his wife (a once dogged and patient woman) has ceased to be realistic—has ceased to belong to reality. Because it's the inexplicable that keeps him jabbering on nineteen to the dozen like this and scurrying further and further into the past. . . . Because his children . . . suddenly want to listen, and although he's trying to explain he's really only telling a— (108-109)

The situation at hand and the events leading up to it have, as we can see from the passage just quoted, also made Mary unbearably other to Tom, and his narrative is for that reason also an attempt to reclaim her, to recover a point at which he at least thought he knew her meaning. Sitting at the bench in Greenwich Park with Mary after she has revealed that God will give her a child, Tom "is constrained to hug his wife as though to confirm she is still there. For in the twilight it seems that, without moving, she is receding, fading, becoming ghostly. . . . He doesn't know how to play this crazy game she is playing" (148). A few paragraphs earlier, Tom notes that "[s]he is leaving him; she is forsaking him. . . . But this is *no ordinary separation*" (147; emphasis mine). Faced with Mary's radical otherness, Tom rehearses the said: "He believes: this is Mary; this is a bench; this is a dog. The last thing he wants to believe is that he's in fairy-land".

Swift sets up the scene in which Mary reveals her otherness (thus revealing the impossibility of revelation) with wonderful irony: the bench is placed "some fifty yards from the line of zero longitude" (146), that is, in a sense, pretty much at the centre of the measured world, and furthermore close to the Observatory, with its "locked-up collections of antique chronometers, astrolabes, sextants, telescopes—instruments for measuring the universe" (147). However, the instruments for measuring the universe are notably *locked-up*, and what is more Tom significantly keeps noting that "the park [is] soon to close" (146); "[t]he park must close soon. Soon, everyone must be gone" (147). In other words, the instruments of universality have been discarded and the centre must be evacuated, as Tom cannot even begin to measure the single being sitting next to him. However, what ensues is not a careful engagement with Mary as other, but a withdrawal from her.

It turns out, in fact, that Tom's and Mary's life together (or, more accurately, lives together) has been a constant evasion of engagement with the other, at least from the moment when Mary brings home the fact that

Dick has killed Freddie Parr out of jealousy, thus shattering Tom's dream of innocence: "He couldn't bring himself to face the face which faced him" (132), Tom observes about himself, making himself an other in a statement that echoes both Prufrock and the Levinasian face-to-face. He retreats into subjective sentimentalism, "[a]s if it were all some trick against *him*". Even at this early point in his and Mary's relationship, "he's alone. She's alone. He's blustery-raging alone; and she's rooted, patient alone". And there begins Tom's mistake of perceiving Mary as rooted and patient, of fixing her as a finite moment and space. Looking back, Tom reflects: "But she made do (*so he thought*) with nothing. . . . And whereas he had to keep going back every day to school, there was always this grown-up woman to return to, who was stronger than him (*he believed*) at facing the way things must be" (126; emphases mine).

However, this misconception of Mary is not wholly Tom's responsibility; at the same time as Tom withdraws into his interiority, there is a negligence on the part of Mary, as she does not offer the gift of her suffering as utterance to Tom: "She won't ever tell about the time when—" (341). Mary's silence is fatal; as a consequence of her reticence, she acts out her trauma. *Waterland* thus illustrates the "two contrasting ways of bringing the past into the present: acting out and remembering" (Connerton 25). When an individual refuses or is unable to remember, the "compulsion to repeat [replaces] the capacity to remember". As a result of this compulsion, individuals "deliberately place themselves in distressing situations: in this way repeating an old experience". Refusing to remember, Mary becomes again the Mother of God she cried out for and identified herself with during the abortion: "HolyMaryMotherofGodHolyMaryMotherofGodHolyMary-Motherof—" (308). She places herself in the distressing situation of kidnapping a baby that at least part of her knows she will not be allowed to keep, thus repeating the experience of losing her child.

Waterland shows, then, that history, which is usually—certainly in the doctrine of modernity—made other, made what we are not, what we have surpassed, is inescapable: we are in history, continually becoming history, always haunted by history, always suffering from history and suffering *in* history. The fates of Tom and Mary show that, *pace* Jameson, there still is a subject of/in history and "a self present to do the feeling", to do the suffering. And *Waterland* is, as we have now seen, about suffering vis-à-vis narrative, about narrative as remedy, narrative as therapy.[6] This notion of narrative is most explicitly expressed by Tom's mother, Helen: "[S]he believes in stories. She believes that they're a way of bearing what won't go away, a way of

[6] This is true of *Out of This World* too, where the relation becomes explicit in Sophie's therapy sessions with Doctor Klein.

making sense of madness. . . . No, don't forget. Don't erase it. You can't erase it. But make it into a story" (225). Tom's father, on the other hand, traumatized by serving in World War One, becomes the main example, besides Mary, of the consequences of not telling one's story: "Henry Crick forgets. He says: I remember nothing. But that's just a trick of the brain. . . . Because it doesn't take much or long . . . and [he is] crying out again for treatment. . . . [He] comes home from a long walk one October afternoon, a mass of twitches, trembles, shakes and jitters, unable to speak a sensible word" (222-23). Indeed, it is under the auspices of his future wife, who believes in the talking cure, that he finally recovers. Importantly, the remedy lies not in explaining, not in uncovering truth, but in the telling itself; this view is supported by psychoanalytical theory: "[P]sychotherapists who otherwise disagree claim that worrying about the objective truth of memories serves no useful purpose, since it is only the patient's subjective belief in the truth of often error-prone and partially fabricated memories that needs to be heeded" (Ross vii-viii).[7]

As we have seen, though, Tom, who has learnt the value of narrative remembrance from his parents, is never quite able to rid himself of the historian's ambition to *explain*. We may note that he concedes only with great pain that the past is irreclaimable and the other inscrutable: "he's really only telling a—", he says, incapable of uttering the word "story", as if that word was in itself traumatic. Tom has to struggle to accept fiction. When his mother told him bedside stories when he was a young boy lying ill, he tells us, "he strove to cleave a passage through to a mother who was becoming less and less real, more and more besieged by fiction", and increasingly felt "that he himself was in danger of becoming—a figment" (272). Tom thus shirks before fiction, which is here revealed to have the power of representing the world and oneself as other than what has been said, opting instead for facts and explanation, for "the Grand Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears of the dark" (62).

Tom's belief in explanation is, however, countered by Price's astute remark that "explaining's a way of avoiding the facts as you pretend to get near to them" (167). Put next to that remark, Tom's reaching beyond the point of his own birth, back to the beginning of recorded history, in order to

[7] Harold Schweizer similarly points out that the "authority [of the talking cure] lies in its exchange, which is to admit also the indeterminacy of what constitutes that authority. The truth, like the authority of the analyst's constructions, is thus a self-conscious, interminable textual 'edition' of the past, a story always under revision, always in transition between reader and text or between analyst and patient" (51). And further: "Freud's narrative theory implies the importance of present (and this means interminable) social interactions. These must now replace both the final cure (as well as its religious or ideological analogues) as well as the truth of the past" (53).

explain his current situation is deeply parodic. In his incessant insistence on *explaining*, Tom is ignoring, or avoiding, what the novel implies is much more urgent: *engaging*; engaging, that is, with the other. At the same time as his vigil over the past is a kind of ethical engagement, then, it constitutes, inevitably perhaps, a violation; like the signified always becomes signifier, the saying always risks becoming the said. Yet, even in his classes on the Grand Narrative of the French Revolution, Tom begins, again challenged by Price, to observe not only the limits, but the violence of explanation: "As you try to define the revolution you imitate precisely the action of the revolution itself—eliminating with a mental guillotine those who do not fit some impossibly absolute notion of revolution" (139).

Consequently, Crick's main narrative objective, which, lest we forget, is the reclamation of *love*, is put under a lot of strain by his awakening postmodern consciousness, which, importantly, has its own internal contradictions: at the same time as this consciousness strives to do as little violence as possible to the other and to recount experience in its singularity, it also recognizes that all narrative representation is immediately and inescapably caught up in a pre-existing system of tropes and, what is more, that experience itself is structured by internalized codes of perception and by conventionalized attitudes. Hence, all but the earliest recollections of his and Mary's relationship are ironized. For instance, their adolescent rendezvous in the disused windmill are described in idyllic, sentimental terms:

> Within the windmill by the Hockwell Lode curiosity and innocence held hands. . . . Within its stunted, wooden walls we first used those magic, those spell-binding words which make the empty world seem full, just as surely as a thing fits inside a hole: I love—I love—Love, love . . . And perhaps the windmill itself, empty and abandoned . . . found in our presence a new-found windmill-purpose. (52; second ellipsis in the original)

Only a few pages later, however, irony enters Tom's lover's discourse, as he relates the nature of Mary's and his relationship following the death of Freddie Parr: "A simple but edifying scene in which Mary and I embrace to confirm the power of our love in the face of the unforeseen perils of the world and the frailty of flesh, as witness the death of a mutual friend. Not to be. Mary doesn't unclasp her shins" (56). Similarly, after Mary has decided to end her three year vigil and Tom has finished his military service, he "makes his journey home in the guise of the returning Prince ready to pluck aside briars and cobwebs and kiss his Princess out of whatever trance has possessed her for the last three years" (120). Having met at Gildsey station, Tom and Mary sit at a nearby tea room "in a scene evoking for the outsider

but not for the protagonists certain cinema-screen reunions" (121). Tom's narrative, notably increasingly third-person, is thus fraught with distancing evocations of ancient and modern myths: fairy-tales, movies. His and Mary's whole life together, it turns out, is a kind of acting-routine, a play of surfaces: they learn "[t]o withstand, behind all the stage-props of their marriage, the empty space of reality" (126). Still, Tom notes in passing, as he often notes things of import and poignancy, that Mary is the person "whom he needed indeed, when it came to it, more than he needed all the wisdom and solace of history" (126-27).

Importantly, however, in the final analysis irony heightens the emotional impact of Tom's narrative, as irony is precisely the simultaneous evasion and acknowledgement of suffering. Irony is a mode that allows one to get near the fact of suffering as one avoids it, and thus has as its effect a kind of sublimity. This is perhaps most evident in the following passage, which, narrating the moment at which Mary reveals that she is a latter-day successor to her Biblical namesake, moves from ironized melodrama to sentimental poignancy:

> The experienced observer of park-bench lovers' tiffs might say that the woman has had something to confess. . . . Is this that familiar drama, the "It's time we broke it off", the "It's time we never met again" drama? Or is it that equally much-repeated scene, the "You see—there's another" routine? That outrage on his part; that hand-waving, question-firing . . . The passer-by might catch the words "doctor—you must go to a doctor". So then, it is that other well-known amorous crisis: the "Darling, I think I'm—" crisis. But these words of his are not spoken with their usual air of masculine bluster . . . but with a kind of desperation—can it be that our park-bench gallant is going to weep?—with the kind of anguish with which one begs, one prays— (147)

The suffering of love stifling language, though, Tom breaks off at the very point he is about to express the true vulnerability of the situation, about to display its open wound.

However, Tom's narrative is not just about his love of Mary; it is about "our love of life, children, our love of life" (205), as Tom puts it in a kind of sentimental or melodramatic slippage. And both the love of the more insular party of two and the love of the subject for the world depend, Tom insists, on curiosity: "Curiosity . . . is an ingredient of love" (51); "Children, be curious. Nothing is worse (I know it) than when curiosity stops. Nothing is more repressive than the repression of curiosity. Curiosity begets love. It weds us

to the world. It's part of our perverse, madcap love for this impossible planet we inhabit. People die when curiosity goes" (206). *Waterland* portrays the complication of love that resides in its having, in order to endure, to simultaneously accept alterity and try to surmount it. In order to endure, love must learn that the mystery of the other will never yield to curiosity, but that curiosity must not for that reason succumb to indifference. In this, *Waterland* brings to mind Bauman's analysis of love in *Postmodern Ethics*:

> [T]he "pathos of love" acknowledges the duality of being as more than a temporary failure, more than what thus-far-has-remained-unsurmounted; it accepts the duality as in-surmountable. And yet it cannot give expression to that acceptance in any other way but by attempting, from the beginning and as long as love lasts, to deny what it has assumed—to surmount the insurmountable: to make the partner's suffering one's own, to "suck in" the partner's sentiments, to partake of the partner's being . . . Without that codicil which demands that the duality should be lived as a challenge . . . love would not be love, but alterity pure and simple. Dropping the codicil; this is how love wilts, fades and dies. . . . [T]he pathos of love feeds on mystery. But the mystery it feeds on is one it hopes to crack. Curiosity is the hope of knowledge—and when the hope wanes, curiosity gives way to indifference. (94-95)

The failure of Tom's and Mary's love is put in precisely these terms: when the murder of Freddie Parr, paired with Mary's pregnancy, puts pressure on their relationship, Tom notes, "something's gone from her face. Curiosity's gone" (57); "But Mary's not interested. Her face is white and clammy. Her eyes clench. She's not interested in stories. Not curious" (296). And when Tom comes home one day, some thirty years later, to find Mary sitting in the sofa with her kidnapped Son of God, while his propensity for curiosity is greater than Mary's, he does not engage with her mystery in the terms of gentle curiosity. He notes the radical alterity of the situation—"That's your wife over there; you know, Mary, the one you though you knew. But maybe this is unknown country"—"[b]ut he does not stoop before the blanket-wrapped bundle . . . , kneel down, place palms together and let his eyes fill with wondering reverence" (265-66). Instead of engaging in a devotional, curious watching, he tries to drag Mary into sameness, peppering her with demands: "Mary, you'd better explain"; "That— That's utter nonsense"; "You've got to tell me"; "You've got to explain" (266); "Mary, explain—"; "How? Why? Why?" (268). The sudden eruption of otherness—the event—shatters the Levinasian ideal of careful engagement and gives way

instead to a violent melodramatism:

> Observe your history teacher in action. Yes—for all his droning on, for all his talk-and-chalk—in spontaneous action. Observe him locked in elemental violence . . . cast now in the role not of an amazed shepherd but of a ruthless Herod . . . The golden retriever, left out of things, nuzzles its head on the sofa; yaps, growls. Your history teacher gives it a sharp, a sudden, a ferocious kick. (266-68)

We can tell from Tom's language in narrating this event that he is indicting himself for coming up short, for not being open to the event: he is "a ruthless Herod", who "for all his talk-and-chalk" is "locked in elemental violence". At the same time, this passage illustrates the difficulty of heeding Wyschogrod's call for a "radical saintly generosity" and "a desire on behalf of the Other" (xxiv); faced with a traumatic now, with the sudden disruption of the said, we all risk turning from "amazed shepherd" to "ruthless Herod", turning from patience to offence, from the vigilant to the violent. But as in the case of Tom and Mary, what results is a failure: a failure of patience, of generosity, of curiosity, of love.

However, the final failure of Mary's and his love is seemingly what makes Tom capable of imbibing the truth of love, of realizing the value of gentle curiosity; but as their love is a failure, Tom must turn elsewhere to engage his new-found sense of love. He must opt instead for the "perverse, madcap love for this impossible planet we inhabit". As Tom suggests, "the world is so arranged that when all things are learnt, when curiosity is exhausted (so, long live curiosity), that is when the world shall have come to its end" (204). The relationship of the subject to the world is thus the same as that of the subject to the other of what Bauman calls "the moral party of two".

At the same time, subject and world do not easily form a party—our madcap love for the world may turn out to be unrequited, and the other of (hu)man may turn out to be menacingly indifferent. The resulting decentrement of (hu)man and dehumanization of the world might seem to effect an eclipse of sentimentality. However, as it turns out, this is not the case. Crucially, it is in his engagement with the non-human or not-quite-human realms of the world that Tom begins to accept that the world is elusive and tantalizingly seductive and will not yield a final "how" or "why", thus reaching a heightened sense of the spiritual and of a sentimental relation to *any* other. The world ceases to be the docile, petrified object of modern instrumentality, and becomes *curiously* personified, yielding to the pathetic fallacy, the fallaciousness of which we saw Prentis question in *Shuttlecock*.

The world is like a will-o'-the-wisp, that rare marsh gas phenomenon that Tom's father was once blessed with encountering:

> It ripples, twinkles, now in, now out of the water, now mingling with the reeds; it twirls, whirls, flashes, flutters, flames, grows dim then bright again, skips, hovers, dodges, zips and seems to be saying all the time, "Look at me—do I have your full attention? Yes, I see I have your full attention." For one instant it seems to take on the flickering shape of a woman. Then as it reaches the barrier of the sluice, it vanishes. (232)

The intentionality and the seductive powers of the phenomenon are of course made explicit in quite parodic terms by its taking on the shape of a woman. *Waterland* thus elicits a decentrement of human consciousness, although its terms for evoking extra-human consciousness are inescapably anthropomorphic. In this decentrement, the novel corresponds to what Hassan writes of "dehumanization" in "POSTmodernISM":

> There is more to "dehumanization" than "another idea of man"; there is also an incipient revulsion against the human, sometimes a renewal of the sense of the superhuman. Rilke's "Angels". Lawrence's "Fish":
>
> And my heart accused itself
> Thinking: I am not the measure of creation
> This is beyond me, this fish.
> His God stands outside my God. (36)[8]

We may compare Hassan's (and Lawrence's) notions here to Tom Crick's observation that the not-quite-human Dick, who notably has "the dull, vacant stare of a fish" (242) and is "a sort of machine . . . can give the impression that he looks down from his lofty and lucid mindlessness, half in contempt and half in pity at a world blinded by its own glut of imagination. That he knows something we don't" (38). Like Prentis's father in *Shuttlecock*, Dick is an emblem of the inscrutability of the other: "The eyelids alone registered emotion. But although they registered emotion it was impossible to tell merely from their movement what emotion was being signalled" (27). The greatest irony of Dick is perhaps that, in keeping with the ironic ascription of vigilance mentioned earlier, he is the only character in the novel who spontaneously assumes responsibility and begs for excuse, not even knowing quite what is wrong: "S-s-sorry, Tom. S-s-sorry" (323); of course, Dick is the one character in the novel whom no one would hold accountable. The

[8] For the sake of clarity and space, I have altered the original layout of this passage.

machine-man, the semi-object, then, and not the subject, assumes responsibility. The human is dehumanized and the non-human is humanized—to use an anthropocentric vocabulary that belies the precise point of the novel's vision here. Not only do both the powers of seduction and the impetus of responsibility move from the human to the non-human realm, but the focus on the other that is preeminently human in Levinas—the other is an other human being, who has a face—is refocalized onto the other of human being.

From the amphibian, not-quite-human fish-man Dick, though, *Waterland* extends its exposition of otherness and its simultaneous personification to not only other species but to inanimate objects.[9] For instance, besides its obvious, slightly parodic, reference to the survey chapter on whales in *Moby Dick*, the chapter "About the Eel" in *Waterland* mainly serves to point out that eels lead an existence quite unknown to us, something our ontologies will not cover. Neither will our epistemologies, as the point of the chapter very much is that not only is no full knowledge of the eel *per se* possible, but neither is any of the *phenomenon* of the eel. The eel takes on mystical, spiritual meanings that go beyond but also *through* (hu)man, decentring him/her: when the chapter arrives at the time of the First World War, Tom notes with relativist irony that "yet it must be said that this catastrophic interval, to which such dread words as apocalypse, cataclysm, Armageddon have not unjustly been applied, does not interrupt the life cycle of the eel" (201). Later in the novel, the eel Dick offers Mary as a token of love is described as having "little glimmering amber eyes which, for all one knows, could be the windows of a tiny eel-soul. It has little panting gills and, behind them, delicate whirring pectoral fins not unreminiscent of Dick's whirring eye-lashes . . ." (253). Thus, the assumption of (hu)man as sole bearer of soul, of consciousness, of rights, is questioned.

Similarly, when Tom narrates, in a way, the Dawn of Man by telling of the first men who came to settle by the river Ouse, he suggests that

> how the Ouse regarded (for let us adopt the notion of these primitive peoples who very probably thought of the Ouse as a God, a sentient Being) these two-legged intruders who by daring to transmute things into sound were unconsciously forging the

[9] Considering that Levinas, in *Otherwise than Being*, uses the term "amphibology" for the coexistence within language of both the saying and the said, or, in Eaglestone's words, the "interdependency of the saying and the said, the amphibology of language" (149), we might read Dick as an emblem of the eruption of otherness within the same. If we do so, *Waterland* offers little hope for difference, for the unpresentable, as the unpresentable seemingly recognizes its own ex-centricity and erases itself: realizing his "monstrosity", Dick dives into the water never to return.

> phenomenon known as History, we can say readily: with indifference. For what did such a new-fangled invention matter to a river which flowed on, oozed on, just as before. What did the three Stone Ages, the Beaker Folk, the Bronze Age, Iron Age, the Belgic Tribes and all their flints, pots, axes, brooches and burial customs signify to a river which possessed as no man did, or does, the secret capacity to move yet remain? (143)

The Ouse thus shows, if not revulsion, then indifference to the human, but also decentres humanity and all its pretensions; still it does this precisely in the human imagination, becoming a kind of othering-object, a site for imagining Being as different, for imagining the somehow different within one's self-sameness—and conversely a disruption from within through the projection of one's same onto that which should be other, which then invades one in turn.[10]

Most fascinating in this respect, however, is, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Dick's motor-cycle. The Velocette is not only Dick's closest friend, but perhaps even his lover: Dick "talks, for solace, to his motor-bike, more than he talks to any living thing. And . . . it has even been said . . . that Dick is so fond of his motor-bike that he sometimes rides it to secluded spots, gets down with it on the grass and . . ." (38). There is also "the tuneless wail, the wordless, endless song of love to his motor-cycle that Dick always sings as he rides" (134). Consequently, when Dick has wooed Mary for the first time, he comes back "to his abandoned and—who knows?—jealousy-smitten motor-bike" (254). Those passages may have been passed off as instances of poetic liberty, though, were it not for the ending of the novel, which highlights precisely the motor-cycle, "abandoned but vigilant" (358). With that ending, all the instances of decentrement of man in the novel come into focus and assume a central significance. And thus the novel's engagement of the sentimental, of the subject that does the feeling, is,

[10] This conundrum of othering from within is touched upon by Deleuze and Guattari, as they discuss the "percept" and the "affect": "The landscape sees. Generally speaking, what great writer has not been able to create these beings of sensation, which preserve in themselves the hour of a day, a moment's degree of warmth (Faulkner's hills, Tolstoy's or Chekhov's steppes)? The percept is the landscape before man, in the absence of man. But why do we say this, since in all these cases the landscape is not independent of the supposed perceptions of the characters and, through them, of the author's perceptions and memories?" (*What Is Philosophy?* 169). And further on: "André Dhotel knew how to place his characters in strange plant-becomings, becoming tree or aster: this is not the transformation of one into the other, he says, but something passing from one to the other. . . . It is a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility, as if things, beasts, and persons (Ahab and Moby Dick, Penthesilea and the bitch) endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation" (173). We may also think of Ted Hughes's animals, always inescapably anthromorphized, yet dually othering: animal becoming man, man becoming animal.

at least in the structural terms of Tom's narrative, swallowed up by a kind of irony of the object in the vein of Baudrillard. Indeed, Baudrillard's *Les Stratégies Fatales*, which sings "the supremacy of the object", was published in the same year as *Waterland* (but not translated into English until 1990).

As it turns out, however, on closer inspection *Waterland* resists the twilight analyses of Baudrillard. Baudrillard claims that "everything is inverted if one passes on to the thought of seduction . . . [where] it's no longer the subject which desires, it's the object that seduces" (cf. the will-o'-the-wisp) and concludes that "the subject is fragile and can only desire, whereas the object gets on very well even when desire is absent" (*Fatal Strategies* 111). However, the object at the end of history in *Waterland* is notably "abandoned", that is, lacking the subject it depends on, but "vigilant", that is, awaiting the return of the subject that gives it meaning.[11] Even if *Waterland* seems to yield finally to all possible postmodern ironies, it still smuggles in the reciprocity of love in its very last words, albeit a highly mysterious kind of reciprocity and a quite uncommon realm of love. Paying a postmodern toll, the novel actually ends by sentimentalizing both subject and object, affirming the value of both man and his other and establishing their spiritual relation. In its very final moment, then, the novel engages the sentimentum, orchestrating sentimental impulses under quite some ironic strain.

My reference to Baudrillard provides a fitting transition to my discussion of *Out of This World. Waterland* was published two years after Baudrillard's *Simulacre et Simulation*, and in the same year that the key essay of that volume was published in English translation as "The Precession of Simulacra", together with another brief essay, under the title *Simulations*. Considering that Baudrillard speaks in that essay of "the desert of the real", that is, the last remnants of reality not yet sucked into the hyperreal, it may seem like a conscious irony that Swift chose for his setting a place that is on the contrary sinking in water, but still as flat and devoid of s(t)imulation as a desert: "The great flat monotony of reality; the wide empty space of reality" (*Waterland* 17). The connection is made even more explicit when Tom notes that the American servicemen who join in the vain attempt at preventing Dick's watery suicide have a Ford with "[t]he legend, in turquoise: 'Arizona: Queen of the Desert'" (352). Swift's waterland is indeed, like Baudrillard's desert, the place in which the last remnants of the real reside and traumatize whoever is confronted with them; the real, it turns out, is the absence of

[11] John Schad offers a similar reading, albeit cast in somewhat different terms: "[W]hat might distinguish the end of *Waterland* from Baudrillard's metaphysic is that the material object, the vigilant motorcycle, still owns some faint trace of dependence on God and man for its value, both semiotic and economic" (916-17).

event: "reality is that nothing happens" (40). Life is "this terrible combination of emptiness and responsibility" (114). In *Out of This World*, this state of things is reiterated, although with a clearer focus on the simulacrum and the hyperreal, as well as on their effect on and relation to ethics, spirit, love—sentimentality.

Out of This World: The Simulacrum and Forgotten Tenderness

After the four years that consecutively yielded *The Sweet Shop Owner*, *Shuttlecock*, *Learning to Swim* and *Waterland*, there was a five year gap before *Out of This World* arrived. If this gap raised expectations of a weighty tome of a book to match *Waterland* in breadth, scope and complexity, those expectations were surely thwarted by the apparent slimness and sharp concentration of *Out of This World*. However, on closer look, the novel yields both complexity and range, as it shifts between different voices and points of view and kaleidoscopically shifts the layers of time. More importantly, though, it would seem that those five years made for a sentimental turn. True, it may be said that *Out of This World* deals with a starker, more relentlessly disenchanted world than does *Waterland*. Whereas in *Waterland* the realm of fairy-tale is brought into sharp focus, in *Out of This World* it figures as spectre or trace. Yet that trace upsets the numb white daze of trauma; if not a romance, *Out of This World* is a traumance.[12] The first signal of this interplay of disillusion and affirmation is the title: "out of this world" connotes both the yearning to escape the "terrible combination of emptiness and responsibility" and a more positive sense of transcending a world of disillusion; besides this, it is of course the idiomatic expression for something spectacular or magical or wonderful. The epigraph of the novel is ambiguous too: "What the eye sees not, the heart rues not". The novel contests at least one of the interpretations of this proverb: that what we do not have before us does not touch us, that is, that by escaping the face of the other we can escape the demand of the other. And thus it contests, as well, the earlier Levinas, to whom the actuality of the face-to-face relation seems to be very much the be-all-and-end-all of ethics.

Still, as in *Waterland*, there is a failure of connection on the part of the characters, a failure of heeding the demand of the other; there is a lot of "blame" and "guilt"—those phrases recur, like "vigilance" in *Waterland*, throughout the novel—but no real dialogue. Thus, the emotional mode of

[12] It may be, as Poole argues, that "*Out of this World* is the grimmest of Swift's novels in the images of violence and destruction it invokes. But it is also the most wilfully optimistic about the possibilities of healing, reparation and revival for the damaged male figure" (160). (Poole's discussion focuses upon the crisis of male identity as it is portrayed in Swift.)

most of the novel is one of wistfulness and subdued suffering.

Connected with this issue of ethics is the continuation of what may be construed as a dialogue with Baudrillard begun in *Waterland*: *Out of This World* displays the seemingly all-consuming play of simulacra and of surfaces only to reveal the precession of the real and of depth, at least in the form of traces (and so we may say that novel "dis-plays" the play of simulacra). Notably, the novel is partially set in an America very similar to the one Baudrillard made an emblem of his philosophy in *America*, a book published in French two years before *Out of This World*, and in English in the very same year as Swift's novel (1988).

The issues of ethics and of the hyperreal are, as I mentioned above, related in the novel. The two main narrators of the novel, the former photo-journalist Harry Beech and his daughter Sophie, have tried to escape the face-to-face and the responsibility of the real precisely by seeking refuge in the hyperreal: Sophie has moved to America, the land of which Baudrillard writes that it "is neither dream nor reality. It is a hyperreality" (28), and Harry has left his long life of making simulacra of the troubles of the world only to become an aerial photographer in the service of an archaeologist, thus radicalizing his detachment from the world, like Tom Crick avoiding it as he pretends to get near it. Their reason for escaping in this fashion is their having experienced together what was simultaneously the shock of the real and the shock of the simulacrum, namely the bomb explosion that killed Harry's father, Sophie's grandfather, the arms manufacturer Robert Beech. The explosion itself was of course traumatic enough, but the crucial trauma is the one that ensues, and which Sophie tells her psychiatrist, Doctor Klein, about:

> You see, that's when I believed. That's when I knew it's all one territory and everywhere, everywhere can be a target and there aren't any safe, separate places anymore. I've never told anyone. I've kept so quiet about it that sometimes I actually think it was—what would you call it?—a "hallucination under extreme stress". I saw him first, then he saw me. He was like a man caught sleep-walking, not knowing how he could be doing what he was doing, as if it were all part of some deep, ingrained reflex. But just for a moment I saw this look on his face of deadly concentration. He hadn't seen me first because he'd been looking elsewhere, and his eyes had been jammed up against a camera. (111-12)

In this passage, Sophie narrates the moment at which the terror of the simulacrum and the incommensurable otherness of her father simultaneously

became evident to her. The fact that a terrorist car bomb has just blown up her grandfather and his chauffeur at the secluded Beech country house is of course evidence that "everywhere can be a target" and that there are no "safe, separate places anymore". But that act of terrorism is not what Sophie is referring to. She is referring to the precession of the simulacrum, the logic whereby her father abides in reaching, the moment after he hears the explosion, for his camera in order to take a picture of his practically disintegrated father. Not only is the camera linked, through this scene, to terrorist actions, but Sophie also explicitly equals the camera to a gun: "You can shoot with both. You can load and aim with both. With both you can find your target and the rest of the world goes black" (77). The horror of his action is not lost on Harry himself, though: pretty much there and then he puts away his camera, ending his photo-journalist career. Later, he is to observe of his professional start, as a war-photographer during the Second World War, that "I was sent to London where I was taught the parts and use of a camera in much the same manner as rifle drill" (49).

Nonetheless, the event occasioned by her grandfather's disintegration (which is mirrored aesthetically by the disintegration of the narrative, which shifts between narrators and perspectives) makes Sophie break all communication with her father; at the same time, having realized that there is no longer any territory safe from the terror of the simulacrum, she decides to move with her husband Joe to the centre of the hyperreal world: America. "I guess I belong to the new world now", Sophie begins her narrative. This new world is "[t]he land of cancelled memories. The land without a past" (16). This lack of a past is precisely what makes the land the perfect birth-place of the hyperreal, according to Baudrillard: the Americans are "Anabaptists: having missed out on the original baptism, they dream of baptizing everything a second time and only accord value to this later sacrament which is, as we know, a repeat performance of the first, but its repetition *as something more real.* And this indeed is the perfect definition of the simulacrum" (*America* 41).[13] The hyperreal is the world of appearance without depth, of perfect transparency: "This is the only country which gives you the opportunity to be so brutally naive: things, faces, skies, and deserts are expected to be simply what they are. This is the land of the 'just as it is'" (28). Indeed, Sophie observes (albeit questioningly) about her new homeland

[13] This view is shared by Umberto Eco, who notes that in America "[t]he . . . philosophy is not, 'We are giving you the reproduction so you will want the original', but rather, 'We are giving you the reproduction so you will no longer feel any need for the original'" (*Travels* 19). And later: "The pleasure of imitation, as the ancients knew, is one of the more innate in the human spirit; but here we not only enjoy a perfect imitation, we also enjoy the conviction that imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it" (46).

that "[t]here's a sort of comfort, a sort of security, isn't there, in the absence of disguise, in knowing the way things really are?" (17). The plumber Nick, whom Sophie commits adultery with, offers the following, similar, assessment: "I bin to Europe . . . They got a lot of pretty things over there. But I prefer New York. You know what I think? . . . Europe is like a broad all dressed up. You don't know what's underneath. But New York is like a broad without any clothes. She may not be a princess, but she's naked and she sure as hell is real" (18). Sexual innuendo aside, Nick is practically a ventriloquist's doll for Baudrillard.[14]

Harry, for his part, has spent most of his life even prior to the explosion escaping earlier traumas by hiding behind a lens; his being in the stronghold of the hyperreal is what causes the action that so traumatizes Sophie. Although that action makes him abandon photography "almost overnight, it seems" (118), he comes out of the shock later the same year, opting for a more detached, safe realm of the simulacrum: "I surfaced again—or rather, took to the air. And didn't entirely jettison my camera. . . . In 1973 I . . . set up shop as an aerial photographer" (37). Indeed, aerial photography is a combination of the detachment of the camera and the detachment from the very earth, the very world: "I have always loved flying. Never . . . lost the magic of it. That release from the ground" (38). Thus, Harry has entered the realm of the super-ficial.

However, whereas Sophie is only just beginning to realize that there is no refuge in hyperreality, Harry has had a critical relation to it for decades. Beginning his narrative by recalling the night he and his father sat up watching the first moon-landing, he digresses: "The first rule of photography: that you must catch things unawares. That the camera doesn't manufacture. But that night was the first time perhaps that I thought: No, times changed since then. The camera first, then the event. The whole world is waiting just to get turned into film. And not just the world but the goddam moon as well" (13). A few years earlier, photographing the Vietnam war, he thinks: "I'm bound up with this thing, hooked on it now, it's rubbed off on me so much there's nothing much left of *me* any more. Just the eyes" (81). Occasionally, he waxes Baudrillardean indeed: "When did it happen? That imperceptible inversion. As if the camera no longer recorded but conferred reality. As if the world were the lost property of the camera. As if the world wanted to be claimed and possessed by the camera. To translate itself, as if afraid it might otherwise vanish, into the new myth of its own authentic-synthetic photographic memory" (189). He even ventures to suggest that "it's no longer easy to distinguish the real from the fake, or the world on the screen

[14] Many more parallels can be drawn between Sophie's musings over New York and those of Baudrillard, but the ones drawn here will suffice for my discussion.

from the world off it" (188).

Thus, just like Tom Crick is vacillating between his earlier positivist historiographic sensibility and his new postmodern consciousness, Harry is beginning to lose his faith in photography, discarding his objectivist credo. "Someone has to be a witness", he maintains (49); "[w]ithout the camera the world might start to disbelieve" (107). However, recalling a picture he took of "a marine throwing a grenade at Hoi An" (119), he notes that a photograph is a free-floating signifier, and as such lends itself to perpetual reification and dissemination:

> [The marine's] right arm is stretched back, his whole body flexed, beneath the helmet you can see the profile of a handsome face. It's pure Greek statue, pure Hollywood, pure charisma. And it's how it was. It must have been. Because the camera showed it. A second later, that marine took a round in the chest and I took two more shots and then some more as they got him clear. I wanted the whole sequence to be printed. But you can guess—you know—which single shot they took. This was '65. And that picture got syndicated everywhere, and even got transferred, with or without my knowledge, but never with my consent, on to posters, bookjackets, propaganda hand-outs, even t-shirts, till no one remembered any more, if they had ever known, that this was a picture of a real man, who'd died seconds afterwards . . .
>
> What is a photograph? It's an object. . . . It becomes an icon, a totem, a curio. A photo is a piece of reality? A fragment of the truth? (120)

The photograph, then, is as much in the service of ideology as any old myth or narrative. However, against such reification and mystification Harry sets a view that holds that, more radically, perhaps the photograph in itself says nothing, or rather is the saying and not the said: "Every picture tells a story—worth two columns of words. But supposing it doesn't tell a story? Supposing it shows only unaccommodatable fact? Supposing it shows the point at which the story breaks down. The point at which narrative goes dumb" (92). In this view, the photograph is absolute otherness, incommensurable and unspeakable. Having reached this point in his analysis, Harry cannot but renounce, albeit gradually, his belief in transparency. His conclusion is, like Tom Crick's in *Waterland*, that the mind cannot bear the silence of naked reality: "I used to believe that ours was the age in which we would say farewell to myths and legends . . . and we would see ourselves clearly only as what we are. I thought the camera was the key to this process. But I think the world cannot bear to be only what it is" (187). In other words,

the saying is unbearable and must be circumscribed by means of proper narratives. Paired with the mirrorworld of postmodernity, this circumscription seems to all but preclude the saying.

Consequently, the task rather becomes one of doing as little violence as possible, or the best kind of violence possible, to the other in one's narratives. As in *Waterland*, "the answer to the problem is to learn how to tell", as Sophie's psychoanalyst Doctor Klein puts it (74). Indeed, Harry's and Sophie's narratives commence at the point when they are beginning to reconstruct their relation, realizing that they cannot escape their responsibility for each other through distance and silence. "Out of sight, out of mind. Isn't that the way?", Sophie asks (34). She comes to realize, though, that it is not: "Out of sight, out of— But Doctor Klein . . . says that's the oldest lie in the world" (140); "[a]nd time heals. That's . . . the other big lie. Let some years go by. Oh, five, ten years. Then rub your finger over the place where the old wound was. See? Hardly feel a thing" (184). Sophie learns that time and distance do not heal when she is traumatized again, this time, ironically, by a toy gun her sons have brought into the house. A simulacrum of what her grandfather was trading in, and of what she likens the camera to, is what makes her act out her earlier trauma and what shakes her slowly back into the reality of responsibility again; she begins to tell, and so is slowly redeemed.

In Sophie's and Harry's process(es) of reconciliation and healing, then, the discourse on the simulacrum takes on a more poignant nature, a more ethico-sentimental nature, swinging more in the direction of Barthes's meditations on photography in *Camera Lucida*: "As *Spectator*", Barthes writes, "I was interested in Photography only for 'sentimental' reasons; I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, I think" (21). The photograph, the simulacrum *par excellence*, is also the sentimental object *par excellence*. However, it need not be the object of sentimental *reification*. Rather, it may open up to us the irreducibility of the other in a more poignant revelatory fashion. While it may seem the perfection of the frozen time of the said, the photograph may upset the said. As Barthes shows, there may also emerge from *within* the fixedness of the photograph what Barthes calls the *punctum*, which is that element in the photograph that pierces what Barthes calls the *studium*, which is my general, casual interest in the photograph. In a way, then, there is a plane of the saying that may pierce a plane of the said in the photograph: "A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (*Camera* 27). Both the photograph's disruption of the said and the *punctum* of the photograph are illustrated in a passage of *Out of This World* where Robert has showed Sophie a picture of himself as a young man, before he lost an arm in the Great War: "And the strangest thing about

the photograph wasn't that it was Grandad, taken years and years before, or that in it he had two arms—there it was, his real right arm, holding up a cigarette. The strangest thing was the face. The face was alive. Compared to the face of the Grandad I knew, that I was looking at right then, the face in the photograph was alive" (62).

Photographs, then, are haunting fragments of the past, and may bring us face to face with others who no longer walk among us. Indeed, what animates Barthes's meditations in the second part of *Camera Lucida* is his discovery of a photo of his mother, who has died recently. In *Out of This World* there is a similar scene where Harry, nine years old, discovers a photo of his mother, only the scene is more radically fraught with otherness since Harry's mother died giving birth to him:

> Fact or phantom? Truth or mirage? I used to believe—to profess, in my professional days—that a photo is truth positive, fact incarnate and incontrovertible. And yet: explain to me that glimpse into unreality.
>
> How can it be? How can it be that an instant which occurs once and once only, remains permanently visible? How could it be that a woman whom I had never known or seen before—though I had no doubt who she was—could be staring up at me from the brown surface of a piece of paper? (205)

Here, rather than being truth incarnate, the photograph is ghostly, unreal; but it is unreal precisely because what has been constituted as real is in fact steeped in narrative, in explanation, in the said. Unreality resides in what one brings to the photograph, that is, one's expectation that the real be said; the photograph itself is *it*, the saying, the challenge, as Barthes suggests:

> In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This* (this photograph, and not Photography), in short, what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression. (*Camera* 4)

In fact, the photograph is always, even when it is of the living, an apparition of the dead; even the photograph of oneself confronts one with oneself as dead, oneself as other: "[T]he Photograph is the advent of myself as other" (12); "the Photograph . . . represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of paren-

thesis): I am truly becoming a spectre" (14). The photograph, whatever it is of, then, says: this is no more, this moment, this person has fled; which is why the view of the photograph is "immediately steeped in desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria" (21), all at once.

Consequently, it is quite intriguing that there is no mention in *Out of This World* of Harry's ever taking a picture of anyone close to him, and that neither he nor Sophie mention any pictures of themselves. Significantly, Harry states that "[w]hen you put something on record, when you make a simulacrum of it, you have already partly decided you will lose it" (55), and notes about his fiancée Jenny that "I have never taken a photograph of her" (56). Harry is afraid of putting Jenny to death, of petrifying her. However, at the same time, he admits that "[w]hen I am not with Jenny . . . I play the game of trying to imagine exactly how she looks. I never can. When I see her, she is always so much better than the picture in my head. *But I don't know if this is good or bad.* If it's good that reality outshines the image, or if the fact that I can't imagine her means that *I don't know her*" (55; emphases mine). Of course, Harry does not know her, cannot know her; but that insight does not quite accrue with him: though he does not want to photograph her, he seems to insist on the possibility of possessing, in a mental image, the full truth of Jenny.

The insight that the other cannot be possessed is rather left to the reader. The lead-in to a portrait-cum-interview television show Harry agrees to appear on asks: "But what of the . . . mind behind the lens . . . ?" (113). That question may be construed as: "What of the mind behind the lens of the *eye*". *Out of This World* illustrates that while we would like to know that mind, we cannot. The novel does this by juxtaposing the different narrators and revealing their misconstructions of each other, revealing the clashes of the saying and the said. The novel's major narrative mode is thus one of dramatic irony, a mode which reserves "full" insight for the reader. Although the four narrators (Sophie's husband Joe and Harry's dead wife Anna narrate one chapter each) address their soliloquies to each other, the addresses are imaginary. In the case of Sophie, they are also directed, most of the time, to the faceless Doctor Klein, to whom her talk means nothing, instead of to her father, to whom her talk would mean everything. This "incommunication" turns out to have been the narrators' *modus operandi* throughout their lives, and not unexpectedly turns out to have lead to a number of fatal misunderstandings; in other words, instead of engaging with the other as saying, they have leapt headlong into the said. For instance, when Sophie recalls the time she told her father, who was passing through England from one job to the next, that she was pregnant, this is the assessment she makes: "I just said, 'I'm pregnant.' And do you know what his very first reaction was

to those words—the very first, brief look in his eyes? I'd swear it was alarm, I'd swear it was something almost like fright. He was passing through, all right" (68). The reader knows, however, that what Harry is expressing is genuine concern (in every meaning of the word) and love; some thirty pages earlier, Harry has recalled his emotional response to Sophie's birth:

> It must be one of the commonest experiences. But I had never imagined what it was like to be a parent. I became afraid. I had never reckoned on this fear. . . . I never expected such fear and such terrible, crushing love. When I held her in my arms I never wanted to let go, because of the risks. It was as though only my arms were protecting Sophie from the world. (31)

Moreover, Sophie blames her father for never being there, but as we learn from his narrative he has some reasons for retreating from his family. First, his mother died giving birth to him, and this is something his father is never able to forgive him for: "He might have loved me with a double, a compound love. He chose instead to blame me, to see me as the instrument of his wife's death" (29). As if this was not enough, not long before his beloved wife Anna dies, seven years into their marriage, in a plane crash, Harry painfully becomes the witness of her committing adultery with his friend Frank at a seaside hotel:

> I pushed the door an inch open with one finger. The head of the bed was hidden by the corner of a wardrobe. Was that luck of a kind? I didn't want to see her face. You have to see, but some things you can't look at. Her legs were round him. The curtains were drawn. Frank's arse, absurdly white where his swimming trunks went, was bucking up and down. . . .
>
> Then I turned. Then I crept down the passage. Past other rooms. Past our room. *Our* room? . . . And I was thinking all the time: This wasn't me. I'd left me behind. I had left my heart in a hotel in Cornwall. . . . Locked it up and walked away. (167-68)

Not telling Sophie or Anna any of this, he estranges both of them and estranges himself from both of them.

Anna, in her turn, has kept the story of her sorrow away from Harry, just like Mary in *Waterland* keeps hers away from Tom. Seemingly speaking from beyond the grave, or from that Greek mountain where her plane crashed, she says:

> [Y]ou never knew how often, in that room where we found so much joy, I had wept . . . for the fate of Anna Vouatsis, orphan

> and virgin of one-and-twenty, who had made her way all alone . . . from the country of her birth, where (but this was her secret) she never intended to return. . . . [Y]ou never quite understood—with all your keen-sightedness, with all your professional interest in the world's troubles—how your Anna, your very own Anna, was one of the earth's walking wounded. (173-74)

However, she adds: "Not that I blame you. How can I do that? I am the one to blame. I am the one to blame" (174). She is also eager to make it clear that "[w]ith Frank it wasn't happiness. It was a tactical affair. A tactical desertion" (174). But Anna realizes the tragedy of silence too late; even if the appearance of her voice suggests some kind of afterlife where reconciliation might be possible, or an afterimage carrying the promise of reconciliation, Harry can hear her as little in death as he did in life.

Still, *Out of This World* does end up with the promise of reconciliation and engagement in life. In the course of Harry's and Sophie's narratives the silence is broken and a dialogue seems about to be re-established: Harry, about to marry Jenny, sends Sophie a letter asking her if she would consider being present at the wedding, and Sophie decides, in the end, to go. The two brief passages revealing the sending and the reception of the letter also reveal the intense emotion involved on both sides; both passages are at the very end of their respective chapters, and both break down into the stutters and dashes that signify the stifling of language by emotion:

> Dear Sophie. How can I tell you? How can I say this? Your father, who you haven't seen for ten years . . . is going to get married. . . . And though we haven't told anyone yet, and we haven't fixed a day, I was wondering, we were wondering— I was hoping— If, after all this time—? If—? (82)
> I haven't seen Harry since that time I said goodbye to him ten years ago. And he hasn't seen me. . . . He tried to get close to certain things. Certain facts of life. It's just that he wasn't much good at closeness. And I wouldn't have to tell you these things. Why should I ever have to tell you these things? I really meant it, you see: Goodbye for ever. But now he writes me this letter . . . and in the letter he says— (140)

It is, indeed, the power of love that has begun to heal Harry, re-enchanting the world for him, and that power is now beginning to work on Sophie too. Harry is actually happy, and what is more he is the first of Swift's characters to be so. As one reviewer of *Learning to Swim* pointed out, the characters of Swift's earlier fictions seem to be "distrustful of happiness"

(Caless, Online). Consequently, in his hypertext thesis on Swift written in 1989, when *Out of This World* was Swift's most recent novel, Barry Fishman cannot but ask: "Why is Harry so happy, and how does he fit into Graham Swift's world?"; "How is it possible for Harry to be happy?". Fishman goes on to conclude that "Harry Beech has accomplished the impossible for a Swift character—he has actually achieved happiness" (Fishman, Online). "I am happy", Harry says; "in spite of everything (and at my age!) I am actually—" (21). The reason for his happiness is Jenny. For all his cynicism and scepticism, Harry cannot escape being romanticized by Jenny: "When she turns fully to catch my glance and smile, secret pods of joy burst inside me. . . . She's beautiful. She's incredible. She's out of this world" (36); "She makes me feel—hell, she makes me feel that I'm half my age, that everything is possible. She makes me sing, unapologetically . . . She makes me feel that the world is never so black with memories, so grey with age, that it cannot be re-coloured with the magic paint-box of the heart" (141).

Let me recall, from the introduction to this study, that those are the passages that made Peter Widdowson wonder: "Is this just a slip in stylistic decorum on the part of a most poised writer, or is the mawkish and meretricious language of sentiment here a sign of authorial disavowal?" (16). My answer is that it is neither: *Out of This World* actually wishes to show that when people reach out and try to connect and offer each other the gift of trust, then the world may become an enchanted place the only proper language for which is what we call "sentimentality"—albeit with a difference: that of irony, of a double-bind. The saying, the rupture, thus becomes one of romance, and the said one of disillusion. Both Harry and Sophie end up being able to suspend disbelief, albeit with some cautious sense of irony; as Harry puts it,

> [m]iracles shouldn't happen. Picture-books aren't real. The fairy-tales all got discredited long ago, didn't they? There shouldn't be thatched cottages still, tucked away among green hills. You shouldn't be able to advertise in the local papers for an assistant and fall in love with the very first candidate who comes along. I should have gone on, in fairness, to consider Applicant Two and Applicant Three . . . But I found out that, after all, I was still human. (79)

Speaking to Doctor Klein, Sophie puts her newfound expectations in similar terms:

> The truth is I want it to be wonderful. Wonderful. I want to go. Can you believe that? . . . I want him, and her, whoever she is

> (but I hope she's as lovely as a princess), to be waiting at the airport. I want to throw my arms around him and feel his arms around mine. Harry Dad Father. . . . And I want to hug her too and kiss her like a sister . . . and say, I hope you'll be happy with him, because I never was. Shit, I know this is pure theatre, I know this is like a bad movie, like the way it isn't. But what's the point of life, and what's the point of goddam movies, if now and then you can't discover that the way you thought it isn't, the way you thought it only ever is in movies, really is the way it is? (145)

Sophie, then, manages to break out of her cynicism and scepticism, to discard the cultural code that maintains that sentimentality and happiness are only manufactured by the entertainment or image industry. Breaking out of her forced independence, she is able to rediscover the force of interdependence: "He's going to get married. He's going to get fucking *married*. To some fucking *girl*. And he wants me to— He'd like me— He wants me" (99).

Thus, *Out of This World* is as much about suspending *belief* as about suspending disbelief: about breaking out of roles, daring to renounce the said (one's belief, one's self) and take heed of the saying (the other that upsets one's belief; one's other self). While Harry and Sophie are finally able to do this, the other characters in the novel are not. Interestingly, though, Harry notes about one of the times his father was scolding him for not wanting to take over the family business that "just for an instant I thought his eyes were no longer fierce. They were saying: Harry, get me out of this, get me out of this *person*" (71). Harry has been offered a brief glimpse of infinity: the other is not the mask, the persona, the said that has been offered to it; his father is not Robert Beech, arms manufacturer, patriot, patron. In a later passage, Harry recalls another occasion when he was forced to admit that maybe "that picture I had drawn . . . of my father . . . [was] an illusion" (143).

As for Joe, the chapter he narrates only serves to tell that he is content with acting the happy-go-lucky guy everyone thinks he is. Joe is perhaps the saddest character of the novel, as he professes a kind of self-eradication, a contented residing in the said. In existentialist terms, he is an aesthete. Hence, he is a reprise of Willy Chapman in *The Sweet Shop Owner*, as is evident in the following statements of Joe's:

> Well, if you ask me, I know there was never any big thing going for me, no plan, no special assignments. I was what you call an "accident", or an almost-accident. A visitor, that's all. An extra guest at the party. (147)
> I'm a surface person. I like it to sparkle and ripple. "Buoyant" is the word they use. I float easy. And you can go on floating even

> when you're way out of your depth. (149)

Just like Willy, then, Joe is a "dummy", avoiding confrontation and assuming no responsibility. Somewhat fittingly—and ironically, considering his wife's life story—he sells package tours to Great Britain, offering visions of a merry old England that never existed in the desert of the real. In other words, whereas Sophie has tried to escape into hyperreality from an England that was the site of the eruption of the real in her life, Joe is a kind of hyperrealist neo-colonizer of her home country who champions a kind of "Britainism" (as in "Orientalism") and is seeking to make England yield to American simulacral rule. In other words, Joe is entirely in superficiality, in simulation, in acting.

Harry and Sophie have had their share of acting, too. Consider, for instance, the following passage, where Sophie remembers the reception after Robert's funeral:

> We came face to face in the drawing-room as the whole thing was winding up. People were leaving, moving to their cars, and Frank was saying, "Go now, Sophie. You're exhausted. You've been marvellous." (Never performed better.) . . . He looked stranded. So what's the matter, Harry, no home to go to? He held his arms outwards, like a pair of useless wings. I know what he wanted. He wanted to embrace me. So it would look right, there in front of everyone. Life is an act, isn't it? Life is a real act. (88)

It is against the backdrop of this cynical sense of numb simulation that the sentimental moments of the novel gain force and credibility.

Still, the prevalent sense in the novel that reality is either nothing or simply gone, that is, the sense of the precession of simulacra, does put a lot of strain on those sentimental moments. One may get the feeling, in the end, that *Out of This World* represents the last gasp of romance in a world tending more and more toward simulation. Toward the end of the novel, Harry reveals that, in his cottage in Wiltshire, he has "a stash of nine artificial arms" (199), left to him by his father. The arms constitute a history of the perfection of the simulacrum, the perfection of simulation:

> The earlier ones are shapely, useless bits of sculpture that gradually lose their anthropomorphic wishfulness and their aesthetic pretensions; the later ones look like nothing human, but actually simulate the function of an arm.

> They are like an index of the twentieth century. (200)[15]

Thus, at least in a second reading, there is something eerie about Robert's jokes: "I make a good robot, don't I?" (67); or, having had a pacemaker installed: "Soon I will be all spare parts" (91). Robert may be seen as a harbinger of hyperreality, in which distinctions between nature and artifice, original and copy, truth and falsity no longer hold. As Harry notes, with some emotion and with reference to his father: "My God! My God, Jenny! My God, Sophie! How terrible to die, how terrible to be dying and not to know, at the end of it all, what is true and what is false" (72).

However, even if life may be an act, it is still, as Sophie somewhat unwittingly observes, "a *real* act" (emphasis mine), involving others who call one to be called to one's careful attention. The point *Out of This World* drives home is: you cannot escape the other, the past, or emotions.[16] The novel ends with Harry's childhood memory of flying back to England from France with his father:

> I can see now that throughout that homeward journey his feet must have been, so to speak, still on the ground, still caught in the mud. And I was being lifted up and away, out of this world, out of the age of mud, out of that brown, obscure age, into the age of air. (208)

In *Out of This World*, we are lifted out of the age of mud (which is waterland, the sticky substance composed of depth and surface) into the age of air (which is perfect transparency, the medium of light and hence the medium of the reflections of surfaces). But the ending is ironic, Harry's childhood revelation an illusion; he cannot get out of this world, out of the mud of memory and responsibility. As Malcolm Bradbury puts it, "Beech too is in history, and not out of this world", and the novel is about "the 'bomb damage' we somehow can no longer escape, however high we try to fly 'out of this world'" (*Modern* 434).

There is thus a difference between *Out of This World* and *The Sweet Shop Owner*: the former gives the promise of communication and reconciliation. There is a difference, as well, between *Shuttlecock* and *Out of This*

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[15] This assessment is identical to that of Baudrillard in "The Orders of Simulacra", 92-96. Under the heading "The Automation of the Robot", Baudrillard writes that the robot, the perfect mechanical simulation of man, "is radically opposed to the principle of theatrical illusion. No more resemblance, of God, or human being, but an imminent logic of the operational principle" (95).

[16] Cf. Lyotard in his preface to *Postmodern Fables*: "You're not done living because you chalk it up to artifice" (vii).

World: like *Shuttlecock*, *Out of This World* suggests that you can discard notions of absolute truth and transparent reality, but whereas Prentis avoids the tug of the real by placing his dreamworld as finality, the latter novel also emphasizes that you cannot escape the other, responsibility, the tug of the real.

That lesson, the lesson of both *Waterland* and *Out of This World*, is recast in Swift's last two novels, *Ever After* and *Last Orders*, in a mutation of the postmodernist form: a kind of postmodernism that bites its own tail of radical play, thus neutralizing the terms of its incessant scepticism and allowing for a new configuration of faith. It is to this mutation, to those two novels, that I now turn.

4
"All His Own": Toward an Aesthetics of Vulnerability in *Ever After* and *Last Orders*

> "Gentlemen were romantic . . . then."
> —*The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles
>
> If a person very close to us is dying, there is something in the months to come that we dimly apprehend—much as we should have liked to share it with him—could only happen through his absence. We greet him at the last in a language that he no longer understands.
> —Walter Benjamin
>
> My father said that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead.
> —*As I Lay Dying*, William Faulkner

In *Ever After* and *Last Orders*, the promise of a less guarded sentimentality that is discernible in *Out of This World* is fulfilled. While *Ever After* is still a very ironic novel both formally and thematically, in the execution of the final chapter it discards to a large extent what could be called its ironic alibi and thus enters a more "vulnerable" dimension of the sentimentum. The final chapter of *Ever After*, like much of the novel as a whole, leads the way into *Last Orders*, in which the ironic skin seems shed altogether, and the play of sentiment, spirit and ethics involved in the sentimentum is brought out in full resolve. Still, this fuller pronunciation of the sentimentum depends on irony, on metafictional devices and on relativizations; the discarding of irony and of markers of self-consciousness may take place locally in the narrative, but not in the narrative as a whole.

The fuller pronunciation of the sentimentum is also, it turns out, allowed by a stronger focus on, or centring around, death and dying. Whereas *The Sweet Shop Owner* is a third person narrative, albeit adopting inner monologue and free indirect narration, about the events of the last day in the main character's life, leading up to his suicide, *Ever After* is the first person narrative of a man who has attempted suicide—but failed. *Last Orders* stretches the motif of death even further, by including a brief chapter narrated

by Jack Dodge, whose ashes are being carried to the sea throughout the novel. True, the voice of a dead character is present in *Out of This World* too, but because of that novel's somewhat kaleidoscopic character, it is not clear whether this is actually a voice from beyond the grave, or just a fragment of the past.

From *The Sweet Shop Owner* to *Last Orders*, then, we witness a reversal: from death as finality to death as beginning. *Ever After* and *Last Orders* are without question the most emphatic of Swift's novels as far as the death motif goes, a fact signalled by their epigraphs: the former has as its epigraph a few words from Virgil's *Aeneid*, ". . . et mentem mortalia tangunt" (trans.: "mortal sorrows touch the heart"), the latter two lines from Browne's *Urn Burial*: "But man is a Noble Animal, splendid in ashes / And pompous in the grave".

Ever After: A Life in Plastic or Divine Love?

Ever After weds two fairly recent genres: the campus novel (most famously and successfully employed by David Lodge) and the literary mystery novel (the most immediate example of which would be A.S. Byatt's *Possession*). The novel is narrated by Bill Unwin, a Cambridge professor of literature who sits in the Fellows' Garden of his college taking stock of his life following the suicide of his terminally ill wife and his own subsequent failed suicide attempt. As if his wife's death was not enough, he has also recently lost both his mother and his stepfather. On the death of his mother, he has come into the possession of the notebooks of one of his maternal ancestors, a troubled Victorian by the name of Matthew Pearce. The notebooks offer little comfort, as they are the record of Matthew's falling under the spell of Darwinism, renouncing Christianity and consequently being forced to leave his wife, the daughter of a Rector.

However, despite all this loss and heartbreak, in *Ever After* we are back in fairy-tale land, in the land of make-believe. Significantly, whereas in *Waterland* the fairy-tale may seem like a Bataillean reworking of the brothers Grimm, and the fairy-tale quality of all knowledge is maddening and alienating, in *Ever After* the fairy-tale is more properly romantic, and "make-belief", as the narrator calls it, is seen as a positive and potentially enabling force. Thus, *Ever After* develops the sense of enchantment harboured by Harry Beech in *Out of This World*. The novel also presents the most unabashedly spiritual and sentimental land constructed by Swift to date: the phrases "divine" and "*amor vincit omnia*" recur throughout the novel like a heavenly chorus. The title is of course the first signal of a fairy-tale aesthetic: "ever after", that trusty old formula, usually preceded by "And then they

lived happily". This formula is both upheld and, not unexpectedly, dispelled (or dis-spelled) in the novel: it is a narrative told *after* the "ever after", after the "and then", that is, told after the long life of love has ended. Or has *been* ended, for both the narrator's wife and the narrator himself have put an end to their lives. Whereas the fairy-tale formula does not seem to acknowledge death even as a possibility—"they *lived* happily *ever* after"—*Ever After* poses the question (and forges an answer): how can one *die* happily? And can one live happily ever after dying?

This question and the process of answering it are made possible because the narrator's attempted suicide has failed; being a semi-ghost, an "undead", he is thus able to encounter himself as another; to encounter, as another, himself.[1] Indeed, Unwin finds it necessary to stress that the tone of his semi-ghostly narrative is foreign to him:

> [T]hese *words*, or rather the tone, the pitch, the style of them and consequently of the thoughts that underlie them, are not mine. I have penned in my time—long ago—a thesis and an academic paper or two, but I have never begun to write anything as—personal—as this. Yet this way in which I write is surely not *me*. What would you call it? A little crabbed and sardonic? A little wry? A tendency to the flippant and cynical? Underneath it all, something careless, heartless? Is this how I am? (4)

Accordingly, one of the central questions of the novel is whether academic life and interminable reflection and analysis numb one's spiritual and emotional faculties. That it may do so is exemplified by the fate of Matthew Pearce, Unwin's Victorian Darwinist scepticist ancestor; a man whose belief in the truth imperative led to incessant quarrels about Darwinism between him and his father-in-law, the Rector, and consequently to the separation of him and his wife. Another example the novel offers of spiritual drainage through intellectual strife is the fate of Charles Darwin himself, who, allegedly, gradually lost his appetite for all things artistic and poetic: "There is a passage in [the *Autobiography*] where [Darwin] laments the gradual loss of all taste for poetry, likewise, virtually, for music, painting, and fine scenery . . . Is he trying to tell us something?" (225).[2]

Most importantly, when one scrutinizes Unwin's self-questioning musings quoted above it seems that Unwin himself is yet another victim of the plights of academe: he has written academic papers, notably as a *literary*

[1] I am leaning here, again, on Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself As Another*.

[2] In *Ever After*, then, Swift seems to question what J.G. Wood wrote in *Nature's Teachings* in 1877: "It is therefore, partially, true that science does destroy romance. But, though she destroys, she creates, and she gives infinitely more than she takes away" (qtd. in Beer 71).

scholar, but never anything personal, and now that he tries to do the latter, he finds himself in the stronghold of the sardonic and the cynical. However, he strives to maintain a sense of enchantment, and the beliefs he expresses in the process are uncannily like the views that Frank Lentricchia surprised us with four years after Swift's novel was published, in his "Last Will and Testament of an Ex-Literary Critic". In that essay, Lentricchia observed with some disdain that "those who (when teenagers) spent the days and nights of their lives with their noses buried in imaginative literature now believe that they must look elsewhere, to academic disciplines, for the understanding and values of their happiness" (64). There is a resemblance to Lentricchia's views here in Unwin's statement that

> what has put the learned noses out of joint is the so-deemed simplicity of my actual views on literature. . . . Apparently, word has got out that in those tutorials of mine . . . I have been doing little more than urging my students to acknowledge that literature is beautiful—yes, the thing about a poem is that it's beautiful, beautiful!—and other such crude, *sentimental* and unschooled tosh. (70; emphasis mine)

In these views, Unwin is also a precursor of the Hassan of "Confessions of a Reluctant Critic", published one year after *Ever After*: "As Gertrude Stein once said to an obtuse interviewer, 'But after all you must enjoy my writing and if you enjoy it you understand it. If you do not enjoy it why do you make a fuss about it?' That is why I finally became a teacher of literature, to live in the vicinity of that joy" (164-65). There are further similarities, as Unwin continues his "extemporary lecture" by noting about literature that

> the most tired and worn (and bitterest) thoughts . . . return to us, in another's words, like some redeeming balm. . . . [T]he words hold us with their poise, their gravity—their beauty. They catch us up and speak to us in their eloquence and equilibrium, and just for a little moment (are you listening, my fine Fellows, my prize pedants?), the obvious is luminous, darkness is matched with light and life is reconciled with death.
>
> I rest my case. (71)

Compare this to Hassan and note the similarity in tone:

> [W]hat precisely did I, does anyone, expect to find in literature? Beauty and truth, really? . . . Balm for loneliness, for loss? An endless vision going endlessly awry? . . . Occult knowledge? The redemption of reality? A mirror in the roadway, a pie in the sky?

> All these and none: simply a way to make a living?
>
> On some days—they are rare—I suspect that literature touches the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (Rudolf Otto). (153)[3]

Ever After, then, in a sense, charts Unwin's attempts to be himself, or to be his *sentimental* self, which almost succeed in the final chapter. There is of course much to be said about the very premises of such an attempt in these deconstructionist times, and Unwin does acknowledge this: "I am not me. Therefore was I ever me?" (4); there are similar reflections on the fuzziness of personality and identity scattered throughout the novel.

Yet the attempt is there in earnest; as earnest as one can be living in the "as if". As always in Swift, the uncertainty the characters face does not shatter their selves the way it does in the works of, say, Beckett or Acker, but rather instigates the elaborate construction of a self out of the debris of the past and the conundrums of the present—or vice versa. Once again, crisis occasions narrative as a means of healing. And there is no want of crises in *Ever After*: Unwin's wife has committed suicide to escape the pain of her last months with cancer and his mother and subsequently his stepfather have died. What is more, the stepfather dies shortly after he reveals to Unwin that Unwin's real father, whose suicide has so determined Unwin's inner conflict, was not his real father after all. On top of this, Unwin conceives of his conflict in terms of *Hamlet* (his father the old King, his stepfather Claudius, his mother Gertrude, and his wife lurking as Ophelia). The set-up is, as we can see, quite melodramatic.

However, the melodramatic and sentimental impulses that might result from this set-up, and which are quite evident in Unwin's Hamletian conception, are kept in check by the fact that the set-up is revealed gradually in a non-linear narrative tinged with irony.[4] More decisively, those impulses

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[3] Brooks, in his discussion of the "moral occult" and "the Sacred", makes a similar observation about literature as a site for the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. See Brooks 17-18. As Calvin O. Schrag explains, in Otto the experience of the *mysterium tremendum*, or the Holy, "is a matter of encounter rather than of inference, informed by the self-disclosure of an alterity that invades the intentional structure of intramundane perception and evaluation. . . . The experience of the Holy is qualified as little as possible by everyday forms of consciousness. Its status as a marker of that which is wholly other is determined by the uniqueness of religious experience rather than by the outcome of a metaphysical argument" (115-16).

[4] Brooks enumerates the following characteristics of melodrama: "the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety" (11-12). All these may be found, at least in covert, subtle or suppressed form, in *Ever After*. However, a non-linear narrative of course serves to short-circuit the suspense of *the moment* (which is the melodramatic mode of suspense *par excellence*), the breathtaking peripety and the *finality* of the reward of

are kept in check by a scepticist imagination. In the maze of others (wife, mother, "father", stepfather, Pearce, etc.) in which Unwin finds himself, he also finds himself lost—and left, left with his narratives about others, including himself, as he now sees himself as an other. Aware that they are narratives, Unwin realizes that there are parallel or possible narratives that are in conflict. In the course of the novel, he even doubts whether his wife was always faithful to him, as he observes the promiscuous air of the acting life. The scepticism cuts both ways, however: Unwin offers several possible reasons for his father's suicide, and when he learns that his father was not his father, he is still not sure whether what he learns is necessarily true, and, if it is true, whether it rules out any of the reasons for the suicide:

> I told myself, of course: it doesn't matter. What should I do? Nothing. What should I say? Nothing. How am I changed? In no way. The fiction of my life (if that is what it is) may as well serve as the fact. I am my father's son, meaning my father-whom-I-once-knew-as-my-father's son, by whose death my life has been so irreversibly moulded. I am who I am. I am Bill Unwin (there, I declare myself!). I am Hamlet the Dane. (159-60)

Thus, Unwin is stuck in a locked groove, or in a maddening hermeneutical spiral, which complicates his sentimental engagement and his projection of a self.

Moreover, besides the more tangible crises in his own life, Unwin has to come to terms with how a Victorian gentleman, Matthew Pearce, could leave his wife and children, both of whom meant the world to him, for "Truth". "I don't understand him", Unwin says, "I never sought him out, I could do without him. But there he is, washed up before me: I have to revive him" (132). Unwin feels that he *has to*—an ethical imperative seems to be involved here. At one point, Unwin even ventures: "He wrote the Notebooks for *me*?" (213). It is precisely because Matthew is so different to Unwin that Unwin has to seek to understand him, to respect him. As in the thought of Levinas, the other is infinite and insurmountable, and hence mobilizes ethics as careful engagement with the other: "a nonviolent relationship to the infinite as infinitely other, to the Other", as Derrida puts it ("Violence" 83). Significantly, Unwin poses the conundrum of engagement with the same reference to Hamlet that Levinas makes in *Otherwise than Being*: "What is

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virtue. Cf. Herget's discussion of the rhetoric of sentimentality, especially p. 5.

Matthew to me? 'What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?'" (*EA* 143).[5] Unwin furthermore faces an *historical* other, which adds an historiographic dimension to the difficulties of engagement. Not only is the other infinite, in this case the other also comes to the same in the form of manuscripts, in the form of a text necessarily marked by absence—not in the form of the presence of the face, which is so decisive to Levinas.[6]

It is thus in the case of Pearce that scepticism threatens Unwin's melodramatic or sentimental imagination the most. He wants the story of Matthew Pearce to be the story of two young, lovely people who loved each other without reservations until Pearce's truth imperative separated him and his wife—although the two went on loving each other. It is, however, precisely a kind of truth imperative that serves to undermine that story, as Unwin himself cannot help acting the scholar: "Elizabeth obtained a divorce, on grounds of desertion. I am working now from data outside the Notebooks (I have done my background research), which stopped with Matthew's departure. Elizabeth married James Neale in November 1862" (211). This discovery makes Unwin's romantic concoction turn sour: "Let's read between the lines. Let's be brutal and modern and take apart these precious Notebooks—this precious marriage of Matthew and Lizzie. . . . And while we're about it, we may as well ask the big question: which came first—the failed marriage or the ideological anguish?" (211-12). Consequently, Unwin has to ask himself:

> So, have I got it all wrong? I invent. I imagine. I want them to have been happy. How do I know they were ever happy? I make them fall in love at the very first meeting on a day full of radiant summer sunshine. How do I know it was ever like that? How do I know that the Notebooks, while they offer ample evidence for the collapse of Matthew's marriage, were not also a desperate attempt to keep alive its myth, and that, even when he seems most honest, Matthew, with much display of fine feeling, tender conscience and wishful thinking, only beats about the bush of an old, old story? (212)

We may note the subtle, "embedded" metafiction: Unwin scrutinizes his story about Matthew, rather than Swift scrutinizing his story about Unwin, but the passage resembles Fowles's authorial interventions in *The French*

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[5] Levinas asks, "[w]hy does the other concern me? What is Hecuba to me? Am I my brother's keeper?", and quickly adds that "[t]hese questions have meaning only if one has already supposed that the ego is concerned only with itself, is only a concern for itself" (*Otherwise* 117).

[6] Or if walls have ears can leaves have eyes? If you stare long enough into the text, will you find that the text stares back at you?

Lieutenant's Woman. Especially in this passage, for all of Unwin's claims that he does not understand Pearce, the documents relating to Pearce also function as a *mise-en-abyme*: if those documents are conflicting or unreliable, then so too are Unwin's own narratives. If Unwin picks Pearce's Notebooks to pieces, why should we not pick Unwin's narrative to pieces? If there are doubts about Matthew's marriage, why should there not be doubts about Unwin's? But also: like Unwin wants Matthew and Lizzie to have been happy, the reader probably wants Bill and Ruth to have been happy. And why not pick the picking-to-pieces to pieces?

Indeed, Unwin goes to great lengths to salvage his life of romance. It is in this respect that *Ever After* is unquestionably brave and fascinating: it ends up, in the last chapter, with a truly sentimental and romantic point of view. The last chapter begins with a negotiation in which the sentimental and the melodramatic get the upper hand: "It's not the end of the world. *It is*. Life goes on. *It doesn't*" (249; emphases mine). Subsequently, Hamlet enters as an emblem of the assumption of importance and responsibility: "Why seems it so particular with thee?" (249; qtd. from *Ham*. 1.2.75). Things are important; there are responsibilities; there is responsibility—this is Unwin's stance.

After this reiteration of earnestness and poignancy, Unwin goes on to tell the story of Ruth's and his first consummation of their love and the arrangements preceding it. The two lovers are embraced by love, embracing in love, embracing everything in love: "And she was enamoured of the stage, and I was enamoured of poetry, and we were both enamoured of each other. Too happy, too busy being happy, to worry about the Bomb" (249). Happiness being suspect, doubt rears its head again, but is duly made to hang it in shame: "But what sort of a plea, what sort of an excuse, is happiness? Perhaps it's the only plea. Why march with banners of protest unless to save a world in which happiness can exist?" (249).[7] Subsequently, the question(ing) of art is also settled: "And what are these things: the theatre, poetry? Bubbles, toys. It doesn't take a bomb to shatter them. They only tell us what is in our hearts. They are only mirrors for our lost, discredited souls" (249). And then comes the exclamation that shatters, in its audacious jocularity and loveliness, the book of doubt and paves the way for the book of love and life: "O Mayflower Road! O garrets under the stars! O *vie Bohème*! O Mimi! O Rodolfo!" (250).[8]

I cannot cite the whole chapter here, although that would be necessary to convey its (sentimental) impact. I can only refer the reader to it and provide a brief quote to illustrate the tone and the air of it:

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[7] We may recall Kiernan Ryan's words: "sometimes [sentimentality] is the only piece of wreckage left to cling to" (217).

[8] Unwin's reference here is of course to Puccini's *La Bohème*.

> How many taxi rides? How many shillings on the meter? How many journeys, all too quick, through the emptied streets, through the small, shy hours of love, before we even dared to speak the magic words? Perhaps love is more than the sum of two people. Perhaps love is a third thing, mysteriously bestowed, precious and fragile, like some rare, warm egg. We wished and feared to hasten it. We took it into our care like diligent trustees, waiting our charge's coming of age. (250)

Thus, Unwin paints the picture of a world in which "[l]ove makes of its initiates bold undercover agents in the hostile territory of mundanity and propriety" (252).

When Unwin pauses in his romantic narrative to reflect with hindsight, to speak again from the vantage point of loss, it is to conclude that

> nothing else will do. No simulations, fabrications, biographical conjurations. . . . Surely you are lucky—lucky. The films, the videotapes, the hundreds and hundreds of photographs—publicity shots, rehearsal shots. You can turn a page, push a button, press a cassette into its slot, and there will be Ruth—moving, talking, breathing—before you.
>
> But how can I explain it? The pictures mock me. They are, they are not Ruth. I can't bear to look at them. (255-56)

As we can see, the critique of the simulacrum carried out in *Out of This World* lingers on in *Ever After*; Unwin may find himself at the end of history, where people experience "the nostalgia for the nostalgia of nostalgia" (81), but he still believes he has found *the real thing*, and he maintains that simulacra and substitutes will not do, will never be the same: "They say I should write her biography. . . . The life of Ruth Vaughan, actress. . . . But it seems to me it would be an impossibility, a falsehood, a sham. It's not the life, is it, but the *life*? The *life*" (253).

Unwin's stepfather, the owner of Ellison Plastics, on the other hand, represents both sexual promiscuity and the Baudrillardean view: "You gotta accept it, pal, . . . the real stuff is running out, it's used up, it's blown away, or it costs too much. You gotta have *substitoots*" (7).[9] As so often in Swift's stories, the child has refused to join the father's business, and Unwin has done so "in the conviction that the real stuff of life lay elsewhere" (7). Indeed

[9] This is what Baudrillard says about plastic in "The Orders of Simulacra": "Is it not man's miracle to have invented, with plastic, a non-degradable material, interrupting thus the cycle which, by corruption and death, turns all the earth's substances ceaselessly one into another? . . . There is something incredible about it, this simulacrum where you can see in a condensed form the ambition of a universal semiotic . . . the fantasy of a closed mental substance" (91-92).

he proclaims: "You see, I think I found the real stuff, the true real stuff" (9).[10] "The real stuff" can refer to nothing else but Ruth, the love of his life, his life of love. Nothing else will do. Therefore, the loss is absolute:

> And nothing is left but this impossible absence. This space at your side the size of a woman, the size of a life—of the world. Ah yes, the monstrosity, the iniquity of love—that another person should *be* the world. What does it matter if the world (out there) is lost, doomed, if there is no sense, purpose, rhyme or reason to the schemeless scheme of things, so long as— But when she is gone, you indict the universe. (256)

Looking at this passage, especially out of context, we may find the observations and sentiments expressed in it common, banal even. In the Hamletian terms invoked by the novel, the (unsentimental) reader may say to Unwin what the Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother, says to Hamlet: "Thou know'st 'tis common,—all that live must die, / Passing through nature to eternity" (*Ham.* 1.2). And Hamlet answers: "Ay, madam, it is common". The reader asks in turn: "If it be, / Why seems it so particular with thee?". Having been drawn into Unwin's world, into him, and having encountered the struggle in him between dis-belief and make-belief, however, the reader will realize the urgency and poignancy of the passage. And the reader may understand Hamlet's answer: "Seems, madam! nay, it is; I know not seems".

The final chapter of *Ever After*, then, seems to tell the reader that no double coding, no ironic alibi, is needed; tell it like it was: the first weekend you spent in bed with your lover was a magical, seminal event, laced with secrecy and comedy, and the first night, you told each other the stories of your lives, the gist of yours being that your father took his life. That is how the novel ends: "He took his life, he took his life" (261); the repetition of the phrase brings to mind a melodramatic exclamation, but for the want of precisely an exclamation mark.

Still, maybe all is not perfectly well that ends well. And maybe the novel does not end perfectly well—at least not as far as unabashed sentimentality is concerned. That last chapter cannot help but have a tone of irony, and its effect—the success of its effect—relies on the very fact that it is preceded by so much doubt and confusion. Self-conscious tension is still integral to the accomplished contemporary novel—and to the text of the sentimentum. What *Ever After* shows, however, is how one can try to reverse the polarity and let faith subvert scepticism instead of the other way around.

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[10] We may compare Unwin, then, to Willy Chapman, who "never believed you could have the real thing" (*Sweet Shop* 184).

Ever After, then, is something other than the typical double coded, deconstructive and ironic postmodern novel. Its simultaneous inscription and subversion is not quite of the kind described so elaborately by Linda Hutcheon: a parodic re-inscription, a reciting and resiting, of existing genres, texts or discourses motivated by gender, cultural identity or class politics.[11] In fact, it seems to be, and even more clearly so than in *Waterland* and *Out of This World*, the postmodern *itself* that is inscribed and subverted; the very devices or acts of deconstruction and irony are inscribed, but then subverted in the name of sentimentality. One may however argue that it is precisely in the postmodern state of instability and uncertainty that the sentimental and romantic views finally become tenable. Throughout the history of philosophy, though, uncertainty has typically led to scepticism, or even nihilism. But as William James knew, scepticism itself constitutes a peculiar leap of faith: the sceptic *believes in* scepticism.[12] And as Nietzsche understood, nihilism must eventually yield affirmation, as the nihilist ultimately says "No" to his "No". In similar fashion, *Ever After* contests the hegemony of scepticism, setting sentimentality against nihilism, setting love against truth: "I would believe or not believe anything, swallow any old make-belief, in order to have Ruth back. Whereas Matthew— Whereas this Pearce guy— " (256).

In fact, *Ever After* elaborately inscribes and contests a number of postmodernist *idées reçues*. I will illustrate this move of inscription and contestation by re-approaching the question of the title and the question of death. Those questions have a bearing not only on the particular issue of the sentimentum, but also on the issue of postmodernism in general. Notably, the first sentence of the novel carries on the deathly speech of the epigraph, as Unwin states: "These are, I should warn you, the words of a dead man" (1). The sentence makes up a paragraph of its own, adding density to its already momentous air. Now, being (over)educated readers who know a thing or two about the French scene of the last three or four decades and its broader impact, what are we, really, to make of a novel, published in 1992, that begins in that way? The novel is, once again, called *Ever After*, and the meanings that phrase acquires in the course of the novel is "ever after Darwin"[13], "ever after Einstein"—and "ever after Barthes", (in)famous announcer of "the death of the author".[14] After Barthes, the opening sentence

[11] See, for instance, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 101-107.

[12] See James's *The Will to Believe*, e.g. 1-31.

[13] "Life after Darwin: As You Like It, or What You Will", as Unwin puts it (233).

[14] See "The Death of the Author". Barthes argues that "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is to reach, through a preliminary impersonality . . . that point where not 'I' but only language functions, 'performs'" (50). Similar observations are made by Foucault in "What Is an Author?".

of *Ever After* is prankish rather than momentous and unsettling; these are the words of a dead man, indeed—taken metafictionally, the statement is trivial. Why state the obvious?

One reason for stating the obvious is of course to subject it to re-negotiation. Paraphrasing the quip answering Nietzsche's "God is dead" with "No, *Nietzsche* is dead", one may answer Barthes's "The author is dead" with, of course, "No, *Barthes* is dead"—with all due respect. For how does the next paragraph of the novel begin, how does the next sentence of the novel go? It goes: "Or they are at least—the warning stands—nothing more than the ramblings of a prematurely aged one". What ease, what *swift*ness, in dealing with that paradoxical birthmark of postmodernism—the death of the author, the transition from work to text.[15] A few pages into *Ever After*, such post-mortemism is contested by Unwin, the literary scholar: "Literature, which despite its failure to save lives, including, I suppose I must say, my own, and despite its being, in a place like this, forever chopped up and flung into preservatives as if it were the subject of an autopsy, I still believe in. I still believe it is the speech, the voice of the heart. (Say things like that round here and see what happens.)" (5). These musings continue the dialogue with Barthes, who writes at the end of "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" that "literature itself is a science—no longer of the 'human heart', but of human discourse" (21). At the same time, *Ever After* follows the Barthes of the *Fragments* in giving voice to the "unwarranted discourse" of sentimental love.

Thus, *Ever After* sets the stage much more clearly than *Waterland* or *Out of This World*: the troubled anti-hero of this drama, which continually and explicitly refers to *Hamlet*, is postmodernism, asking itself, not whether to be or not, but *how* to be.[16] There is another troubled anti-hero under scrutiny in the novel: Hamlet himself, quite simply. As Unwin conceives his life and its major conflict in terms of Shakespeare's play, he is implicitly asking: Can one be Hamlet at the end of the twentieth century? Can one be Hamlet in a postmodernist novel? T.S. Eliot would seem to have settled the question as far as modernism goes, as he let Prufrock exclaim: "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be", as Prufrock famously exclaimed. The rest of that stanza of "Prufrock" is a fitting description of Unwin too:

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[15] See "From Work to Text". To paraphrase Barthes's argument: because there is no originary authorial subject and all utterances are tangled up in an intertextual web, the so-called author's product can no longer be called a "work", but must be considered but one thread in that wide web: a "text", "entirely woven of quotations, references, echoes: cultural languages . . . antecedent or contemporary, which traverse it through and through, in a vast stereophony" (60).

[16] The opening words of *Ever After* themselves are thus made to allude to the appearance, and later the words, of Hamlet's dead father in the first act of the play.

> Am an attendant lord, one that will do
> To swell a progress start a scene or two,
> Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
> Deferential, glad to be of use,
> Politic, cautious and meticulous;
> Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
> At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
> Almost, at times, the fool.

In other words, the Prufrockian man has warmed up since Willy Chapman in *The Sweet Shop Owner*. Indeed, Unwin had dreams in his youth of taking to the stage, but became instead a recluse literary student, financing his studies by working at a night club, meeting there his wife-to-be, the rising actress star Ruth Vaughan, to whom he eventually became a manager of sorts, lurking forever in the shadows; deferential and glad to be of use.

One can see further intertextual echoes of Eliot's poem in *Ever After*. Unwin's first words may remind us of Prufrock's "I am Lazarus, come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all". They may also remind us of the epigraph to Eliot's poem, taken from Dante: "If I thought that my reply would be to one who would return to the world, this flame would stay without further movement; but since none has returned alive from this depth, if what I hear is true, I answer you without fear of infamy" (Dante, *Inferno* 27.61-66, trans. in Abrams 2504, n.2). *Ever After* also leads us back to Dante, by way of its own epigraph, taken from Virgil's *Aeneid* (Virgil of course being Dante's guide in *Divina Commedia*, as well as the poet who penned the words "*amor vincit omnia*", in *Eclogues*): " . . . et mentem mortalia tangunt". These connections to Dante's epic offer us a hint as to why we should be *warned* that we are about to hear the words of a dead man; that we are in fact hearing them means that we are not quite in the place we should be—or, with reference to *Hamlet* again, that the dead man only speaks to us in order to ask something of us, to rock the boat and upset the applecart. What is the boat then? It is, once again, postmodernism. What we would seem to be warned about is the fact that Unwin has come back from the dead, from the realm of the dead author and the literature of exhaustion, come back to tell us all that Literature and Romance are alive and well—or at worst only prematurely aged.

The applecart carrying Hamlet, however, does not seem to be so upset after all. We may note that the question of Hamlet operates the other way around too: If one is Hamlet, or if one can maintain the casting of oneself in that role with some seriousness, then how can one continue to be post-modern? For even if the great (postmodern) irony of the novel is that the whole Hamletian conflict turns out be a chimera, based on inaccurate

suppositions, the perception of that conflict is, at least as long as it seems to be fully actual, to Unwin quite earnest and poignant. Unwin is not, then, the modernist alienation casualty that Prufrock has become an emblem of; he manages to invest his reality with romance and a tinge of melodrama, and does so without much of a sneer:

> In Paris my mother first took me to the opera. A matinée of *La Bohème*—a Parisian tale. And there, in Act One, behind Rodolfo's garret window, and again, in Act Four, as poor Mimi lay melodiously dying, was a painted vista of Paris rooftops just like any you could actually see, and perhaps still can, around Sacré Coeur or Montparnasse. It had never struck me before that Reality and Romance could so poignantly collude with each other . . . (13)

Unwin even suggests that he was born under a particularly romantic star: "I was born in December 1936, in the very week that a King of England gave up his crown in order to marry the woman he loved. . . . I have always felt that the timing of my arrival imbued my life, for better or worse, with a sort of fairy-tale propensity" (57). Significantly, it is only with hindsight that Unwin begins to ironize overtly about his earlier perceptions, and even then those perceptions maintain their status as basis for vivid propositions precisely because the very terms in which the merciless deconstruction of those earlier perceptions are made allow for the subsequent re-reversal or neutralization of the conflicting propositions, rendering the earlier perceptions once again possible truths. The discussion of *Ever After* thus becomes, as Derrida notes about deconstruction itself, "a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself" ("Structure" 282).

Posing this problem, though, *Ever After* maintains a kind of postmodernist irony that threatens to tip the novel into the quicksand of undecidability. Once again it makes quite some sense to relate the novel to Eliot's work, and once again we may note that *Hamlet* serves as a nexus for the two: *Ever After* may be seen as a reversal of Eliot's poetic project, defined not least in his essay on Hamlet, and of the outcome of that project. As Victor Strandberg reminds us,

> Eliot developed four basic stratagems to accomplish [the] escape from feeling and selfhood. The first was his adoption of masks or personae behind which to hide his authorial personality; the second was his . . . use of image and symbol as a device for ob-

> jectifying feelings (the objective correlative); the third was his pervasive use of irony and sarcasm as mechanism of emotional control; and the fourth was his abundant use of allusion to other writings to achieve a classical level of urbanity. But in the end, all of these tactics failed. Despite his theories and efforts to the contrary, Eliot's feelings and personality came to form so dominant a presence in his poetry as to repeat in some degree the Shakespearean error that made Hamlet an "artistic failure". (172)

We may compare Eliot's professed aesthetics to Swift's aesthetics of vulnerability, in which various formal devices should *not*, in a sense, hide the author, "like somebody putting on a suit of armor to keep in the things that matter rather than to show them" ("Interview" 229); to Swift, "feeling *seems* at least to stand in opposition to form: form is to do with control and discipline, and feeling is to do with liberation and release" (228). The strongest statement of this aesthetics by Swift is when he says: "I am desperate to avoid a sense of the power derived from form" (229).

However, what happens in *Ever After* is that, whereas Eliot could not ultimately suppress superfluous emotion by means of formal devices, Swift cannot keep formal devices from controlling and disciplining feeling; and these formal devices are precisely the mask or persona (Unwin and Pearce), irony and sarcasm (as Unwin himself notes) and allusions to other writings (*Hamlet*, the *Aeneid*, *La Bohème*, "Prufrock", *The French Lieutenant's Woman*[17]). The one thing Swift (or Unwin) maybe violates—but this is difficult to decide, and Eliot himself would have to be the final judge—is the objective correlative; in that case, what was Eliot's failure is Swift's

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[17] For instance, the following passage from Fowles's novel could easily have been pasted into Swift's, apropos Pearce's debates with his father-in-law:

> "I confess your worthy father and I had a small philosophical disagreement."
>
> "That is very wicked of you."
>
> "I meant it to be very honest of me."
>
> "And what was the subject of your conversation?"
>
> "Your father ventured the opinion that Mr Darwin should be exhibited in a cage in the zoological gardens. In the monkey-house. I tried to explain some of the scientific arguments behind the Darwinian position. I was unsuccessful. *Et voilà tout.*"
>
> "How could you—when you know Papa's views!"
>
> "I was most respectful."
>
> "Which means you were most hateful." (11)

For an extensive catalogue of the intertextual instances in *Ever After*, see Jacobmeyer, appendix one. Jacobmeyer does, however, not note the subtler intertexts of Eliot and Fowles.

success—a success, that is, in terms of the sentimentum.

The structure of this section has ideally served to convey to the reader the sensation one has when reading *Ever After*: passages of illumination are interspersed with passages of profound undecidability; just when you think the final analysis is at hand, doubt and confusion are reinstated. Indeed, as in most of Swift's narratives, there is no closure in *Ever After*. The last paragraph of the novel, which is, paradoxically, perhaps the most unabashedly sentimental paragraph of the sentimental last chapter, refers us back to the beginning of the novel and to its main mysteries:

> How strange, how incomprehensible, that whispered phrase. How unreal, even as he speaks it. How impossible that either of these young people, whose lives, this night, have never been so richly possessed, so richly embraced, should ever come to such a pass. He took his life, he took his life. (261)

We may thus see what sets the novel apart from the romanticism of *Shuttlecock*: Unwin has worked through scepticism, arrived at the choice of belief, but ends with a sharp reminder of violence and failure. As Wendy Wheeler suggests, "it is precisely this ambivalence associated with art which, as it were, resolves by not resolving" (75). Indeed, as Wheeler also argues, what comes more to the fore in *Ever After* than in Swift's earlier novels "is the question of the adequate symbolisation of loss itself. In other words, Swift's question increasingly becomes one which is concerned with the relationship between aesthetic form and ethical content. The form must be one which is capable of properly symbolising the trauma of loss" (74).

Moving on to *Last Orders* we find a different answer to this question of symbolization, with a more affirmative yet still, importantly, tenable, sense of closure—tenable because it is partial and is not cast in the terms of regression or naïveté.

Last Orders: A Sentimental Journey

My reading of *Last Orders* locates in the novel an affirmative turn that, to my mind, is inseparable from an aesthetic turn. *Last Orders* is a novel that speaks to the emotions, that depends on empathy and sympathy, but that also reciprocates them. Yet, this speaking to emotions, to empathy and to sympathy is not an end in itself. Rather, as John Banville wrote of the novel in the *New York Review of Books*, it "seeks to reaffirm the values of decency, loyalty, love" (Banville, Online). This reaffirmation is also a reaffirmation of the communal and intersubjective over and against the individual and subjective; in the words of Wendy Wheeler, "the movements of spirit which

trace out all the follies and detours of the stages of the encounter with Death and mourning [in the novel] turn out, in the end, to be the work of mutual recognition and obligation which is love (*caritas*) as *work* in the social and political commitments and activities of the day to day" (76).

Arguably, the novel also seeks to reaffirm the value of narrating "real, lived lives" (Banville, Online) as opposed to the intertextually inscribed masques we tend to end up with in much postmodernist fiction, including Swift's works. At a first glance, the novel seems drained of metaphoricity and allusion; it is as actual as fiction can be. It is by such an aesthetic move that the sentimentum comes into its most daring fruition. However, as a novel of the sentimentum, *Last Orders* is a novel of enchantment and a novel marked by postmodernism. As Wheeler points out, "one of the most interesting things [in the novel] is the way in which, beneath the ordinary Bermondsey voices and lives, another language surprisingly emerges: the symbolic language of the spirit and the soul. No elevated language here, but, nonetheless, a glimpse of the sacred and the enchanted" (76-77). Furthermore, as we shall see below, the novel does carry out a postmodernist re-examination of representation and does constitute a potent installment in the genre of historiographic metafiction.

As I stated in this chapter's introduction, it is also the vivid presence of death that allows the sentimentum to be brought out in full resolve. Let us remind ourselves why this is so: Death, in its final manifestation of infinity in the moment of the final gaze of the other, is also the other *par excellence*. If, as in Levinas, the other is compared to, or indeed *is*, infinity, then death cannot terminate the other; in fact, death rather makes evident the infinitude of the other. In their actuality, and contrary to Jameson's notion of "the waning of affect", these relations are woven into a tapestry of sentiments and sentimentality: longing, suffering, love, bliss. Like *Ever After*, *Last Orders* is such a tapestry, but instead of being cast in the mould of an ultimately monologic postmodern romance, it achieves a more communal vision through what could be described as a polyphonic magical social realism.

In *Last Orders*, four men undertake a journey to spread the ashes of their friend Jack Dodds in the sea at Margate. They embark upon a pilgrimage, for the route they take is the same as Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims would have taken. On their journey to Margate, they stop by monuments to their shared and personal histories: a war memorial, the place of the conception of Jack's estranged daughter, and, of course, Canterbury Cathedral. During the journey, the four men reminisce, and their recollections are narrated by themselves in chapters attributed to, respectively, Ray, Vince, Lenny and Vic. That is not all, however; all in all, the novel musters a seven-voice polyphony: Jack's widow, Amy, who has declined to join the pilgrim's

progress, also narrates a few chapters, and Vince's wife Mandy as well as Jack himself speak out in one chapter each. Like those of Chaucer's pilgrims, the tales of Swift's characters do not shy away from the outrageous in all its senses, but they are also tales of sadness and remorse. As the tales intersect and rush back and forth, up and down Memory Lane (a cliché used in the novel), and blend with the events of the characters' outing to the sea, a note of dignity is struck—"Dignity, that's the word, dignity", the Host of this Chaucerian journey, Ray, concludes (75)—and a mode of reconciliation is found. Death is made meaningful as the clearing of a space for summation of, and reconciliation with, the past and the now. *Last Orders* may thus be said to engage with the question of what Derrida has called "the gift of death", moving his discussion ever more into the territory of ethics and of the spiritual.[18]

Indeed, the four men's beer- and whiskey-soaked journey of introspection and revelation—a case of *in vino veritas*—acquires an overtly spiritual dimension. The pub in which the men meet before their outing is likened in Ray's mind to a church: "There's a shaft of sunlight coming through the window, full of specks. Makes you think of a church. . . . The bottles racked up like organ pipes" (1). The everyday communion of men—and it is very much the story of *men*—is thus made holy, the downing of spirits raises their spirits.[19]

Essentially, though, for all its detours and digressions, what takes place in *Last Orders* is a funeral procession. As we saw above, death, if anything,

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[18] See *The Gift of Death*. See also John D. Caputo's *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, especially 188-212, as well as the collection *Religion*, co-edited by Derrida with Gianni Vattimo. As Caputo explains, "Derrida is . . . exploiting a paradoxical sense captured in the English translation 'gift of death', viz., the gift that death gives. 'Giving' seems like altogether the wrong word in any language inasmuch as visiting death upon a living thing is usually not a gift but rather an unwelcome destruction; such giving takes everything away. But Derrida . . . wants to know whether and when giving death is a good deal, a solid investment that promises a good return, and whether there is a giving, indeed a giving death, that represents a gift without return" (191). And further: "In every case, Derrida says, life is a kind of 'wake', a watchfulness over death . . . and dealing in death is a good deal" (191).

[19] By saying that the novel is very much about men, I do not wish to downplay the presence of women in it. Furthermore, while it is true that the female characters in Swift's novels are often marginalized and silent, they do speak out in quite distinct voices now and then, emerging as fully rounded characters marked by both bruises and blessings, as for instance Amy in *Last Orders* and Sophie in *Out of This World*. I do not agree, then, with Pamela Cooper's assessment that "Swift's heroines are, in a sense, goddesses. They suggest an archetypal femininity: 'woman' as a kind of eternal principle . . . [and] blend impressionistically into one: a single force of enigmatic womanhood, working variously as perennial of male desire, as mother, as the bearer of universal human experience, and as the vessel of harsh wisdom" (29). If this is true, it is as true—*mutatis mutandis*—in the case of many of Swift's male characters, especially the mysterious fathers in *Shuttlecock*, *Waterland*, *Out of This World* and *Ever After*.

mobilizes ethical action. As Ray observes, "[w]hat you never know won't hurt, but it's different when someone's dying, because it's not like you can say least said soonest mended, because there aint going to be no soonest or latest and you won't ever get the chance again to tell or not tell nothing" (98). However, "in the face of death" we are also *im*mobilized, "we don't know left from right", as Vic, the undertaker, notes (79). *Last Orders* poses the mystery: Why do dead people matter? Why do dead people mind? Like the recent collection of Derrida's eulogies, *The Work of Mourning*, the novel becomes a meditation on the question of how best to mourn at our point in history.[20] These questions, these mysteries, are rehearsed throughout the novel, in which it is evident that death makes people uneasy, as it shatters sheer materiality and confronts them with an embarrassing spirituality—embarrassing, that is, in an individualist, secular consumer society. "Seems to me the only time a man can get what he asks is when he's dying", Vince says as he ponders Jack's last requests and the added bonus of Jack's being carried to the sea in "an S-Class Merc, extra long wheelbase, walnut dash" (23)—a touching, if not also satirical, blend of ethico-spiritual and bluntly materialist gestures. Satire of contemporary society, with its monuments and cathedrals raised to industrialism, similarly looms large when the four men come to Canterbury and Ray disappointedly reports: "I don't see no cathedral. I see the gas-holder in front of it, and I see the cars zipping along the A2, just ahead, Dover one way, London the other" (192).

The contemporary complication of mourning also transpires as the four men's sentiments in the face of death escape their language; this is especially apparent when they sit in a pub in Rochester and their dialogue becomes touchingly comical or comically touching:

> Lenny says, "It's a crying shame he aint here", like Jack was planning on it but something else came up.
>
> "He'd've appreciated it", Vince says.
>
> "He shouldn't've hurried off like he did", I say, entering the spirit.

[20] A collection of Derrida's *in memoriams* on the occasions of the deaths of his philosopher friends from 1980 to 1998, *The Work of Mourning* is both surprisingly sentimental and expectedly self-conscious. Hence, I would say that it is an intriguing instance of the sentimentum. For instance, in his funeral oration on Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida writes, or says: "By meditating upon what Emmanuel Levinas wrote about the French word *adieu*—which I will recall in a few moments—I hope to find a sort of encouragement to speak here. And I would like to do so with unadorned, naked words, words as childlike and disarmed as my sorrow" (200). However, immediately after this there is a self-conscious, searching turn: "Whom is one addressing at such a moment? And in whose name would one allow oneself to do so?" (200). The oration becomes a meditation on how to speak, at all, how to speak to Levinas, for Levinas, and ultimately a meditation on how to meditate.

> "Daft of him", Lenny says.
>
> Vic's gone quiet.
>
> "Crying shame", Lenny says. . . .
>
> Then Vic says, like it's a truth we're not up to grasping, that has to be broke gently, "If he was here, we wouldn't be, would we? It's because he's not that we are." . . .
>
> "If it weren't for him we wouldn't be here", Vince says. "We wouldn't be here without him", and he looks sort of snagged up by his own words. We're all looking snagged up, like everything means one thing and something else at the same time. (111)

In the last paragraph, Ray is unwittingly observing the melodramatic imagination at work; one of the characteristics of the melodramatic lies in its use of "the things and gestures of the real world, of social life, as kinds of metaphors that refer us to the realm of spiritual reality and latent moral meanings. Things cease to be merely themselves, gestures cease to be merely tokens of social intercourse whose meaning is assigned by a social code; they become the vehicles of metaphors whose tenor suggests another kind of reality" (Brooks 9). The melodramatic mode exists to articulate "the 'moral occult', the domain of spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality" (5). Hence, "everything means one thing and something else at the same time", especially in the spiritually pressing situation of discussing one's dead companions.

However, Brooks also draws a conclusion similar to Harold Schweizer's: "Words, however unrepressed and pure, however transparent as vehicles for the expression of basic relations and verities, appear to be not wholly adequate to the representation of meanings, and the melodramatic message must be formulated through other registers of the sign" (56). Significantly, *Last Orders* is the first novel of Swift's in which the narrator(s) spontaneously burst into tears in the novel's present. As significantly, keeping with the discussion of the fate of spirituality and sentimentality in contemporary Western society, they find it difficult to do so in public:

> I say, "I've got to take a leak."
>
> But it's not just to take a leak. I find the Gents and I unzip, then I feel my eyes go hot and gluey, so I'm leaking at both ends. . . . Some other punter comes in, a young feller, but I don't reckon he sees, or thinks twice if he does. Old men get pissy eyes. . . . Crying's like pissing. You don't want to get caught short, specially on a car journey. (111-12)

Similarly, when they have visited the war memorial at Chatham, Ray

observes that

> [Vince's] face is all fixed and distant as he comes towards us, like he wishes we weren't around.
>
> I'd say he's done blubbing too. We all need our moment. (140)

Suffering is expressed spontaneously by the body when it cannot—as it never quite can—find an outlet in language. Indeed, Vic, the undertaker, reveals that "[w]hat you learn in this business is how to keep your mouth shut" (213).

Our specific historical and geographical moment aside, death induces more time- and placeless confusions. Always and everywhere, it would seem, there are faces, masks, deaths and spirits or ghosts. In fact, it turns out, death does not constitute the final gaze of the other, but rather suspends the closing of the lids perpetually: throughout the novel the narrators, particularly Vince, show uncertainty as to whether Jack is not in fact watching them. When Vic claims that Jack would "be none the wiser . . . [i]f they scattered the ashes in the cemetery garden", Lenny reminds him that "wishes is wishes" and Vince objects: "How do we know he'd be none the wiser?" (29-30). When Lenny says he reckons "it was a try-on, just to see if we'd do it", Vince eagerly asks: "So you think he does know? You think he can see us?" (31). Similarly, when Ray explains his reasons for following his dead father's advice and getting a desk job, he claims that "it was partly the memory of him, as if he was watching" (38). The persistence of the dead is acknowledged yet again when Ray ponders whether his daughter, Susie, would come home from Australia to attend his funeral:

> But I aint going to see. It doesn't matter, it's immaterial, because I aint going to see. Unless it's true, like Vincey seems to think, that they're watching, the dead 'uns, so when I'm dead I'll be able to watch my own funeral. And they're watching us, even now, the old man, and Charlie Dixon and Vince's mum and dad, and Duke, and Jack here, peeping through the cardboard, and all the dead 'uns me and Jack and Lenny left behind in the war, lying in the desert . . . (77)

Here is the appropriate point at which to note that my use of the phrase "magical social realism" above was not just a quip. That it was, and is, not is firstly due to the fact that Jack narrates one chapter in a novel in which the chapters are laid out linearly, whether they narrate the events of the now or narrate reminiscences. Hence, there is no foundation for viewing Jack's voice as anything but the voice of a dead man. Secondly, the more subdued magical

realism of *Last Orders*, in which Jack is seemingly only imagined as sitting alive in his jar of ashes, serves that same "moral occult" which there is much reason to suspect that proper magical realism is meant to tap into. It is also unclear where the line between "seeming" and "actual" is to be drawn. For instance, when the bartender, Bernie, is presented with the jar of ashes, this is how Ray perceives his response:

> "That's Jack?" he says, leaning closer, as if the jar might answer back, it might say, "Hello Bernie."
> "Jesus God", Bernie says, "what's he doing here?" (10)

Likewise, when the four men get out of the car in Rochester to go to the pub, Ray has to point out that "[i]t don't seem right just to leave him there on the back seat, does it? . . . I mean, it don't seem right us going off and just leaving him on his own", to which Vince eventually responds, "You're right, Ray. He should come with us, shouldn't he?" (108). Later, when Vince and Lenny have had a fight over the jar at Wick's Farm, this is how Ray assesses the situation:

> It's like the reason we're out here in this field is because the jar's gone and made a bolt for it and we've had to run after it and catch it. . . . And the jar's sitting there in Vince's hands like it's shaking its head at us all, like Jack's inside there peeping out and sighing over us, with a bit of him left behind in the field for the sheep to trample on. He didn't expect this, he didn't expect this at all. (180)

Thirdly, throughout *Last Orders*, not only Jack and other "dead 'uns", but all sorts of others, including inanimate objects, assume the power of the gaze and the power of initiative. When the four men have mounted the hill in Chatham and can finally see the memorial, Ray feels that it is "like it's been waiting for us all along, expecting us, sticking up tall and white against the sky . . . It's as though the tower of the memorial is pulling us up towards it. . . . It looks like it's floating, because you can't see what it's attached to, like when you get near it, it might shift off somewhere else" (121-22). Later, "Vince looks up at the obelisk, all intent, as if it might do something sudden and he don't want to take his eyes off it" (134). When the men arrive in Canterbury, Ray concludes that "now we're here, with the cathedral just a few streets away hiding somewhere, like it's seen us if we aint seen it, it's too late to back out" (192), and he subsequently describes the cathedral in the following way: "It's a big building, long and tall, but it's like it hasn't stretched up yet to its full height, it's still growing. It makes the cathedral at

Rochester look like any old church and it makes you feel sort of cheap and titchy. Like it's looking down at you, saying, I'm Canterbury Cathedral, who the hell are you" (194). One is reminded of "Levinas's focus on shame as arising in the face of the Other who approaches one from a height" (Bernasconi 33).

For all the "likes" and "as ifs", the language in these passages is highly suggestive of some arcane order. Moreover, the language gradually becomes one of actuality rather than simile: leaving the cathedral, Ray states a *fact*: "I can feel the cathedral behind me, looking at me" (225). Likewise, when Ray recalls Jack's death-bed request that Ray bet a thousand pounds on a horse to secure Amy's future, he straightforwardly notes: "I kept not looking at the name looking up at me from the middle of the list for the three five" 232). The horse, Miracle Worker, implausibly wins, the odds being thirty-three to one; all of which—the horse's name, the odds, and the fact that the name *looks up* at Ray—suggests some sort of divine intervention. Our powers of suspending disbelief are thus severely tested, as is our assumption—were we under it—that *Last Orders* is a straightforwardly realist work of literature.

Importantly, Ray's winning bet is also the first of two instances in the novel of a kind of sentimental closure. The second, and ethico-spiritually more significant, of these two instances of closure comes at the very end of the novel. Indeed, *Last Orders* is arguably the most traditionally conclusive novel of Swift's yet. It ends in a kind of epiphany, an epiphany of the now, whereas all five previous novels end in riddle or find an epiphany only in the past. If there have always been traces of nihilism and postmodern play in Swift's novels, *Last Orders* is breathtakingly affirmative; it makes no excuses for itself, it does not provide any clear alibi of irony. The novel ends with Ray's realization that Jack is part of the four men on the pier, or that they are made of Jack, and that his death has provided a haven for their angers, fears and affections:

> Then I throw the last handful and the seagulls come back on a second chance and I hold up the jar, shaking it, like I should chuck it out to sea too, a message in a bottle, Jack Arthur Dodds, save our souls, and the ash that I carried in my hands, which was the Jack who once walked around, is carried away by the wind, is whirled away by the wind till the ash becomes wind and the wind becomes Jack what we're made of. (294-95)

Notwithstanding the Cockney grammar, the final phrase is mystical and tantalizing, graspable on an intuitive and emotional rather than on a rational level. It speaks for interconnection with and responsibility for, as well as to,

the other—even beyond death, or *particularly* in death.[21] Given the setting, it also seems a riposte to T.S. Eliot's famous lines, "On Margate sands. I can connect / Nothing with nothing" (from *The Waste Land*). We have moved from modernist disillusion to postmodernist re-enchantment, then: Ray is rather connecting everything with everything. Intertexts aside, Ray's last words—although attributing those words to a single subject somewhat belies their meaning—also has affinities with what Winfried Fluck identifies as "one of the greatest achievements of sentimental fiction, its successful transformation of the conventional view of death as an instance of irreversible separation to its redefinition as a promise of a finally indissoluble union" (19). This is typical of the deathbed scenes found in the literature that Herget and Fluck identify as sentimental, the classical example of which is Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*.

In connection with this issue of indissoluble union, I would like to recall Otto Friedrich Bollnow's contention that "out of an attitude of 'devoted absorption' might spring 'other and deeper' ways of cognition" in which "the boundaries between subject and object become blurred" (Buchwald 48). This is precisely what happens at the end of *Last Orders*: "The sky and the sea and the wind are all mixed up together", says Ray, "but I reckon it wouldn't make no difference if they weren't because of the blur in my eyes" (294). As we can see, the boundaries between elements in what is conceived as the outside world begin to blur. Moments after this, Ray can no longer tell where he and the other men on the pier end and Jack begins and vice versa. This moment is of course also a moment of suffering, and, as Schweizer argues, the moment of suffering also dissolves boundaries. In this moment of devoted absorption and suffering, then, like Bollnow, Swift "sets faith against doubt, trust against *angst*, harmony against split, absorption against dominance" (Buchwald 48). Importantly, Ray's kenotic moment is not a cosmic moment, but decidedly local and, we may suppose, transient; the moment is firmly anchored in the sand and sea at Margate and cast in Ray's Cockney tongue: "Jack what we're made of".

So death—*a* death—takes on *a* spiritual and ethical meaning in the lives of the Bermondsey people in *Last Orders*. By way of implication, however, in the carrying out of Jack Dodd's last orders that he be scattered in the sea, it also takes on a more general spiritual meaning. Geno-mythologically, death may be envisioned as a return to the primordial ocean. Jack is scattered in the sea. When death is made into a return to the ocean,

[21] It may also be seen as a subtle metafictional moment: indeed, Jack is the occasion of the whole narrative, he is what brings the other characters into being. The narrative revolves around his ashes, which, enclosed in the jar, provide a centre, and when they are scattered, the centre dissolves, and with it the narrative and the characters.

whence we all presumably came originally, we are reaching a more grand spiritual scale, one that simultaneously relativizes the individual and offers it a place in the more abstract community of "mankind" and that thus holds the potential of a sentimentalization of human qua human. This grand scale was established in *Waterland*, which ends with Dick Crick diving into the river Ouse, "[o]beying instinct. Returning. The Ouse flows to the sea . . ." (357). Indeed, when they arrive at Margate and step out of the car, Ray gathers that the air "smells like something you remember, like the seaside you remember, except *I never got taken to no seaside*. . . . It smells like memory itself . . . " (287; emphasis mine).[22] If one was tempted, then, to read Ray's final, kenotic moment in the Kristevan terms of regression to a pre-linguistic, infant state "of bodily drives, pulsations, and integration with the mother and the world" (Noble 69), Ray's musings on the seaside rather suggest a reading in Jungian terms of the archetypal and the collective unconscious, and perhaps also in Deleuze-Guattarian, anti-Oedipal terms of not the pre-individual and its mother—which all the same inscribes individuality and self-sameness into the matrix of psychological being—but of multiplicity, the many rather than the one.[23] Thus, *Last Orders* brings both particular and universal spiritualities and sentimentalities into play, neither questioning nor endorsing them, but displaying them with but the slightest trace of irony—and then not the irony of knowing, but the irony of not knowing, of unknowing.

Lest we forget, *Last Orders* is also about life and the living, and the mode, or mood, of the sentimentum finds its way into that sphere too. Interestingly, while Jack's death provides a space for reconciliation and meaning and Jack himself even narrates a chapter seemingly from beyond the grave, emphasizing his "life-in-death",[24] the life of one of the other characters in the novel is "death-in-life" and this character never utters one word. This character is Jack's and Amy's daughter, June, a child with a dysfunctional brain and a child of silence. We may thus compare *Last Orders* to Jenny Diski's novel *Like Mother*, where we find a child without a brain but with a voice. Such Diskian improbabilities, such ontological play, are foreign to Swift, and quite foreign to the aesthetics of the sentimentum, which finally

[22] The significance of the sea in the novel is emphasized by the second reference of the novel's epigraph: "I Do Like to Be Beside the Seaside", the popular song penned by John A. Glover-Kind in 1909.

[23] Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari bring attention to the question of the one and the many as a bone of contention between Freud and Jung, as they recount how "[o]nce Jung had a dream about bones and skulls. A bone or a skull is never alone. Bones are a multiplicity. But Freud wants the dream to signify the death of *someone*. 'Jung was surprised and pointed out that there were several skulls, not just one. Yet Freud still . . .'" (*Plateaus* 30; the quote is from E.A. Bennet, *What Jung Really Said* (New York: Schocken), 74).

[24] Cf. Unwin in *Ever After*.

relies on a certain degree of realism. Nevertheless, June's nothingness, her silence, plays a sentimental part, for it is the silence of affection. It is affection, if it is there to begin with, holding its tongue. What June specifically does not say, what her mother is longing to hear her say, is "Mum" (274)—only once, as a communication of affection and some sense of connection; in effect, "I love you", that most bleached, worn out utterance, the precise statement that Umberto Eco argues requires irony and circumstance to be possible in our time. Love and affection are also fraught with suffering, which, if we follow Schweizer's reasoning, would give an alternative explanation for the need for circumstance. Indeed, June's silence of affection even makes it impossible for Jack to visit her in the nursing home; "*Best thing we can do, Ame, is forget all about her*", he tells his wife (253). In the end, Amy too visits June for the very last time, saying "Goodbye" (278). It would seem that in Levinasian or Derridean terms—indeed in any terms—Amy commits an unethical act when she turns her back on June only because June is incapable of reciprocating any actions or feelings; the ethical act would consist precisely in giving *without* expecting reciprocation. Still, if an act is only truly ethical when directed at someone we do not expect anything back from, that order of things depends on the potential of reciprocation. With June, there is no such potential. Loving June perhaps cannot be ethical, since one *knows* that she will give nothing back. And June perhaps cannot be an ethical being, since she cannot give. All the same, Amy's act is profoundly *un*sentimental.

However, Jack's final act, as we learn from Amy's recollections, is deeply sentimental, constituting a strange kind of atonement. The reason for Jack's wanting his ashes to be thrown off the pier at Margate is that once, when June was young, he threw a teddy bear, which although it may not have been directly meant for her inescapably brought her to his mind, into the sea off the Jetty. Having won the teddy bear at a game of pot-shots, Amy and Jack walk out to the end of the Jetty (which has since disappeared), and as Amy stoops down to fix a strap on her new shoes, she hands the teddy bear to Jack:

> And I think even as I handed it to him I knew what he was going to do. There he was for a moment, a grown man, on the end of a pier, holding a teddy bear, a man on the end of a pier. He looked at it for an instant like he didn't know why he was holding it, like he didn't know what it had to do with him. Then he stepped nearer the railings. And then there wasn't any teddy bear, there was just Jack. Goodbye Jack. (255)

The words "Goodbye Jack" imply that Jack's action provoked a romantic

separation, but they also instantly connect the event to Jack's own farewell gesture. That gesture can, however, not mean anything to June, but it does show that June meant something to Jack. And perhaps it is this acknowledgement on the part of Jack that releases Amy from fifty years of solitary responsibility, that releases her from her own prolonged and somehow pointless acknowledgement.

We may pursue the significance (or in-significance) of June further by noting that she is an exemplar of one of the stock characters of melodrama: the mute.[25] Like Prentis's father in *Shuttlecock* and Sarah Atkinson in *Waterland*, to name but two obvious examples from Swift's oeuvre, June mocks the expectations of literature in general and of melodrama in particular: the expectations of expression. Having been born deprived of not only speech, but mind as well, June most clearly belongs to those characters "whose very physical presence evokes the extremism and hyperbole of ethical conflict and manichaeistic struggle" (Brooks 56). Of all Swift's characters, June is perhaps the most troubling: a sound- and gestureless, and hence seemingly soulless, body, she induces a kind of gnostic dread, and all the more so for her being the daughter of a butcher in a narrative the epicentre of which is the Smithfield meat market. She is a being, and she does have a face, though, and therefore she is also the riddle of the other incarnate; perhaps the riddle of Being incarnate; even the void that stares back at you. In the most overtly Levinasian moment of the novel, Vic the undertaker explains that to him, who deals with the dead every day, "it's the living who are strangers, it's the living whose shapes you can't ever guess" (216). June is the hyperbolic illustration of this point. She does not ask anything. You cannot ask her anything. Yet she is there; or ~~is there~~. Without voice, without body language, without signification; yet with significance: signifying precisely nothing. Whereas the silences of Prentis's father in *Shuttlecock* and of Sarah Atkinson in *Waterland* never cease to be cast in the sentimental terms of the hope of revelation—and not just any revelation, but that of the actual truth of the past and that of the future, respectively—June is finally beyond the hope of utterance as invested with deliverance and redemption. If twentieth century philosophies of language have taught us that all that there may be is *vox, et praeterea nihil*, then June is plain *nihil*—nothing, nothingness. She is the black hole that threatens to swallow

[25] "The mute role is remarkably prevalent in melodrama", according to Brooks (56). Brooks makes the following, very illuminating, observation: "[T]he different kinds of drama have their corresponding sense deprivations: for tragedy, blindness, since tragedy is about insight and illumination; for comedy, deafness, since comedy is concerned with problems in communication, misunderstandings and their consequences; and for melodrama, muteness, since melodrama is about expression" (57).

the sentimental light of the novel, and hence also a most radical device for keeping the sentimental imagination in check.[26]

We begin now to perceive a tension in *Last Orders*: the sentimental and melodramatic impulses must be balanced; the sentimentum can only prosper under the auspices of a postmodern imagination. In this tension, form expectedly also plays a major part. As I have already signalled, there is an important difference in *Last Orders* to Swift's other novels. This difference has the form of a conspicuous absence: there is no overt double-bind, no ironic alibi. Thus, the promises of the final chapter of *Ever After*, in which postmodern devices were marginalized, are fulfilled. In *Last Orders* Swift puts into unashamed practice the poetics Unwin elaborated in *Ever After*: "[T]he most tired and worn (and bitterest) thoughts . . . return to us, in another's words, like some redeeming balm" (*EA* 71). The vernacular prose of *Last Orders* has more in common with the poetry of Wordsworth or Robert Burns than that of Unwin's presumed ancestor Walter Raleigh, though. It is prose, however, and as such it compares better with the vernacular *tours de force* of the great American modernist, William Faulkner, than with romanticist verse, be it urban or rural.

Formally, *Last Orders* is on the surface a very typical modernist text. As mentioned above, it has a number of different first-person narrators narrating the "same" events, a technique made most famous perhaps by Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*. The novel is however also a quite obvious re-writing of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, which uses the multiple narrator technique within *one* novel in the same way as *Last Orders* does. *Last Orders* very elaborately mimics the motifs, themes, structure and formal aspects of Faulkner's novel: like *As I Lay Dying*, *Last Orders* is the tale of a funeral procession both fun and funereal, and it shares with Faulkner's novel the use of vernacular speech as well as the inclusion of a single sentence chapter, a chapter consisting of a list with numbered entries, as well as a chapter narrated by a dead person. In this elaborate appropriation and mimicry of an earlier text lies the aesthetic postmodernism of the novel. *Last Orders*, as all postmodernist art, asks of Ezra Pound, "Make *what* new?", and answers itself: "Make *the past* new!". In doing this, it attests to an awareness that the "literary work can actually no longer be considered original" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 126), and to the realization that, however "universal" and "timeless" a work may be, its themes may be forever re-inscribed in new forms, or new themes may be inscribed in its forms, or new particularities

[26] She is hardly alone in this respect, neither is she without real life counterparts: Hassan recounts of William James how "once he saw the abyss mirrored in the face of a poor epileptic in an asylum; the young man sat there, greenish of skin, 'moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human'. . . . There it was, the void incarnate . . ." ("The Expense" 16).

inscribed in its themes and forms, and so on. *Last Orders* inscribes new particularities in *As I Lay Dying*, and hence challenges the closure and autonomy of Faulkner's novel.[27] If the past, as the narrator of *Waterland* believes, "accumulates and impinges" (126) on the present, then postmodernist art reverses this order, making the present impinge on the past too. *Last Orders* re-shapes *As I Lay Dying*, suggesting that Faulkner's novel was expecting this re-writing, as well as countless others. In its attention to detail and its particularity of setting and vernacular speech, *Last Orders* turns Faulkner's mythical South into the working-class London of Bermondsey—or, *Last Orders* reclaims the working-class London of Bermondsey from its exclusion, its exclusion from *As I Lay Dying*.[28]

The formal mimicry of Faulkner's novel also renders *Last Orders* a double coded text: the novel becomes simultaneously a realist work of literature with a classical plot structure and without overt metafictional elements, and a text that flaunts its artificiality, its dependence on existing forms, and raises questions about representation and literary creation. The borrowing of Faulkner's form, then, serves to establish a framework into which the *fabula* of *Last Orders*, together with its themes and the mode of the sentimental, may be inserted with aesthetic success in our cultural environment. At the same time, *Last Orders* comes closest of all of Swift's novels to date to fulfilling that aesthetics of vulnerability which Swift himself has formulated.

However, even if the postmodernist formal devices of *Last Orders* serve the sentimentum, they do compromise the mode of vulnerability that Swift wishes to attain. The way Swift explains that mode, it would seem to require the return to an aesthetic innocence long lost, or to require a collective cultural amnesia. It is illuminating here to recall Schweizer's observation that "even if artistic representation is fundamentally attuned to the incommensurability of its cause, all art must lastly compromise the incomprehensible by transforming the formless into form and the unsharable truth of suffering into bearable fictions" (3). Swift's consciousness of form and his knowledge of what passes for Literature these days, indeed the *cleverness* we saw him renounce above, invade the fiction of *Last Orders*, invade the four men's sentimental journey—or, rather, sentimentum journey, journey of the sentimentum. Indeed, whereas Faulkner's novel could still hark back to a pastoral society and imagination, Swift's novel, as we have

[27] We should of course note that Faulkner himself was one of the first, if not the first, to challenge the closure and autonomy of the work by adding *Absalom, Absalom!* to *The Sound and the Fury*.

[28] Again, as in Levinas, the other is infinity. In this case, the other(s) of *As I Lay Dying*, that is, all its excluded possibilities, the number of possible *As I Lay Dying*s, are limitless.

seen, is resolutely urban and makes of Canterbury Cathedral and the Garden of England anachronisms stripped of much of their mythical force. Instead, "God", taken as the name of spirit and salvation, moves in consumerist ways: by the Dreamland amusement park at Margate and at the race track where Ray places his decisive bet. As Wheeler puts it, it is from Dreamland's "tacky fantasy of the pleasures of mass consumption, rather than from the cathedral mass at Canterbury, that symbolic salvation must be found" and "[t]he Miracle Worker in this novel is the name of an outsider running at 33-1" (77). Thus, as ironies abound, so do inklings of a theology that places God not just in the everyday, but in the commodification of everyday life. Instead of the sentimentality of the death-bed scene or of the country graveyard, we encounter the sentimentality of ashes from a plastic jar blowing in over a Ferris wheel. If Swift cannot write a sentimental journey, then, he can still try to make us acknowledge through our postmodern haze the reality of spirit, sentiment and ethics, as these re-emerge in the guise of the sentimentum.

Conclusion: Reading Swift, Re-reading Postmodernist Fiction

> Every work of art is the child of its age and, in many cases, the mother of our emotions.
> —Wassily Kandinsky

From a novel that begins in enigma and ends with death, to a novel that begins with death and ends in epiphany, Graham Swift's oeuvre moves toward a sense of affirmation tenable, one might even say endurable, in our postmodern clime. It remains to be seen whether the next step in Swift's literary production will be a reversal in turn, a new kind of embarkment, or a move further in the same direction. The only piece of fiction by Swift published since *Last Orders* is the somewhat grotesque yet sentimental short story "Our Nicky's Heart", published in *Granta* in the spring of 2000. That story indicates to me that Swift is much more accomplished as a novelist than as a short story writer, and that for a sentimental narrative to be palatable to a postmodern taste, it must be self-conscious, ironic and dialogic. "Our Nicky's Heart" is none of these things, and hence does not succeed quite like Swift's last three or four novels.[1]

Whatever the current drift of Swift's literary production may be, though, my argument that we may trace an ever more affirmative pronunciation of the sentimentum in Swift's fiction holds for the six novels of his published so far. My argument would also, for what it is worth, seem to be congenial with Swift's own literary intentions or wishes; in a discussion with Catherine Bernard about truth in fiction, Swift concludes that "much more important for me is the emotional side of fiction. Whether or not they can say they've discovered some truth by reading my book, I want my readers to have had an *experience*, I want them to be emotionally involved. If it's not about truth, then fiction is about compassion" ("Graham Swift" 13).

However, while my endeavour to establish and work with the concept of the sentimentum may have been sparked by an interest in Swift, it is an endeavour that reaches farther than a single author's oeuvre. A larger and more general ambition takes hold. To rephrase what I said in the introduction, it is not my view that Swift's fictions seminally open up postmodernism to

[1] I should note, however, that Swift's brief memoir of Ted Hughes, "Fishing, Writing, and Ted", published in *Granta* in the spring of 1999, is a *tour de force* of extracting poignancy from real life experiences.

considerations of sentimentality, but rather that they draw our attention to the sentimentality that may be, and indeed has been, housed in postmodernism. Swift's novels are not alone in accommodating the sentimental in the form of the sentimentum in postmodernist fiction. Yet, at first glance, it may seem that most other writers of postmodernist fiction are still caught up in more overt ironies and double binds than Swift is. To modify this view, in what follows I take a brief, suggestive rather than exhaustive, look at a few British postmodernist novels published in the last fifteen years or so, that is, in the same period in which we may begin to trace the emergence of an aesthetics of vulnerability in Swift. The novels in question are Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger* and Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*. Bringing in two female authors, as well as one novel with a narrator clearly gendered as feminine and one novel with a narrator of uncertain gender identity, I approach the issue of the sentimentum vis-à-vis gender(ing). After this discussion, I touch briefly upon issues of class and cultural identity, and also broaden the field of vision to include postcolonial literature in English (or "post-Commonwealth literature") and American fiction.

Let me say from the start, though, that it is British postmodernist fiction that seems to me most hospitable to the sentimentum. This probably has to do with the sustained relationship said fiction has to the British tradition of the realist sentimental novel of the Victorian period. As Malcolm Bradbury observes of British fiction of the eighties, which mark the beginning of the period of interest to me here, "[t]here was indeed some sign of a return to traditional forms, to a conventionalized literariness, to a fiction of pure historical recreation or sentimental nostalgia" (*Modern* 406). Importantly, as Bradbury suggests, "it was less that novelists were returning to the fictional verities of the past than making the relations of past and present narratives a matter for self-conscious literary examination" (406). In discussing the relation between the postmodern novel and the Victorian novel, Bradbury even hazards that contemporary writers "see some continued if perhaps tricky connection between the age of Dickensian fogs and Darwinian crises and the nuclear age, the age of postmodern absurdity and the *nouveau roman*" (5).

Bradbury's suggestions are at least valid for Julian Barnes's novel of 1984, *Flaubert's Parrot*, the novel I would like to discuss now. Barnes's novel is indeed a meditation on the great French arch-modernist and contemporary of the Victorian novelists, a meditation on the latter half of the nineteenth century as it was perceived by Flaubert and on the sustained merits of those perceptions. It is also a postmodernist rewriting of *Madame Bovary*, the narrator being a medical doctor whose adulterous wife has died

shortly after a failed suicide attempt. Thus, it is indeed a case of making the relations of past and present narratives a matter for self-conscious literary examination. It is a complex novel, thematically and formally rich, but here I want to focus on its striking employment of sentimentality, both as a term and as a lived mode of affect. Most conspicuously, the narrative presents throughout a quite negative attitude to the word "sentimental" and its cognates. To begin with, the narrator Geoffrey Braithwaite notes early in the narrative that "all that remains of [Flaubert] is paper" and that "[t]his, as it happens, is precisely what he would have wanted; it's only his admirers who sentimentally complain" (2). Not much later, Braithwaite considers his quest for the parrot that Flaubert kept on his writing desk during the composition of *Un Cœur Simple*, and asks: "Is a reader wrong—worse, sentimental—to think of that parrot at the Hôtel Dieu as an emblem of the writer's voice?" (12). In similar fashion, discussing the use of coincidences in fiction (to which Ray's winning bet in *Last Orders* would belong), Braithwaite argues that "there's something cheap and sentimental about the device" (71). More flippantly, tackling the accusation that Flaubert was a misanthrope, Braithwaite retorts: "He loved his mother: doesn't that warm your silly, sentimental, twentieth-century heart?" (149). However, there is a slippage at the end, in which Braithwaite implicates himself in the sin of sentimentalism: learning that Flaubert had returned the parrot lent to him by the museum, Braithwaite states: "I felt vaguely disappointed. I had always sentimentally assumed—without proper reason—that the parrot had been found among the writer's effects after his death" (222). Moreover, for all his pejorative uses of the word, Braithwaite is in practice quite sentimental and sentimentalizing. The novel thus becomes a kind of treatise on the to-be-or-not-to-be of sentimentality.

Flaubert's Parrot, then, is also a meditation on sentimentality, as well as on suffering and on mourning, that of Flaubert and that of Braithwaite. The commonplace notion of Flaubert as disempassioned stylist and cynical ironist is countered by accounts of the Flaubert who lived, who loved, who suffered and who mourned his family and friends. Braithwaite, for his part, is mourning his dead wife, Ellen, trying to come to terms with her suicide attempt, with her subsequent death and with the fact that she was sexually promiscuous during long stretches of their marriage. The issue of Ellen is however continually dodged by Braithwaite, who resorts to ellipses and postponements when she comes to his mind: "My wife . . . died" (3); "I loved her, but I never deceived myself. I remember . . . But I'll keep that for another time" (82); "My wife . . . Not now, not now" (120). When he does get to what he calls the "pure story" of his wife, in chapter thirteen, the chapter still seems to offer more insight into the life of Flaubert than that of

Ellen, and he concludes that his wife is "someone I understand less well than a foreign writer dead for a hundred years" (201). Braithwaite's discourse, then, is marked by the stutters and false-starts we have seen are characteristic of suffering and mourning in the narrators of Swift's novels. Moreover, similarly to some of Swift's narrators, as well as to theorists such as Kristeva and Schweizer, Braithwaite himself explains his silence by claiming that "[t]he words aren't the right ones; or rather, the right words don't exist. . . . You talk, and you find the language of bereavement foolishly inadequate. You seem to be talking about other people's griefs" (191). Indeed, Braithwaite is talking about other people's griefs: those of Flaubert and those of Louise Colet, Flaubert's mistress. Thus, the reader may well suspect that the discourse on Flaubert that constitutes the main part of the novel and which is marked by uncertainties about, and critiques of, notions of truth, authenticity, centre and ethical justification, is really a projection off the issue of Ellen onto the issue of Flaubert—a kind of sublimation.

At any rate, Braithwaite's is a sentimental project, a project of care for but also obsession with an author who expressly wanted posterity to forget all about him. By examining Flaubert's letters, notes and *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas*, but also his novels, short stories and plays, as well as what his friends, lovers and critics said of him, Braithwaite seeks to reconstruct the width and complexity of the artist, rescuing him from facile critiques and commonplace notions. In a sense, then, Braithwaite is trying to offer sayings that will pierce and disrupt the said. However, as the epigraph of the novel, taken from a letter from Flaubert to Ernest Feydau, makes clear, there is a more obsessive, possessive and violent aspect to Braithwaite's undertaking: "When you write the biography of a friend, you must do it as if you were taking *revenge* for him" (vii). Hence, the novel becomes a posing of the *problem* of engagement: where does it cease being a disinterested caress and become a subjective investment in the other, or even an usurpation of the other, an active taking of the other as hostage rather than letting oneself be the other's hostage? There is a vacillation between caress and violation, both in Braithwaite and in Flaubert; or, rather, there is a vacillation between representations of Flaubert and self-representations of Braithwaite as either tender and sentimental or harsh and cynical. For instance, Braithwaite recalls "Lemot's famous cartoon of Flaubert dissecting Emma Bovary. It shows the novelist flourishing on the end of a large fork the dripping heart he has triumphantly torn from his heroine's body. He brandishes the organ aloft like a prize surgical exhibit, while on the left of the drawing the feet of the recumbent, violated Emma are just visible" (7). At the same time, in the very novel which Lemot thus lambastes for lack of sentimental care, and in the face of all the criticism that pins Flaubert down as a cynical stylist, Flaubert writes what Braithwaite

refers to as "his sad definition": "'Language is like a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, while all the time we long to move the stars to pity'" (11). This vacillation, or dual nature, of Flaubert's is succinctly summarized in the chapter where Braithwaite imagines Louise Colet speaking of her long-lost lover: "He was rough, awkward, bullying and haughty; then he was tender, sentimental, enthusiastic and devoted" (177). Braithwaite, for his part, tries to adopt the cosmopolitan irony of Flaubert, displaying the kind of flippancy, self-contradiction and teasing found in the *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas*; he even presents, in chapter twelve, his own *Dictionary*. Ultimately, though, he seems sentimentally involved, championing an ethics of engagement and love:

> [Ellen] didn't ever search for that sliding panel which opens the secret chamber of the heart, the chamber where memory and corpses are kept. Sometimes you find the panel, but it doesn't open; sometimes it opens, and your gaze meets nothing but a mouse skeleton. But at least you've looked. That's the real distinction between people: not between those who have secrets and those who don't, but between those who want to know everything and those who don't. This search is a sign of love, I maintain. (148)

However, trying to know everything is, as we have seen in Swift's *Shuttlecock* for instance, a misguided effort. Like Prentis in *Shuttlecock*, though, Braithwaite seems to reach at the end of the novel an exit from the maddening and hopeless quest for truth; arriving at the end of the search that has animated his narrative, the search for the stuffed parrot which Flaubert kept at his writing desk during the composition of *Un Cœur Simple* and which figures in Braithwaite's narrative as a symbol for truth and authenticity, he is shown the three remaining parrots at the museum of Rouen, only to conclude in a shrug-of-the-shoulders tone: "Perhaps it was one of them" (229). Melancholy obsession and monomania seem to have lost their grip on him, and so the narrative stops. What level of happiness ensues we do not know, but at least redemption seems possible.

A similar, but also in many respects different, interweaving of past and present in the form of historiographic metafiction is found in Penelope Lively's 1987 Booker Prize winner, *Moon Tiger*. Like most of Swift's narrators, at least from Tom Crick onwards, as well as like Barnes's Geoffrey Braithwaite, Lively's Claudia Hampton is an ironic, wry and flippant narrator. Claudia is an historian, of the self-conscious, narrativist type, and so she notes all the problems and cruxes of composing history, which is always histor*ies* in the plural, and which must deal with the fact that there is always

that which is exterior to it. Lying in a hospital bed, suffering from a terminal illness, Claudia contemplates writing a history of the world that would really be the full story: "from the mud to the stars, universal and particular, your story and mine" (1). As Claudia observes, though, "[w]e all look differently at it. My Victorians are not your Victorians. My seventeenth century is not yours. The voice of John Aubrey, of Darwin, of whoever you like, speaks in one tone to me, in another to you. . . . The lives of others slot into my life: I, me, Claudia H." (2). At this point, Claudia stops to consider her perspective: "Self-centred? Probably. Aren't we all?" (2). However, her narrative becomes an illustration of the limits of one's self-centring and an illustration of the inescapable impingement of other selves, other narratives, on one's own. "My story is tangled with the stories of others", Claudia notes (5), "[s]o, since my story is also theirs, they too must speak—Mother, Gordon, Jasper . . . Except that of course I have the last word. The historian's privilege" (6). The thing is, though, that she does not have the last word—the novel ends with a third-person narration of her death:

> It is late afternoon. Claudia lies with her eyes closed; she breathes loudly, an irregular rasping that makes the bed from which it comes the focal point of the room, though there is no one but Claudia to be aware of this. . . .
>
> The sun sinks . . . The room darkens again. Presently it is quite dim . . . And within the room a change has taken place. It is empty. Void. . . . No life. Something creaks; the involuntary sound of expansion or contraction. Beyond the window a car starts up, an aeroplane passes overhead. The world moves on. And beside the bed the radio gives the time signal and a voice starts to read the six o'clock news. (207-8)

Here lies the most difficult and vexing aspect of the novel: the novel starts and ends with a third-person perspective and throughout shifts between Claudia's first-person narration and third-person narrations with shifting focalizers, as well as free indirect narration. There is much reason to view all these various narrative modes as issuing from Claudia, as she states explicitly from the outset that she will let various voices be heard. However, if this is the case, then how do we interpret the concluding passage of the novel? As *post mortem*, out-of-body narration? Or as the point at which we must renegotiate the whole narrative and view it as consisting of disparate voices that result in a mode of dramatic irony, much as in Swift's *Out of This World*? The last passage thus serves as a device for radical indeterminacy and othering. If we view the whole novel as Claudia's narrative, then it undoubtedly constitutes a death-bed realization of the sentimentum: Claudia

explodes subjectivity, projecting other voices, decentring her self, reaching a level of intersubjective sentimentality. If, on the other hand, we view it as an ironic blending of autonomous points of view, then the sentimentum is realized on a "hypertextual" level: the reader of the novel is left to balance and evaluate the voices, and to see the cracks in Claudia's representations of others and in others' representations of her. Claudia's narrative complacency is challenged, for instance, in a passage where Claudia's daughter Lisa is the focalizer and silently addresses to her mother what is all but a blunt metafictional comment: "You are not, as you think, omniscient. You do not know everything; you certainly do not know me. You judge and pronounce" (56). It cuts both ways, though: Lisa certainly does not know her mother. "[W]e all survive in the heads of others . . . appallingly misrepresented", Claudia notes (125), and the novel illustrates this misrepresentation, for instance, in a passage where Lisa speculates, about her mother, that "very likely she has never loved anyone" (124). This passage is deeply ironic, for at the root of Claudia's detachment and cool, as in the narrators of Swift and Barnes, lies a trauma, a suffering, a loss. As Claudia acknowledges, "[n]ot even the most maverick historian—myself, perhaps—would deny that the past rests upon certain central and indisputable facts. So does life; it has its core, its centre" (70).

The core, or centre, of Claudia's life, we learn after much circumstance and displacement or deferral, is Tom, the great love of her life whom she met in Egypt during the Second World War: "I know how I felt—richer, happier, more alive than ever before or ever since" (73). She gets pregnant by Tom. However, she finds happiness only to find Tom lost in battle and the baby lost in a miscarriage. Like Tom Crick, then, Claudia finds out that "history is true and . . . unfortunately you are part of it" (103). This "unfortune" dissolves rationality and scepticism and opens the cynical and agnostic Claudia up to sentimentality and spirituality:

> First there is disbelief, resolute disbelief. No, it is not possible. Not him. Others but not him. And there is hope because missing does not necessarily mean killed, missing men turn up—wounded, taken prisoner. Or they walk in out of the desert days later, unscathed; Cairo is full of such tales.
>
> Hope becomes endurance . . . with this hollow ache within, this tumbling down a cliff-face of fear each time you allow yourself to think, to remember.
>
> Praying. Praying shamefaced in the Cathedral. (127)

In the face of all this sorrow, *Moon Tiger* is also a testimony to the redemption of time. While time does not heal all wounds, it transforms grief

and suffering into poignancy, into emotions recollected in some degree of tranquillity: "It is like travel. You journey from the event and as it becomes more distant it becomes less potent and more poignant, like a remembered home. As the weeks go by the knife turns differently" (130). And yet trauma must forever be worked upon; it cannot be hemmed in by narrative or dissolved by one's changing the topic of conversation: "It is not that [Tom] is ever forgotten, but mostly emotion lies dormant; it lies quiet, biding its time. And then every so often something brings it raging forth, and she is back, . . . back in that Cairo summer, back with the raw new truth of it" (150).

The novel ends, however, on an affirmative and sentimental note, narrating Claudia's final moment as one of spiritual elation, approximating perhaps bliss:

> And then the rain stops. Gradually, the room is filled with light; the bare criss-crossing branches of the tree are hung with drops and as the sun comes out it catches the drops and they flash with colour—blue, yellow, green, pink. . . . Claudia gazes at this; it is as though the spectacle has been laid on for her pleasure and she is filled with elation, a surge of joy, of well-being, of wonder. (207)

The success of this passage depends, though, on the subsequent, very last words of the novel: "The world moves on. And beside the bed the radio gives the time signal and a voice starts to read the six o'clock news" (208). Sentimentality and closure are relativized—Claudia or no Claudia, the world moves on; for all the local, temporary bursts of harmony, the six o'clock news keep charting a world of suffering and loss.

Loss is indeed what animates Jeanette Winterson's novel of 1992, *Written on the Body*. "Why is the measure of love loss?" is the somewhat sentimental question that opens the narrative (9). What takes place through the narrative's intertextual play and ironic juxtapositions, after its initial displays of cynicism and disillusion, is an attempt at recovering from loss and at recovering what one has lost: the loss and the lost of love. *Written on the Body* is, like *Moon Tiger*, a tale of losing the love of one's life, and as in Lively's novel, what hides underneath the cynicism and the irony is trauma, suffering, remorse: as the narrator remarks, "[t]he hard-bounded space hides the vulnerable self" (120). Indeed, even the title of the novel suggests the vulnerability of the body laid bare to wounding, to corporeal inscription. Thus, the title also breaks down the barrier between textuality and corporeality—writing is here not simply a closed system, but may affect the body; word and flesh are wedded; there is no outside text. What has been lost has also left its mark, its trace, on the sentimental body, which laid itself bare

to inscription by the other in its longing for sentimental union.

For the novel is also a kind of postmodern *Bildungsroman*, charting the movement of the unnamed, ungendered and bisexual narrator beyond the drudgery of promiscuity and adultery, beyond amorous bondage, toward the unknown, the impossible, the always yet-to-come: true engagement, the risking of oneself. The disruption of drudgery and disillusion is Louise, who is "intense and beyond common sense" (91) and who incidentally states that "[i]ts the clichés that cause the trouble" (155), a kind of Levinasian statement which is adopted by the narrator. Louise awakens in the narrator "the hope of a saint in a coracle", the faith, but not the certainty, of finding "another place uncharted and unseen" (80), a place beyond clichés, beyond a residing in the said. Louise has "set before [the narrator] a space uncluttered by association" (81). Such a space, the narrator notes, "might be a void or it might be a release" (81), but if one dares risking oneself, one's self, then "a further intimacy may begin, the recognition of another person that is deeper than consciousness" (82).

Written on the Body, however, turns into an elegy on the loss of that *Viens!* (to adopt the prayer of the more recent Derrida), the loss of that amazing grace. The narrator finds out from Louise's husband that Louise has leukaemia. The husband happening to be a specialist in the field, he convinces the narrator that Louise will be better off left to his expertise and care. Deciding that it is better to be apart from Louise knowing that she might be saved, the narrator writes a goodbye-note to Louise and disappears without a trace. Subsequently reconsidering, s/he is unable to find Louise, who has equally disappeared without a trace.

And so the narrator is left to seek to recover from loss and to seek to recover what she has lost. As in Swift, Barnes and Lively, we are faced with the subject suffering from history and suffering in history: the narrator notes "how easy it is to destroy the past and how difficult to forget it" (17). Buying a bicycle because s/he "wanted to be too exhausted to think", she discovers that "[s]till every turn of the wheel was Louise" (107). Thus, like Tom Crick in *Waterland*, s/he attempts "to go back to where things went wrong. Where I went wrong" (17). In the process, s/he also tries to recover, to salvage, the saying of love from the said: following Barthes and Eco, the narrator notes that "'I love you' is always a quotation", but also, like Barthes in the *Fragments*, that "[l]ove demands expression" (9). Consequently, s/he proceeds to compose, again like Barthes, an affirmation, a lover's discourse that "unsays" love. As s/he states, "I don't want to reproduce, I want to make something entirely new" (108). The entirely new being difficult to produce, particularly in language, the lover's discourse oscillates between clichés ("I did not know this much happiness was possible" (105)) and unexpected

observations and imagery (as in the reversal "Burst figs are the livid purple of your skin" (124)), in what is an obvious rewriting of the Song of Solomon. As in all postmodernist discourses, the said, the already said, must be heeded and then disrupted from within. Thus, through a discourse which, figuratively, dismembers the body of the loved one in order to map and know it, and which we recognize from both the Song of Solomon and from Petrarch, the narrator moves toward a realization of the limits of possession and knowledge: "I know how your hair tumbles from its chignons and washes your shoulders in light. I know the calcium of your cheekbones. I know the weapon of your jaw. I have held your head in my hands *but I have never held you. Not you in your spaces, spirit, electrons of life*" (120; emphasis mine). The desire for possession and halt may take hold: "I cannot allow you to develop, you must be a photograph not a poem" (119). However, the realization of time, of passing, of eruption, of contingency, in all its sadness, follows:

> You were milk-white and fresh to drink. Will your skin discolour, its brightness blurring? Will your neck and spleen distend? Will the rigorous contours of your stomach swell under an infertile load? It may be so and the private drawing I keep of you will be a poor reproduction then. It may be so but if you are broken then so am I. (125)

Still, the novel ends happily, sentimentally even, although the ending is ambiguous: "From the kitchen door Louise's face. Paler, thinner, but her hair still mane-wide and the colour of blood. I put out my hand and felt her fingers, she took my fingers and put them to her mouth. The scar under the lip burned me. Am I stark mad? She's warm" (190). Does the narrator hallucinate, or dream, is she "stark mad", or does Louise really return, and if so will she live? The very last sentence hints at both uncertainty and promise: "I don't know if this is a happy ending but here we are let loose in open fields" (190). Here, the reader's sentimental temperament and abilities of suspending disbelief decide which reading of the ending may be operational. *Written on the Body* thus challenges us, not only, as has so thoroughly been noted, in terms of gender, but also in terms of sentimentality, in terms of the sentimentum.

With *Written on the Body* I inescapably come to the issue of gender and gendering. Since sentimentality and sensibility have traditionally been gendered as feminine, it is of course of some importance to consider what

gendering the sentimentum assumes.[2] Yet, we must note that, even in the eighteenth century, sensibility and sentimentality were held up as ideals for men too, as one can tell from MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, which, although it was satirical of the culture of feeling, advocated sensibility in its less extreme forms. All the same, if we consider sensibility, vulnerability and openness to the other, in their postmodern, Levinasian or post-Levinasian form, we must note that, as Gibson suggests, especially when "contrasted with the understanding of the term in the Eliotic and Leavisite traditions, Levinas's might indeed be thought of as a 'feminized' conception of sensibility. Insofar as it is made into an ethical value in literary criticism, it may also tend to privilege a canon of female writers" (168). However, I would add that when it comes to male writers of more recent generations, the crisis of masculinity and the subsequent renegotiation and reconstruction of male identities have resulted in literary representations that would contest a privileging of female writers in relation to sensibility.[3] Furthermore, as Gibson is quick to note, "there is an immediate danger, not only of hypostasizing sensibility as 'essentially female', but, in doing so, of confirming an order in which sensibility is likely to be proportional to powerlessness" (168). This point is elaborated upon by Gibson in his reading of the fiction of Jean Rhys: "Indeed, under patriarchy, it is never clear that the will to self-exposure is not in fact inverted power, power wedded to hopelessness and therefore issuing in a will to self-destruction" (169). Refusing this mode of binary thinking, though, Gibson is able to show that Rhys's fiction "keeps alive a version of the woman's story which recognizes how far sensibility, vulnerability, expenditure without reserve do not of themselves have to mean humiliation, exploitation and victimization" (173).[4] I would add to Gibson's assessment that a postmodern, Levinasian ethics of sensibility carries within it a hope for, if not reciprocity, then mutuality: one's

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[2] See G.J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* for a thorough account of the gendering of sensibility and sentimentality as feminine that took place throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as an account of the employment of the concepts and what they denoted by early women's rights thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft.

[3] One study that addresses the destabilization of masculine identity and its representation in literature is Danuta Fjellestad's *Eros, Logos, and (Fictional) Masculinity*, which presents readings of both modernist and postmodernist texts by male writers, including Swift's *Waterland*, with a focus on structures of desire. See also Ellen G. Friedman's "Where Are the Missing Contents?: (Post)Modernism, Gender, and the Canon", which, in a Lyotardian reading, argues that whereas the unpresentable in recent male texts is a stable patriarchal and paternal order, which is now "the no longer presentable", the unpresentable in female texts is "the not yet presented" (242), an "order" yet to come.

[4] See Marianne Noble's *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* for related observations of how sentimentality in nineteenth century female writers' texts usually entailed self-victimization.

invitation of the other may be disinterested (as far as one's self goes), but not indifferent to the nature of the other. As John Caputo argues, "[t]he notion of justice as *à-venir* refers structurally to the vulnerable; to the victim, not the producer of the victim. It would never be the case that the 'other' one to come would be Charles Manson, or some plunderer or rapist" ("Discussion" 131). In other words, if woman is cast in the position of the victim, her will to exposure does not entail the acceptance of victimhood or the invitation of the oppressor.

Moreover, if we still posit a distinction, as regards the sentimentum, between those narrators or characters gendered as feminine and those gendered as masculine, that distinction breaks down when we encounter *Written on the Body*. We may be tempted, because conditioned so, to read the discourse of the novel as feminine precisely because of its employment of the terms of sentimentality and sensibility. But the novel will not support such a reading. Furthermore, as we can tell from my readings of Swift and Barnes, the sentimentum decisively is at work in literary representations gendered as masculine. What has taken place, then, if it had not already, is a de-stabilization of gender differences as regards sentimentality and sensibility. If traces of an older dichotomy persist, they do so more as differences between individual characters and narrators, regardless of gender, than as firm, general differences between gender categories.

With this said about gender(ing), I would also like to consider the sentimentum in terms of class and cultural identity. One may induce from the novels I have presented here that representations of the sentimentum typically involve narrators and characters portrayed as intellectual and middle-class: Tom Crick is a history teacher, Harry Beech is a photo-journalist, Bill Unwin is a professor of literature, Geoffrey Braithwaite is a medical doctor with a literary interest, Claudia Hampton is an historian and the narrator of *Written on the Body* is a translator of Russian. The only exception is *Last Orders*, in which the narrators are distinctly working class. Indeed, those narrators are the least self-conscious, ironic and allusive, which is why, I believe, they lend themselves to the aesthetics of vulnerability as formulated by Swift.

If one may say, then, without wishing to disregard difference and plurality, that the sentimentum is primarily part of a middle-class, intellectual identity, may one also say that it is primarily part of a Western European identity? I may approach this question by suggesting a few further novels by not only British, but also postcolonial or "post-Commonwealth", authors that I believe could fruitfully be examined in terms of the sentimentum. These include not only other novels by Barnes, Lively and Winterson, but also novels by Peter Ackroyd (especially *English Music*), A.S. Byatt (especially *Possession*), John Banville (especially *The Untouchable*), as well as novels

by Salman Rushdie, Ahdaf Soueif, Michael Ondaatje and Gerald Murnane. Not unexpectedly, as far as literature in English goes, the sentimentum may thus be found in novels by authors who, while they may have an "ex-centric" identity, have a Western, not to say British, education and a Western, not to say British albeit hybrid, identity.

However, it remains to look to the land "most west" and to note that the emergence of the sentimentum (and of a postmodernist aesthetics of vulnerability) need not be seen as a British post-imperial or post-Commonwealth phenomenon. While American postmodernist fiction seems to me less hospitable to the sentimentum, I wonder what would happen if one read, for instance, Paul Auster's *Leviathan*, John Updike's *Memories of the Ford Administration* and Don DeLillo's *Underworld* in terms of the concept. Most intriguingly, though, as Stephen Baker observes in his recent study *The Fiction of Postmodernity*, even the American master of the postmodernism of play and anti-realism, Thomas Pynchon, has in his latest novel, *Mason & Dixon*, constructed a postmodern realist narrative with a tinge of sentimentality—much to the consternation of critics. Some critics have been pleased with the development: Baker cites Jenny Turner's review in the *London Review of Books*, in which Turner writes that "[y]ou start the book bewildered, then slowly ease into its curious patternings of order and disorder. . . . By the time you get to the Talking Dog, your face will be cracking into the nicest of new-dawn smiles" (qtd. in Baker 129). Turner also, as Baker says, "contrasts Pynchon's 'usual weakness for lumbering his characters with gross-out names like Tyrone Slothrop or Hubert Stencil' with the status of Mason and Dixon as fully rounded and credible portraits of historical figures" (129). However, as Baker notes, "other commentators, more reluctant to be robbed of Pynchon as a postmodern icon . . . express some frustration at these celebrations of 'substantial' characters, the drawing of sympathetic and sometimes even 'heroic' figures in whose 'humanity' we can perhaps recognize our own" (129). Baker cites Stefan Mattessich, who complains that "[t]here seems to be little patience nowadays . . . for reflexive textual practices, for double and ironic anti-realist fabulations of the kind associated with Pynchon's early work" (Mattessich qtd. in Baker 130). As Baker's own reading of the novel shows, though, good old Pynchonianisms still abound: "The linguistic, punning playfulness that we would normally associate with Pynchon's writing remains a prominent feature of *Mason & Dixon*. Those self-reflexive, cartoonish elements of previous novels' characterisation and historical portraits are again stressed in Pynchon's most recent work" (133). Yet, as Baker stresses, "for all this postmodern, textual playfulness, there remains the scandal of the novel's depth of characterisation—at least to the extent of the two main protagonists. . . . [T]hese are

characters who engage readers on both intellectual and emotional levels, drawing us into precisely the sort of fantasies of emotional empathy that postmodern fiction was supposed to have rendered irrelevant, if not ridiculous" (133-34). Could this not have been the assessment of, for instance, *Waterland*, had Swift previously written something like *The Crying of Lot 49* or *Gravity's Rainbow*? Interestingly, Baker rounds off his discussion of *Mason & Dixon* with a remark very similar to the one with which I concluded my reading of *Out of This World*: "*Mason & Dixon* makes us feel how even absent history hurts" (136).

Indeed, the fiction of the sentimentum makes us feel that even what is absent hurts: the play of signifiers and the renunciation of presence do not constitute the waning of affect. If ethics is first philosophy, if the relation to the other is primary, then perhaps what is immanence, what is hither of myself, is the ability to be affected by that which is exterior—including the narratives of others. This speculation prompts me to comment on my reluctance to make clear-cut distinctions between the sentimentum as, on the one hand, represented in fiction, or as a critical category, and as, on the other hand, something that is at work in society in general, in "actual postmodern subjects". This reluctance is due to my contention that representations in fiction are precisely *re*presentations of at least *possible* subjects-in-society and that as soon as a fictional (re)presentation, a fictional mode of being and relating, enters the public sphere, it does so because someone—an editor, a reader—has made a connection, recognized something, and the fictional (re)presentation subsequently—potentially—influences "actual" modes of being and relating.

Maybe I can say then that Graham Swift's oeuvre so far, together with the novels by other authors which I have discussed here, gives us occasion not only to (re)locate the sentimentum at the heart—yes, the heart—of postmodernist fiction, but also to recognize the sentimentum in (to echo Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot*) our silly, sentimental, twenty-first century hearts.

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An Aesthetics of Vulnerability

The Sentimentum and the Novels of Graham Swift

Arguing against the view that postmodernism is marked by "the waning of affect", this book investigates the fate of sentimentality in postmodernist fiction. The investigation focuses on the novels of the British author, Graham Swift, tracing in them the emergence of a blending of representations of sentimentality with a postmodernist aesthetics and a postmodern ethico-spiritual imagination—a blending resulting in what is designated by the shorthand "the sentimentum".

The expression of the sentimentum is further shown to rely on Swift's move toward the fulfilment of an aesthetics of vulnerability, which neutralizes the opposition between irony and sentimentality, and which also corresponds to an ethics of vulnerability that has found its formulation in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Through close readings of Swift's novels, from *The Sweet Shop Owner* to *Last Orders*, it is shown how both the aesthetics and the ethics of vulnerability are gradually more pronounced and affirmed through each successive installment in Swift's oeuvre.

Ultimately, though, the ambition of the book is to bring attention to an aesthetic and thematic configuration that may be found in a number of postmodernist novels. Hence, the study is concluded by comparative and complementary readings of novels by Julian Barnes, Penelope Lively and Jeanette Winterson that illustrate the wider relevance of the concepts of the sentimentum and of an aesthetics of vulnerability.

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