Modernism, Empathy, and the Contemporary Novel



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ABSTRACT

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This thesis reveals previously unrecognised relations between modernism, empathy, and the contemporary novel. It argues that Ian McEwan, Ciaran Carson, and Zadie Smith in particular reclaim a rich history of empathy that defines their approach and reason to rework modernist texts. Drawing on philosophical, psychological, sociological, neuroscientific, and aesthetic theories of empathy, my chapters offer close readings of contemporary and modernist novelists' representations of empathic experience to ultimately demonstrate how McEwan's, Carson's, and Smith's reclaiming of modernist empathies is at the same time formally, creatively, ethically, and attentively enabling.

McEwan pays particular attention to Woolf's representation of self–other and subject–object relations, dramatizing, through his highly engineered narrative patterns, aesthetic and intersubjective empathies. Carson miniaturizes Joyce's attentional associative patterns, staging an empathic way of reading that involves an attention to and a distraction from the text. Zadie Smith dramatizes Forsterian tension between narrative symmetry and a comedy of arbitrariness, using Forster's ideas about musical and visual empathy and distinction between rhythm and pattern to map urban relations onto networks of a more relaxed coexistence.

Through their close attention to modernism's representations of empathic experience, these novelists sidestep the simpler notions of empathy that their non-fictional statements suggest, expanding empathic attention in their novels to include attunement with art, objects, and others. Their reason to do so has various consequences. Firstly, they test the creative expansiveness of modernism, probing how closely they can attend to Woolf's, Joyce's, and Forster's novels without creating a simple pastiche. Secondly, they problematize new ethical, reconstructive tendencies of post-postmodern humanist realisms. Thirdly, through their minute attention to modernist empathies, these novelists also advocate an empathic, inclusive, patient way of reading to accommodate and expand twenty-first-century attentional demands.

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Introduction: Modernist empathy in contemporary fiction

You have to look at all of this, at all these histories of looking.
(Tom McCarthy, *C*)

"… you can never explain the world. You can only go half the way… I think one should write out of this state of not knowing, explore that realm," goes contemporary Belfast poet and novelist Ciaran Carson's answer to his interviewer's question about realist representation and the paradoxes of writing.[1] Carson refers to a way of writing that acknowledges the unknowability of the world, but more importantly, allows that unknowability to unfold, to meet the writer or the viewer *halfway*. His spatial metaphor of going halfway in attending to and representing the world points to a possible way of conceptualising the complicated relationships into which one is embedded. It is a way of positioning the novelistic senses in everything around them, whilst emphasizing how one stretches one's attention outward, toward the outer or the other to bridge an inherent distance between the two. Carson sees a dialogic relationship between subject and object, self and other, viewer and world in his poetry and fiction, carefully attending to the microscopic transactions that happen between the two.

Carson's wording recalls the long philosophical tradition of subject–other relations, from Hegelian anxieties about a lost immediacy between self and world to Keats's negative capability, T. S. Eliot's theory of impersonality, and Walter Benjamin's auratic object. Very particularly, it evokes an often overlooked, and arguably modernist way of dealing with this distance through empathy. Many modernists were engaged with aesthetic, philosophical, and psychological theories of subject–object relations, finding ways to articulate new forms of perception and attention under the pressures of modernity. One influential aesthetic theory

[1] Ciaran Carson, "Inventing Carson: An Interview," by David Laskowski, *Chicago Review,* June 22, 1999.

in the early twentieth century that aimed to conceptualise this process of attention by making sense of the space, relations, and transactions between subject and object was the theory of *Einfühlung*. *Einfühlung*, often translated as empathy, meant one's imaginative projection into a work of art, an object, or another person, but, more broadly, a specific way of attending to the external world: a careful, steady, expansive attention or projection that allows for dialogue or exchange.

Unsurprisingly, this originally aesthetic concept takes on distinct ethical overtones as soon as it encompasses the paying of attention to other people. It foreshadows contemporary popular understandings of empathy as feeling with and caring for others. If I do not pay attention to others, runs the standard formulation, I cannot empathise with them. In fact, the etymology of attention which comes from the Latin *attendere* "to stretch toward," whilst presupposing an inherent distance, suggests an outward movement, a reaching out to something outside oneself.[2] In addition to questions of aesthetic attention and realist representation, therefore, Carson's idea of going halfway reflects another aspect of empathy: one cannot attend empathically to every situation one encounters. One's empathic attention is necessarily selective, and rightly so, because too much empathy can be exhausting. Distraction and emotional numbness are just a few ways that hinder empathic attention or even help people to cope with empathic excess. Pieter Brueghel's well-known *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* depicts the tragedy of Icarus only in the corner of the painting, with all the characters looking away from it; the perspective is drawing away our attention from what is actually happening in the picture (and indeed you don't notice those two legs sticking out of the water unless you deliberately pay attention to them because the perspective of the

[2] Phenomenological accounts of attention make great use of the directionality of attention; Sartre, for example, explains how "attention is an intentional direction toward objects" (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 269); *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "attention," accessed April 6, 2018, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/12802?redirectedFrom=attention#eid.

painting draws you somewhere else). As W. H. Auden most famously showed, Brueghel represents how we're missing the point, how important things go unnoticed within the routine of the everyday. And it conveys how, as Auden writes, suffering is dismissed, is not paid attention to, or becomes a marginal event of and within the everyday:

> In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
> Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
> Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
> But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
> As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
> Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
> Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
> Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.[3]

Virginia Woolf captures very clearly this correlation between attention and empathising with the other in her essay "On Being Ill":

> As it is, there is always some distraction – an organ grinder at the corner of the hospital, a shop with book or trinket to decoy one past the prison or the workhouse, some absurdity of cat or dog to prevent one from turning the old beggar's hieroglyphic of misery into volumes of sordid suffering; and thus the vast effort of sympathy which those barracks of pain and discipline, those dried symbols of sorrow, ask us to exert on their behalf, is uneasily shuffled off for another time.[4]

That is to say, this conditioned empathy reinforces an exclusive focus, a tacit decision to get distracted. On the other hand, being empathised with indefinitely can also be overwhelming. In the same essay, Woolf herself suggests that "always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable."[5] This is very similar to what George Eliot writes, though in a different tone, in *Middlemarch*: "That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the

[3] W. H. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts," *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 179.
[4] Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill*, introductions by Hermione Lee and Mark Hussey, afterword by Rita Charon (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 2012), 9–10.
[5] Woolf, *On Being Ill*, 12.

squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity."[6]

Woolf's, Auden's, and Eliot's empathies or sympathies, then, all point to the limits of an unwavering or panoramic empathic attention: Auden depicts an ethical consideration of inattentiveness; Woolf gives a direct example of one's selective attention and conscious distractedness (through an engagement with one who needs sympathy nevertheless); Eliot writes that it would be unbearable to be universally attentive. In all these cases, conjunctions between inattention and empathic awareness are expressed lyrically, simultaneously acknowledging and sidestepping the "hieroglyphs of misery" and the elements of tragic frequency. Woolf, Auden, and Eliot beautifully consider the nuanced attentional registers that empathy involves. Within these few examples, empathy refers to an aesthetic consideration of things, a general form of attention, a linguistic and creative care, the more familiar feeling for or with another person, and a formal gesture underlying all these.

This thesis sets out to explore these nuanced understandings of empathy and their representation in order to uncover previously unrecognised relations between modernism, empathy, and the contemporary novel. It argues that, alongside Carson, several contemporary novelists reclaim an empathic attention deeply rooted in modernist representation in order to experiment with the rewritability or the creative expansiveness of modernism in contemporary fiction. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is threefold. Firstly, it intervenes in current discussions about the ways in which contemporary British and Irish novelists read modernism today – what they attend to and what they leave out in their reworking of modernist novels. Secondly, it reads this return to a modernist empathy in relation to contemporary critical and creative literary discourses of reconstruction, not least because empathy has played such a central role in conceptualisations of twenty-first-century

[6] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871), introduction by Zadie Smith (London: Penguin Classics, 2012), 210.

socio-cultural experience. Finally, it sees contemporary novelists' engagement with empathy as one of the central reasons for rekindling the return to modernism in contemporary fiction. In this sense, empathy functions to answer both the why and the how questions about contemporary novelists' return to modernism. I argue that Ian McEwan, Ciaran Carson, and Zadie Smith in particular reclaim a rich history of empathic attention in their rewriting of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and E. M. Forster, redrawing the legacies of modernism through a close attention to modernism's representations of empathy as a form of attention, knowledge, and care. Carson extends his attention particularly to Joycean encyclopaedism, McEwan reworks Woolfian self–other relations, and Smith rethinks Forsterian ideals of connection.

In their interviews and discursive writings, McEwan, Carson, and Smith explicitly state their fascination with and concerns about empathy as intersubjective experience. However, as this thesis shows, in their novels they are engaging with a wider and more complex range of empathic attention to others, to artistic objects, and to things. The reason why empathy remains the useful term here is because these novelists are sidestepping and extending precisely the simple categorizations of empathy acknowledged in their non-fiction through a delicate engagement with early twentieth-century understandings of the term. Many other contemporary novelists, such as J. M. Coetzee, Michael Ondaatje, Toni Morrison, and Philip Roth, are also interested in the ethics of empathy, but their engagement with it is not centrally concerned with modernist anxieties about and representation of empathic attention, and, on the flipside, their rewriting of modernist legacies is not substantially linked to empathic concerns. In contrast, McEwan's, Carson's, and Smith's nuanced understandings of empathy offer distinctive and productive ways of thinking about modernist legacies in twenty-first-century fiction. The ethical questions they ask by representing the failure of certain forms of empathy are often secondary to their close

attention to a modernist aesthetics of empathy and ways of reading and attending that are guided by what Carson refers to as the realm of not knowing, or the long philosophical tradition of negative capability and disinterested interest. Empathy in the works of these novelists is not simply a moral matter but also a question of aesthetic attention, political stance, and formal exuberance and experimentation.

In the interview quoted above, Carson sets out his relationship to his fictional material more broadly, implicitly acknowledging the temporal gap one must overcome to approach modernism halfway. This introduction, therefore, clarifies modernism's connection to empathic representation, contemporary novelists' concern with specifically this modernist empathy, and their possible reasons for reworking it now. In order to clarify modernism's empathy and empathy's modernism, I will start by giving a brief outline of the modern history of empathy and drawing parallels between modernist and current crises of perception to account for a return in the novel to this type of attention. To set my argument into a broader context, I will first outline contemporary critical reflections on modernist legacies and trends in theorising and historicising contemporary forms of realism and experimentation. Then I will explain how the return to modernist empathy is deeply embedded in the post-postmodern literary landscape's rhetoric of reconstruction. My final section establishes the current multidisciplinary landscapes in which empathy has become a generic term, tracing the origins of widespread Nussbaumean ideals about the empathic benefits of reading, and, ultimately showing how McEwan, Carson, and Smith move away from such idealistic perspectives on empathy.

Modernism's empathic attention

McEwan's, Carson's, and Smith's close attention to modernist empathies is embedded in the convoluted recent history of the term. Though the concept of empathy was

widely-theorised in the period usually associated with the emergence of modernism, empathy is not generally linked to modernist representation. On the whole, "Victorian sympathy" has generated much broader critical interest than modernist sympathy or empathy. Indeed, it is George Eliot's fiction, and not Woolf's, that is generally associated with too much or too little empathy. Our familiar notions of modernism might not immediately evoke the empathetic, and McEwan, Carson, and Smith press against generalised binaries distinguishing Victorian realism from modernist experiment – for example, fragmentary and alienated versus sympathetic and humanist writing (indeed, we will see later how aesthetic empathy reaffirms a sense of alienation rather than dismisses it).

Several recent books on affective modernism and modernism and ethics have been instrumental in the resurgence of empathy studies in modernism.[7] Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* (2007) paved the way for literary empathy studies; Meghan Marie Hammond's *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* (2014), and Kirsty Martin's *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence* are especially important books here, because they consider the aesthetic implications of empathy.[8] Hammond includes early twentieth-century psychological discourse in her discussion of narrative empathy in the works of Henry James, Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, Ford Madox Ford, and Woolf, explaining how these theories are "intimately connected with the development of literary modernism" and to the

[7] See Julie Taylor, ed., *Modernism and Affect* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); Julie Taylor, *Djuna Barnes and Affective Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Justus Nieland, *Feeling Modern: The Eccentricities of Public Life* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008). On modernism and ethics see Lee Oser, *The Ethics of Modernism: Moral Ideas in Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Christine Reynier, *Virginia Woolf's Ethics of the Short Story* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Ann Katrin Jonsson, *Relations: Ethics and the Modernist Subject in James Joyce's Ulysses, Virginia Woolf's The Waves, Djuna Barnes's Nightwood* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

[8] Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2007); Meghan Marie Hammond, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), cited subsequently as *Empathy and Modernism*; Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

ways in which these writers "reconfigure notions of intersubjective experience."[9] Martin examines Vernon Lee's, Woolf's, and D. H. Lawrence's novels in relation to emotion studies, arguing that their "type of sympathy is founded on a conception of what it is to be alive."[10] Though in this thesis I draw on some of Hammond's and Martin's ideas in reuniting empathic contexts with modernism, compared to Hammond's particular focus on (interpersonal) empathy as "a solution to the problem of other minds" and Martin's concern with vitalist rhythms of sympathy, here I pay more attention to the interplay between aesthetic and interpersonal meanings of the term.

Even at the verge of the twentieth century, when the term emerged in English-speaking contexts, "empathy" already bore a complicated conceptual inheritance. In 1909, when leading turn-of-the-century psychologist Edward Bradford Titchener coined the word empathy in English after German philosopher Theodor Lipps's *Einfühlung*, empathy referred to one's kinaesthetic–affective projection not only into a work of art or an object, but also into another person.[11] Today critics commonly define empathy as an imaginative identification with the other, and, indeed, this is its conventional meaning.[12] This switch from a primarily aesthetic concept to perhaps the key word in today's moral vocabulary is a complex and fascinating one. Simon Cooke gets to the heart of the problem when he wonders "Exactly how the word transformed from a primarily aesthetic term to a watchword of

[9] Hammond, *Empathy and Modernism*, 4.
[10] Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy*, 1.
[11] Edward Bradford Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes* (New York: Macmillan, 1909). For a concise account see Remy Debes, "From Einfühlung to Empathy: Sympathy in Early Phenomenology and Psychology," in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. Eric Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[12] See, for example, Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, eds., *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Hammond, *Empathy and Modernism*; Douglas Chismar, "Empathy and Sympathy: The Important Difference," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 22 (1988): 257–266; Gustav Jahoda, "Theodor Lipps and the Shift from 'Sympathy' to 'Empathy,'" *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 41 (2005): 151–163.

interpersonal and intercultural relations."[13] Tracing the interweaving of different versions of empathy is especially important for my chapters, where I explore McEwan's, Carson's, and Zadie Smith's reworking of these forms of empathy, and the reasons for their critique of purely ethical versions of it.

It is worth starting here with one of empathy's major conceptual precedents after which Titchener himself modelled his translation of *Einfühlung*, because the prevalence of empathy as an intersubjective category today perhaps lies in its close associations with older interests in the morality of sympathy. Indeed, empathy today is often theorised in relation to (and against) sympathy as feeling *with* rather than feeling *for* someone.[14] This apparent critical need to define empathy against sympathy points to empathy's complicated conceptual development. Several critics maintain that sympathy originally included the meaning now attributed to empathy; while others argue that introducing empathy into the English language suggested a need to refresh the semantically busy term sympathy. In the case of the former, Sophie Ratcliffe and Jonathan Lamb have both argued that the term empathy is unnecessary, because sympathy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries already entailed an imaginative identification with others.[15] In the case of the latter, Carolyn Burdett argues that "empathy appeared in culture when more traditional Victorian terms for feeling, including sympathy and sentiment, were coming under great strain. The causes of this strain were various: they included, for instance, the effects of political democratization, the impact of secularization, and the rise of scientific naturalism."[16] Similarly, Hammond writes that "those who studied the concept closely [at the turn of the century] felt the need

[13] Simon Cooke, "'Unprofitable Excursions': The Ethics of Empathy in Modernist Discourses on Art and Literature," in *Ethics in Culture: The Dissemination of Values in Literature and Other Media*, ed. Herbert Grabes, Astrid Erll, and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 159–160.
[14] See, for example, Coplan and Goldie, *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*.
[15] Sophie Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009).
[16] Carolyn Burdett, "Is Empathy the End of Sentimentality," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 16, no. 2 (2001): 261.

to differentiate" between empathy and sympathy, concluding that empathy "was incorporated into our lexicon […] because of a cultural desire for a new kind of connection between minds."[17] These are historically instructive observations, but, at the same time, I think that new structures of feeling and "a cultural desire for a new kind of connection between minds" are only part of the story. That is, a pronounced scientific and literary interest in the process of aesthetic attention had also contributed to the use of empathy in English-speaking circles, by writers such as Vernon Lee, T. E. Hulme, and Rebecca West. Before discussing their aesthetic take on empathy, however, there is one aspect of the confusion between sympathy and empathy that will illuminate our thoughts about the modern history of empathy.

Undeniably, sympathy had also been an aesthetic category before, but the sustained study of the aesthetics of sympathy is ultimately credited to German empathy theorists such as Robert Vischer and Theodor Lipps, who favoured the word *Einfühlung* over *Sympathie*.[18] "By the end of the [nineteenth] century," Benjamin Morgan notes, "aesthetics was widely considered a science, with *Einfühlung* as one of its major subfields."[19] The main distinction between empathy and sympathy in this and later contexts seems to be a disciplinary one: sympathy flourishes in the realm of moral philosophy whereas *Einfühlung* or empathy gradually becomes the preferred term in aesthetics, and the first steps towards the confusion between the two today arise in experimental psychology. Perhaps Rae Greiner is right to say that empathy has indeed come to mean everything that sympathy has already meant before.[20] Convincingly arguing that "empathy should be thought of less as an improvement over a

[17] Hammond, *Empathy and Modernism*, 6.
[18] Schliesser, *Sympathy: A History*, particularly Debes, "From Einfühlung to Empathy."
[19] Benjamin Morgan, "Critical Empathy: Vernon Lee's Aesthetics and the Origins of Close Reading," *Victorian Studies* 55, no. 1 (2012): 37.
[20] Rae Greiner, "1909: The Introduction of the Word 'Empathy' into English," *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. D. F. Felluga (nd), http://www.branchcollective.org/?page_id=620.

sympathy understood as old-fashioned, pitying condescension than an innovation in theorizing a relation with which the first philosophers of sympathy were also concerned, that between the thinking mind, emotion, and aesthetic form," Greiner concludes that "Empathy does not supplant a naïve, outmoded sympathy but seeks to answer different questions or to answer old ones in new ways."[21] I agree with Greiner, but it is surely important to point out that this prevailing retrospective confusion between sympathy and empathy is mostly relevant only after aesthetic meanings of empathy have faded in favour of an exclusively intersubjective concept of empathy, and the empathy–sympathy confusion becomes prevalent once both empathy and sympathy are well-established concepts of a social-psychological and moral-philosophical vocabulary.[22]

Sympathy becomes quintessentially moral in the eighteenth century, when, as cultural historian Carolyn Dean puts it, "sympathy is first deemed a crucial component of the enlightened self, the feeling individual, and the new social order."[23] According to David Hume's, Thomas Hobbes's, and Adam Smith's moral philosophies, sympathy is a moral sentiment. Smith's theory of "complete" sympathy foreshadows twentieth-century understandings of empathic experience: "sympathy is very properly said to arise from an imaginary change of situations with the person principally concerned."[24] Smith theorised questions of distance and immediacy between the self and the other by neatly foregrounding

[21] Ibid., np.

[22] Even Titchener uses empathy in relation to sympathy as complete identification: "Bühler, like his predecessors, lays great stress upon the attitude of the experimenter and the introspective calibre of the observer. The experimenter must be in full sympathy with his observers; he must think, by empathy, as they think, understand as they understand, speak in their language" (Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes*, 91).

[23] Carolyn J. Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy After the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 2.

[24] Smith continues: "yet this imagination is not supposed to happen to me in my own person and character, but in that of the person with whom I sympathise." In other words, change does not happen to me as I am myself, but happens to me as I am the other (not just in the situation of the other). While he argues that it is necessary to maintain sympathetic distance in order to be able to react to and judge the other's situation, he also accentuates the fact that fellow feeling has the power to change the one who sympathizes. This means that even if identification with the other is not and cannot be complete, it allows for a sense of otherness within the self (Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 3rd ed. (London, 1767), 392, digitized by Goldsmiths' Library, University of London. Also see J. Ralph Lindgren, *The Social Philosophy of Adam Smith* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973).

the steps of sympathetic identification: first, the "spectator" imaginatively steps into the situation of the "actor"; then he reacts to the situation; he compares his feelings with the feelings he imagines the other has; and, finally, he approves or disapproves of them. It is clear that from the first step when "I not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters," everything happens as the "spectator" is in the shoes of the "actor."[25] Approving or disapproving of the actor's feelings will or will not lead to social motivation. This is Smith's main concern, and it is in his work, alongside that of Hume and Hobbes, that sympathy expressly becomes attached to the healthy functioning of society. This version of a moralistic sympathy that benefits society will be revived mutatis mutandis by the updated empathy concept predominantly at the turn of the twenty-first century by the new ethicists (and seemingly by novelists as well), as we will see later.

If one looks closely at the modern history of empathy, affinities with Smith's version of sympathy are readily apparent, because early philosophers and psychologists of empathy did not make a sharp distinction between one's projection into a work of art, an object, or another person's situation; on the contrary, they explained one in terms of the other. The roots of empathic identification are located in Romantic thought, where *einfühlen* (to feel into) was a general way of knowing nature, others, and objects. (Herder's poetry is often invoked as a quintessential example in the origins of empathy as extensive aesthetic attention.)[26] In the first comprehensive theory of *Einfühlung On the Optical Sense of Form* (1873), German philosopher Robert Vischer defined empathy as an imaginary exchange with a "lifeless form" very much in terms of an intersubjective experience:

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[25] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 392. With this alternative, as Lamb explains, Smith tries "to protect his kind of sympathy" from accounts which consider sympathy self-centred (Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy*, 87). Smith's argument could also be a viable argument against recent critiques about the self-absorbed nature of empathy.

[26] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der Menschlichen* (Seele, Riga: Hartknock, 1778), digital edition: http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10044996_00009.html. For a brief discussion see Currie, "Empathy for Objects"; Derek Matravers, "Empathy in the Aesthetic Tradition," in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*, ed. Heidi Maibom (London, Routledge: 2017), 77–86.

> I project my own life into the lifeless form, just as I […] do with another living person. Only ostensibly do I keep my own identity although the object remains distinct. I seem merely to adapt and attach myself to it as one hand clasps another, and yet I am mysteriously transplanted and magically transformed into this Other.[27]

Even though Vischer talks about imaginary identification with an object, he does so by referring to both bodily and mental processes in one's identification with the aesthetic form (the "symbolism of form," as Vischer calls it). He is clearly appealing to well-established ideas of human sympathy. Vischer also acknowledges that only after completing his work on empathy, did he come across Hermann Lotze's *Microcosmos*, "in which, without a systematic overview, he also speaks of a 'sympathetic projection' [*mitlebende Versetzung*] that is related to a 'generalised memory of the activity of our own body'" and finds that some of Lotze's examples "correlate to our concept of kinaesthetic empathy."[28] Similarly, another early empathy theorist, Johannes Volkelt uses *Einfühlung* or aesthetic sympathy interchangeably.

Vischer himself does not account for his choice of the word *Einfühlung*, but it is clear that in all these cases the aesthetic category or modifier is meant to differentiate empathy from earlier moralising accounts of fellow feeling or sympathy.[29] There is, however, another aspect to this ostensibly amoral conceptualisation of empathy, for Vischer wrote some of his essays with the clear political intent of forging a sense of national belonging.[30] Empathy as a question of (global) belonging will become particularly important in the last chapter, in Zadie Smith's search for markers of relaxed urban coexistence, and in this thesis as a whole

[27] Robert Vischer, "On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics," in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center, 1994), 104.
[28] Vischer, "On the Optical Sense of Form," 92.
[29] Throughout this thesis, I will also use aesthetic and intersubjective empathy for the sake of clarity.
[30] Barbara Titus, *Recognizing Music as an Art Form: Friedrich Th. Vischer and German Music Criticism, 1848-1887* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016); also see Joseph Imorde and Richard George Elliott, "'Empathy' in Art History," *Art in Translation* 6, no. 4 (2015): 377–397.

in terms of the larger contexts in which contemporary novelists' embracing of certain forms of empathy over others inevitably have ethical and political implications.

Another context that Vischer's theory directly reaches out into is physiology. Vischer urges more expert fellow researchers to apply physiology to his theory in exploring how aesthetic projection exactly works:

> My principal concern in developing these concepts now became to explain mental stimulation in every case precisely through and together with bodily stimulation. Although the physiological knowledge at my disposal is inadequate for this task, it seems to me that the manner of its application is valid in itself and not unworthy of being carried forward and completed by the sure hand of a specialist in this field. We stand here before a 'mystery that has to be explained by physiology in conjunction with psychology.' The attempt has to be made now, and in the end the daily – even hourly – discoveries will at least begin to illuminate the 'impenetrable darkness that envelopes those areas where the soul and the nerve centres are one.' It seems to be 'an impossible task ever to construct a system in this dark realm on the basis of a few observations.' Nevertheless, with the help of some generally known features of our physical life I have ventured to undertake a preliminary and simple analysis of the structure of our imagination. Although much may still sound immature and problematic, it may also throw a faint light on the dark paths of the genesis of our feeling for symbolic form.[31]

It is this physiological and psychological approach to the "feeling for symbolic form" that Lipps, among others, developed further and that Titchener later drew on.

Lipps adopted Vischer's term to talk about the "psychology of aesthetic attention," but also about the philosophical problem of knowing other minds.[32] This psychological inquiry aimed to explain the basis on which we can determine that others are as real as us.[33] Lipps was interested in how viewers project their "physical and kinaesthetic response but also the accompanying emotions" on to "a natural object or a work of art," and how a similar projection would help us to understand another person's state of mind.[34] Thus Lipps linked

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[31] Vischer, "On the Optical Sense of Form," 92–93.

[32] Karsten R. Stueber, *Rediscovering Empathy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 6; also see Debes, "From Einfühlung to Empathy."

[33]Alec Hyslop, "Other Minds: The Problems" (2006), *Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science*, Wiley Online Library, accessed 20 March 2018, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/0470018860.s00303,

[34] Paul Guyer, "Aesthetics," in *The Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Michael N. Forster and Kristin Gjesdal (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2015), 510; Lipps, "Empathy, Inner Imitation and Sense-Feelings," trans. Max Schertel and Melvin Rader, in *A Modern Book of Esthetics: An Anthology*, ed. Melvin Rader (New York: Holt, 1979), 71–8; Lipps, "Empathy and Aesthetic Pleasure," trans.

aesthetic and intersubjective understandings of empathy more firmly in psychological discourse. As philosopher Karsten Stueber explains, "In his *Aesthetik,* Lipps closely links our aesthetic perception and our perception of another embodied person as a minded creature. The nature of aesthetic empathy is always the 'experience of another human.'" Stueber continues, "We appreciate another object as beautiful because empathy allows us to see it in analogy to another human body. Similarly, we recognize another organism as a minded creature because of empathy."[35] At this point – in the early 1900s – empathy is thoroughly outlined as a bodily and mental response to objects and to others, and its mechanisms can be used interchangeably for knowing others and appreciating art. As opposed to Vischer's model of empathy, which is arguably based on an intersubjective sympathy concept, there seems to be a reversal in Lipps from aesthetic attention modelled on intersubjective empathy to its opposite. According to him, it is on the basis of aesthetic empathy that one recognises the other as a minded creature. This switch from art modelled on life to life modelled on art will become especially important to more familiar versions of modernist aesthetics. It is also perhaps thanks to Lipps's firm intersubjective take on the term that aesthetic empathy started to wane from academic discourse throughout the twentieth century and has been excluded from an original context that was deeply entwined with the emergence of modernism.

Perhaps it is due to empathy's claim to explain so many different phenomena (imitation of and sensory-motoric projection into an object, and the problem of other minds) that the next famous empathy theorist Titchener's ideas on empathy become quite varied.

Karl Aschenbrenner, in *Aesthetic Theories: Studies in the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Karl Aschenbrenner and Arnold Isenberg (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), 403–12.

[35] Stueber, "Empathy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2018), accessed April 15, 2018, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/empathy/; also, Gregory Currie notes that "aesthetic encounter with an object is a case of experiencing aesthetic qualities within ourselves" (Gregory Currie, "Empathy for Objects," in Coplan and Goldie, *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, 85).

Titchener refers to empathy in his *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes* (1909) to explain at least three distinct situations: at first, he portrays empathy as inner imitation, then he sees it as a way of understanding another person, and, finally, he talks about motor empathy in terms of syntactical associations. In the first case, he mentions motor empathy in terms of a "kinaesthetic imagery," which means that visual images make one "act the feeling out" imaginatively: "Not only do I see gravity and modesty and pride and courtesy and stateliness, but I feel or act them in the mind's muscles. This is, I suppose, a simple case of empathy, if we may coin that term as a rendering of *Einfühlung*."[36] Later in the same book, he refers to empathy in interpersonal terms, explaining that "The experimenter must be in full sympathy with his observers; he must think, by empathy, as they think, understand as they understand, speak in their language."[37] At another instance, he connects turns of phrase with specific visual images when he recalls how a picture associated with a situation is "combined with an empathic attitude." He mentions a lecturer he remembers through his frequent use of a word, saying that "In this particular instance, the picture is combined with an empathic attitude; and all such 'feelings' […] normally take the form, in my experience, of motor empathy."[38] All in all, credited with the coinage of the word in English, Titchener is not particularly invested in systematising or researching empathy. When he first mentions the word in his lectures at Columbia, he quickly adds that "there is nothing curious or idiosyncratic about it; but it is a fact that must be mentioned."[39]

It is Vernon Lee who draws on Lipps's empathic tradition more precisely (and popularises empathy in Britain) through a strong emphasis on embodied aesthetic reaction

[36] Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes*, 21. This hypothesis of visual images triggering clear sensorimotor reactions is of central importance to current neuroscientific research.
[37] Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes*, 91.
[38] Ibid., 185.
[39] Ibid., 21–22.

to the world around us.[40] Lee develops a version of *Einfühlung* where, as Stacy Hand puts it, the body becomes "an active, potentially transformative medium of aesthetic reception."[41] In this case, as Jonathan Crary explains, "*Einfühlung* described a mode of intense perceptual absorption in which lines and forms were experienced by the subject as specific motor sensations, and were the catalyst for a vitalization of the imagination."[42] Through vitalist theories, Lee explains the viewer's conscious attention and kinaesthetic and affective reaction to shapes and forms in terms of movement. When we look at a mountain, she says in *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (1913), we perceive "empathic movement," as the triangular shape of the mountain "rises … It rises and keeps on rising, never stopping unless we stop looking at it."[43] Lee argues that we experience a motional analogy between shapes and our body, which is essentially a feeling of "kinship with the rest of the physical world."[44] She explains that

> In the moments of […] emotional perception, our souls also, ourselves, become in a higher degree organic, alive, receiving and giving out the life of the universe; come to be woven into the patterns of harmonies, made of the stuff of reality, homogenous with themselves, consubstantial with the universe, like the living plant, the flowing stream, the flying cloud, the great picture or statue.[45]

Lee describes this feeling of oneness with the universe through a material, even physical unity, when she talks about homogeneity, consubstantiality, and the same "stuff or reality" we are made of. As Martin puts it, "when we become most vividly aware of our own physicality we also become aware of our kinship with the rest of the physical world. Whilst

[40] See for instance Currie, "Empathy for Objects"; Morgan, "Critical Empathy: Vernon Lee's Aesthetics and the Origins of Close Reading."
[41] Stacy Hand, "Embodied Abstraction: Biomorphic Fantasy and Empathy Aesthetics in the Work of Hermann Obrist, August Endell, and Their Followers," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 2008), 26.
[42] Crary clarifies that these theories "generally insisted that it was not the attentive subject who identified form, or distinguished form from a larger background, but rather the reverse, that 'good' form had the capacity to produce attentiveness in a subject" (Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 158).
[43] Vernon Lee, *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 72–73.
[44] Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy*, 44. Cf. Romantic use of *einfühlen*.
[45] Lee, *Laurus Nobilis: Chapters on Art and Life*, (London: John Lane, 1909), 108.

moments of intense emotionality make us aware of our own individual body they also infuse us with an energy that is shared by all creation."[46] Thus Lee's version of empathy is based on the premise of an embodied oneness, communion with the world around us.

Early in her chapter "Empathy" in *The Beautiful*, Lee steers clear of alleged misinterpretations of empathy as a form of projection or sympathy. In the case of the former, she argues that empathy is not a "metaphysical, quasi-mysterious *projection of the ego* into the object under observation."[47] Geoffrey C. W. Waite argues that Lee intended this as a critique of Lipps; however, Lipps was much more careful to outline a dialogic model of empathy rather than a one-way projection into an object.[48] Waite explains that in Lipps

> empathy is neither a simple spontaneous occurrence in you, but rather the fact that you move yourself and are moved when you perceive anything whatsoever. It is not a feeling (*Gefühl*) that is valorized […]. It is rather 'self-objectification' in which both terms, self and object receive diacritical stress. […] It is not so much a projection (*sich einfühlen*), although it is this, but rather an activity of objectification (*eine Tätigkeit*). Empathy is closely related to translation (and thus […] to a figural and rhetorical process of metaphor-making), to translating something felt in you into an object. But this object is something, as Lipps repeatedly insists, that makes counterdemands (*Förderungen*, *Zumutungen*) on you. The relation between the object and the subject is precisely circular.[49]

Defining this circular relationship between subject and object, according to Lipps, involves a certain level of self-projection that goes hand-in-hand with self-objectification. At another instance, however, when referring to the perception of a spiral shape, he seems to undermine precisely this self-objectification:

> I do not create the *living* spiral by objectifying some particular manner of myself living in spiral manner; but I make the spiral to be alive, by adding my life – (which has nothing to do with the spiral as such, but all the more to do with force, with inhibitions and freedom, with resistance and resistance overcome, with tension and solution) – by adding *my* life to the forces, inhibitions, resistances, etc., which

[46] Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy*, 44.
[47] Lee, *The Beautiful*, 66–67.
[48] Geoffrey C. W. Waite, "Worringer's Abstraction and Empathy: Remarks on Its Reception and on the Rhetoric of Its Criticism," in *Invisible Cathedrals: The Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer*, ed. Neil H. Donahue (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 24.
[49] Waite, "Worringer's Abstraction and Empathy," 24.

> appear to me to be present in the spiral; and by making this addition of *my* life I put my life also into them.[50]

These contradictory explanations of empathy suggest an increasing difficulty in theorising the transactions that happen in the space between self and object, something of which McEwan, Smith, and Carson are acutely aware in their rereadings of Joyce, Woolf, and Forster. Even though Lee aims to give an account of empathy where the body is an integral part of the universe, the fact that there is a need to describe this experience of oneness or "feeling-into" the world presupposes an (aesthetic, contemplative) distance from it.[51] This sense of alienation is arguably one of the markers that make empathy modern.

Lee's sense of alienation and Lipps's attempts to theorise the space or distance between subject and object are part of the early twentieth century's crisis of perception and representation, induced by the vast changes of modernity or**,** as Husserl put it, the "modernity crisis" that involved, in addition to altered market forces and the temporal–spatial acceleration instigated by technological advancements, a changed pace in one's attention to the external environment.[52] Crary explains how "aesthetic perception is inseparable from the processes of modernization that made the problem of attention a central issue in new institutional constructions of a productive and manageable subjectivity."[53] He also demonstrates how the industrialisation of visual and auditory culture led to new forms of representation in modernist art.[54] In fact, several critics agree that one of the defining aspects of modernist aesthetics lies in its specific treatment of objects. Douglas Mao explains that modernists' "feeling of regard for the physical object as object – as not-self, as not-

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[50] Theodor Lipps, "Æsthetische Einfühlung," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Pys. Der Sinnesorgane*, 22 (1909), translated in *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics*, Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1912), 36.
[51] Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy*, 67; Hammond, *Empathy and Modernism*, 18.
[52] Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy. Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). See especially Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*.
[53] Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 2.
[54] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); *Suspensions of Perception.*

subject, as most helpless and will-less of entities, but also as fragment of Being, as solidity, as otherness in its most resilient opacity – seems a peculiarly twentieth-century malady or revelation, in any case; or rather, we might say, the open acknowledgment of such a feeling seems one of the minor trademarks of the writing of this period."[55] He goes on to explain that

> the high modernists introduced into their writings a self-conscious contemplation of the object qua object hitherto only sporadically anticipated. There is very little in previous fiction in English, after all, that resembles Woolf's fascination with the eerily proximate distance of physical things or Joyce's obtrusive catalogues of urban detritus and household debris; nor was there a poet before Stevens who dwelt so insatiably on the scene of mind confronting thing, or one before Williams who so explicitly called for a poetry of the life of the object in all its immediacy. The encounter between Sigmund Freud, *Traumdeuter*, and H. D., *Imagiste*, thus unquestionably figures one of modernism's defining passages, from an older tradition in which the object appears principally as a signifier of something else or a component of scenic plenitude to a newer order in which its value depends neither on metaphoricity nor on marginality.[56]

Modernism's focus on the object as object (or the *thing* itself, in Bill Brown's terms) sheds light not only on changed subject–object relations, but on the nature of one's attention to objects and ways of managing and representing distances between the two. Aesthetic empathy was meant to theorise precisely this process of attending to a work of art or an object (or, as we have seen, to others).

Henri Bergson's ideas on the dialogic relationship between art and viewer exhibit another important aspect of this process of attending. Lipps was writing around the same time as Bergson developed his philosophy, and clearly (besides more obvious influences on Lee's work), there is a vitalist strain that runs through Vischer's and Lipps's theorisations of empathy. Both these theories are, as we have seen, mainly about the subject's "life force"

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[55] Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 4; also see Mark McGurl, *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction After Henry James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Bill Brown, *Other Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Allan Hepburn, *Enchanted Objects: Visual Art in Contemporary Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).
[56] Mao, *Solid Objects*, 13.

humanising the object: according to Vischer, we "entrust [our] life to the lifeless form"; for Lipps, we "add life" to the objects. There is one particular aspect of the shared ideas of Bergson and Lipps, however, that is particularly interesting here. Bergson, like Lipps, also considers the dialogic relationship between subject and object. Lipps writes that "a sensuous object distinct from me 'expresses' [ausdruckt] something interior or soullike," which is very similar to how Bergson thinks about the ways in which "art aims at impressing feelings on us rather than expressing them: it suggests them to us."[57] Though both philosophers are concerned with the object's function in initiating feelings and thought, the main difference between their arguments here is that while Lipps talks about aesthetic perception in general (of art and other objects), Bergson refers to aesthetic reception, the artistic object's effect on the one who perceives it, in theorising the transaction that happens between subject and art. This brings us to an understanding of empathy as both artistic production and response to art. Art historian Wilhelm Worringer's take on empathy is key here because it facilitated further interest in empathy theories in Britain, and it is useful in showing a very specific aspect of the empathic space between subject and art.

In his thesis *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), Worringer argues that artistic production can be defined in terms of the artist's immersion or alienation from the world.[58] He aligns empathy with the artist's comfortable immersion into the world, and abstraction with a strong disconnection and alienation from it. Worringer's ideas, alongside those of Bergson were particularly influential on T. E. Hulme's theories of abstraction, who proliferated Worringer's theory in Imagist and Vorticist circles.[59] Hulme was mainly interested in negotiating the distance between subject and object (or art and life) that abstract

[57] Henry Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: George Allen and Co., 1913, facsimile reprinted by Adamant Media Corporation, 2005), 16.
[58] Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style,* trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1997).
[59] Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 287.

art induces. Worringer's dichotomy may have influenced Rebecca West's distinction between active and passive empathy: "The active power of empathy which makes the creative artist, or the passive power of empathy which makes the appreciator of art."[60] For West, just as for Worringer, empathy is a marker of creative production. However, her ideas on passive and active empathy need not oppose production or appreciation of abstract art.

But how could Worringer's polarisation of abstraction and empathy be reconciled? Hulme's ideas are of further help here. For Hulme, abstraction and empathy are not a reflection of one's relation to the world; they are rather types of artistic production that are based on mimesis or abstraction. Rebecca Beasley observes that, as opposed to Worringer's idea of abstraction as a simplification of the external world, Hulme's version of abstraction reflects more complex elements "associated in our minds with the idea of machinery."[61] There is a sense that Hulme tried to clarify or even place himself at a certain remove from Worringer's tight binary. This is especially important, because earlier accounts of empathy we have discussed above did include theorisations of one's responses to abstraction. What differentiates Worringer's accounts of abstraction versus empathy from those of Lipps, Lee, and Hulme, then, is that they were specifically interested in aesthetic projection into abstract shapes and geometric forms. Therefore, abstraction or abstract art cannot sidestep empathic responses to itself, nor, by analogy, artistic creation. In fact, in case of the majority of modernists, an intense empathic attention to the object induces a sense of alienation and defamiliarization from it. Worringer's polarised account of empathy versus abstraction, then, does not work in the context of modernist attention, because the alienation entailed by abstract art or non-empathic or non-immersive relationship with the world is already inherent in modernist empathy, which builds on alienation in order to defamiliarize. From

[60] Rebecca West, *The Strange Necessity* (New York: Doubleday, 1928), 102.
[61] Rebecca Beasley, "'A Definite Meaning': The Art and Criticism of T. E. Hulme," in *T.E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism*, ed. Edward P. Comentale and Andrzej Gasiorek (London: Routledge, 2016), 68; Beasley qts. from Hulme's "Modern Art and Its Philosophy."

Lee's concept of empathy as a feeling of unity with the world we can derive a modernist realisation of the distance between subject and world that needs to be bridged. Therefore, modernist empathy works on the grounds of the awareness of this alienation.

In their negotiation of changing subject–object relationships, several modernists were also attentive to a Lippsian dialogic model of empathic projection, or what Lipps terms the object's counterdemands on the subject. Mao draws attention to the fact that modernists "were concerned not only with the limitations upon their abilities to initiate social change […] but also – and perhaps more critically – with the troubling *extensiveness* of human power, and with the likeness between their own operations on their materials and the apparently limitless transformations effected by technology."[62] Indeed, this crisis of being unable to acknowledge, represent, or receive the object's counterdemands echoes Kantian ideals of disinterested interest, a difficulty of freeing oneself from a "satisfaction which we combine with the representation of the existence of an object," or from the "interests [of] Reason that the Ideas (for which in moral feeling it arouses an immediate interest) should have objective reality."[63] As Mao continues,

> For the painful truth (which Adorno, above all, recognized) is that it is very hard to think of the work of art as anything but a product of subjectivity's action on the object world. One of the oldest stories about modernism is that of its struggle against the mass-produced commodity on behalf of the handcrafted thing, which can certainly be read as an active effort on behalf of the kind of utopia already described: if to contemplate the object in its unviolated integrity is to catch a glimpse of a serenity beyond ideology and interest, then to produce objects that inspire this kind of revelation might be to bring the world closer to utopia not just as possibility but as reality.[64]

It is in this context of the anxiety of aesthetic production and attention to art that empathy, beyond a negotiation of aesthetic, contemplative, and revelatory distances between subject and object, becomes a question of representation: a detailed description of the object

[62] Mao, *Solid Objects*, 11.
[63] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1914), 179.
[64] Mao, *Solid Objects*, 11.

on the one hand, and addressing the representability of distance that the process of attention to the object involves. According to Hammond, narrative techniques associated with modernism serve as ways of expressing empathic immediacy: "the interior monologue, stream-of-consciousness narration, narrative marked by anachrony and fragmentation, and rapidly shifting character focalisation" are "best understood as empathy-driven."[65] These arguments have occasionally been inflated to have empathy function as a distinct period marker: Hammond joins critics who argue that "modernism enacts a crucial shift from sympathetic representation to empathetic representation,"[66] while also admitting that modernist empathy is continuous with the tradition of nineteenth-century literary sympathy. Greiner explains this shift through the realist–modernist binary, arguing that sympathy defines nineteenth-century novelistic form and "produces realism."[67]

This parallel between empathic or sympathetic representation and literary periods seems slightly reductive and difficult to uphold, but it does shed light on a broadly-accepted notion about the different modes of attention to the external world or the object that empathy and sympathy involve. Empathy (as aesthetic attention) bridges distances but reinforces alienation through defamiliarization; sympathy aims to keep distance between self and others in place. Though recent work in studies of "empathic modernism" aims to put modernist empathy back into conversation with its psychological and philosophical context, it is still very much interested in intersubjective versions of the term.[68] One of the ways in which modernism moves away from nineteenth-century literary sympathy, critics say, is through its less pronounced interest in the moral flavour of relationships among characters. Indeed, studies of empathic modernism generally agree that modernists were sceptical about

[65] Hammond, *Empathy and Modernism*, 4.
[66] Hammond, *Empathy and Modernism*, 1.
[67] Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 9.
[68] Hammond uses the term "empathic modernism" in *Empathy and Modernism*.

the morality of empathy and sympathy – their interest lied rather in representing the immediacy of the inner and outer world by experimenting with form. [69]

Though Woolf, Joyce, or Forster did not or only rarely mention the word *empathy*, they were all, in one way or another, acquainted with questions of aesthetic perception and theories of fellow feeling, and at times criticised certain versions of the latter. Woolf, for one, was familiar with the ethics of fellow feeling through her father, Leslie Stephen's writings on the matter, and the type of critical attitude towards moralistic concerns about empathy mentioned above is readily visible in one of her essays. She writes in "On Being Ill" that:

> About sympathy for example; we can do without it. That illusion of a world so shaped that it echoes every groan, of human beings so tied together by common needs and fears that a twitch at one wrist jerks another, where however strange your experience other people have had it too, where however far you travel in your own mind someone has been there before you – is all an illusion. We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others. Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way. There is a virgin forest, tangled, pathless, in each; a snow field where even the print of birds' feet is unknown. Here we go alone, and like it better so. Always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable. But in health the genial pretence must be kept up and the effort renewed – to communicate, to civilise, to share, to cultivate the desert, educate the native, to work by day together and by night to sport. In illness this make-believe ceases.[70]

Woolf's anxieties about the unknowability of oneself and others dismisses sympathy's pretence to interpersonal understanding and universal connectedness. She expresses her thoughts on the untrodden paths to one's unknowable "soul" through a movement away from a shallow, "make-believe" urge to sympathetic understanding: "Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way." I would like to concentrate for a moment on

[69] In Hammond's and Martin's monographs, Woolf's later works prove to be the most controversial cases of empathic representation. Hammond mainly examines phenomenological aspects of Woolf's version of empathy and demonstrates that she became gradually disillusioned with empathic representation, almost rejecting the "experience of a foreign consciousness"; Martin looks at "Woolf's changing conception of sympathy across her work," and argues that Woolf was mainly concerned about the morality of sympathy. For moral dilemmas in modernism see Martin Halliwell, *Transatlantic Modernism: Moral Dilemmas in Modernist Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Hammond, *Empathy and Modernism*, 4.
[70] Woolf, *On Being Ill*, 11–12.

this image, because Carson, at the beginning of this introduction, echoes a very similar spatial metaphor. Carson suggests that we can only go half the way in knowing the world; Woolf writes that interpersonal immediacy and understanding stops short after a certain point, it cannot go all the way. They are both describing the moment of letting go of the urge to know and understand indefinitely (interpersonal relations in Woolf, and broader attentional ones in Carson). Carson, just as Woolf, offers space to the "other half" of everything to unfold in its unknowability. All in all, as the chapter on McEwan's rewriting of Woolf will show, Woolf's humanistic aesthetic attention to objects and living beings does retain a deep awareness of their unknowability.

Forster's concern with sympathetic connection is undeniable, but his interest goes beyond questions of fellow feeling. Self-professedly learning from Roger Fry, as Woolf herself did, Forster wrote on aesthetic attention to and identification with painting and music.[71] These essays are all considerations of the process of aesthetic perception and projection, even if there is no explicit mention of the word *Einfühlung*.

Joyce does use the word empathy in *Finnegans Wake* with a close reference to psychoanalysis (Freud also had a keen interest in empathy theories): "Can you not distinguish the sense, prain, from the sound, bray? You have homosexual catheis of empathy between narcissism of the expert and steatopygic invertedness. Get yourself psychoanolised!" Cathexis, coined by Freud after the Greek *kathexis* (retention), is a psychoanalytical term that means an excessive, unhealthy concentration or fixation of one's "mental energy on one particular person, idea, or object."[72] And the *Wake*'s "catheis of empathy" might refer more generally to a neurotic, concentrated empathic attention to things. Strikingly, a reviewer, writing for the *Observer* in 1928, classifies Joyce, alongside

[71] See for example Forster's "Not Looking at Pictures" and "Not Listening to Music" (1939) in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Penguin, 1972).
[72] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "cathexis," accessed April 6, 2018, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/cathexis.

Proust as "the possessor of a violent empathy."[73] Though it is not clear what the reviewer exactly meant by this, it is possible that he understood empathy in the more capacious sense of both an aesthetic and intersubjective attention, and saw *Ulysses* as an excessive practice of both.

The reviewer's use of empathy, alongside the empathy theories surveyed in this section show, then, how interrelated understandings of fellow feeling and aesthetic attention have historically been. This is important because even though Woolf's, Forster's and Joyce's empathies have been recently studied in relation to intersubjectivity, the contemporary novelists discussed in this thesis seem to be attentive to modernists' more nuanced empathic representations. Their ethical interest in empathic identification goes hand in hand with a questioning of the possibility of representing empathy in fiction. In the next sections I outline how such close-knitted aesthetic and intersubjective empathy concepts fit into broader contemporary critical and creative agendas and new ethical theories in order to explore the contexts in which McEwan, Carson, and Smith rethink modernism's empathic attention.

Modernism and postmodern endings

Contemporary novelists' reworking of a specifically modernist empathy (just as their seemingly simple rendering of empathy) is part and parcel of the critical and cultural landscape of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. This return is attuned to or even partially motivated by the wider changes in the literary critical and cultural field since the 1990s, which can be broadly characterised by a return to realism, sincerity, and ethics, and a celebration of literary value. One of the major trends in contemporary literary studies that accompanies these returns is a movement away from the recent literary past's useful

[73] Humbert Wolfe, "The Response to Art," review of Rebecca West's *The Strange Necessity*, *Observer*, July 29, 1928; the *OED* lists Wolfe's lines among the earliest uses of empathy (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "empathy," accessed April 6, 2018, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/61284?redirected From=empathy).

marker, postmodernism, and a renewed interest in modernist aesthetics. At a recent symposium on *metamodernism*, the speakers, Peter Boxall, Urmila Seshagiri, Adam Kelly, and Alison Gibbons, concluded their discussion about the legacies of modernism in contemporary fiction with the endlessly restated end of postmodernism.[74] Those present seemed to agree with Boxall who said that the postmodern, once coterminous with the contemporary, no longer seems to be a useful term to describe the current literary scene. To illustrate how the past, present, and future are "held delicately in balance" by contemporary fiction, Boxall used Dickens's famous passage from *A Christmas Carol:* "I will live in the past, the present, and the future. The spirits of all three shall strive within me," contending that contemporary fiction "is trying to receive the legacies of modernism, while embracing and moving past postmodernism."[75] The interweaving of modernism, postmodernism, and contemporary fiction and the subtle historicising movements that happen between the three revolve around questions of balance, death, afterlives, and resurrections of literary period markers, terms that remain difficult to conceptualise. The main question I will focus on in the following is why and how contemporary fiction's interest in modernism persists after (and through) the endings of the postmodern.

It has become a critical commonplace to explain this move towards modernism as being prompted by the alleged philosophical circularities of postmodernist deconstruction, and also by the gradual "abandonment of postmodernism" as a useful category in academic discourse.[76] As Jean Michel-Rabaté puts it, in the past few decades postmodernism has been "almost completely discarded"; "in the last five years," as Jason Gladstone, Andrew Hoberek, and Daniel Worden explain, "an increasing number of critics have also begun to

[74] First AHRC Metamodernism Symposium, Manchester Metropolitan University, January 31, 2018.
[75] Peter Boxall, "Imagining the Future" (talk, First AHRC Metamodernism Symposium, Manchester Metropolitan University, January 31, 2018).
[76] Irmtraud Huber, *Literature after Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

question whether postmodernism was ever a significant aspect of postwar American literary culture," a point even more relevant in the case of British and Irish literary and cultural criticism.[77] Julian Barnes, when recently asked whether he minds being labelled as postmodernist said that: "I find it a fairly neutral label and I don't mind. When I was first called a postmodernist, which was 15 or so years ago, it sounded like something which was pretty up to date but it seems to me that most of the labels have become almost meaningless."[78] He continued by wondering about the tenacity of various new labels:

> After all, I don't think I can be a postmodernist because if we think of the modernists in the English writing world such as Joyce, Eliot and so on, and then think of the postmodernist generation, it must be people like Borges, Nabokov, Calvino, and they're all dead, so does that make me a post-postmodernist? There's a certain point where you come out on the other side. Joyce Carol Oates once reviewed one of my books and said he's a pre-postmodernist.[79]

As Barnes himself seems to suggest, the forces that led to postmodernism's diminished importance in literary studies range from a proliferation of alternative period markers that attempt a more differentiated mapping of the postwar fictional landscape to postmodernism's rethought period boundaries. Recent volumes in the field use this alleged dissolution of the postmodern category in mapping contemporary critical and literary trends. In *Postmodern/Postwar— and After* (2016), Gladstone, Hoberek, and Worden neatly explain the ways in which postmodernism has "dropped out" of both literary and academic enterprises, arguing that "one of the effects of these approaches to post-1945 literature has

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[77] Jean Michel-Rabaté, "Philosophy," in *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, ed. David Bradshaw and Kevin J. H. Dettmar (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 10; Jason Gladstone, Andrew Hoberek, Daniel Worden, eds., *Postmodern/Postwar—and After*: *Rethinking American Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016), 1. The need to replace the postmodern with more nuanced categories attests to its overuse in critical discourse. Back in 1985, Umberto Eco famously noted that postmodernism had become "a term bon á tout faire" (Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt, 2014), 569). This tendency to extend postmodernism's period boundaries backwards facilitated its dispersion into a set of stylistic and political taxonomies that can be applied to several periods. At the same time, extending period boundaries and dismantling the little coherence that is left in postmodernism ultimately seems to be a backtracking on critics' part about postmodernism as a distinct category.

[78] Vanessa Guignery, "Julian Barnes" (interview with Julian Barnes by Francois and Vanessa Guignery in 2001), in *Novelists in the New Millennium: Conversations with Writers* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 23.

[79] Ibid.

been to displace postmodernism as an explanatory category in the name of more pragmatic institutional histories, circulation studies, sociological inquiries, and reception models."[80] They foreground how "a field formerly known as postmodern literary studies" is "now known by a growing number of periodizing terms […] (contemporary, cosmodernist, exomodern, neoliberal, post-9/11, to name just some)," and argue for the usefulness of the "reevaluation of postmodernism" for thinking "about what forms and functions might literature take" today.[81] This recently published volume is symptomatic in that it sees the now familiar move away from postmodernism as a productive force (or starting point) for new theorisations of the field.

The chronological expansion of the New Modernist Studies has been instrumental in displacing the postmodern category.[82] Gladstone, Hoberek, and Worden agree that "in the 1990s postmodernism is unquestionably dominant, only to be offset by a stronger notion of modernism in the 2000s" in literary studies.[83] Indeed, New Modernist Studies has expanded in temporal (into the late nineteenth and twenty-first centuries), geographical (globally), and cultural (bridging the high–low divide) terms, as Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz explain.[84] At the other end of the spectrum of the "period formerly known as postmodern literary studies," the newly founded British Association for Contemporary Literary Studies is a timely intervention in the field, suggesting a sense of confidence and comfort in the process of historicizing and institutionalising twenty-first-century fiction on its own terms, without the "post-" prefix.[85] Therefore, postmodernism remains bracketed between the

[80] Gladstone et. al., *Postmodern/Postwar—and After*, 6.
[81] Ibid., 2.
[82] Gladstone, Hoberek, and Worden argue that "often in support of this expansion of modernism, studies of contemporary literature have also increasingly set aside 'postmodernism' as an organizing category" (Gladstone et. al., *Postmodern/Postwar—and After*, 5).
[83] Ibid., 11.
[84] See Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (May 2008): 737–48.
[85] The association aims "to raise the visibility and heighten the legitimacy of contemporary literary studies," conceiving its lines of interest broadly, stating that "BACLS will focus on a 'rolling sense' of the contemporary rather than a particular historical period. We are dedicated to a fluid and hybrid understanding of the

expanding new modernist studies and the new platforms dedicated to contemporary literary studies, ultimately squeezed out to facilitate stronger critical and creative ties between modernist and contemporary criticism and fiction.[86]

Questions of influence: experimental and real, traditional and innovative

Now that we have seen how the critical fallout of the postmodern conditioned twenty-first-century criticism's heightened attention to modernism, I will take a closer look at how these legacies interweave in contemporary writing. In his discussion of Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children*, Boxall argues that the contemporary novel (inevitably) brings together modernist, postmodern and mid-century legacies that "interweave and flow into each other."[87] More importantly, as Philip Tew suggests, these influences are "strongly evident, yet there is something determinedly contemporaneous and different."[88] The relation between intensely evident influences and "something distinctly contemporaneous" in twenty-first-century fiction poses questions about the nature of literary inheritance. Andrzej Gasiorek argues that twenty-first-century novelists such as Zadie Smith are not guided by

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contemporary 'moment' as an ever-evolving experience of the contemporary" ("About BACLS," accessed March 14, 2018, https://www.bacls.org/about/); Amy Hungerford coins "long modernism," affirming that "the second half of the twentieth century sees not a departure from modernism's aesthetic, but its triumph in the institution of the university and in the literary culture more generally" (Amy Hungerford, "On the Period Formerly Known as the Contemporary," *American Literary History* 20, no. 1–2 (2008): 418).

[86] In fact, postmodernism seems to retain varying degrees of relevance in both fields from which it has been officially (and routinely) expelled. Gladstone, Hoberek, and Worden foreground the theoretical camp of contemporary literary studies where postmodernism is still "alive and well," whilst acknowledging a row of conscious attempts aimed at rejecting the "now institutionalised modes of criticism associated with postmodernism and backed (most often) by poststructuralism" (Gladstone et. al., Postmodern/Postwar—and After, 12; see in the same book: "Postmodern, Postwar, Contemporary: A Dialogue on the Field," Andrew Hoberek, with Samuel Cohen, Amy J. Elias, Mary Esteve, Matthew Hart, and David James (27–58)). In his conclusion to *Contemporary Fiction and the Uses of Theory* (2006), Michael Greary offers an optimistic image of the future of postmodern theory, arguing that representations of its death continue to live on in the fiction of several contemporary writers (Jonathan Franzen, etc). Greary writes that "Novelists have been imagining the death of theory for 'years and years and years' now, but the tremendous energies they have devoted to envisioning its demise or disappearance have only served to grant it a rich and indefinitely prolonged afterlife in the pages of contemporary fiction" (Michael Greary, *Contemporary Fiction and the Uses of Theory: The Novel from Structuralism to Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), 160).

[87] Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 152.

[88] Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel*, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2007), xv.

an anxiety of modernist influence; on the contrary, these novelists engage in a creative play with modernist works.[89]

David James's books have been instrumental in exploring modernist legacies in contemporary fiction.[90] James argues that modernism functions as a "precondition of new circumstances of creativity"; it carries an *unfulfilled promise*, "yet to be fully realised," and thus revivified, reactivated, and extended by contemporary fiction.[91] In his view, modernism's active presence triggers new angles for novelistic innovation, and the necessity of developing critical vocabularies to accommodate the claims of such correlations. He argues that "fiction today partakes of an interaction between innovation and inheritance that is entirely consonant with what modernists themselves were doing more than a century ago, an interaction that enables writers to work *with* their lineage in the process of attempting new experiments with form."[92] However, this interweaving of "innovation and inheritance" remains tricky to pinpoint.

This problem reverberates in the critical practice of different ways of reading. Amy Hungerford emphasizes that "a reading of experimentalist novels can be – and, indeed, must be – integrated with a discussion of realist writing." She explains how several critics set themselves the "task of undoing the reigning bifurcation of contemporary fiction into the 'postmodern' avant-garde and the writing of women and people of color that was so often dismissed, in the academy, as naively realist or concerned more with social issues than with the development of literary aesthetics."[93] This bifurcation, though based on slightly different terms, is apparent in David Lodge's familiar idea of the "novelist at the crossroads," an

[89] Andrzej Gasiorek, "'A Renewed Sense of Difficulty': E. M. Forster, Iris Murdoch and Zadie Smith on Ethics and Form," in *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. David James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 170–187.
[90] James, *Modernist Futures: Innovation and Inheritance in the Contemporary Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and his edited volume cited above.
[91] James, *Modernist Futures*, 5, 30.
[92] Ibid., 2.
[93] Hungerford, "On the Period Formerly Known as the Contemporary," 411.

image that Gasiorek used in an attempt to reintegrate the polarised view between experimentation and realism in post-war British fiction.[94] A Lodgean view guides Zadie Smith's article "Two Paths for the Novel" which sees the experimentalism of Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* and the realism of Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* as two opposing agendas. Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, and Leigh Wilson in *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (2015) contend that arguments like Smith's overlook the subtler interweaving of realism and experimentation in the fiction of the new millennium. They devise three broad paths for the novel: firstly, a preoccupation with postmodern techniques grounded in ethical questions, where they include the fiction of Nicola Barker, A. L. Kennedy, Hari Kunzru, Toby Litt, Tom McCarthy, David Mitchell, Ali Smith, and Will Self; secondly, a return to "a broadly realist mode as an implicit rejection of postmodernism," consisting of writers such as Monica Ali, Andrea Levy, Caryl Phillips, John King, Courttia Newland and Alex Wheatle; and thirdly, a "self-conscious return" to "modernist techniques as a way of return to a pre-postmodernist aesthetics,"[95] with the canon of some of Zadie Smith's, McEwan's, Alan Hollinghurst's, and Will Self's novels. Bentley, Hubble, and Wilson also admit that the "three categories overlap," reaffirming the complex ways in which realism and experimentation interlace, and suggesting a parallel between the returns to realism and to modernism both motivated by a rejection of postmodernism.[96]

Novelists themselves have often found it hard to theorise and historicise their place on the contemporary literary scene. When asked in one of his interviews whether he considers himself an experimental novelist, Tom McCarthy refrained from doing so, but struggled to historicize a new type of realism that does not ignore modernism and still remains somewhat experimental:

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[94] Gasiorek, *Post-war British Fiction*: *Realism and After* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).
[95] Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, Leigh Wilson, *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 17.
[96] Ibid., 19.

> People use that term [experimental] when what they actually mean is 'not conforming to a certain type of realism,' and that's just as much a literary convention as anything else. Burroughs said his 'cut-up' writing was more realistic than Jane Austen. I think he was right. You're being assailed by associations and networks.

This is a fairly familiar claim for experimental writing, rehearsing even at this point a modernist logic about being more realistic than realism. Will Self articulates a similar problem when he admits that reading modernist texts is liberating, but working through modernism still lands him with the conventional:

> I haven't been content to carry on producing books that merely strain against the conventions […] I've become determined that they should be the fictive equivalent of ripping the damn corset off altogether and chucking it on the fire. […] I felt a dreadful intractability about the text I was working on – no matter that I had eschewed the simple past and dived into the dangerous waters of the continuous present; no matter that I had struck out from the safe shores of the third-personal to embrace the slippery evanescence of the stream of consciousness, still I felt the corset cutting into me, still I felt mired in convention.[97]

While reading modernism becomes liberating for Self, *imitating* the modernist project encloses him in a loop of convention. Like Self, several other contemporary novelists' close attention to modernism's long institutionalised modes and conventions might hinder them from creatively extending this aesthetics (the modernist project). James writes in relation to Roth that there is a "distinction between simply reusing modernist devices and the more challenging work of absorbing modernism's message while 'finding a voice and subject of one's own.'"[98]

James, Boxall, Tew, and Nicola Allen argue for contemporary writers' *balanced* approach to modernism. James traces modernism's continuity in the works of J. M. Coetzee, Milan Kundera, Ian McEwan, Toni Morrison, Michael Ondaatje, and Philip Roth, arguing that these writers' shared artistic commitments are to a balance between "self-reflexivity and

[97] Will Self, "modernism and me," *Guardian*, August 3, 2012.
[98] James, *Legacies of Modernism*, 139.

formal integrity."[99] Boxall broadly agrees, while emphasizing in addition that "it is this twin pressure – the political desire for realism and the self-reflexive aesthetic engagement with the limits of narrative in capturing experience – that characterises the emerging historiographical fiction of the new century and that acts as the basis for a twenty-first-century literary sensibility more widely."[100] In a similar vein, Allen explains Jeanette Winterson's views on inheritance and irreverence, writing that authors "incorporate elements of the postmodern tradition but ultimately insist upon a balance that incorporates a more traditional understanding of narrative."[101] There is certainly something programmatic about this "balance" that is hard to grasp. David Palumbo Liu calls this a "vacillating dynamic between empathy and critique" in contemporary fiction.[102]

All these critics are careful to outline the ways in which modernism is reworked into "something contemporaneous." David James and Urmila Seshagiri call this literary sensibility metamodernism, arguing that "Metamodernist practice redistributes the innovative energies of its predecessors." They give a rich overview of the ways in which modernism is used creatively by contemporary fiction:

> It pays tribute to modernist style (as in the writing of Alan Hollinghurst, Kazuo Ishiguro, Michael Ondaatje, Zadie Smith, Jeanette Winterson); it inhabits the consciousness of individual modernist writers (Virginia Woolf in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* [1998], Henry James in Colm Tóibín's *The Master* [2004], Henry James and Joseph Conrad in Cynthia Ozick's Dictation: *A Quartet* [2008]); and it details modernism's sociopolitical, historical, and philosophical contexts (Bruce Duffy's *The World As I Found It* [1987], Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* [2004], Pat Barker's *Life Class* [2007]). And if early-twentieth-century modernism takes center stage in fiction that aggressively examines the very idea and ethos of modernist artistry (McEwan's *Atonement* and Coetzee's *Youth*), it plays an equally formative role as an absent or vanishing referent in novels where overt influences are less visible (Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* [2011], Ali Smith's *There but for The* [2011], Self 's *Umbrella* [2012]). Across vastly divergent transnational literary registers, as even these partial catalogs reveal, metamodernist

[99] James, *Modernist Futures*, 35.
[100] Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction*, 81.
[101] Nicola Allen, *Marginality in the Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2008), 28.
[102] David Palumbo-Liu, *The Deliverance of Others: Reading Literature in a Global Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 13.

> writing incorporates and adapts, reactivates and complicates the aesthetic prerogatives of an earlier cultural moment.[103]

This catalogue gives a wide-ranging picture of contemporary fiction's *balancing act* between irony and realism, between modernism and possibilities for further experimentation. James and Seshagiri conclude that "As a historical antecedent, a cultural trope, and an archive of stylistic and technical possibilities, twentieth-century experimental modernism exerts considerable force on the vision and voice of such contemporary novels."[104]

Metamodern timing

One of the questions that these arguments, alongside those of Boxall's, Tew's, Allen's, and Liu's, necessarily pose is that of timing. Why does the contemporary return programmatically to modernism now? I have already suggested that this attention to modernism is connected to the demise of postmodernism, however, there are other forces at work. The Henry James phenomenon in the early twenty-first century – the "wonderful convergence" of writers focusing on Henry James's oeuvre almost simultaneously – is an interesting case in point here. In his review of David Lodge's *Author, Author* (2004), Peter Kemp writes that:

> If anyone deserves to win this year's Man Booker prize, it's Henry James. During 2004, he has been the originator of no less than three outstanding novels. In March, Colm Tóibín's *The Master* admiringly depicted him as a genius of watchfulness. A month later, Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (whose hero was a James-enthusiast writing a thesis about his style) traced Jamesian themes – the guilefulness of charm, the way social suavity can mask cruelty, selfishness and greed – across the world of London's rich and powerful in the 1980s. Now, with *Author, Author*, David Lodge pays fictional tribute.

[103] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution," *PMLA* 129, no. 1 (2014): 93.
[104] Ibid.

Indeed, Tóibín's and Lodge's novels feature a fictionalised James as the central consciousness of their novels, whilst also reworking James's stylistic heritage. David Lodge starts his book *The Year of Henry James: The Story of a Novel* (2006) with Kemp's first sentence, complementing Kemp's list with two further novels written or published in or around the same year: Emma Tennant's *Felony* (2002; paperback 2004), and Michiel Heyns's *The Typewriter's Tale* rejected in 2004 (the "year of Henry James") and published the following year.[105] One controlling factor of this convergence of interests is publication histories. Heyns's novel had been initially rejected by the publisher, because, as Lodge tells, it would have been impossible to sell so much written on James in the same year.

Unquestionably, the complex engagement with modernism that James and Seshagiri neatly outline is partly due to (or made possible by) the publishing and reading markets.[106] Lodge embarks on further possible explanations for this "convergence of novelistic attention" by referring to the upsurge of feminist and queer studies, but more importantly to the rise of the biographical novel about writers. In addition, these critical trends are part of a broader "convergence" of cultural contexts. Several critics draw parallels between early twentieth-century and twenty-first-century cultural and socio-political events, pointing to a similarity between the impact of modernity and postmodernity on literary sensibility. Boxall, for example, remarks several parallels between modernity's industrialisation and speed and

[105] David Lodge, *The Year of Henry James or, Timing is All: The Story of a Novel. With Other Essays on the Genesis, Composition and Reception of Literary Fiction* (London: Harvill Secker, 2006).
[106] In a recent article in the *New Statesman*, Bret Johnson talks about the return to modernism in the market, explaining "How we learned to stop worrying and love modernism (again)," thanks to (daring) publishers' willingness to publish radically experimental fiction and readers' love for such "difficult" novels. He sees the newly established Goldsmith's Prize for experimental fiction a way of drawing critical and popular attention to these "niche novels" ("How we learned to stop worrying and love modernism (again)," *New Statesman*, November 14, 207, https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/ books/2017/11/how-we-learned-stop-worrying-and-love-modernism-again).

contemporary changes in technology, looking at the latter as an almost exponential phase of modernity.[107]

Undoubtedly, the return to modernism in twenty-first century fiction is embedded in socio-political changes and facilitated to a great extent by the publishing and literary prize industry, together with complex interactions between institutional, critical, and academic creative writing agendas,[108] but, as I will argue in this thesis, contemporary fiction's resonance with modernist empathic representation foregrounds a stronger and rather overlooked connection between the two periods, one that is specifically grounded in the phenomenology of attention, and the routine contemporary crises of subject–object and self–other relations.

James and Seshagiri's notion of metamodernism, then, is revealing of yet another aspect of modernist reworkings that has to do with contemporary fiction's intensity of attention to the modernist project. In his lectures on attention and feeling at Columbia University in 1908 (those in which he coins the word empathy), Titchener explained how the intensity of a sensation is relative to our attention. He presented contemporary findings in experimental psychology which proved that in the case of both weak and strong stimuli "attention has an intensifying effect."[109] These findings demonstrated that, for example, "The sensation of a loud sound, inattentively experienced, may seem equal […] to that of a faint sound, attentively experienced."[110] In a similar vein, the version of modernism that emerges today depends on the intensity and focus of attention that contemporary fiction casts upon it. I suggest that twenty-first-century fiction's insistence on, or exaggerated

[107] Boxall, *Twenty-First Century Fiction;* for similar arguments about parallels between early and late twentieth-century modernity, see Thomas Docherty, 'Postmodernism: An Introduction,' in *Postmodernism: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).
[108] See Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).
[109] Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes*, 217.
[110] Titchener qts. Külpe, *Lectures on the Elementary Psychology of Feeling and Attention* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 213.

version of empathy identifies a strong connection with modernist aesthetics, without narrowing it to simply a set of reusable formal techniques. Here I agree with Laura Marcus and James that contemporary novelists do not simply recast modernist texts as "reusable relics of literary history."[111] As Marcus argues in relation to McEwan (but her argument is applicable to Smith and Carson as well), McEwan "does not attempt merely to reproduce the modernist text, nor to create a parody or pastiche of it," but he "acknowledges the debt even as he calls attention to the necessary and inevitable distance between his own time and that of the modernist novelist."[112] I contend that contemporary novelists engage with the wider context of early twentieth-century fiction, being attentive to modernists' deep crisis about different forms of empathy. Through their nuanced engagement with empathy, these novelists foreground "histories of looking" and attending (to objects and others) in and at modernism, albeit presenting a less radically experimental reworking of modernist form. I agree with James and Seshagiri's argument that contemporary "novelists collectively perpetuate a notion of modernist art's capacity [...] for resisting the whole phenomenology of recognition by which readers apprehend and assimilate a new work within existing frames of generic reference and evaluation."[113] However, I extend this argument by showing that contemporary novelists draw attention to exactly this phenomenology of recognition by offering and demanding different models of attention and by emphasizing their very processes of reading and attending to modernist empathies.

Whereas for James the return to modernism perhaps paradoxically underwrites the experimental in contemporary fiction (he sees modernism as a springboard for further experimentation), I argue instead that contemporary fiction tests the limits of creative engagement with modernism, aiming to probe how intensely it can attend to modernism

[111] James, *Modernist Futures*, 138.
[112] Laura Marcus, "Ian McEwan's Modernist Time: *Atonement* and *Saturday*," in *Contemporary Critical Perspectives: Ian McEwan*, ed. Sebastian Groes, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2013), 85.
[113] James and Seshagiri, "Metamodernism," 93.

without creating a join-the-dots-kitsch, or an updated pastiche.[114] On the flipside, it is worth noting contemporary fiction's difficulty of dissociating itself from modernism, largely due to the reading patterns that modernism demands and has created. One the one hand, McEwan, Carson, and Smith perpetuate a reading process that mimics modernist attentional demands; on the other, they are testing what happens to modernism if rewritten very closely, drawing attention to the literary critical expansiveness of modernism. My understanding of the *meta-* in metamodernism therefore refers to contemporary novelists' awareness of the scale or the extent to which experiments can be done with modernism, without (or whilst) bordering the middlebrow and kitsch.

Histories of not looking: empathy, ethics, and Victorianism

One of the reasons why a significant portion of contemporary fiction has been accused of middlebrowing is because of its ostensible concerns with ethics over formal experimentation. Tom McCarthy's assessment of the contemporary British literary scene is symptomatic. He says in one of his interviews that "The avant garde can't be ignored, so to ignore it – as most humanist British novelists do – is the equivalent of ignoring Darwin. Then you're just a creationist. It's ostrich-like. It needs to be worked through – which is not the same thing as imitation."[115] McCarthy is concerned about contemporary novelists' reworking of a less radically experimental modernist project, an institutionalised, assimilable, unrebarbative version of modernism. By framing twenty-first-century British

[114] This raises the problem of modernism's "functionality," even necessity, as, in James's words, a (re-)"usable past" (*Modernist Futures,* 57), and its recuperation as kitsch, artefact, and subject to middlebrowing. As Jesse Matz astutely concludes in his writing about novels by Tóibin and Cunningham, "Pseudo-Impressionism?", even if Impressionism seems to be no more than a waning caricature, it actually discloses "a fascinating record of Impressionism's legacies", a "comprehensive exploration of the ways Impressionism has come down to us." The writers selected for this thesis, similarly to Tóibin, transpose – in our case – modernism "into a new contemporary mode" (Jesse Matz, "Pseudo-Impressionism?" in *The Legacies of Modernism*, 127; 130).

[115] Tom McCarthy, "To Ignore the Avant Garde Is Akin to Ignoring Darwin," interview by James Purdon, *Observer*, July 31, 2010.

fiction in terms of an attention or a lack of it to certain versions of modernism and the avant-garde, McCarthy's description raises crucial questions about what gets rewritten today, who doesn't get that much attention by contemporary novelists and why. What are the consequences of this uneven attention? Why and how can the avant-garde and the modernist project be "worked through"? What McCarthy himself misses, however, is precisely contemporary novelists' engagement with an empathic modernism outlined above. His opinion is also symptomatic of how this experimentation with empathy did not fully register within shared contemporary critical vocabularies. For McCarthy, McEwan, Zadie Smith, and Carson presumably register as sentimental humanist novelists who are not interested in "working through" Wyndham Lewis's novels or Beckett's works, for example, and are probably stuck in the traditional ethics of empathic care.

McCarthy's sentimental humanist categorisation of British novelists is a familiar one, neatly corresponding with a contemporary critical discourse built on the rhetoric of reconstruction, a pronounced move away from postmodern scepticism towards a form of realism in late twentieth-century fiction.[116] This "new" realism has been theorised as critical realism (López, Potter), historical reparation (Gauthier), authenticity (Funk), 'New Sincerity' (Kelly), 'Aesthetics of Truth' (Hassan), 'New Sensibility,' alternative possibility, commitment, or a new confidence and belief in representability and the creation of value.[117] Critics widely consider David Foster Wallace's 1993 essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" as predictive of this "new sincerity" and "new realism" paradigm in

[116] Irmtraud Huber, *Literature after Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[117] See: Jose López and Garry Potter, *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism* (London: The Athlone Press, 2001); Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Tim Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations: A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, and Salman Rushdie* (London: Routledge, 2006); Adam Kelly, "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction," in *Consider David Foster Wallace. Critical Essays*, ed. David Hering (Los Angeles: SSMG Press, 2010), 131–146; Ihab Hassan, "Beyond Postmodernism: Toward and Aesthetic of Trust," in *Beyond Postmodernism: Reassessments in Literature, Theory, and Culture*, ed. Klaus Stierstorfer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 199–212.

contemporary fiction.[118] Wallace writes that "The next real literary 'rebels' in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of 'anti-rebels,' born oglers who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse single-entendre values. Who treat old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-consciousness and fatigue."[119] Wallace's statements systematically undo contemporary fiction's ties to postmodernism, risking a sense of outdatedness and lack of experimental vision in literary production. He warns that

> These anti-rebels would be outdated, of course, before they even started. Too sincere. Clearly repressed. Backward, quaint, naive, anachronistic. […] Real rebels, as far as I can see, risk things. Risk disapproval. The old postmodern insurgents risked the gasp and squeal: shock, disgust, outrage, censorship, accusations of socialism, anarchism, nihilism. The new rebels might be the ones willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, […] the 'How banal.' Accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Credulity.[120]

Wallace thus pre-empts McCarthy-like criticisms about an overly sentimental and less radically experimental new fiction, seeing the move to realism and sincerity as risk-taking and a conscious decision. On the British literary scene, Zadie Smith's well-known remark at the 2003 Orange Word Lecture symptomatizes this turn to sincerity through a renewed sense of the importance of value in contemporary fiction: "They say when you become a practitioner you become a sentimentalist – maybe that's what happened. All I know for sure is that I no longer find it impossible to speak of value (not universal value, or even shared value, but value as it concerns this reader)."[121] Bentley, Hubble, and Wilson observe that the 'New Sincerity' wave in British fiction comparable to its American version has been more strongly criticised for its perceived outdatedness: "An apparently analogous return to

[118] Gladstone, Hoberek, and Worden in their introduction to *Postmodern/Postwar—and After* see Wallace's essay as a "programmatic power" in contemporary American fiction; also see Bentley et. al., *The 2000s*.
[119] David Foster Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1993), 192–193.
[120] Ibid., 193.
[121] Zadie Smith, "Love, Actually," *Guardian*, November 1, 2003.

'sincerity' in British fiction is 'bracingly old-fashioned.'"[122] This view certainly chimes with McCarthy's complaint. His sentimental humanist category perhaps tellingly exhibits a critical perspective that is dissatisfied with the ostensibly 'outdated' return to realism in British fiction. In what remains of this introduction, I will give a brief account of how the privileged position of empathy in today's moral vocabulary and its less privileged position in literary criticism, together with contemporary novelists' reworking of a specifically modernist empathy, translates into the ethical, realist, and new sincerity turns in fiction.

The past decades particularly have seen an explosion in empathy studies in several disciplines from neuroscience, social psychology, and evolutionary biology to medicine and economics. Though academic interest in aesthetic empathy has largely dropped out of favour after its prevalence in the early twentieth century, the sheer quantity of research on empathy, and particularly via the cognitive turn has triggered significant renewed research in the psychology of empathy.[123] One of the suggestive titles, best-selling author Franz de Waal's popular science book *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (2009), epitomises the popularity of the term across disciplines and its strongly ethical framework by linking human empathy to altruism, care, fairness, and a general moral awareness (even goodness) in society. Psychology professor and primatologist by training, listed by *Time magazine* as one of the 100 most influential people in 2011, de Waal sees empathy as one

[122] They are referring to reviews of A. S. Byatt's *Possession* and its references to *Middlemarch* (Bentley et. al., *The 2000s*, 211).

[123] David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, among others, argue for an embodied simulation account of empathy, maintaining that empathetic response to a work of art has a "definable material basis in the brain." They look at how representations of feelings and emotions elicit bodily resonance, and at the ways in which objects, actions and intuited artistic intentions induce an imaginary "acting out." Freedberg and Gallese explain that the observation of an action activates exactly the same neural network as when the action is performed; they also clarify that "mirror neurons not only underpin action understanding, but they are also involved in understanding the intentions that underlie action." For example, a painting which implies movement can evoke the same movement in the viewer, and a self-reflexive artwork can bring about imitations of its process of creation. Even those works of art which do not imply motion "can be 'animated' by the embodied simulation" they evoke in the brain (David Freedberg, Vittorio Gallese. "Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11, no. 5 (2007): 200–201). Terence Cave's recently published book *Thinking with Literature* (2016) illustrates this kinaesthetic understanding of literature, where reading a text translates into quasi-physical responses which are both conceptual and muscular (*Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)).

of the pillars of morality, and an evolutionary given in human nature, arguing that the empathic model handed down to us by evolution should constitute the basis of today's society. His argument chimes with many books written from different stand-points; one with a similarly daring title, Jeremy Rifkin's *The Empathic Civilisation* (2011) also sees empathy as the key to a better society.[124] Rifkin argues that extending human beings' empathy for one another to empathy for the biosphere would solve large-scale socio-economic problems. De Waal's and Rifkin's arguments come as no surprise, as the (late twentieth-century's) "age of empathy" in research emerged in conjunction with the 1980s ethical turn, a celebration of ethical and moralizing approaches to disciplines.[125] Nancy Eisenberg and Janet Strayer's preface to their edited volume *Empathy and Its Development* (1987) is symptomatic of such an approach, highlighting empathy's foundational role in bettering human relationships:

> Among the many self-evident problems in modern society are the lack of communication and understanding between individuals and groups and the frequent occurrence of inhumane and uncaring behaviour. Many factors, both societal and psychological in nature, may contribute to these problems. There is a great need, particularly at this time of human history, for information about these factors and their precise role in the development and maintenance of affective bonds, understanding, and caring actions among people.
>
> One factor long considered to be a mediator or contributor to positive human interaction and altruistic behavior is empathy or its potential derivative sympathy. There is now some empirical evidence to support such a view. Therefore, it is important that we fully understand the nature of empathy, its development, and its role in behavior. With such an understanding, we may be able to improve the quality of human interrelationships.[126]

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[124] Franz de Waal, *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York: Harmony, 2009); Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilisation: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010). Obama's argument about empathy and education is another famously quoted example of these links between empathy, literature, and society: "When I think about […] the most important set of understandings that I bring to that position of citizen, the most important stuff I've learned I think I've learned from novels. It has to do with empathy. It has to do with being comfortable with the notion that the world is complicated and full of grays […]. And the notion that it's possible to connect with some[one] else even though they're very different from you" (President Obama & Marilynne Robinson: A Conversation – II, *New York Review of Books*, November 19, 2015).

[125] See Kenneth Womack and Todd F. Davis, eds., *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

[126] Nancy Eisenberg and Janet Strayer, eds., *Empathy and Its Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), ix.

As both Woolf and Eliot recognised in the lines I quoted at the beginning of this introduction, one of the persistent problems with sympathy or empathy is that it can become overwhelming, and one needs distractions or emotional distance to become immune to excessive amounts of it. The technical term for this excessive empathy is "empathy fatigue" or "compassion fatigue," and it is triggered by exhaustive attention to the suffering of others. Carolyn Dean calls this an emotional numbness, something that "does not simply suggest that most of us won't disrupt our daily routines for the sake of others near or far without a real or imaginary causal connection to sufferers. It suggests that we are often willing to do so, but to our surprise we feel nothing or are paradoxically immobilized by guilt and even resentful of those who make claims upon us." She remarks that "Assertions that we are numb and indifferent to suffering, that exposure to narratives and images of suffering has generated new and dramatic forms of emotional distance […] are by now commonplace in both the United States and western Europe."[127] In Dean's view, direct or indirect exposure to the mass atrocities of the twentieth-century has brought about new narratives of empathic and emotional numbness or 'not looking' in society.[128]

More recently, 9/11 has been one of the most prominent calls for empathy – perhaps marking a partially restored (global) faith in the necessity of empathic understanding.[129] However, as Dean argues, empathic numbness persists, and it represents a new challenge to "the liberal ideal that we can empathically project ourselves into others with whom we share

[127] Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy*, 2.
[128] She writes that "The socio-historical context within which more recent anxieties about our ability to feel compassion have been articulated has changed dramatically in the aftermath of two world wars, both in Europe and in the United States. […] After the Great War and during the interwar period (1918–39), however, a new middle-class consciousness of empathy's precariousness emerged, and it intensified dramatically after the Second World War. After 1945, the victors prosecuted war crimes literally, by putting perpetrators on trial, as well as symbolically, by reasserting the Enlightenment heritage against the unfathomable collapse of empathy. […] In the next decade, and especially after 1960, discussion about the war shifted from war crimes generally to the extermination of European Jewry and genocide more broadly, and the phrase 'crimes against humanity' […] became increasingly pervasive. […] It was in the context of these discussions that new anxiety about the fragility of empathy developed most self-consciously" (Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy*, 3–4).
[129] Cf. literature of reconstruction versus the end of postmodernism.

a common humanity, whether strangers or neighbors." She explains that numbness is not simply a "psychological form of self-protective dissociation," but a "new, highly self-conscious narrative about the collective construction of moral availability, if not empathy, and may thus constrain humanist aspirations in ways we do not yet recognize."[130] Woolf's and Eliot's words at the beginning of this introduction also refer to a self-protective distraction, whilst outlining the limits of what Dean calls a "collective moral availability." They agree that there is a limited amount of attention one can pay to (the suffering of) others, and that distraction might be the way to cope with empathic excess. Even though this selectivity of empathic attention is necessary, it does instil an overall uncertainty about the optimistic and redemptive functions of empathy. While empathy is widely celebrated as an ideal practice in society today, its actual possibility is simultaneously questioned. Belief in the benefits of empathic understanding and care that de Waal and Rifkin, among others, promote, runs in parallel with a "thickly wadded" and "self-protective" emotional numbness to suffering, and a longer modern history of ethical scepticism about empathy.[131]

In social psychology, empathy is quickly established as the moral heir of (intersubjective) sympathy. After the 1980s, empathy becomes the "watchword of interpersonal relations," largely in tandem with the ethical turn. Fundamentally, empathy is gradually seen in philosophy and psychological research as the opposite of and even antidote to violence.[132] Daniel Batson's influential empathy–altruism hypothesis has been

[130] Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy*, 5.

[131] Famously, Brecht was against passive notions of empathic reception in the theatre; Adorno largely criticised an idea of understanding based on empathy. In referring to Wilhelm Dilthey's notion of empathic understanding as a method in the social sciences (connected to the reliving of others' experiences), Adorno said that: "Philosophically, the concept of understanding has been compromised by Dilthey and his followers and by categories such as empathy" (Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 456).

[132] James Blair argues after Robert Hare that violent behaviour is first and foremost due to empathic dysfunction: "The very ability to inflict serious harm to others repeatedly can be, and is […], an indicator of a profound disturbance in an appropriate 'empathic' response to the suffering of another" (R. James R. Blair, "Empathic Dysfunction in Psychopathic Individuals," in *Empathy in Mental Illness*, ed. Tom Farrow and Peter Woodruff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3. These studies have been underpinned by earlier attempts to measure empathy. One of the first famous empathy tests, Robert Hogan's empathy scale connected empathic behaviour to "moral conduct" and "socially appropriate behaviour" – a perspective that derives from

instrumental in cementing (new ethical and) popular thought about the goodness of empathy. He aimed to demonstrate that empathic feelings could bring forth altruistic behaviour, arguing against egotistic versions of empathic behaviour.[133] He argues that "feeling empathy for [a] person in need evokes motivation to help [that person] in which these benefits to self are not the ultimate goal of helping; they are unintended consequences."[134] Batson is careful to distinguish different versions of empathy in his research, explaining how empathy has come to mean diverse phenomena:

> The term empathy is currently applied to more than a half-dozen phenomena. These phenomena are related to one another, but they are not elements, aspects, facets, or components of a single thing that is empathy, as one might say that an attitude has cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. Rather, each is a conceptually distinct, stand-alone psychological state. Further, each of those states has been called by names other than empathy. Opportunities for disagreement abound.[135]

Though Batson includes Hume's sympathy under his explanation of the empathic phenomena of "Coming to Feel as Another Person Feels," he does not explain how Hume's version differs from empathy. He mentions sympathy also in his section on "Feeling for Another Person Who Is Suffering," acknowledging critics who see a divergence between the feeling of the sympathiser and that of the person eliciting sympathy. Stueber explains that "sympathy is seen as an emotion *sui generis* that has the other's negative emotion or situation as its object from the perspective of somebody who cares for the other person's wellbeing."[136] Batson's taxonomy of empathic phenomena is another example of the broad discursive contexts in which empathy functions, and suggests how understandings of

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early philosophical thinking about sympathy (Robert Hogan, "Development of an Empathy Scale," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 33*, no. 3 (1969): 307–316).

[133] See C. Daniel Batson and Laura L. Shaw, "Evidence for Altruism: Toward a Pluralism of Prosocial Motives," *Psychological Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (1991): 107–122; Batson, *Altruism in Humans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena," in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, ed. Jean Decety and William Ickes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 3–15; "Two Forms of Perspective Taking: Imagining How Another Feels and Imagining How You Would Feel," in *Handbook of Imagination and Mental Simulation*, ed. K. D. Markman, W. M. P. Klein and J. A. Suhr (New York: Psychology Press, 2009), 267–279.

[134] Batson and Shaw, "Evidence for Altruism," 114.

[135] Batson, "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena," 4.

[136] Stueber qts. Darwall "Empathy," np.

empathy can depend on whether the argument attempts a vindication of sympathy's or empathy's centrality; whether the argument favours a long eighteenth-century tradition or a twenty-first century perspective; or it is based on neuroscientific findings or critiques of sentimentality. The general picture that arises from these disciplinary perspectives is that empathy is indispensable for moral judgment and prosocial behaviour, a view to which de Waal's and Rifkin's popular books unquestionably subscribe.[137] Batson's work, then, has contributed to a widespread empathy–altruism argument in philosophy (that started with Hume, Hobbes, and Smith) and literary studies (since the Victorians).

A shared interest in the ethics of empathy has been prominent in the same years in both philosophy and literary criticism, dealing with questions about the novel's place in facilitating empathic understanding, and thus advancing an ethos of care in society. And these are the kinds of novels that McCarthy accuses of formal ignorance. His critique is probably directed towards Nussbaumean ideals that reading enhances one's empathy. Several new ethicists draw on Batson's experimental facts in their argument about the benefits of empathy and compassion in society. An admiring Martha Nussbaum writes that "Batson has focused intelligently on the problem of separating egotistic from altruistic motivation, and to my mind he succeeds in showing that helping behaviour is not explainable on the basis of egoism."[138] Batson's argument, in his newest book Nussbaum praises, summarizes his thirty-five-year research on the links between empathy and altruism, confidently reaffirming that "Empathic concern – other-oriented emotion elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone in need – produces altruistic motivation."[139] He continues by saying that his theory "claims that humans are, indeed,

[137] Martin L. Hoffman, "The contribution of empathy to justice and moral judgment," in *Empathy and its Development,* 47–80.
[138] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 339.
[139] Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 228.

capable of valuing more than their own welfare."[140] Batson's insistence on the value of care reverberated in new ethical debates in the past few decades on literary value and its relation to care, empathy, and compassion.

Largely influenced by the work of American philosopher Stanley Cavell, one of the defining preoccupations of the humanist wave of the ethical turn in literary criticism and philosophy revisits the question of what literature can do in the real world. Cavell aims to productively bring together philosophy and literary criticism through what he calls a "new literary-philosophical criticism,"[141] arguing, after Thoreau and Emerson, that literature is essential to the pursuit of perfection and human development. As Andrew Taylor puts it, "Cavell is clear that the impulse to overcome our alienation from society by establishing meaningful connections with or in it is fundamental to" a healthy society, "through a shared commitment to 'mutual responsiveness,'" represented in both literature and film.[142] Cavell's notion of "mutual responsiveness" and his emphasis on literary value has certainly influenced Nussbaumian theories of ethical responsibility. Nussbaum argues that reading fiction enhances one's compassion, and thus responsibility, for others.[143] Dorothy J. Hale, among others, sees Nussbaum's philosophy and the "new ethical theories" of J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, Derek Attridge, Michael André Bernstein, and others as a "new celebration" of literary value, an "attempt to articulate a positive social value of literature for our postmodern age."[144] She argues that "the return to moral reflection in contemporary literary theory is in fact a double return: the

[140] Ibid., 228–229.
[141] Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 110.
[142] Andrew Taylor, "Embodying an American Union: Cavell's Conjugal and Conversational Ties," in *Stanley Cavell, Literature, and Film: The Idea of America*, ed. Andrew Taylor and Áine Kelly (New York: Routledge, 2013), 189.
[143] Though Nussbaum is considered to be one of the most prominent spokespersons for the benefits of exercising empathy through literature, she is specifically interested in compassion and its connections to empathy (Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, particularly 297–354).
[144] Dorothy J. Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics: Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century," *PMLA*, 124:3 (May 2009): 889.

renewed pursuit of ethics has been accompanied by a new celebration of literature, and it is in the imbrication of these endeavors – the revival of ethics leading to a new defense of literature – that literary theory and moral philosophy find common ground in the twenty-first century."[145] This celebration and defence of literary value, according to Hale, is, in fact, invested in an aesthetics of alterity; she argues that "the ethical value of literature lies in the felt encounter with alterity that it brings to its reader."[146] These theories, then, see empathy – an imaginative encounter with alterity – as literature's claim for real-world impact. The benefits of empathy – as eliciting altruistic behaviour and underlying desired social understanding – are, therefore, transposed into the value that fiction holds in bettering human relationships.

Naturally, influenced by new ethical thinking, literary empathy studies have primarily focused on the reader's empathy with fictional characters, and specifically on the capacity of literature to improve morality. Counter-arguments question the actual effect of literary texts on the reader and the implied correlations among empathy, care, and action.[147] Suzanne Keen identifies key concerns in this sense: complete identification threatens to subsume the other (hyperempathy); it might not lead to action (failed empathy); and it could possibly create misunderstandings of others (false empathy). She argues that "we should not [...] risk spoiling a great source of aesthetic pleasure, refreshing escape, and edification, with a task it cannot accomplish"; rather, she suggests that the novel provides readers a "safe zone" to exercise empathy without the responsibility to take action in the real world.[148] Outside or within novels, empathy continues to be considered one of literature's strongest

[145] Ibid., 897.
[146] Jesse Rosenthal, *Good Form: The Ethical Experience of the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 1.
[147] Sophie Ratcliffe gives a concise overview of this debate. Noel Carroll, Christopher Butler, Eaglestone, and Geoffrey Galt Harpham unsettle "the question of what sort of relation aesthetic engagement might have with altruistic action" (Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy*, 45–49).
[148] Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 168.

claims to measurable real-world impact. Keen neatly foregrounds why such arguments persist:

> If novels do cultivate readers' empathy, and if empathy undergirds both caring and justice in society, then fiction apparently has a vital job to do today. However, the tethering of fiction (or novels, or narrative) to caring also shows a wish to raise the status of fiction and to boost a minority activity, reading. Linking novel reading to a widely shared moral principle – caring – without demanding that fiction be about caring allows broad claims about the medium to exist without evaluating content. This is a neat trick. Novels, by this logic, do not need to articulate the principle that people ought to care for one another. Didacticism is not required. Instead, the very action of reading fiction – any fiction – supposedly trains people to care for one another. (Martha Nussbaum offers a more canonical set of recommended readings; though classics, however, her favorite texts shy away from didacticism.) Then, the relationship among reading, empathy, and caring justifies (by back formation) the cultural centrality, even necessity, of novels for a healthy society. These appealing connections may not be justified, but they clearly have their attractions for defenders of the humanities.[149]

This ethical sensibility is to a great extent connected to contemporary criticism and fiction's move away from postmodernist deconstruction towards modernism and a rhetoric of reconstruction. Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan in *The Good of the Novel* (2011) foreground this link between the abandonment of postmodern theorising and a return to ethics when they say that their project is "motivated partly by the sense that, as books like Terry Eagleton's *After Theory* (2004) and Valentine Cunningham's *Reading After Theory* (2001) postulate, we are emerging from a period of heavily theoretical criticism and that, as a result, what might be called the novelness of novels is coming back into focus. The loosening of the theoretical grip has coincided with a reinvigoration of evaluative literary criticism."[150]

In 1981, Fredric Jameson mockingly states that "In our time, ethics, wherever it makes its reappearance, may be taken as the sign of an intent to mystify, and in particular to replace the more complex and ambivalent judgements of a more properly political and

[149] Ibid., 20–21.
[150] Liam McIlvanney, Ray Ryan, eds., *The Good of the Novel* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), vii–viii.

dialectical perspective with the more comfortable simplifications of a binary myth."[151] Though aspects of the ethical turn are more complex than Jameson allows, they can still prove reductive. In fact, as Rohan A. Maitzen explains, Jameson's view is symptomatic of the ethical turn's general reception in many ways. He articulates precisely that prejudice against which new ethicists were busy defining themselves: the confusion of more complex ethical enquiries with the philosophy of right or wrong that is morality, accentuating a common assumption about the ethical turn's proximity to Victorian moralizing.[152] Though new ethicists consciously and explicitly distance themselves from general versions of a "Victorian ethos" and its evaluative dogmatism (and those influenced by it), they do turn to the Victorian novel to substantiate some of their arguments, and inevitably borrow aspects from Arnoldian theories about the novel's role and function in society.[153] Andrew Gibson even sees a close relation between Lionel Trilling's "mid-twentieth-century naive humanism" and Nussbaumian moral theory.[154] Hale remarks that "those hostile to Nussbaum" see her as pre-Barthesian, someone "who unembarrassedly confesses her love of literature, who argues not just for the positive social value of literature but for the superiority of literature to other types of social discourse, and who even goes so far as to claim that 'literary people' (authors and readers of literature) are 'best equipped' to perform ethical inquiry."[155]

To exemplify literature's capacity to extend one's care for others, Nussbaum, for example, chooses the Victorian novel, in particular Dickens's and Hardy's novels, in *Love's*

[151] Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 56.
[152] Rohan Amanda Maitzen, "'The Soul of Art': Understanding Victorian Ethical Criticism," *English Studies in Canada* 1, no. 2 (2005): 151–185.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Andrew Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics, and the Novel: From Leavis to Levinas* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
[155] Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics," 897.

Knowledge (1990) and *Poetic Justice* (1995).[156] She says that these novels are best suited for her argument because their form elicits ethical ways of thinking, or supply, as Nicholas Dames puts it, "a training process in ethically valuable cognitive habits."[157] Nussbaum argues that in order to enhance our compassion "we seem to require a text that shows a temporal sequence of events (that has a plot), that can represent the complexities of a concrete human relationship, that can show both denial and yielding: that gives no definitions and allows the mysterious to remain so."[158] Similarly, Attridge's literature and alterity, Miller's "innocent reading," Harpham's view of ethical reading as a "dialectic of freedom and obligation," all borrow, to some extent, from Victorian literary culture and moral philosophy.[159] The Victorian novel's suitability for such ethical quests comes as no surprise, of course, with its pronounced interest in the workings of sympathy at a time when moral philosophical thinking about sympathy has been a central concern in relation to its benefits for society. What is more, Victorian ways of reading and ethics are arguably an integral part of our critical discourse today. As Jesse Rosenthal argues, "the moral principles that attached to the Victorian understanding of the novel form have persisted and become an implicit part of our own ongoing critical practice."[160]

Several critics see the persistence of Victorian ethical values in criticism as strongly typical to British literary criticism. In *The Novel After Theory* (2012), Judith Ryan highlights the preoccupation with ethics as one of the main differences between American and British literary criticism. In relation to the trajectory of literary theory, she says that

> The rise of theory in Britain was intricately connected with its rise in America, but with important differences. While I. A. Richard's *Practical Criticism* (1929) crossed

[156] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).
[157] Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.
[158] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 281.
[159] Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004); J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature: Thinking in Action* (London: Routledge, 2002); Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 95.
[160] Rosenthal, *Good Form*, 2.

> the Atlantic to join the New Criticism as developed and practiced by Cleanth Brooks, Wimsatt and Beardsley, and Robert Penn Warren, the tradition established by F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis in the journal *Scrutiny* (starting in 1932) was not precisely identical with the New Criticism – although it did demand close attention to texts. F. R. Leavis's book, *The Great Tradition* (1948) moved decisively beyond analysis of form to questions of ethics. The long life of this strand of criticism, with its enlargement of the scope of critical writing to encompass what he called "moral intensity" gave a particular inflection to British literary studies.[161]

However, Leavis's interventionist criticism stops with Joseph Conrad's novels, and it certainly does not make claims on later (modernist) ethical concerns.[162] The fact that Leavis does not include later modernist ethical concerns is perhaps due to modernists' rich engagement with the process of empathy that contemporary novelists aim to take forward. However, there seems to be a firm ethical trait in contemporary British literary production, vaguely reminiscent of Leavis's ethical interventions, that the contemporary novel does not seem to have shaken off completely, mostly because many novelists seem to agree about the moral benefits of empathy.

These contemporary novelists seem to believe that empathy is central in solving global concerns and agree that fiction can enhance one's empathic capacity. However, their opinion about the morality of empathy is contradictory: while McEwan, Smith, and Carson generally agree about literature's capacity to elicit readers' empathy and altruistic behaviour in their interviews and non-fictional writings, they remain largely critical about the inherent morality of empathy in their novels.[163] Both McEwan and Smith frequently emphasize the necessity of empathetic engagement in contemporary society. In his article published in the *Guardian* four days after the 9/11 attacks, McEwan writes that "if the hijackers had been able to imagine themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the passengers, they would have

[161] Judith Ryan, *The Novel After Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 12.
[162] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966).
[163] Dominic Head observes in relation to McEwan that his claims about the moral function of fiction do not necessarily align with his fictional practice (Dominic Head, *Ian McEwan* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 174).

been unable to proceed."[164] He argues that it is through "empathy that moral questions begin in fiction," and equates empathy with the practice of fiction and considers it the cornerstone of humanity.[165] Similarly, Smith believes that "real empathy makes cruelty an impossibility," and that "when we read with fine attention, we find ourselves caring about people who are various, muddled, uncertain and not quite like us (and this is good)."[166] Ciaran Carson draws attention to the meanings and consequences of identification in his poetry. To an interviewer's question about his idea "of what you want your art to achieve in moral, social or political terms," Carson responds by expressing an unambiguous conviction about fiction's capacity to elicit empathy: "it seems to me that the moral of every story is to put the reader into another place, to make them consider other possibilities, to imagine what it might be like to be someone else, or see the world through another's eyes. To make them think again. To make them examine their preconceptions. To disturb them, sometimes without their knowing. To leave them wondering. To see their world anew."[167]

Empathic attention to modernism

These long-lasting convictions about the ethical traits of British fiction or a resistance to them seep into twenty-first-century criticism and McCarthy-like evaluations of "ignorant ostrich-like British humanist novelists" with sincere, reconstructive ideals after postmodernism's vacuousness. However, awareness of the limitations of empathy defines to a great extent contemporary writers' versions of empathy in fiction. Perhaps their

[164] Ian McEwan, "Only Love and Then Oblivion. Love Was All They Had to Set Against Their Murderers," *Guardian*, September 15, 2001, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/15/september11.politicsphilosophyandsociety2.
[165] Ibid.; Liliane Louvel, Gilles Ménégaldo, and Anne-Laure Fortin, "An Interview with Ian McEwan," *Études Britanniques Contemporaines*, 8 (1995): 1−12.
[166] Zadie Smith, "Zadie Smith Talks with Ian McEwan," in *Conversations with Ian McEwan*, ed. Ryan Roberts (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 108−33; Smith, "Love, Actually."
[167] Ciaran Carson, "For All I Know: Ciaran Carson in Conversation with Elmer Kennedy-Andrews," in *Ciaran Carson: Critical Essays*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 24.

cautiousness is one of the reasons why they return to an alienated, at times detached version of empathy rather than more comforting notions of it.

In their novels, Zadie Smith, Carson, and McEwan are attentive to less optimistic versions of empathy, drawing out failed or unwanted consequences of empathic relations: for example, McEwan's *Atonement* and *Saturday* illustrate the main characters' inability to understand the others around them whether through fiction or neuroscience. Crucially, their awareness of the limitations of the ethical empathic project goes hand in hand with a rich reclaiming of the history of empathy as both an aesthetic and an intersubjective category in their novels. These novelists problematize the sincerity, genuineness, and truly other-oriented nature of empathy while finding ways to rework modernist attention to others and things. Their narrators and characters carefully attend to art and to objects they encounter as much as to intersubjective relations. McEwan's novels explore different ways of knowing the other and the outside world; Carson's novels minutely engage in the layered histories of artworks and objects; Smith's explore empathic identification in relation to music and painting. These novelists defamiliarize the simple empathy story, by reaching beyond the ethical, back to the modern origins of the word through modernism's representation of it.

The modernist legacies of empathy that contemporary novelists reclaim thus sit firmly, even if uncomfortably, in this new sincerity narrative of reconstruction in contemporary critical and creative practices, although tinted with alienation and defamiliarization. The novelists discussed here explore the consequences that empathic exchanges might have: McEwan uses Woolfian models of self–other relation, Carson rethinks Joyce's encyclopaedism, Smith rewrites Forster's narrative design in order to connect formal techniques with empathic awareness. In doing so, they employ modernist form to emphasize a closer, more empathic way of reading. Thus empathy is at the same time attention and, in ideal cases, a suspension of attention, reminiscent of Lou Agosta's

"evenly-hovering non-attention" which cultivates empathic receptivity and understanding. Agosta derives his concept of "evenly-hovering non-attention" from Freud.[168] Freud, a contemporary and self-proclaimed rival of Titchener and an admirer of Lipps, the two early theorists of empathy, builds on a similar model of attention that Titchener describes in his Columbia lectures when he suggests that the psychoanalyst should maintain "the same evenly-hovering attention [...] in the face of all that [he] hears" from the patient.[169] If he focuses on one thing, he could miss information of crucial importance; therefore, a "kinder, gentler, evenly suspended attention that actually avoids concentrating one's attention" is necessary for a greater chance of understanding the other.[170] Agosta calls this rather an "evenly-hovering non-attention" and considers it a form of empathic receptivity which is followed by empathic understanding and empathic responsiveness. McEwan, Smith, and Carson problematize exactly this connection between empathy, (non)attention, and understanding, practicing an expansive, panoramic, "evenly-hovering" attention to others and things. Their engagement with these nuanced contradictions of empathic attention is intertwined with empathy as a form of knowledge, attention, and care. By probing divergences between visual, cognitive, and emotive understanding, these novelists point to the consequences these types of empathy might have on how we read modernist legacies today.

My first chapter explores McEwan's rethinking of empathy through the lens of Woolfian modernism, arguing that McEwan's testing of *intersubjective* forms of empathy goes hand in hand with his representation of *aesthetic* empathies. I focus on the ways in which McEwan's narrative engineering encompasses characters' moments of self-revelation, their forceful empathic orderings, or subtler empathic reconnections. This

[168] Lou Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy: Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[169] Freud, "Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis" (1912) qtd. in Agosta, 79.
[170] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy*, 79.

chapter suggests that the novels' dichotomies between the self and the other and between the individual and the outer world do not collapse into a moralizing approach to empathy, nor into a simple pastiche of modernism. McEwan's close attention to Woolfian modernism in his depictions of aesthetic empathy and minute repositioning of modernist objects allows rather than obstructs his nuanced reworking of modernist aesthetics.

The second chapter on encyclopaedism in Ciaran Carson and James Joyce focuses on Carson's move away from depictions of intersubjective empathy to an insistence on aesthetic empathy. I examine Carson's novels and Joyce's *Ulysses* in relation to the attentive mechanisms that writing and reading such novels involve, arguing that Carson scales down Joyce's encyclopaedism in order to foreground an empathic awareness at a formal level. Reading (and writing) encyclopaedic details in both Carson and Joyce requires an attention to the text and its distracting mechanisms, which can be usefully connected to an understanding of empathic awareness as "evenly-hovering non-attention." By shifting from empathy as content to empathy as formal characteristic, Carson also enacts modernism's scepticism about the possibilities of empathy, suggesting a non-translatability between empathic thought (the possibilities of projecting oneself into the situation of others) and experience (the actual limits and limitations of empathy).

Perhaps Zadie Smith engages most explicitly with issues of intersubjective empathy, both through her creative and discursive writings. In this third chapter on her novels and E. M. Forster's *Howards End* and *A Room with a View*, I argue that Smith creates a version of empathy that hovers between attention and distraction by dramatizing the tension between a comedy of arbitrariness and a tightly symmetrical plot borrowed from Forster. Strikingly, Smith, who is most explicit about her liberal humanist views on the good of the novel, makes the most abrupt critique of empathy among my three contemporary novelists, and suggests an alternative urban view of society that is not necessarily based on a moral empathic

understanding. She rather emphasizes peaceful coexistence (over connection) in multicultural London. Smith's version of empathy thus unsettles the 'reconstructive' acts of twenty-first-century fiction, effectively engaging with, alongside McEwan and Carson, modernist ways of (not) listening or (not) looking at art, objects, and others, and with sociological critiques of empathy.

McEwan, Carson, and Smith, then, propose and advocate, in a knowingly or unconsciously political move, an expansive empathic attention alongside a slower, attentive, and at the same time distracted reading to accommodate contemporary crises of attention through modernist representation. Their rewriting of modernism probes the limits of representation through an empathic seeing, knowing, and understanding that goes hand in hand with an awareness of, in Carson's words, the "realm" of not knowing.

Chapter One

"Expanding circles" of empathy: Ian McEwan and Virginia Woolf

> *... in all this great space it was curious to think how few the towns were, and how small little rings of light, or single glow-worms he figured them, scattered here and there, among the swelling uncultivated folds of the world. And in those towns were little men and women, tiny men and women. Oh, it was absurd, when one thought of it, to sit here in a little room suffering and caring. What did anything matter?* (Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*)

In his letter from 1905 sent to his brother Stanislaus, James Joyce recorded his impressions of reading Turgenev: "I have felt in reading him more than in any other novelist I have read in the palpable presence of an emotion, though Turgenev is hardly a poet. He brings you almost too near his characters; you feel as if their personalities were looming and filling narrow rooms. You hardly ever get an outdoor impression."[1] Joyce's observation of these looming personalities cut off from the outside yet pressed by their indoor confines is very similar to Virginia Woolf's reading of Turgenev's short stories. In a 1921 essay she wrote that: "Beyond the circle of his scene seems to lie a great space, which flows in at the window, presses upon people, isolates them, makes them incapable of action, indifferent to effect, sincere, and open-minded."[2] By looking beyond the "circle of the scene," Woolf highlighted an overwhelming outside or external environment that encloses Turgenev's characters. Her image of the circle here represents "a supreme symbol of wholeness and unity, a wholeness and unity constantly threatened by the chaos outside it."[3] In *The Voyage Out*, the reader finds Terence looking out of the window into the darkness, into a "great

[1] James Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. II, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1966), 119.
[2] Virginia Woolf, "A Glance at Turgenev," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. III, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1988), 316.
[3] Nena Skrbic, "Crossing Cultural Boundaries," in *Trespassing Boundaries: Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction*, ed. Kathryn Benzel and Ruth Hoberman (New York and Basingstoke: Macmillan Palgrave, 2004), 33.

space" lit by the "small rings" of town lights, "suffering and caring" for the ill Rachel whilst thinking about the "little men and women" living in near-by towns:

> Rachel, a tiny creature, lay ill beneath him, and here in his little room he suffered on her account. The nearness of their bodies in this vast universe, and the minuteness of their bodies, seemed to him absurd and laughable. Nothing mattered, he repeated; they had no power, no hope. He leant on the window-sill, thinking, until he almost forgot the time and the place.[4]

Terence's attention to his and Rachel's shared fates with unknown "tiny" others "in this vast universe" does not fit the unity and fixity of the circle symbol from Woolf's essay, which delineates threatening dichotomies between the self and other minds, between the individual and the external environment, and between private and public spheres. Though in both Turgenev's short stories and *The Voyage Out* there is a "great space" that "presses upon" the "circle of the scene," there is a subtle difference in the directionality of movements between the two. Whereas in Turgenev, according to Woolf, the outside "flows in at the window," making characters "indifferent to effect"; in *The Voyage Out*, Terence extends his attention to those "little rings of light" that lie in the "uncultivated folds of the world." His attention to the absurdity of fate rather expands and dissolves into the "great space" of the outside world, opening up "enclosing circles" and "narrow rooms" by feeling with (and perhaps for) others. Terence's acknowledgement of shared fates is the first step towards an extensive empathic attention.

Ian McEwan explores precisely this contradiction of expanding and enclosing "circles" of empathy in both his fiction and nonfiction. He is interested in the ethics of empathy, in the failures of empathic imagination, whilst finding ways to represent more expansive empathies, as this chapter will show. His marked interest in the possibilities of empathy ranges from questions of self–other relations to the ways in which characters perceive, imagine, and create the other and their external environment. His twenty-first-

[4] Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1920), 345-46.

century novels are particularly invested in testing the limits of interpersonal empathic engagement: *Atonement*'s Briony Tallis can empathise fictionally but not "in real life," forcefully ordering lives around her modernist story by the fountain; *Saturday*'s Henry Perowne strives to decipher other minds but he is unable to empathise; *The Children Act*'s Fiona Maye cannot judge when things overflow her professional life. In all these cases, McEwan equates empathy with the epistemology of knowing and understanding others. He approaches this anxiety about knowing others through dichotomies between, as it were, the "circle of the scene" and the "great space" beyond it, examining the thin lines between the two: *Saturday* (2005) reflects disparate lives and interconnected fates, *Atonement* (2001) points to the thin lines between reality and fiction, *Sweet Tooth* (2012) builds on the exchanged roles of the observer–observed pair, *The Children Act* (2014) considers the interweaving of the intimate and the professional, and *Nutshell* (2016) focuses on the permeability of the inside and the outside.

Inside and outside or interiority and exteriors are just a few comfortable (critical) handles on a wide variety of dichotomies McEwan is interested in. In his review of *Solar* (2010), Jason Cowley aptly writes that McEwan "remains a determined binarist; what continues to interest him are stark dichotomies, the clash and interplay of stable oppositions. Repeatedly in his fiction he sets reason against unreason, science against art, the mind against the body, technology against nature."[5] Much of the critical response to McEwan's works has indeed been dedicated to outlining and exploring the trajectory of these binaries in terms of, for example, subconscious and conscious creative intent, private and public affairs, inner lives and political, social, and ethical issues.[6] Rather than focusing on the harsh

[5] Jason Cowley, "*Solar* by Ian McEwan," *Guardian*, 14 Mar 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/mar/14/ solar-ian-mcewan.

[6] See David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002); Christina Byrnes, *The Work of Ian McEwan: A Psychodynamic Approach* (Nottingham: Paupers' Press, 2002); Claudia Schemberg, *Achieving 'At-one-ment': Storytelling and the Concept of the Self in Ian McEwan's The Child in Time, Black Dogs, Enduring Love, and Atonement* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004); Dominic Head, *Ian*

dividing lines between extremes, I am more interested, like many of these critics, in the intricate, ambivalent, and minutely constructed transactions that happen between McEwan's ostensible opposites, exploring this continuity between the two as central to McEwan's interest in modernism and empathy.

Crucially, many of his novels are engaged in probing what happens when two poles (interiors and exteriors, inside and outside, professional and private, fictional and real) interfere with each other, or even exchange place. The neurosurgeon Perowne's thoughts nicely illustrate this exchange. He wonders about how it would be to change fates with others: "For a vertiginous moment Henry feels himself bound to the other man, as though on a seesaw with him, pinned to an axis that could tip them into each other's life."[7] The narrative flip at the end of *Atonement* and *Sweet Tooth* stages a similar reversal of perspectives. *The Children Act* plays on the unstable axes tipping high court judge Fiona Maye into the insecure grounds of either her marriage or her work. All these exercises of exchanging lives or perspectives rest in very early understandings of aesthetic empathy as a dialogic process, where viewer and viewed exchange places, or at least possess almost the same agency. McEwan's narratives give characters a chance to toy with this kind of agency, even if temporarily and only imaginatively. It is in his work, among the novelists in this thesis, that fiction as an empathic experience is most directly thematised as an aesthetic and ethical problem.

This chapter argues that, whilst staging the failures of an expansive intersubjective attention, McEwan's novels reclaim more nuanced forms of empathic attention to others, to art, and to objects modelled on Woolfian aesthetics. The failure of intersubjective empathy is structurally built into the novels' obsession with scientific precision and rigour. Characters

McEwan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Lynn Wells, *Ian McEwan*. New British Fiction (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Tomasz Dobrogoszcz, *Family and Relationships in Ian McEwan's Fiction: Between Fantasy and Desire* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018).

[7] McEwan, *Saturday* (London: Vintage, 2006), 74. Hereafter cited as *S.*

fail to empathise with the people they see through their windows because they cannot step out of their professional, linguistic, and factual frames, and their urge to empathise or understand the other has disastrous consequences. My preoccupation in the first half of this chapter is precisely the perspectival lens – scientific rigour, windows, interiors – through which empathic effects are always jeopardised. However, in the second half of the chapter I will show how such exaggerated structuring and ordering tendencies also enable a minute attention to Woolfian objects and character relations.

McEwan's concern with different forms of empathy is specifically important throughout this thesis because it demonstrates contemporary fiction's subtle concern with the intellectual history of empathy and modernism. The links McEwan draws between aesthetic and intersubjective empathy are also relevant for reading Zadie Smith, who makes explicit connections between aesthetic appreciation of art and moral goodness, only to sidestep such idealistic equations. In McEwan's case, as we will shortly see, a reworking of Woolfian imagery and descriptions of empathic attunement with art happen at crucial moments of the narrative: when characters realise something about the knowability or unknowability of themselves, others, or the world. And these moments are, as his novels posit, valuable experiences for his characters. McEwan's novels suggest that modernist empathy enhances his characters' acts of knowing others and the world, even if this means realising their unknowability.

Ultimately, this chapter shows how McEwan's close reworking of Woolfian aesthetics and empathy "enables rather than hinders" his creative experiments with modernism. Laura Marcus, David James, Peter Boxall, and Sebastian Groes, among others, have explored McEwan's ambivalent relationship with modernism, agreeing that it is more

than simple pastiche.[8] I concur with this argument, as I have suggested in my introductory chapter, but I will show in addition that his concern with intense aesthetic and intersubjective empathies allows McEwan to rework Woolfian representations of empathy. I will also consider cases where McEwan's descriptions of aesthetic attention to art are not necessarily Woolfian, but do reflect broader modernist concerns with empathy as aesthetic attention.

I will read McEwan's novels primarily in the light of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, because McEwan attends very specifically to the objects, scenes, character relationships, and narrative structures of these two novels. In what follows, I will first outline McEwanesque narrative engineering to locate characters' inability to empathise and violent attempts at understanding the other in the novels' structural frames. Then, I will focus on the literal and the abstract windows that hinder characters from expanding their empathy to others. At this point, I will explain how McEwanesque "circles of empathy" incorporate sociobiological, ethical, and Woolfian legacies, and briefly consider how McEwan engages in new ethical theories about the benefits of empathy while moving beyond them. After considering characters' forceful orderings of other lives, I will turn firstly to McEwan's Woolfian models of subtler empathic exchanges between husband and wife, and among family members, and then his stagings of more relaxed aesthetic empathies through characters' attunement with art. Finally, I will demonstrate how, strikingly, McEwan's controlled, fixated fictional order gives way to a minute, empathic attention to Woolfian objects and imagery in his novels, thus a more detailed engagement with modernist empathies.[9]

[8] Marcus, "Ian McEwan's Modernist Time"; Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction*; James, *Modernist Futures*; Sebastian Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*," in *Contemporary Critical Perspectives: Ian McEwan*, 99–114.

[9] David James tackles a similar problem in "map[ping] the twenty-first-century renaissance of [the crystalline novel] as one that affiliates the way several important novelists are reconsidering how aesthetic attention in contemporary fiction can perform ethical and political work" (James, "A Renaissance for the Crystalline Novel?" *Contemporary Literature* 53, no. 4 (2012): 845). In this chapter I focus on how different notions of empathy manoeuvre such aesthetic attention.

Empathic circles: ethics, biology, and Woolf

In her 1961 essay "Against Dryness," Iris Murdoch wrote that we are in need of a "new vocabulary of attention," because "moral progress" can only take place through the "enriching and deepening of concepts" about "the substance of our being."[10] Ethical attention to oneself, others, and the external world in Murdoch's broader philosophical thinking is one that qualifies for the "quiet, unpossessive" attachment of a prayer, suggests philosopher Sabina Lovibond.[11] It is passive, disinterested, and detached. McEwan's keen interest in the workings of empathy through the uncertain translatability between the internal and the external and the tension between staged uncertainty and fixed structure readily maps onto an ethical territory. Dominic Head sets McEwan's fiction in the Murdochian ethical tradition, in that he considers McEwan one of the prominent contemporary writers who rekindles the bond between ethics and fiction.[12] But, as opposed to Murdoch, McEwan does not gravitate towards a subtle, kind, almost quiet ethical attention; he is more interested in attention of the possessive kind. His characters forcefully arrange realities outside themselves, moulding rather than observing events and others, because they are, as we will see, expressions of the narrative's obsession with control and precision.

This possessive, even documentary empathy significantly determines the reach of the novels' empathic circles. The mechanisms of a ripple nicely illustrate how these circles work. If we throw a small pebble into a lake, the smooth surface of the water creates concentric circles that are more defined around the point of impact, and less contoured at the farther ends, where the bigger rings of water slowly fade away. This is the model of

[10] Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch," *Encounter* 16 (January 1961): 20.
[11] Sabina Lovibond, "The Simone Weil Factor," in *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy* (London: Routledge: 2011), 28–46.
[12] Dominic Head, *Ian McEwan* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); James, "A Renaissance for the Crystalline Novel?"

Adam Smith's "concentric circles" of sympathy, Hume's "confined generosity," and Darwin's idea of an innate sympathy.[13] Building on this long line of moral philosophers and evolutionary theorists who were concerned with how far humans can extend their care, current neuroscientific and sociological research on empathy demonstrates that we are prone – neurologically wired – to truly care for our immediate social circle, family and friends, but not for distant others. Social neuroscientist Jean Decety, for example, contends that one's genetically encoded empathic capacity is limited and parochial, and that expanding concern beyond one's "ingroup" is a moral choice that needs to be exercised.[14] Moral philosopher Peter Singer's classic account of the "expanding circle" of moral progress (borrowed from Darwin) argues precisely for this expansion of empathies. Singer asserts that empathy is both biologically encoded and voluntary, and that there is a need in today's society for the expansion of empathy and care in a spirit of equality to all human beings and other living creatures. These debates are certainly familiar to McEwan himself, friend and self-proclaimed admirer of Richard Dawkins (who often collaborates with Singer).[15] McEwan admits that "My interest in science is actually lifelong. It represents for me the only available and credible metaphysics given that I have no religion."[16] He even borrows the "expanding circle" metaphor from moral philosophy and evolutionary theory to describe Perowne's broodings at the fishmongers in *Saturday*.

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[13] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 3rd ed. (London, 1767); Fonna Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: D. Appleton, 1876).

[14] Jean Decety, "The Complex Relation between Empathy and Morality: A Lesson from Evolutionary Biology, Social Neuroscience and Psychopathy" (keynote lecture, University of Basel, Switzerland, June 22, 2017, see abstract here: https://www.empathies2017.com/uploads/3/1/9/7/31971835/decety_university_of_basel_2017.pdf); also see Decety, ed., *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011); Decety and William Ickes, eds., *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

[15] See, for example, Ian McEwan, "A Parallel Tradition," *Guardian*, April 1, 2006, a celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene.*

[16] Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

This scene proves representative of McEwan's general wariness of the liberating effects of a moral version of empathy. Planning to cook the family dinner, Perowne heads to the fishmongers to buy the ingredients for his special fish stew, but he is troubled by the sight of living sea creatures:

> This is the growing complication of the modern condition, the expanding circle of moral sympathy. Not only distant peoples are our brothers and sisters, but foxes too, and laboratory mice, and now the fish. [He] goes on catching and eating them, and though he'd never drop a live lobster into boiling water, he's prepared to order one in a restaurant. The trick, as always, the key to human success and domination, is to be selective in your mercies. For all the discerning talk, it's the close at hand, the visible that exerts the overpowering force. And what you don't see . . .[17]

Perowne captures the contradictions of an "expanding circle of moral sympathy," suggesting that the more these empathic circles expand to include all living beings, the more they fade away by losing their effect and significance. Here Perowne does not exclusively refer to a fellow-feeling for geographically distant people, but to the closeness of everyday empathic experiences with living sea creatures. He admits that he would never kill a lobster, but does not mind others killing it. As Dominic Head writes, "The culture to which Perowne contributes, and to which a novel like *Saturday* belongs, embodies consolations that, it seems, outweigh the doubts occasioned by such ethical paradoxes."[18] Perowne himself acknowledges that "it's the close at hand, the visible" that is likely to receive empathic consideration. This chimes with Decety's arguments, who demonstrates that our empathic concern with suffering others or animals is relative to the closeness and vivid visual and emotional appeal of these.[19]

This raises important questions about *Saturday*'s problematising of the inherent morality of empathy because the novel seems to suggest that even in these direct, close, and visible encounters with the other, empathy is difficult to uphold. As Head suggests above,

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[17] *S*, 128.
[18] Head, *Ian McEwan*, 185.
[19] Jean Decety, "The Complex Relation between Empathy and Morality."

Saturday's ethical paradoxes turn to comfortable consolations of an invisible agency. This means that if Perowne did not kill the lobster he can morally excuse himself for eating it. Overall, this scene at the fishmongers incorporates one of the central concerns of McEwan's novels: an acute awareness of the moral ambiguities of empathy with living beings manifested in this convenient correlation between seeing and knowing. One can choose not to know about atrocities if one does not witness them. The lobster scene maps onto a bigger nexus, taking us to geopolitical scales. The Iraq war is an explicit consideration of how far one can actually care for unseen others. During his argument with his daughter Daisy about the justifications of the Iraq war, Perowne realises that "They are fighting over armies they will never see, about which they know almost nothing."[20] He says that the protesting crowd Daisy joined is oblivious of atrocities: "Ask Saddam's torturers at Abu Ghraib prison and the twenty thousand inmates. […] The genocide and torture, the mass graves, the security apparatus, the criminal totalitarian state – the iPod generation doesn't want to know."[21] And this is because, as Perowne emphatically contends at the fishmongers earlier that day, "the key to human success and domination," or to a comfortable standard of moral living, "is to be selective in your mercies."

Woolf, as we have seen at the beginning of this thesis, is wary about the selectivity, therefore the inherent morality of empathy. To recall her thoughts about distraction and empathy, she writes that "the vast effort of sympathy which those barracks of pain and discipline, those dried symbols of sorrow, ask us to exert on their behalf, is uneasily shuffled off for another time."[22] However, in Woolf's concept of the "circle of the scene" mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the circle as the "image of containment,"[23] does not fade

[20] *S*, 190.
[21] *S*, 191.
[22] Woolf, *On Being Ill*, 10.
[23] Kurt Koenigsberger, "Virginia Woolf and the Empire Exhibition of 1924: Modernism, Excess, and the Verandahs of Realism," in *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place*, ed. Anna Snaith, Michael Whitworth (London: Palgrave, 2007), 113.

away as the rippling empathy-effect of moral philosophy. Instead of a diminished care for those farther away, it gives access to a shared, broader unity of thought between near and distant people. But Woolf also admits, we remember, that this shared community of thought is just an illusion:

> That illusion of a world so shaped that it echoes every groan, of human beings so tied together by common needs and fears that a twitch at one wrist jerks another, where however strange your experience other people have had it too, where however far you travel in your own mind someone has been there before you – is all an illusion. We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others.[24]

Nevertheless, for her, fiction is a way to trace (even if merely illusions of) the expanding circles of empathic attention and care. In *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, the nexus of character relationships exhibits "human beings so tied together by common needs and fears that a twitch at one wrist jerks another."[25] Here characters are weaved into a mesh of shared present and past moments, being *attached* to each other, exchanging words and thoughts. Clarissa thinks how her friends "went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread (since they had lunched with her) which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London; as if one's friends were attached to one's body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread."[26] There is also the deep interconnectedness that the novel attributes to the complementarity of Clarissa's and Septimus's lives. Their lives seem complementary to such an extent, that, as Paul Ricoeur suggests, "in a certain way, he dies in her place."[27]

McEwan closely builds on Woolf's momentarily comforting but uneasy distractions and illusions in his version of empathic circles. However, like Woolf, he is also interested the *attachments* between people in his novels. But these attachments are more direct considerations of "exchangeable" lives and fates than those in Woolf. When Perowne meets

[24] Woolf, *On Being Ill*, 11–12.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 95. Hereafter cited as *MD.*
[27] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. II. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 111.

the eyes of the sweeper and considers all the possible lives they could have had, the meaningful consequences of their collisions slide to the fore: "As the two men pass, their eyes meet briefly, neutrally. [...] For a vertiginous moment Henry feels himself bound to the other man, as though on a seesaw with him, pinned to an axis that could tip them into each other's life."[28] From that point onwards, there is a constant comparison and oscillation between the probability of well-defined presences and implausible futures. For Perowne, diverging fates "can't just be [the results of] class or opportunities."[29] He thinks about the randomness of futures in relation to his daughter, doubled by a young heroin addict he sees from his window, and the vaguely diverging paths of lives:

> It troubles him to consider the powerful currents and fine-tuning that alter fates, the close and distant influences, the accidents of character and circumstance that cause one young woman in Paris to be packing her weekend bag [...] and another woman led away by a wheedling boy to a moment's chemical bliss.[30]

In a way, the entire novel plays on this dangerous dichotomy of "slipp[ing] into each other's lives"; the very thin separating line between lives signals more than the erratic nature of fate: it is a serious consideration of the consequences these encounters with other lives might have.[31]

The predominant imagery of the "expanding circle" in McEwan, then, subtly incorporates two different but connected legacies: the classic accounts of moral philosophy, and Woolf's fascination with this image as symbolic of, as Angela Hague puts it, the "creative process itself and the widening perspective of consciousness."[32] McEwan is particularly attentive to what Natania Rosenfeld calls Woolf's "idea of character, bound up

[28] *S*, 74.
[29] *S*, 272.
[30] *S*, 65.
[31] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (2000; London: Penguin: 2001), 327.
[32] Angela Hague, *Fiction, Intuition, and Creativity: Studies in Brontë, James, Woolf, and Lessing* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 221.

with questions of empathy, of the precise distance between self and other,"[33] and to the possibilities of fiction in overcoming, masking, or reinforcing these distances. As we have seen, in *Saturday* (but also in his other novels) moral empathic uncertainties are also measured by distances between the empathiser and the visible, close, or distant subjects of characters' empathy. In addition, McEwan carefully reworks, to recall Mao, "Woolf's fascination with the eerily proximate distance of physical things," as a later section will show.[34]

This engagement with empathy and modernist legacies also situates McEwan in the larger context of the relationship between literary theories and philosophical accounts of the 'New Ethics,' theorized by Dorothy J. Hale, among others, as a "new celebration of literature."[35] In Hale's view, this celebration of literary value derives from Henry James's aesthetics of alterity. She argues that James's "acute awareness that the politicized struggle between art and its ideological instrumentality is constitutive of novelistic aesthetics itself"[36] informs both Martha Nussbaum's philosophy and the "new ethical theories" of J. Hillis Miller, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, Derek Attridge, Michael André Bernstein, and others.[37] This modernist aesthetics of alterity, as Hammond demonstrates, revolves around the philosophical problem of other minds, of "how we can determine if other people have inner experience and whether or not it is possible to know about such inner experience if it does exist."[38] Unsurprisingly, McEwan's concern with the ethics of empathy does not unequivocally align him with the new ethicists.[39] His exaggerated versions of intersubjective

[33] Natania Rosenfeld, *Outsiders Together: Virginia and Leonard Woolf* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 90.
[34] Mao, *Solid Objects,* 13.
[35] Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics," 896–905.
[36] Ibid., 900.
[37] Ibid., 899.
[38] Hammond paraphrases Hyslop, *Empathy and Modernism,* 9; Alec Hyslop, "Other Minds: The Problems" (2006), *Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science*, Wiley Online Library, accessed 20 March 2018, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ 0470018860.s 00303.
[39] James writes about "McEwan's amenability to this wellspring of new trends in ethical criticism" in relation to his impressionist techniques in *Modernist Futures,* 145.

empathy call into question this renewed celebration of novelistic value and unsettle clear-cut reparatory or reconstructive directions twenty-first-century fiction might take.

In responding to the 9/11 attacks, McEwan wrote that

> Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality. The hijackers used fanatical certainty, misplaced religious faith, and dehumanising hatred to purge themselves of the human instinct for empathy. Among their crimes was a failure of the imagination.[40]

Similarly, in his interview with Zadie Smith, McEwan mentions that "there's something very entwined about imagination and morals. That one of the great values of fiction was exactly this process of being able to enter other people's minds."[41] His interest in modernism also seems to have sprung from his concern with the ethics of empathy. In an interview on *Atonement* he famously admits that: "I was wanting to enter into a conversation with modernism and its dereliction of duty in relation to [...] the backbone of a plot."[42] In one of his earlier interviews, however, he gives a more precise explanation of his ideas on empathy and fiction: "I think it is at the level of empathy that moral questions begin in fiction."[43] This suggests that empathy becomes a medium through which moral questions are thinkable in fiction, but it also receives a certain precedence over morality. As Head observes, McEwan's claims about the moral function of fiction do not necessarily align with his fictional practice;[44] McEwan rather experiments with the contradictions of morality and empathy: instead of being "an ethics of fiction," empathy eludes categorization and moral classification, and becomes a more nuanced aesthetic and intersubjective concept.

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[40] Ian McEwan, "Only Love and Then Oblivion. Love Was All They Had to Set against Their Murderers," *Guardian*, September 15, 2001, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/15/september11.politicsphilosophyandsociety2.
[41] Zadie Smith, "Zadie Smith Talks with Ian McEwan," in *Conversations with Ian McEwan*, ed. Ryan Roberts (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 111–112.
[42] Ian McEwan, interview by Michael Silverblatt, *Bookworm*, KCRW, Santa Monica, California, July 11, 2002.
[43] Louvel et. al., "An Interview with Ian McEwan," 4.
[44] Head, *Ian McEwan*, 174.

McEwan is certainly aware of the critiques of the self-centredness of fellow feeling when he has Briony Tallis misunderstand her sister Cecilia and Robbie's relationship. He traces the consequences that ensue from Briony's modernist dramatization of the scene by the fountain that the novel casts as her atonement for misunderstanding and ruining Robbie's and Cecilia's relationship. Decety suggests, among others, that one of the major problems with empathy is that it is beneficial for the empathiser but not necessarily for the subject of her empathy. This idea of empathy as "objectified self-enjoyment" is one of Lipps's definitions of the term. McEwan calls writing "a self-pleasuring act," and Briony's rewriting of her modernist novella certainly attests to her fictional "empathic self-enjoyment" and initial neglect of the couple's actual situation in a formally vivid way.[45] She is excited (as she offers the reader a metacommentary of her modernist story) to "write the scene three times over, from three points of view."[46] McEwan points to the fragility of this "empathic self-enjoyment" when he says that "this is also a novel about courage and backbone is what Briony at one point feels she lacks, because she is not telling the story actually as it happened, she is burying her consciousness beneath her stream of consciousness."[47] Here McEwan points directly to modernism's ostensible ethical neglect and a purely aestheticized thinking about other minds, exactly by, as James suggests, "the very formal dynamics that this plot is designed to criticise and whose influence he would prefer to disavow."[48]

Critics often read *Atonement* through Briony's failure to empathize: her failure to grasp Robbie and Cecilia's relationship, and her unwillingness to change her initial understanding of events. Laura Marcus writes that "issues of knowledge and vision function at two levels in the narrative: they relate to the question of what characters know and see, or

[45] Daniel Zalewski, "The Background Hum: Ian McEwan's Art of Unease," *The New Yorker*, February 23, 2009, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/02/23/the-background-hum.
[46] Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London: Vintage, 2011), 40-41. Hereafter cited as *AT*.
[47] McEwan, interview by Silverblatt.
[48] James, *Modernist Futures*, 145.

imagine they know and have seen, and to the question of narration itself and the workings of narrative omniscience."[49] Briony admits that she does not understand the scene she witnesses by the fountain, and her childhood self testifies to her precise demarcations between the self and the other, the real and the unreal. McEwan, in one of his interviews explains that Briony is "encouraged to tell a tale that is completely untrue, […] the police and her mother and all authority are encouraging her."[50] Thus, her "passion for order [...] and powerful imagination" are the primary but not the exclusive reasons of her (fictional) false accusation. Her misunderstanding is not necessarily a failure of empathy, it also seems to be imaginative caring for her sister's well-being, even in the initial stages of the story. Moreover, it is Briony herself who stages this "sin" of misunderstanding. Peter Boxall demonstrates that Briony's "crime" is only a later addition to the story. Her novella, which becomes the novel itself, features almost all the additions suggested by Mr. Cyril Connolly:

> If this girl has so fully misunderstood or been so wholly baffled by the strange little scene that has unfolded before her, how might it affect the lives of the two adults? Might she come between them in some disastrous fashion? Or bring them closer, either by design or accident? Might she innocently expose them somehow, to the young woman's parents perhaps? [...] Might the young couple come to use her as a messenger?[51]

Another possible reading is that Connolly unwittingly guesses what actually happened after the fountain scene, but Briony does not initially include all those details because they incriminate her. Briony's staged inability to empathize is counterbalanced by her imaginative plunge into the minds of others through writing the story. McEwan stages Briony's writing of a modernist story as an aestheticized version of empathy that is, nevertheless, acutely aware of its ethical dimensions, illustrating, at a larger scale, McEwan's attention to the interplay between ethical and aesthetic empathies.

[49] Marcus, "Ian McEwan's Modernist Time," 90.
[50] McEwan, interview by Silverblatt.
[51] AT, 313; Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction*, 69–71.

McEwan's experiments with numerous ethical possibilities also elude clear ideas about the value of fiction that Hale discusses. Here it is worth thinking about *Saturday* a little more, because there is a scene in the novel that thematises most explicitly literature's capacity to elicit empathy. This scene, as the reader might have guessed, describes how Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" saves the Perowne family from the street thug Baxter, who threatens to kill Perowne's wife. Though it seems that the scene rather reductively equates the value of literature with its power to elicit empathy, this relation, if considered in detail, is rather skewed here. The literalness of it already exhibits obvious ironic strains. Whilst the poem does save the family – and that is perhaps our main focus when we read this tense episode, because it is urgent and important, and this is where the novel's emotional and gripping force lies – the scene is not an actual celebration of life-changing poetic moments, or as Head puts it, "a simple celebration of the 'power' of poetry."[52] Around midway in the episode, Baxter asks Daisy, Perowne's daughter, to read from her book of poetry, but instead, Daisy starts reciting "Dover Beach," a poem unknown to Baxter or Perowne. At the second recital of the poem, "Baxter appears suddenly elated. His right hand has moved away from Rosalind's shoulder and the knife is already back in his pocket."[53] He is exalted, admiring what he thinks is Daisy's poem, admitting that it "makes me think about where I grew up."[54] The reason why Baxter could have been so entranced in this empathic immersion into the poem and could forget the purpose of his intrusion, is, as the novel suggests, not because of a powerful literary sensibility that counteracts his violent intentions. Baxter has Huntington's disease which, as Perowne recognises during their first meeting, makes him liable to sudden changes of mood and extreme forgetfulness. Even after Baxter changes his mind about raping Daisy, Perowne is concerned that any swift movement or

[52] Head, *Ian McEwan*, 190.
[53] *S*, 222.
[54] Ibid.

word could tip Baxter back into his original intent. He is aware that Baxter's "state of mind is so delicately poised, easily disturbed. It's important not to surprise or threaten him."[55] So the scene of a household literally saved by poetry is due to a random mental condition that happens to be distracted by particular memories that "Dover Beach" recalls. We do acknowledge, of course, that the poem has an effect, because it resonates with Baxter's childhood memories, but it is not the poem's merit, and definitely not the ethical empathic value of poetry to stop crime that is at stake here. This scene is rather McEwan's tongue-in-cheek response to new ethical celebrations of the empathic value of literature, exactly by recalling the "civilising" Arnoldian here.[56] Though he agrees that fiction is an exercise in empathy, he does not necessarily believe that it enhances reader's empathy.[57] In the next sections I will show how McEwan's "celebration" of empathy and literary value lies elsewhere, in his aesthetic attention to Woolf's expanding circles of empathy, the "precise distance[s] between self and other," and the objects and things of Woolfian modernism.

Novelistic engineering, windows, and empathy

One of the most prominent characteristics of McEwan's novels relevant to his depictions of empathy is a deep-seated preoccupation with fictional order or a heavy narrative engineering. By this I mean that his novels are guided by an urge to rigorously observe, document, and reassemble things with narrative, structural, linguistic, and mimetic precision. *Atonement*, one of the most immediate examples of such tendencies, is about Briony's retelling of Cecilia and Robbie's story because of her strong ordering habit, and a recasting of Robbie's war memories. Alongside *Atonement*, many other McEwan novels are

[55] *S*, 222.
[56] Head, "Accidents of Character and Circumstance: *Saturday*," in *Ian McEwan*, 178–197.
[57] To recall Suzanne Keen's observation, it may not be worth overburdening fiction with claims about how it enhances reader's real-world empathy (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 168).

driven by the reconstruction of the past or a description of the present with scientific rigour and factual precision. McEwan's obsession with facts and love of science is a trademark of his book-projects (predating his emphatic modernist turn): *Enduring Love* (1997) features molecular biology; *Amsterdam* (1998) is a foray into musicology; he shadowed a neuroscientist for two years for *Saturday*; *Solar* follows a Nobel-prize winning physicist; *Sweet Tooth* is an espionage story; *The Children Act* recasts the decisions of a high court judge.

It is important to clarify the reasons behind this mixing of discourses in order to see their centrality to McEwan's versions of empathy. This plunge into different professions and engagement with various disciplinary vocabularies enhances, in a very basic sense, the novels' "reality effect." Tessa Hadley in her review of *The Children Act* writes that "Novelists […] are stricken with reality-envy. Other forms of authority, in the real world, seem so much more dignified and consequential than writing fiction."[58] *Atonement*, *Saturday*, *Sweet Tooth*, and *The Children Act* at times certainly cast fiction in competition with other (more "real, authoritative") texts, but they are more interested in ways in which these discourses interweave. Rather than evincing reality-envy, McEwan believes that both literature and science (and other disciplines) are sovereign ways of representing characters' consciousness. He says in one of his recent interviews that "The past 20 years biologists have been invading the territory of novelists. I have always thought the defining call for literature is to do with the exploration of human nature, which is also a dominant issue within cognitive evolutionary psychology."[59] This way, McEwan suggests, rather than being competing structures of knowledge, literature and science offer more nuanced

[58] Tessa Hadley, "*The Children Act* by Ian McEwan," *Guardian*, September 11, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/11/the-children-act-ian-mcewan-review-novel.
[59] Jon Cook, Sebastian Groes and Victor Sage, "Journeys without Maps: An Interview with McEwan," in *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, 148.

considerations of characters' consciousness in his quest for facts and unperturbed, limpid fictional order.

This exacting precision inevitably defines character's empathies and McEwan's choices to rework certain forms of Woolfian empathic attention to people and things over others. Usefully linking narrative structure and order, characters' empathies, and Woolfian legacies is arguably McEwan's focus on frames and windows. Windows by definition mediate public and private spheres, interiors and exteriors. In *To the Lighthouse*, for example, windows clearly exhibit the dynamics between the inner and the outer, between the overwhelming exterior and the safe interior space: in the Ramsay's summer home "the night was now shut off by the panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily."[60] In *Saturday*, heavy curtains "have a way of cleanly eliminating the square and the wintry world beyond it."[61] McEwan deliberately plays on the opaqueness of windows and the safety of interiors in order to explore, as the distinction between Woolf's essay on Turgenev and *The Voyage Out* has shown, characters' expanding or shrinking circles of empathy.

Windows are essentially ways into other minds with their preoccupations, they express fictional intent and creativity. Perhaps since the invention of glass windows in the seventeenth century, the window metaphor has been a fruitful symbol for writerly inspiration, for imaging other lives, and a useful tool for framing and slicing realism. As opposed to opening up views of the outside, Charles Baudelaire's prose poem "Windows" talks about the lure of a closed window:

> Looking from outside into an open window one never sees as much as when one looks through a closed window. There is nothing more profound, more mysterious, more pregnant, more insidious, more dazzling than a window lighted by a single

[60] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 79–80. Hereafter cited as *TTL*.
[61] *S*, 181.

> candle. What one can see out in the sunlight is always less interesting than what goes on behind a window pane. In that black or luminous square life lives, life dreams, life suffers.
>
> Across the ocean of roofs I can see a middle-aged woman, her face already lined, who is forever bending over something and who never goes out. Out of her face, her dress and her gestures, out of practically nothing at all, I have made up this woman's story, or rather legend, and sometimes I tell it to myself and weep.
>
> If it had been and old man I could have made up his just as well.
>
> And I go to bed proud to have lived and to have suffered in some one besides myself.
>
> Perhaps you will say 'Are you sure that your story is the real one?' But what does it matter what reality is outside myself, so long as it has helped me to live, to feel that I am, and what I am?[62]

Baudelaire's "black or luminous square" of life that lives, dreams, and suffers is a wonderful trope of fiction as an exercise in empathy, of the novel as a fictional retelling and caring for other lives. The black square that blocks the "reality outside oneself" also reveals certain limitations of this empathy *qua* invention, because it is irresponsible to "real" lives. In Baudelaire's terms, this exercise of empathic care benefits the writer, not the imaginary or generic other. He admits that it is useful solely for him. Here it is worth recalling pervasive critiques of empathy that stem from Lipps's empathy as "objectified self-enjoyment" – precisely what Baudelaire talks about when he writes that it does not matter "what reality is outside myself, so long as it has helped me to live, to feel that I am, and what I am?" This way of thinking triggered criticisms that posit empathy as purely egoistic, only useful for the empathiser in her aestheticized viewing of the other's situation. Baudelaire's imaginary empathy, however, makes another important point about the relationship between fiction and empathy in general: fictional empathy is diegetic and thus cannot have effects outside itself. There is no claim in Baudelaire that empathy would have any effect outside literature (or has indeed, much to do with it); the closed window is an empathic "safe zone" irrespective of real-world responsibility, to use Suzanne Keen's words.[63]

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[62] Charles Baudelaire, "Windows," *Paris Spleen*, trans. Louise Varèse (1869; New York: New Directions, 1970), 77.
[63] Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 168.

The closed dark windows of Baudelaire become limpid ones for Woolf and McEwan. For McEwan, these windows represent attentional frames metaphorically and literally, shaping characters' "portion of London"; they shape and delimit character's thinking and looking, as most of McEwan's characters are, in Marcus's words, "watchers from windows."[64] Windows are one of McEwan's overarching narrative and empathic ordering devices, cutting off or facilitating empathic transactions between characters. It is not incidental, then, that McEwan borrows them from Woolf.

McEwan reworks modernist attentional frames through which his characters engage with other minds, and more literal modernist windows, when French windows from *Mrs Dalloway* migrate into *Atonement* and *Saturday's* living rooms. F. H. Bradley's thoughts about the limits of our attentional frames illuminate McEwan's use of windows:

> My capacity to extend the boundary of my 'this,' my inability to gain an immediate experience of that in which it is subordinated and reduced – is mere imperfection. Because I cannot spread out my window until all is transparent, and all windows disappear, this does not justify me in insisting on my window-frame's rigidity. For that frame has, as such, no existence in reality, but only in our impotence. […] The one Reality *is* what comes directly to my feeling through this window of a moment: and this, and also again, *is* the only reality. But we must not turn the first 'is' into 'is nothing at all but,' and the second 'is' into 'all of.' There is no objection against the disappearance of limited transparencies in an all-embracing clearness.[65]

McEwan's characters cannot achieve "an all-embracing clearness," for the novels insist precisely on the "rigidity of their window-frames," on their inability to "spread out [their] windows." Therefore, windows become very specific metaphors for characters' ordering of lives on the other side of the glass, and for their blocked empathies. *Atonement*'s Briony retells a story she saw but could not hear through the closed window; *Saturday*'s neurosurgeon comfortably cuts his slice of reality from the safety of his home; *The Children Act*'s judge looks at the window to focus her thoughts on work and distract herself from her

[64] McEwan, *Nutshell* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016), 123; Marcus, "*Ian McEwan's Modernist Time*," 88.
[65] F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay*, reprint (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 223–224.

domestic reality. These examples recall Woolfian texts framed by windows, and her characters positioned behind windows: Clarissa's plunge into the present and the past through the French windows, the title of *To the Lighthouse*'s first part, and Lily Briscoe's view of Mrs Ramsay through the windowpanes.

Before I explore these novelistic frames, I would like to pause for a moment at one of McEwan's earlier novels' that marks, in Marcus's words, McEwan's "modernist time," and the start of his enduring dialogue with modernism in his twenty-first-century novels, where he arguably reworks an unrebarbative and easily readable version of modernist aesthetics. McEwan himself reflects that "my fiction began to change around the time of *The Child in Time*." Indeed, his later work, starting with *The Child in Time* (1987) has become much more reader-friendly and widely appreciated commercially. The shocking events and unexpected turns of the stories in *First Love, Last Rites*, *In Between the Sheets*, or *The Comfort of Strangers* were abandoned in favour of more digestible storylines; the naturalistic depiction of gruesome events toned down into the more pleasant precision of a trained realist, and into McEwan's interest in other disciplinary discourses. *The Child in Time* is explicitly interested in modernist interiority and temporal shifts, and it is a window that represents a pivotal moment in the narrative's temporal warp: the narrator travels back in time to glimpse through a pub window his young parents, who are deciding whether to abort him.[66]

> He was close to the pub's wall with an oblique view through the window into the saloon. […] Not a recognition so much as its shadow, not its familiar sound but a brief resonance caused Stephen to steady himself against the dry wall. His vision pulsed with the beating of his heart. Had the couple glanced up and to their left, towards the window by the door, they might have seen a phantom beyond the spotted glass, immobile with the tension of inarticulated recognition. It was a face taut with expectation, as though a spirit, suspended between existence and nothingness, attended a decision, a beckoning or a dismissal.
>
> But the young man and woman were engrossed.[67]

[66] Mark Currie, *About Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 126.
[67] McEwan, *The Child in* Time (London: Vintage, 2006), 61.

At one point, however, the woman, Stephen's mother "had glanced up into his direction. […] she simply returned Stephen's gaze as she listened to her partner. […] But she could not see him."[68] This window in time allows for, in Marcus's argument, "This quasi-encounter" that "removes all the security of his being, sending him spinning through a time before, or outside the known structures of, identity and temporality."[69] *The Child in Time* "unites past, present, and future in the depiction of personal time," as Head argues,[70] and it does so through a particular focus on Stephen's position behind the window's spotted glass. The window, then, allows a fluid passage in time but its glassy obstruction prevents notions of (self)knowledge or understanding.

McEwan's windows in his later novels primarily explore the "rigidity of frames" and the kind of empathic understanding that cannot happen through them, because characters obsessively order lives outside their windows. The next section explores these ordering tendencies in relation to Woolf's novels by looking at the lens through which these failures of empathy are staged together with their consequences.

"We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others": Clarissa Dalloway, Briony Tallis, and the "precise distance between self and other"

In defining the act of knowing through a confrontation with others, Hale refers to possible convergences between Butler's and Nussbaum's philosophies:

> As Butler describes it, we come to self-consciousness about our *pretended certainty* through the confrontation with alterity, an experience of the other that surprises us in its intractability, its refusal to conform to what we imagine we know – to fit into our personal 'regime of the norm' (to use D. A. Miller's term), the expectations that we call knowledge.[71]

[68] Ibid., 62.
[69] Marcus, "Ian McEwan's Modernist Time," 86.
[70] Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 235.
[71] Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics," 900. [my emphasis]

The "regime of the norm" recalls what Bradley saw as the rigidity of one's "window-frames" or perspective, one's "inability to gain an immediate experience of" or "an all-embracing clearness" of the "Reality [that] comes directly to my feeling through this window of a moment."[72] There are three significant points in Hale's explanation that recur, though with different connotations, in the novels I analyse in this section: firstly, the idea of a "*confrontation* with alterity" is held in tension with the characters' ability to empathize with each other; secondly, the other's refusal to "fit into" one's "personal 'regime of the norm'" is reinforced by a narrative duplicity (the discrepancy between the novel as a discursive whole and the central character's perspective); and thirdly, characters constantly confuse their own expectations, what they "imagine" to know, with what actually happened in their "pretended certainty."

Atonement's exploration of the problem of knowing others is particularly poignant when Briony contemplates the possible "bright and private *inside* feeling" of people:[73]

> Was everyone else really as alive as she was? [...] Was being Cecilia just as vivid an affair as being Briony? Did her sister also have a real self concealed behind a breaking wave, and did she spend time thinking about it, with a finger held up to her face [...] For, though it offended her sense of order, she knew it was overwhelmingly probable that everyone else has thoughts like hers. She knew this, but only in a rather arid way; she didn't really feel it.[74]

Here the novel describes a moment of uncertainty about knowing oneself and others that echoes, even if on very different terms, Clarissa Dalloway's feeling of uncertainty at her party about herself and her guests:

> Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background, it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things

[72] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality,* 223–224.
[73] *AT*, 36. [emphasis original]
[74] *AT*, 36.

> that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. But not for her; not yet anyhow.[75]

Clarissa's and Briony's approaches to otherness in these passages define and circumscribe their capacity to empathize, and to realize this – as Butler describes – surprising "intractability" of the other. Reading Briony's thoughts in the light of Clarissa's unravels the ways in which McEwan rewrites Woolfian self–other relations through his exaggerated narrative orderings.

At first glance, it seems that Briony assumes a position of centrality, self-assuredness and certainty, and Clarissa a stance of indeterminacy, ambiguity, drifting alterity. Clarissa feels "being something not herself," and this feeling of unreality translates into the way she sees her guests: "every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another." With Briony, on the other hand, the certainty and centrality of the self is unquestioned; her questions about the existence, inconceivability and acceptability of the other ("Was being Cecilia just as vivid an affair as being Briony? Did her sister also have a real self concealed behind a breaking wave, and did she spend time thinking about it?") do not alter her sense of selfhood. Here she rehearses early twentieth-century philosophical queries about the problem of other minds (of knowing whether others outside us are real) and tries to solve them through inference based on analogy and not through a considerate empathic care.[76] Inference from analogy here means that Briony thinks that because Cecilia might have similar behavioural patterns like her, she must have thoughts as well. Briony wonders whether her sister "has a real self concealed behind a breaking wave, and did she spend time thinking about it, with a

[75] *MD*, 145.

[76] Stueber explains that "Within the phenomenological tradition, the above shortcomings of Lipps's position of empathy were quite apparent […]. Yet despite the fact that they did not accept Lipps's explication of empathy as being based on mechanisms of inner resonance and projection, authors within the phenomenological tradition of philosophy were persuaded by Lipps's critique of the inference from analogy. For that very reason, Husserl and Stein, for example, continued using the concept of empathy and regarded empathy as an irreducible "type of experiential act sui generis" (Stein 1917, 10), which allows us to view another person as being analogous to ourselves without this "analogizing apprehension" constituting an inference of analogy" (Stueber, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/empathy/).

finger held up to her face," just as she does. It does not occur to her to think about *Cecilia's* thoughts and feelings at this point. Briony's thinking shows how the other is modelled on the experiential process of the observer (a key instance of *Atonement's* narrative strategy: Briony's shaping of other lives through observed and misunderstood scenes), by shaping the other to her personal "regime of the norm."

Importantly, early theorists of intersubjective empathy rejected the inference through analogy argument, proposing empathic projection as the solution to the problem of other minds. At this point, the novel suggests that Briony's forceful rewriting of lives is due to her inability to acknowledge the reality of other minds, not to mention empathise with the situation of others. But Briony herself suggests that fiction is capable of solving the problem of other minds; the only problem "was the failure to grasp the simple truth that other people are as real as you. And only in a story could you enter these different minds and show how they had an equal value. That was the only moral a story need have."[77] Fictional empathy here is enabling, but it is still confined to the workings of a single perspective.

It is Briony who holds exclusively the novel's multiple focal points. She is at the same time an onlooker and a participant of the story at several levels: as the author of the novel, as the girl who is watching a "dumb show," and, who then interferes in the fate of those whom she has been watching, and at the end of the novel, as the writer who attends the performance of the play ("The Trials of Arabella") written by herself.[78] In addition, *Atonement* also dramatizes the narrative perspective in *To The Lighthouse*. The vast scenes encompassed by the perspectival shifts in *To the Lighthouse* are compressed into the privilege of a single character in *Atonement*. Here it is worth recalling Emily Tallis's migraine scene. Laying on her bed in the darkness, Emily Tallis is aware of everything that

[77] *AT*, 40.
[78] Peter Kemp writes that the "drama (in which Briony will be both author and actor) assemble around her" (*Atonement* by Ian McEwan, *The Sunday Times*, September 16, 2001, accessed March 21, 2015, http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/fiction/article2379965.ece).

happens in the house, like Mrs Dalloway, "who knows the very moment, the very temper of her house":[79]

> Habitual fretting about her children, her husband, her sister, the help, had rubbed her senses raw; migraine, mother love and, over the years, many hours of lying still on her bed, had distilled from this sensitivity a sixth sense, a tentacular awareness that reached out from the dimness and moved through the house, unseen and all-knowing. Only the truth came back to her, for what she knew, she knew. [...] She lay in the dark and knew everything. The less she was able to do, the more she was aware.[80]

Marcus notes that "we hear echoes of Woolf's Mrs Ramsay, of the identification between the mother and the house and her 'becoming' the light of the lighthouse."[81] This scene's modernist elements, "the hypersensitive consciousness, in darkened solitude, attentive to each creak of the house; the maternal solicitousness, offering a persuasive but finally partial interpretation of the sounds and smell she encounters,"[82] dramatize the compression of perspectives, and parody Mrs Ramsay's sensitivity to everyone's view. Though Emily seems to have a panoramic hold on the surrounding reality, "like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, she is weighed down with concerns about the social event taking shape around her."[83] But in Emily's case, the ironic "The less she was able to do, the more she was aware," suggests that the more she was apparently aware of everything, the less she understood the events around her.

There is, however, a significant difference between Clarissa's and Briony's reading of others. The two characters' concepts of the real and unreal are not equivalent. For Briony, the real is enmeshed in and inaccessible because of corporeality, "the smooth, continuous fabric" of the body. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the real and the unreal have less to do with precise bodily outlines, being more connected to a blurry sense of uncertainty – Clarissa even forgets

[79] *MD*, 32.
[80] *AT*, 66
[81] Marcus, "Ian McEwan's Modernist Time," 90.
[82] Alistair Cormack, "Postmodernism and the Ethics of Fiction in *Atonement*" in *Contemporary Critical Perspectives: Ian McEwan*, 73.
[83] Ibid., 73.

"what she looked like, but felt herself a stake driven in at the top of her stairs."[84] Therefore, the self–other relations in Briony's wondering about other minds and Clarissa's sense of unreality could be seen in terms of inward and outward motions of projected selfness and incorporating otherness, where Briony defines others in relation to herself, and Clarissa sees herself in concordance with others. These two ways of self-positioning are central to the characters' notions of empathy. Clarissa thinks that "Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct […]. If you put her in a room with some one, up went her back like a cat's; or she purred"; for Briony "though it offended her sense of order, she knew it was overwhelmingly probable that everyone else has thoughts like hers."[85]

Atonement sets Clarissa's empathic instinct into an ironic contrast with Briony's misunderstanding of others precisely through her reworking of Woolfian aesthetics. Notably, however, Clarissa's and Briony's conclusions are strikingly similar: "it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. But not for her; not yet anyhow"; "She knew this, but only in a rather arid way; she didn't really feel it."[86] Their stated "efforts" of knowing others conclude with negation, where the more pronounced pause of the semicolon instates a sudden hesitancy, continued by an anticipation of a future realisation of the *not yet* and the *not really*. In *Atonement*, this suggests that Briony will "really feel" the reality of other fates after the consequences of her misinterpretation of Robbie and Cecilia's relationship unfold. This foregrounds the novel's problematic negotiation of the possibilities of empathy, of whether or not one can "really feel" and know someone else's inner experience, but, most importantly, of what it means to write about it. This effort that Clarissa refers to and Briony dramatizes recalls Woolf's thoughts in "On Being Ill" where she writes that sympathetic

[84] *MD*, 145.
[85] *AT*, 36.
[86] *MD*, 131; *AT*, 36.

illusion "must be kept up and the *effort renewed*."[87] It is also an acknowledgment of the difficulties of a constant empathic reaching out to others, which is, in case of both women, "uneasily shuffled off for another time."

In *Atonement*, Briony's retelling of lives and "empathic reaching out" is guided by her forceful ordering tendency epitomised by her inability to acknowledge the reality of others. It "offends [Briony's] sense of order" that others might be just as real and "vivid an affair" as she is: "though it offended her sense of order, she knew it was overwhelmingly probable that everyone else had thoughts like hers."[88] Earlier in the novel, Briony is impatient with the fixity of the real and the certainty of self-enclosed facts that upset her smooth writing process. Weighing the fictional against the real, Briony thinks about her play written to celebrate the arrival of her brother, Leon: "The self-contained world she had drawn with clear and perfect lines had been defaced with the scribble of other minds, other needs; and time itself, so easily sectioned on paper into acts and scenes, was even now dribbling uncontrollably away."[89] She regrets preparing the play for a performance, because the smooth dialogue of her play is completely broken up and shattered by the rehearsals, for the constructed nature of fiction and the self-ordering pattern clash with life, with *real* characters.[90] Her cousins cannot and do not conform to the structure; they break the outlines of the characters from the play, and, "for Briony, this deviation from her narrative vision is not just an affront to art but to life as well: 'she *was* Arabella.'"[91] Briony concludes that it would have been easier not to mix performance and text:

> The simplest way to have impressed Leon would have been to write him a story and put it in his hands herself, and watch as he read it. The title lettering, the illustrated

[87] Woolf, *On Being Ill*, 11–12 (obviously, Woolf's tone is joking when she is referring to effort of the Victorian imperialist's "civilising" drive).
[88] *AT*, 36.
[89] *AT*, 36–37.
[90] David O'Hara says that "Here again, we find a self trying to manage (or, in this case, stage-manage) otherness" ("Briony's Being-For: Metafictional Narrative Ethics in McEwan's *Atonement*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 52, no. 1 (2011): 76–77).
[91] *AT*, 36; 13.

> cover, the pages *bound* – in the word alone she felt the attraction of the neat, limited and controllable form she had left behind when she decided to write a play.[92]

The bound, limited, controllable form of the novel clearly alludes to the story of *Atonement* that Briony ends up writing, and to its staging of how facts, rather than time, "dribble (un)controllably away."

This strong sense of order is reflected in seemingly minor cases as well, when, for example, Briony arranges flowers in the vase: "It made no sense, she knew, arranging flowers before the water was in – but there it was; she couldn't resist moving them around, and not everything people did could be in a correct, logical order, especially when they were alone."[93] Initially, the vase is filled with wild flowers, and Cecilia makes "some adjustments in order to achieve a natural chaotic look," which is yet another allusion to the structure of the first part of the novel with its deliberately 'natural chaotic' atmosphere of misunderstandings. Briony makes *some* adjustments to fit the outer world and her perception of the events into a logical and explainable order: her "sense of obligation, as well as her instinct for order, was powerful; she must complete what she had initiated."[94] Consequently, her forceful ordering tendency imaginatively defines or even predetermines the fates of others. Even if she is not sure whether Robbie raped Briony's cousin Lola, she "must complete" the story "she had initiated."

Septimus Warren Smith, on the other hand, suffers at the hands of people who share Briony's ordering habits; he is subjected to the ordering tendency of the outer, homogenizing reality. Lucrezia *interrupts* him; Holmes *intrudes* upon him: "Human nature, in short, was on him – the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils. Holmes was on him"; similarly, Sir William Bradshaw forces his sense of "divine proportion" on him.[95] The satiric strain of

[92] *AT*, 37.
[93] *AT*, 23.
[94] *AT*, 41
[95] *MD*, 78.

Holmes' and Bradshaw's description underlines Woolf's rejection of these proportions. Michael Whitworth makes an illuminating distinction between linear, restricting systems of order and rhythmical, creatively enabling ones: "While Woolf celebrates forms of rhythmical order which seem to emerge from chaos itself, she directs her most forceful satire at imposed systems of order [...] based either on ideas of linearity, or of hierarchy."[96] Woolf shows how these systems of order are inherently distorting, affecting characters' lives: Septimus cannot live with Holmes's and Sir William's theories and treatment imposed on him. Interestingly, Head argues that McEwan's novels "betray an on-going search for systematic ways of knowing the world," which are perhaps closer to those Woolf rebelled against, rather than to her celebrations of rhythmical orders.[97]

In an attempt to find closer links between *Mrs Dalloway*'s and *Saturday's* characters, Jane Thrailkill contrasts Holmes's and Perowne's practices, saying that "if Woolf's physician figured a dogmatic, rationalistic cognitive science, McEwan's surgeon represents (and practices) an interactive, constructivist neuroscience,"[98] as "someone with precisely the expertise Woolf's physician lacked."[99] However, Perowne would still not be able to cure Septimus, since he is not a psychiatrist either; there is a confusion between the surgeon, who works on the brain, and the psychiatrist, who cures what surgery has no access to, suggesting how intently *Saturday* aims to relax Perowne's philistine convictions in a more humanistic framework.[100] Another discrepancy in this respect, most prominently evident with Baxter and Septimus, is that someone who is diseased rejects orderings, and the healthy mind exaggeratedly clings to them. The need to arrange reality into a fixed structure (just like the

[96] Michael Whitworth, "Virginia Woolf and Modernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 154.
[97] Head, *Ian McEwan*, 15.
[98] Jane F. Thrailkill, "Ian McEwan's Neurological Novel," *Poetics Today, Narrative and the Emotions (I),* 32: 1 (Spring 2011): 173.
[99] Thrailkill, 174.
[100] For a different approach to Perowne's "humanist" philistinism see Head's discussion of Perowne's understanding of poetry (Head, "Accidents of Character and Circumstance: *Saturday*").

complete lack of it) obscures and overturns the secure distinctions of the regular and the abnormal. In the case of Perowne's mother, for whom "order and cleanliness were the outward expression of an unspoken ideal of love," the obsessive need changes into an everyday routine, but her once common daily activities "these days are only undertaken by patients with obsessive compulsive disorders."[101]

Although McEwan stacked the odds against empathy being representable, at this point he reflects on socio-culturally different expressions of order. *Saturday* acknowledges that an ordering that could be normal, an expression of health and love in one historical moment, can also be pathologized into obsessive compulsive disorder.[102] The novel also pictures the passage of time between such historically distinct interpretations of order by revisiting Lily Perowne's abandoned home, very much in the style of *To the Lighthouse*: "everything remained in its place, waiting – the yellow rubber gloves hanging from their wooden clothes peg, the drawer ironed dusters and tea towels, the glazed pottery donkey bearing a pannier of toothpicks," until the "objects became junk as soon as they were separated from their owner and their pasts."[103] This imagery draws on Lily Briscoe's memories of Mrs Ramsay, when she notices "the old grey cloak she wore gardening. [...] she could see her with one of the children by her in that grey cloak. There were boots and shoes; and a brush and comb left on the dressing-table, for all the world as if she expected to come back tomorrow."[104] This expectant presence of the past (through abandoned objects) also reinforces the permeability of temporal dimensions through the workings of memory; the materiality of absence presses on the present, effacing and affirming the presence of the past. Time imposing itself on the empty Ramsay house is also depicted by the winds creeping in through the hinges:

[101] *S*, 154–155.
[102] For more on order see: Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[103] *S*, 273–274.
[104] *TTL*, 111.

> Only through the rusty hinges and swollen sea-moistened woodwork certain airs, detached from the body of the wind (the house was ramshackle after all) crept round corners and ventured indoors. Almost one might imagine them, as they entered the drawing-room questioning and wondering, toying with the flap of hanging wall-paper, asking, would it hang much longer, when would it fall?[105]

These winds blowing through the house function as allegories of fading past memories, and stand as reminders of the permeability of exteriors and interiors. However, no one is there to see this fading presence, as if the scene would be narrated by a disembodied voice. McEwan rarely experiments with such Woolfian unowned voices; in his novels everything is markedly focalised. And this is a recurrent motif in McEwan's fiction: he experiments with ways in which characters' attention to things is strictly framed by their expertise. Most pertinently, these imposed patterns are inseparable from characters' creative acts, their need to understand the others, involving, in turn, an empathic exercise in imaging their stories. In most of the cases, the organising mind – that of Perowne and Briony – imposes patterns, much like Holmes and Bradshaw, on the existence of others, rather than understand or empathize with them.

This situating of others through one's frames – reality, worldview, and profession – further clarifies what Butler calls one's "regime of the norm" or knowledge about oneself and the world around. Characters' worldviews (and the slice of reality they see through their windows), whilst trying to accommodate the outside, also mitigate empathic relations with it. The neurosurgeon and the writer are moulding the realities around them. Briony, the writer of fiction rewrites lives, recalling, to a certain extent Clarissa, the hostess, who organises lives through her party; Perowne, the neurosurgeon, reads reality through his profession. As Francisco Ortega and Fernando Vidal argue, "McEwan also portrays the main characters through their relation to brain but lyrically extends the use of a brain-based

[105] *TTL*, 103–104.

vocabulary to contexts that are not medical or psychological."[106] This brain-based vocabulary also hinders Perowne from the aspect of reality he is in continuous search of but cannot grasp: the miracle of consciousness, the "mere wet stuff [that] can make this bright inward cinema of thought, of sight and sound and touch." When operating on Baxter, he thinks that if "penetrating the skull brings into view not the brain but the mind. Then within the hour he, Perowne, might understand a lot more about Baxter."[107] Baxter's brain, of course, does not reveal its workings to Perowne, only confronting him with another layer of surface reality. It seems that Perowne's neuroscientific vocabulary is deemed useful for purposes other than understanding others; it gives a sense of certainty to his assessment of problematic events. The behaviour of Baxter, the intruder, turns out to be unpredictable but, reassuringly, scientifically explainable; Baxter becomes an anticipated and later actual patient; even the hit Perowne receives during his first encounter with him is made somewhat less painful as it is scientifically definable and described. Science offers a sense of certainty to Perowne that alleviates or protects him from the dangers of everyday life.

As Perowne transposes his private life events into the space of the operating theatre, that is, into familiar, comfortable and clearly explainable situations, and "the pleasure of knowing precisely what he's doing," he also distances himself from the experience of the actual: his everyday life happening outside the theatre.[108] Before having to operate on Baxter, he prolongs "his walk by half a minute by going across the square, rather than down Warren Street," and thus allows a little time to create a distance between himself and the events of the night.[109] As the distance increases between the location of the incident, and

[106] Francisco Ortega and Fernando Vidal, "Brains in Literature/ Literature in the Brain," *Poetics Today* 34, no. 3 (2013): 342; Susan Green agrees with Ortega and Vidal, arguing that the scientific discourse operates as a tool of artistic representation, both fundamental forms of knowledge, demonstrating how the "interdisciplinary way of knowing might occur" (Susan Green, "Consciousness and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*: 'What Henry Knows,'" *English Studies* 91, no. 1 (2010): 58–73).
[107] *S*, 254, 243.
[108] *S*, 250.
[109] *S*, 241; David James argues that *Saturday* "navigates that path between impressions and judgements, between sensation and understanding" which acts "as a catalyst for innovation" (*Modernist Futures*, 157–8).

diminishes before the subject who caused it, he falls back into routine. The path between his home and the hospital resembles an open air passage from one certainty to the other. This is later echoed in Fiona's walk through London in *The Children Act*, where Fiona, rather than juggling between two spaces of certainty, moves from one personal tragedy into another. There is one moment in *Saturday* that disturbs Perowne's leisurely walks between certainties: earlier in the day, the freedom of the streets and their possible choices are disturbed by the blockages made to facilitate another procession, that of the protesting public, both limiting his choices and allowing the unfamiliar to intervene. He has to reconsider the well-known, and this step into the untrodden is also an entrance into the unfamiliar facets of city life. Whereas for McEwan's characters walking is a form of distraction or a falling back into routine, for Woolf's Clarissa, it is a chance to absorb all that is, together with its contingency and changeability: "How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fräulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that."[110] Hers is an embrace of the city's distractions together with floating memories of the past.

Perowne's need for certainty also makes him a creator of fictions, for his thoughts constantly project and anticipate the events of his day. He even acknowledges this when he endorses Baxter's appearance in their house as being perfectly normal, an expected fact; "for a few seconds, Perowne's only thought is stupidly that: *of course*. It makes sense, nearly all the elements of his day are assembled" – like Mrs Dalloway's party.[111] These expected facts create the tension of anticipation in the narrative, a structure moulded by prolepsis. The

[110] *MD*, 7.
[111] *S*, 206.

proleptic play with the slipping thoughts of the character adds to this paradoxically floating certainty, deliberately counterbalancing the rapt attention and pure concentration Perowne demonstrates in the operating theatre. At the moment when "he's trying to remember the exact phrasing of a remark Theo made earlier in the day that didn't trouble him at the time. It nags him briefly now," the words crystallize only when the object of the conversation materializes before him: "of course. As Theo said, on the streets there's pride, and here it is, concealing a knife."[112] This anticipation or projection of Baxter's intrusion seems to necessarily call forth its referend. When standing at the window, Perowne usually tries to decipher the figures passing in the dark, foregrounding how apparently inconsequential fabrications of stories, and seemingly detached existences can interfere with his own life. Most often he observes a pair of people walking by, and, later in the day when arriving home, he sees two figures (Baxter and his friend) sitting on a bench, but this time he is not concerned with their possible stories. This implies that real encounters can displace or even efface the possibilities of (or need for) imagined stories. However, whereas Perowne and Briony expect the confirmation of their projections, Mrs Dalloway does not forcefully affect the possible choices of the other. Briony refuses to change her initial understanding of events when she accuses Robbie; Perowne is disappointed when his views regarding the airplane scene prove to be wrong.

The watching of news – Perowne's modelling of uncontrollable events as another aspect of his fiction-making – is paired with his inner compulsion to order real life events. Right after seeing the incident, he wants to talk to his wife, because "he wants to tether himself to the precise details of what he's seen, arrange them before her worldly, legal mind and steady gaze."[113] Perowne needs to forge a certain continuity with the reality envisioned

[112] *S*, 175, 207.
[113] *S*, 23.

and the reality confirmed (just like Briony). After Perowne sees the burning airplane and constructs a story around it, a constant sense of expectation and need for confirmation are highlighted. The news is referred to as "my story," for Perowne thinks he was among the first to see the incident, thus holds the original (fabrication of the) story. He has "a confused sense that he's about to learn something significant about himself," as "he turns on the sound and stands facing the tiny set."[114] He cannot accept that his story is not ranked first in the news, and when it finally does come up, Perowne reassuredly sighs, "and there it is, made real at last."[115] When his story about the tragedy of the plane is not confirmed, he is strangely disappointed, instead of being relieved that the incident was not a deliberate attack: "Good news, but as he walks out of the kitchen in the direction of the larder, Henry feels no particular pleasure, not even relief. Have his anxieties been making a fool of him? It's part of the new order, this narrowing of mental freedom, of his right to roam."[116] The novel counterpoints this "right" to imaginatively roam with the literal obstructions of the streets of London set up for the protesting crowd.

The airplane incident and the news, on the other hand, recalls (though from the privacy of homes) the uniting gaze in *Mrs Dalloway*, where the appearance of the motor car and the airplane build up common personal moments in the present, where, as Maria DiBattista puts it, "individual responses, while still audible, are subsumed into a continuous train of thought that moves in comic synchrony with the motor car."[117] Perhaps this is an example of the Woolfian rhythmic orders to which Whitworth refers. When the airplane appears in *Mrs Dalloway*, "everyone looked up" to decipher the letters it writes in the air.[118] The canon of their misreadings unites the crowd in a moment of silence: "as they looked the

[114] Ibid., 179.
[115] Ibid., 35.
[116] *S,* 180.
[117] Maria DiBattista, "Virginia Woolf and the Language of Authorship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf,* 134.
[118] *MD,* 17.

whole world became perfectly silent ... in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls."[119] The "bell tolling the signal number of eleven" clearly recalls Remembrance Day, the cult of which "was already solidly established by the early 1920s," as Vincent Sherry notes.[120] *Saturday* echoes the uniting force of the moment through another conflict image, the protesting crowd that obstructs Perowne's way: "tens of thousands of strangers converging with a single purpose conveying an imitation of a revolutionary joy."[121] It is worth taking a closer look at how the two novels represent the unity of masses. Whereas *Mrs Dalloway* reveals snapshots of individual perspectives, *Saturday* only mentions "silhouetted figures" which "break away and merge into a darker mass."[122] In McEwan's case, these united thoughts and gazes dismiss the distance between selves and others perceptually, because they are merely blurry figures. They recall a form of empathy that Edith Stein refers to as *Einsfühlung* (feeling of oneness), instead of *Einfühlung* (feeling into or with). Rosenfeld argues that in *Saturday*, people unite "in a moment of empathy toward a third party, they appear as equals who cannot feel either superiority or pity toward one another."[123] However, the reason why Perowne is incapable of seeing himself part of the mass, is because this pseudo-fascist empathy is precisely what he cannot share. This portrayal of empathy as oneness of feeling and purpose that Rosenfeld pinpoints steers away from the condescension or pity that critics particularly associate with sympathy. It also clarifies the silhouettes of self–other or subject–objects boundaries that different concepts of empathy negotiate.

[119] *MD*, 18; Kirsty Martin connects this to Woolf's vitalism: "this suggests something unusual – rather than connecting people through social interactions and culture, it depicts a mode of connection that is intimately connected to ideas of energy crucial to Woolf's work. / This energetic communion in fact show how Woolf's vitalism, as well as grounding individual encounters, shaped her understanding of how emotions could be shared" (*Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy*, 103).
[120] Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 336.
[121] *S*, 72.
[122] *S*, 72.
[123] Rosenfeld, *Outsiders Together*, 181.

Rosenfeld emphasizes how this united empathic feeling toward a third party cuts the mass off from internal inequalities, and, arguably, also offers an almost detached empathic support to those at the farther reaches of the expansive circles of empathy.

It is interesting how the novel plays with the ways in which the mass procession encloses or interferes with Perowne's and Baxter's paths, and with Perowne's focus on more immediate circles of empathy. The blockages of the streets facilitating the procession's route anticipate the disturbing events to follow in Perowne's home (Baxter's intrusion), and the streets' emptiness at night connotes the resolution of the problem, the restored order of the day. London becomes a place that negotiates empathies and non-empathies through a spatial imagery, whilst mapping character relations onto *Mrs Dalloway*'s London trajectory. However, much of *Mrs Dalloway*'s (and bits of *To the Lighthouse*'s) "outdoor impression," as Joyce writes in relation to Turgenev, is transposed into the security of the home in McEwan. Briony's integrity and childhood aspirations are protected by the large Tallis home, even when she sees but does not hear the scene through the tall windows. Fiona in *The Children Act* retains the hollow routine of her and her husband's everyday life even if that necessitates a choreographed use of their flat (she's not using the kitchen when he is, for example). In *Nutshell*, the house owned by the narrator's father, the divorcing poet offers the clearest hiding place for the murder plans against him, and a temporary protection of the secret from the outside world once the murder has taken place (emphatically, Trudy never leaves the house). In Perowne's home most explicitly, the outside intrudes upon the family home, upsetting but not destroying its certainty. In Perowne's case, his inability to understand Baxter outside science (his form of protection, as we have seen) triggers Baxter's revenge, as if the novel is making Perowne pay for his failed empathy.[124] In most cases, the

[124] Head mentions that Baxter's reclaiming his authority in front of his gang by attacking Perowne's family (*Ian McEwan*, 178–197).

frames of the windows allow characters to extend their empathies through an imaginative ordering of other lives, though these windows rarely protect them from extending their empathies into a substantial rewriting of the stories they are faced with from the outside.

Less order, more aesthetic empathy

As opposed to these creative acts as empathically driven but ultimately forceful non-empathic orderings, there are cases in McEwan's novels that focus on more subtle relations between Woolfian characters. Understanding others without words complements the invisible threads that connect characters. Notably in *To the Lighthouse, Mrs Dalloway*, *Saturday*, and *The Children Act*, all the minuscule gestures (or their lack thereof), infinitesimal motions, slight changes within the family, but mostly those between husband and wife, are minutely registered, disclosing an analogous rhythm of gazes and perspectives. This sensorial knowledge of the other is also bound to the impressionistic in the first two and the overtly precise neuroscientific and legislative in the last two. Mr and Mrs Ramsay read one another's thoughts, just as Clarissa and Peter Walsh; their body posture, their position occupied in the room, their "background," all reflect and inform the other participant of the inner narratives at play. At the dinner scene Mrs Ramsay

> saw [Mr Ramsay's] anger fly like a pack of hounds into his eyes, his brow, [...] and the whole of his body started to emit sparks but not words. [...] (they looked at each other down the long table sending these questions and answers across, knowing exactly what the other felt).[125]

In a similar vein, Peter Walsh makes Clarissa "see herself; exaggerate," and both of them seem to be constantly aware of the other's thoughts.[126] In *The Children Act*, Fiona knows exactly what his husband is about to say, infers his mood and thoughts from the position he takes in the room, and registers the minute changes in their relationship from the way in

[125] *TTL*, 78.
[126] *MD*, 142.

which he places a coffee cup on the table. In *Saturday*, Henry feels a constant need to talk to his wife, and later Rosalind says that "there you were again, trying to talk to me with your eyes", "reading the meaning of his silence."[127] When Baxter intrudes into their home, their chances of communication diminish, but Henry searches for possible links with the rest of his family. He exchanges meaningful glances with his son, and his need to extend the warm security and solace of touch through the intensity of the gaze becomes perceptible to the person to whom the glance is directed.

Strikingly, the intrusion in *Saturday* happens through very strong allusions to *To the Lighthouse*'s dinner scene. Though the planned celebratory family dinner itself is ultimately absent from *Saturday*, the preparation for dinner is minutely described, just as in Woolf's novel, with the exact recipe of the dish, its temporal frame, and anticipated effect. Both novels highlight the importance of the event, together with the necessity of perfect timing: the reconciliation of granddaughter and grandfather in one; and Mr Bankes's presence at the dinner in the other. However, the absences of or within the scenes are manifested in different ways, for the dinner in *To the Lighthouse* is filled with suspense; in *Saturday*, it expands into a greater interruption of the planned evening. All the interruptions taking place at the Ramsays' dinner table (the arrival of Paul and Minta, Mildred's requests for further orders) merge into its sphere, whereas the intrusion distances the prospects of a dinner in the Perowne family. Mrs Ramsay "waited, passively, for someone to answer her, for something to happen," but "nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole effort of merging and creating rested on her."[128] Likewise, Perowne's feeling of responsibility for Baxter's appearance rested on his shoulders, but they were forced to wait, "passively […] for something to happen." There are further consonant rhythms and movements in the

[127] *S*, 269.
[128] *TTL*, 69.

scenes, for Perowne struggles to separate his family from the part of the room Baxter stands in, communicating without words; Mrs Ramsay tries to draw everyone closer through the flow of conversation. As soon as the conversation begins at the table, Mrs Ramsay allows the atmosphere a life of its own, raising above her creation like a hawk and "holding them safe together."[129] The Perownes resume their peaceful life after the interruption vanishes, with an altered version of their dinner prospects. The *boeuf en daube* is a "perfect triumph"; the fish stew is "faintly reassuring" of ordinary life.[130] In all these cases, the exchanged glances mediate thoughts and even tangible expressions, by overcoming physical distance between characters.

One of the wordless, often repeated scenes in *To the Lighthouse* is Mrs Ramsay's understanding of her husband's need for sympathy: Mr Ramsay is standing next to her, "demanding sympathy" in silence: "Nothing would make Mr. Ramsay move on. There he stood, demanding sympathy," while James tries to desperately recapture her mother's attention: "By looking fixedly at the page, he hoped to make him move on; by pointing his finger at a word, he hoped to recall his mother's attention, which, he knew angrily, wavered instantly his father stopped."[131] This dynamic between the three of them reveals a strong presence of absent words, but also the void that the presence of absent-minded characters creates, for Mr Ramsay broods incessantly:

> Who shall blame him, if, […] having adventured to the uttermost, and used his strength wholly to the last ounce and fallen asleep not much caring if he wakes or not, he now perceives by some pricking in his toes that he lives, and does not on the whole object to live, but requires sympathy, and whisky, and some one to tell the story of his suffering to at once? Who shall blame him? Who will not secretly rejoice when the hero puts his armour off, and halts by the window and gazes at his wife and son, who, very distant at first, gradually come closer and closer, till lips and book and head are clearly before him, though still lovely and unfamiliar from the intensity of his isolation and the waste of ages and the perishing of the

[129] *TTL*, 85.
[130] *S*, 231.
[131] *TTL*, 32.

> stars, and finally putting his pipe in his pocket and bending his magnificent head before her – who will blame him if he does homage to the beauty of the world?[132]

Mr Ramsay brings into focus his family slowly, cutting out vaguely familiar but unknown faces from the background of his thoughts, whilst cutting through "the intensity of his isolation and the waste of ages and the perishing of the stars." Woolf sets Mr Ramsay's awakening to everyday life through his demand for sympathy into a delayed opposition with his dry philosophy, often emphasized by Lily's table metaphor as well. Lily thinks of Mr Ramsay's philosophy as an angularly cut off version of reality: his "days were passed in this seeing of angular essences, this reducing of lovely evenings, with all their flamingo clouds and blue and silver to a white deal four-legged table."[133]

Ironically, and perhaps deliberately, it is at (and on) the Ramsay's dinner table that Lily has a moment of revelation about her painting of Mrs Ramsay and James: "In a flash she saw her picture, and thought, Yes, I shall put the tree further in the middle; then I shall avoid that awkward space. […] She took up the salt cellar and put it down again on a flower pattern in the table-cloth, so as to remind herself to move the tree."[134] So the table, the lean and spread out space of philosophy, becomes the space for painterly abstraction and an expression of order on Lily's white canvas. This smooth, tactile expression of the interplay between artistic and philosophical discourses is something that McEwan's novels strive for in blending the literary and the scientific. Even if Lily seems to be clearly against the angular essence of philosophy and its (and other) forms of fixity, her way to the "essence" of Mrs Ramsay, the dark purple triangular shape and the straight line at the end of the novel in the middle of her canvas, rehearses similar movements of angularity and ordered fixity. Ultimately, this painterly understanding is Lily's form of artistic empathy. The table itself

[132] *TTL*, 32.
[133] *TTL*, 22.
[134] *TTL*, 70.

(and the things happening on its surface) presents a shared object of enquiry in both artistic and philosophical discourse, expressing how swiftly and subtly Woolf's novel moves between depictions of different kinds of order, empathy, and artistic or (what Lily sees as) philosophical thoughts of angularity and rigour.

Right after her revelation at the table, however, we find Lily pitying Charles Tansley for his inflexible ways of thinking and being. Tansley puts

> his spoon precisely in the middle of his plate, which he had swept clean, as if, Lily thought (he sat opposite to her with his back to the window precisely in the middle of view), he were determined to make sure of his meals. Everything about him had that meagre fixity, that bare unloveliness. But nevertheless, the fact remained, it was impossible to dislike any one if one looked at them. She liked his eyes; they were blue, deep set, frightening.[135]

This quick move from abstraction and visual empathy to Lily's pitying of Tansley shows how in the novel women are often forced into empathy. Gender roles are pulling Lily back to more conventional ideas of empathy where she realises this young man is socially embarrassed.[136]

In what is perhaps the novel's most straightforwardly empathic moment, Lily attempts to "press through" to the "essence" of Mrs Ramsay's mind and heart through metaphors of interiority written into architectural clarity:

> Sitting on the floor with her arms round Mrs Ramsay's knees, close as she could get, [...] she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions [...] What art was there, known to love or cunning, by

[135] *TTL,* 70.

[136] However, there is an important distinction between Mr Ramsay's table of philosophy and the artist's canvas: one is invisible, the other is tangibly present. Ann Banfield observes how "In the table converge two intellectual currents," and, in the same way, "Its reality is dual: it is the visible table, but analysis scours it clean of its appearances to expose an unseen dimension." Relating the table to ways of knowledge in Woolf and Bertrand Russell, Banfield concludes that "the unseen table, a logical possibility, leads knowledge outside the comfortable sphere of certainty to another, uncertain knowledge" (Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 50–51). If we transpose this argument into questions of empathy in *To the Lighthouse*, beyond the table being a piece of epistemological certainty about painterly knowledge, or the knowledge of the seen, as Banfield suggests, it is also a tangible and abstract tool for the knowledge of others, and the uncertainty but fixity of the shapes – empathic tools – on Lily's canvas: the wedge shape and the line. In the iconic ending, Lily draws a "clear line there, in the centre," as if symbolically clarifying her "blurred canvas." Therefore, the unseen table does offer ways into the uncertain knowledge of the other, but its tangible fixities become revelatory for Lily's understanding of Mrs Ramsay.

> which one pressed through into those secret chambers? [...] Could the body achieve, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart? [...] Nothing happened. Nothing! Nothing! as she leant her head against Mrs Ramsay's knee. And yet, she knew knowledge and wisdom were stored up in Mrs Ramsay's heart. How, then, she had asked herself, did one know one thing or another thing about people, sealed as they were?[137]

The scene emphasizes spatial coordinates of both the inside and the outside by bringing together the exterior immediacy of the bodies with the immateriality of the inside (imagined as an interior, a secret chamber) – something that the distancing window metaphors above did not allow. In a way, Lily confers materiality to the chambers of the mind and heart, trying to comprehend the reality of the other through the bonds of the body. She translates the intangible into materiality through language (which is already paradoxical in itself), hoping that her actual proximity to Mrs Ramsay can connect with "the mind and the heart." By creating a material presence of the indescribable mind without locating it, the narrative 'places' the inner self into the exteriorized thoughts of the other. So even though the inside of the body does not reveal the workings of the mind, a version of this reality is created outside the body, in the observer's thoughts. Laura Salisbury argues that "*To the Lighthouse* consistently imagines itself as able [...] to push through the barrier of the body and to see into the mind, perhaps even the heads of others," nevertheless, language meets the "resistance of the flesh, the resistance of matter that [it] cannot penetrate."[138] Woolf's and McEwan's novels do not necessarily dismantle this "resistance of matter," but make it visible through the network of self–other relations. This idea summarizes Henry Perowne's concerns and questions about the miracle of the mind which cannot be deciphered with the tools of neurology, nor through a neurological vocabulary, Briony's attempts to grasp the (existence of the) "real self" of others through writing, Septimus's and Mrs Dalloway's

[137] *TTL*, 43.
[138] Laura Salisbury, "The Skull on the Wall: *To the Lighthouse* and the Minds of Others," University of Oxford podcasts, accessed March 23, 2015, http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/lighthouse.

feelings of "reality" and "unreality," and Lily Briscoe's wish to understand others, "sealed as they were."

McEwan's novels are interested in representing precisely those characters who cannot overstep their "angular" reality, whilst searching for meaningful ways to know, understand, and empathise. There are a few moments in these novels when characters are able to step out of their comfort zone of clarity, order, and secure knowledge of professional vocabulary through a particular form of empathy. This version of empathic projection does not concern intersubjective relationships (though it will lead to them), but relations between subjects and artistic objects. The most compelling form of aesthetic empathy in McEwan's novels is characters' response to music: Perowne's realisation at his son's concert, and Fiona's reverie at her own. When Perowne goes to listen to Theo's new song, he "waits to let his eyes adjust to the low light, straining to hear the sounds, aware of the familiar smell of dusty carpeting. [...] He moves deeper into the lobby, past what he thinks must be the ticket office, [...] and in total darkness follows the wall with his hands."[139] His familiarity, steady orientation, and smooth passage through the darkness is devoid of the obstructions and intrusions – aggressive movements between the interior and exterior and inside and the outside – in the novel, giving way to free floating thoughts about his life and career whenever he hears Theo play.

> Henry has told no one, not even Rosalind, that there are moments, listening from the back of a West End bar, when music thrills him, and in a state of exaltation he feels his pride in his son – inseparable from his pleasure in the music – as a constricting sensation in his chest, close to pain. It's difficult to breathe. At the heart of the blues is not melancholy, but a strange and worldly joy.
>
> Theo's guitar pierces him because it also carries a reprimand, a reminder of buried dissatisfaction in his own life, of the missing element. […] There's nothing in his life that contains this inventiveness, this style of being free. The music speaks to unexpressed longing or frustration, a sense that he's denied himself an open road, the life of the heart celebrated in the songs. There has to be more to life than merely saving lives."[140]

[139] *S*, 169.
[140] *S*, 28.

Perowne's empathic attunement to Theo's guitar playing – "a form of hypnosis, of effortless seduction"[141] – besides his strong appreciation of his son and his music, leads him into the unfamiliar recesses of his own mind and heart. Blues offers Perowne a glimpse of the life he could have had, outside of what he now briefly sees as his profession's conventional fixity and claustrophobia. As if echoing the novel's general concern with the idea of tipping characters and thoughts into other lives (think of the locked in gaze of Perowne and the sweeper), Perowne's statement about "there has to be more to life" than his job comes right after he belittlingly questions the fulfilment that his son's career in music has to offer: "But is there a lifetime's satisfaction in twelve bars of three obvious chords?"[142] – only to make him realise that he is unhappy with his own life. Not all kinds of music provide the same kind of relief or image of a free life to Perowne: classical music, in line with his clear thinking and unwavering focus, aids his concentration in the operating theatre and becomes a benign isolation or shelter from the outside world when he listens to it in his car: "Shamelessly, he always enjoys the city from his car where the air is filtered and sci-fi music confers pathos on the humblest details – a Schubert trio is dignifying the narrow street he's slipping down on."[143] Only the unconventional, spontaneous notes of jazz give him the sense of another, less certain, less bound existence. Music, in this case, seems to be his only way into less forceful cuts between subjects and objects, selves and others, and insides and outsides, and, in a broader sense, into the novel's aspiration to unite both.

For Fiona, a ballad triggers a moment of revelation in *The Children Act*. In the novel's Joycean ending, as Boxall argues, we find her lying "face to face" with her husband "in the semi-darkness, and while the great rain-cleansed city beyond the room settled to its softer nocturnal rhythms and their marriage uneasily resumed, she told him in a steady quiet

[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., 27.
[143] Ibid., 76.

voice of her shame, of the sweet boy's passion for life, and her part in his death."[144] Fiona's revelation about "her part in" Adam's death in this "minute reworking of the ending of 'The Dead'" is preceded by a concert scene, where Fiona accompanies her colleague Mark on the piano.[145] Right before getting up on the stage at the annual Christmas concert in the Great Hall of Gray's Inn, she learns that Adam has fallen ill again, and unwilling to accept treatment, recently died. Her performance with Mark leads up to her realisation that she could have saved the boy for the second time, if only she would have understood his desperate calls for help. Adam follows Fiona to one of her legal trips, and later on sends her letters and finally a poem that echoes Schubert's "An die Musik," a piece that they performed together during Fiona's first visit to the hospital. However, Fiona does not give much importance to these cues at the time. Her second performance of Schubert's ballad, this time with Mark, is the revelatory link between her initial and retrospective grasp of Adam's thoughts. And it is the concert scene that brings her closer to the certainty of the tragic news and the realisation of her part in it.

At the start, she and Mark "were locked into a unity of purpose they had rarely touched on in rehearsal, no longer concentrating on simply getting things right, but able to dissolve in the music without effort."[146] As the concert continues, they "entered the horizonless hyperspace of music-making, beyond time and purpose. She was only faintly aware that something waited for her in return, for it lay below her, an alien speck on a familiar landscape. Perhaps it wasn't there, perhaps it wasn't true."[147] It is at this point that her thoughts start to rush towards the inevitable confrontation with Adam's death, and by the time they get to Mahler's characteristically melancholic "spirit of tranquil resignation,"

[144] *TCA*, 213; Peter Boxall, "Imagining the Future" (talk, First AHRC Metamodernism Symposium, Manchester Metropolitan University, January 31, 2018).
[145] Boxall, "Imagining the Future."
[146] *TCA*, 198.
[147] Ibid.,199.

the notes of anticipation become more immediate: "The couple sensed they were holding their audience, and their performance rose further. Fiona also knew she was moving at a stately pace towards something terrible. It was true, it wasn't true. She would only know when the music ceased and she confronted it."[148] During the last piece of music, the ballad she sang while Adam accompanied him on his violin at the hospital, "The ghost of Schubert may have blessed the introduction she played, but the rising three notes, a broken chord tenderly echoed lower, and again lower still, then resolving, belonged to another hand."[149] As soon as the music ends, Fiona leaves the concert hall in a rush to confirm the news about Adam's death. At this point, "the music she had played didn't resonate in her mind," but later she hesitantly confesses to her husband that she left the concert hall abruptly because she could not cope with the memories brought up by the ballad. She is shaken by her memories of her visit in the hospital:

> The pale thin face, the shaded purple under huge violet eyes. The caked tongue, arms like sticks, so ill, so determined on death, so full of charm and life, pages of his poetry spilling over the bed, pleading with her to stay and play their song again when she had to return to court.[150]

Fiona's second, belated performance of "their song," confronts her with the unbearable realisation that her "authority and dignity" and responsibility resonates beyond "the court-room walls": "Adam came looking for her and she offered nothing in religion's place, no protection, even though […] her paramount consideration was his welfare."[151] In *Saturday,* Boxall sees Perowne's encounter with music as a moment of release, where music can take him beyond himself, and argues that it "shakes McEwan's structures. Everything he writes aspires for that release."[152] *The Children Act* is no exception to this, as Fiona experiences a similar release from her rational precision and routine (glimpsing the far-reaching

[148] Ibid., 200.
[149] Ibid., 200–201.
[150] Ibid., 212.
[151] *TCA*, 212–213.
[152] Boxall, "Imagining the Future."

consequences of her decision) into an impression of the uncertainty and unknowability of others. Music starts to break up Fiona's precise, controlled, unwavering thought-patterns and realist narrative, as Boxall argues, in order to arrive to a Joycean love of unknowing, uncertainty, and anti-rationality, something that is closely related to Woolfian representations of "rhythmic order" in this and McEwan's other novels. Even if McEwan chooses to end his novel on a Joycean note, the very humane, lyrical passage he reworks from "The Dead" is closer to Woolfian lyricism than our typical notions of Joyce's exuberant techniques. Therefore, even at this point, McEwan stays faithful to Woolf.

Empathic attention to modernist objects

Finally, however, it is not exclusively McEwan's interest in character's aesthetic empathy or attunement with art that allows for such "narrative release" in expanding the circles of empathy. His love of fictional order, discussed earlier, gives way to a more expansive attention to Woolfian everyday objects, to a close repositioning of objects and things from Woolf's novels into his. In one of his interviews he puts his finger on the nuanced connection between descriptions of surfaces and things that define to a great extent his turn to and reworking of modernism. He says that in his earlier work he

> was more interested in the surfaces. I thought it was almost cheating to let the reader know what a character was thinking. It seemed antiquated, a dead aesthetic, to provide paragraph summaries of someone's states of mind: I thought a subjective state had to be conveyed through observed details or simply by what people said and did. Later this existential kind of writing came to seem very self-limiting, and my fiction began to change around the time of *The Child in Time*. What fiction does better than any other art form is present consciousness, the flow of thought, to give an interior narrative, a subjective history of an individual through time, through every conceived event, through love, or moral dilemmas. This inner quality is what I now value.[153]

[153] Cook, Groes and Sage, "Journeys without Maps: An Interview with McEwan," 126.

I contend that the "inner quality" that McEwan professedly values over surfaces in his later fiction goes hand-in-hand with his interest in the surface of things. And, arguably, his continued fascination with the surface of things is just as much inspired by modernism as his interest in representing "the flow of thought." In one of his recent interviews he himself admits that "we can never unremember all the lessons of literary modernism."[154]

One of the most telling examples of this interweaving of surfaces and interior narratives in McEwan's consideration of modernist empathy is Briony's existential brooding in *Atonement*. Here I would like to dwell on this scene to show how it epitomises McEwan's understanding of the relations between surfaces and depths. Briony thinks of her "real self concealed behind a breaking wave"[155] while looking at the "continuous fabric of her skin" in a Woolfian moment of self-reflection.[156]

> She raised one hand and flexed its fingers and wondered, as she had sometimes before, how this thing, this machine of gripping, this fleshy spider on the end of her arm, came to be hers, entirely at her command […] The mystery was in the instant before it moved, the dividing moment between not moving and moving, when her intention took effect. It was like a wave breaking […] There was no stitching, no seam, and yet she knew that behind the smooth, continuous fabric was the real self – was it her soul? – which took the decision to cease pretending, and gave the final command.[157]

Briony's musings run from the mystery of self-revelation to the possibility of recognising the same mystery unique yet common to everyone else around her. For a moment, Briony seems vulnerable in her attempts to locate her "real self" in relation to others; she cannot pinpoint her real self that gives intent, that gives the command "between moving and not moving." Boxall sees this moment as Briony's search "for a bound form in which there is no gap between world and thing, between reading and understanding,"[158] something that

[154] McEwan, "A Writing Life," interview by Matthew Stadlen (Oxford Literary Festival, Sheldonian Theatre, March 23, 2018).
[155] *AT*, 36.
[156] Marcus, "Ian McEwan's Modernist Time"; Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction*, 76.
[157] *AT*, 35–36.
[158] Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction*, 74.

inevitably recalls Briony's empathic confusions between seeing, knowing, and understanding.

Shortly after this moment that eases Briony and the reader into modernist techniques, specifically echoing Woolf through its breaking wave metaphor, Briony witnesses from the window her sister Cecilia's incident with Robbie by the fountain, and starts to think about plausible ways of rendering the story from shifting narrative viewpoints: "she could write the scene three times over, from three points of view", "now" that "there was nothing left of the dumb show by the fountain beyond what survived in memory, in three separate and overlapping memories."[159] Her account of the "three separate and overlapping memories" of the scene, just as her above mentioned unknowability and even vulnerability of the self translates into the three visible cracks of the reassembled vase Cecilia and Robbie broke by the fountain: "three fine meandering lines in the glaze, converging like rivers in an atlas, were all that showed."[160] The "breaking wave" behind the "real self" plays on the softness and malleability of water and the sharp force with which it breaks, just like the watery imagery of the "three fine meandering lines in the glaze, converging like rivers" on the porcelain enamel. The two materials meet literally when the broken pieces of porcelain submerge in the water, symbolising the two lovers and the falling apart of their unbegun relationship:

> With a sound like a dry twig snapping, a section of the lip of the vase came away in his hand, and split into two triangular pieces which dropped into the water and tumbled to the bottom in a synchronous, see-sawing motion, and lay there, several inches apart, writhing in the broken light.[161]

The see-sawing motion of these pieces also recalls the novel's temporal shifts and assemblage of fragmented perspectives. Hard surfaces play onto images of softness and vice versa in the novel's juxtaposition of the inner and the outer.

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[159] *AT*, 40–41.
[160] Ibid., 41, 43.
[161] Ibid., 29.

This scene by the fountain, together with Briony's musings is, of course, a moment laden with allusions, because it forms the novel's metatextual core. This story defines Briony's writing career, as well as her forceful ordering tendency; she returns to it over and over again, atoning for it through her rewritings. The scene accumulates, even overloads Woolfian watery imagery of the self, of memory, of shifting narrative perspectives; triangular shapes and the number three reappear multiple times, excessively calling attention to themselves and their allusions (one cannot help hearing echoes of Lily Briscoe's dark triangular wedge shape on her canvas depicting the essence and unknowability of Mrs Ramsay). The vase becomes the symbol of the narrative structure and the uncertainty of interpretations, as the novel playfully suggests, "the glazed surface of [Briony's] conviction was not without its blemishes and hairline cracks."[162] As Brian Finney notes, there is a strong connection between Briony's testimony and the fragility of the mended vase: "Both the vase and the novel as a whole represent a fragile aesthetic form that can easily fall apart."[163] Similarly, Stefanie Albers and Torsten Caeners note that the fragile aesthetic form is closely related to Briony's aestheticized thinking which she translates on to reality.[164] This fragility is also characteristic of the vulnerability and unknowability of the self that Briony thinks about in the passage above.

So there are at least two discernible levels at which *Atonement* plays with modernist representation in this extended episode: in borrowing Woolfian style to describe inner states, and in projecting multiple focalisation onto the porcelain surface of the vase. Firstly, Briony's thinking about the real self behind the breaking wave articulates through Woolfian imagery the essential unknowability of the self. Secondly, Briony extends this watery

[162] *AT*, 168.
[163] Brian Finney, "Briony's Stand Against Oblivion: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 77. 68–82.
[164] Stefanie Albers and Torsten Caeners, "The Poetics and Aesthetics of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*," *English Studies*, 90: 6 (2009): 714.

imagery to encompass multiple perspectives, the three overlapping memories she talks about. Thirdly, these images of watery fluid perspectives play onto the hard surface of the vase that at the same time represents the fragmentedness of Robbie's, Cecilia's, and Briony's memory of the scene by the fountain. It is telling how McEwan uses Woolfian aesthetics exactly at these crucial moments of the narrative, showing how modernism is clasped aesthetically, formally in those moments which are hard to follow or pinpoint, to know or to represent. Woolfian modernism in McEwan seems to be wedged between moments of vulnerability and appears in instances that reveal cracks in the narrative, the artifice of the text, as Briony's metatextual comments show. McEwan's fiction "conceals and reveals its modernist traces" through the conceptual juxtaposition or malleability of inner and outer surfaces, using different forms of empathy in this and his other novels to translate or exhibit transactions between the two.[165]

The scene by the fountain bears a strong relationship to Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway,* also recalling the fountain scene between Clarissa and Peter in their youth. In *Atonement*, the plot hinges on this "pivotal moment in the characters' lives, which opens the novel," as Peter Childs puts it; in *Mrs Dalloway,* "the final scene, the terrible scene which he [Peter] believed had mattered more than anything in the whole of his life [...] happened at three o'clock in the afternoon of a very hot day," changes the web of relationships: both couples end up separated.[166]

> And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced.[167]

[165] Here I am borrowing Richard Robinson's words from the blurb about his book on McGahern: "Drawing out the ways in which McGahern's fiction conceals and reveals its modernist traces," https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/john-mcgahern-and-modernism-9781441125781/.
[166] Peter Childs, *Contemporary Novelists. British Fiction since 1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 171; *MD,* 54.
[167] *MD,* 6.

> The scene by the fountain, its air of ugly threat, and at the end, when both had gone their separate ways, the luminous absence shimmering above the wetness on the gravel – all this would have to be reconsidered.[168]

In both cases this scene is a form of memory, rendered indirectly: in *Atonement*, it is masked by the narrative pseudo-present; in Mrs Dalloway, the scene brings into the present Clarissa's and Peter's accounts of the past.[169] If we read the quotation from *Mrs Dalloway* in the light of *Atonement*, the scene could be understood as another version or even explanation of the same event. From Briony's perspective, not writing the scene would represent the need to 'break' with her powerful "sense of obligation, as well as her instinct for order," or they would be "destroyed, both of them ruined" (as Robbie and Cecilia will be in *Atonement*).[170] The broken and repaired vase marks the beginning of Robbie's and Cecilia's relationship, but also the tragic ending of that relationship. Thus the ending overwrites the beginning, in a way similar to the entire structure of the novel; the scene by the fountain in *Mrs Dalloway* is also about the end of (and marks a constant return to) Clarissa and Peter, where the spout of the fountain is broken: "and they stood with the fountain between them, the spout (it was broken) dribbling water incessantly."[171] This shared scene suggests on a larger scale how McEwan's novels deal with Woolfian representation, carefully repositioning different objects and metaphors of fragility into their twenty-first-century novelistic milieu.

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[168] *AT*, 113.

[169] Such "extended temporalities of a singular occurrence," as Marcus writes, suggest the specific situation itself, which is prolonged through reinterpretations and rewritings (Marcus, "Ian McEwan's Modernist Time," 83); Julie Ellam writes that "the particular use of the shifting point of view also recalls work by James and, occasionally, Woolf as [McEwan] avoids being restricted by the influence of one author or movement" (Julie Ellam, *Ian McEwan's Atonement* (London: Continuum, 2009), 40).

[170] *AT*, 41.

[171] *MD*, 54; one could also connect these two scenes specifically by what Hermione Lee calls as the "slow, deliberate literariness" of Part One of *Atonement* (Hermione Lee, "If Your Memories Serve You Well ...," review of *Atonement*, *Observer*, September 23, 2001, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/sep/23/ fiction. bookerprize2001).

Another novel that starts with a similarly precise relocation of things and objects from Woolfian texts is *The Children Act*. The novel starts off with a literary genre painting of Fiona's living room and thoughts:

> London. Trinity term one week old. Implacable June weather. Fiona Maye, a High Court judge, at home on Sunday evening, supine on a chaise longue, staring past her stockinged feet towards the end of the room, towards a partial view of recessed bookshelves by the fireplace and, to one side, by a tall window, a tiny Renoir lithograph of a bather.[172]

The tall windows, fireplace, and book shelves – a lengthy display of consumer culture – could be part of any upper-middle class interior, but the following sentence discloses a particular connection with *Mrs Dalloway*'s interiors and things: "Below [the Renoir], centred on a round walnut table, a blue vase. No memory of how she came by it. Nor when she last put flowers in it."[173] This is a hint of Woolf, reminiscent of the first words of *Mrs Dalloway*: "Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself." The reason why the vase is important here is because it also refers back to *Atonement*'s rethinking of Woolfian aesthetics, thus holding a double reference to Woolf. The empty vase could even suggest McEwan's move away from certain aspects of his Woolfian aesthetic at the turn of the new century: from a broken vase to its emptiness, something that is not paid attention to, because Fiona's strained lifestyle cannot allow such distractions. It also says something about the use value of (and our adaption to) modernism; Fiona has "No memory of how she came by it. Nor when she last put flowers in it." Of course, we should not overemphasize such textual clues; rather, they are crucial because they exhibit the way in which McEwan inscribes modernist milieus into his fiction with extreme precision.

Boxall makes an interesting case about the novel's interplay of realist, modernist, and postmodern legacies, by seeing the novel's progression as a gradual transition from

[172] *TCA*, 1.
[173] Ibid.

Dickensian realism to Joycean modernism. Boxall looks at the "well-crafted realism" of *The Children Act*'s beginning through its echoes of *Bleak House*: "London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather," drawing attention to the novel's ending on a Joycean mode of uncertainty in the last pages of "The Dead." However, this leap into, or faint reminiscence of modernism starts earlier than Boxall suggests with Woolfian rather than Joycean references. Even if the very first sentences of McEwan's book carefully recall those of *Bleak House*, there is a sense that *The Children Act* has moved away from Dickensian realism, from an "implacable November" to *Mrs Dalloway*'s "hot June day," perhaps even taking a certain distance from modernism, by referring to an "implacable June" evening, rather than day. In *Mrs Dalloway*, "the laden circles" of Big Ben "dissolve in the air"; in Fiona's house, time is measured by the "Blackened raindrops falling irregularly into the grate with a ticking sound against the balled up yellow newsprint" – another echo of watery, irregular time.[174] There is no plunge into the past, but rather a tumble into the dreaded present – a failed marriage rather than an unstarted one with Peter Walsh – and its duties for the next day: Fiona wishes "all this stuff at the bottom of the sea."[175] By using modernist objects or objects that echo modernist texts to delineate character relationships, McEwan's novels depict how permeating modernism itself has become, occupying his characters' everyday lives and his novelistic design.

Woolf's modernism, therefore, seems to be essential in moments of vulnerability, uncertainty, and crisis, as we have seen in *Atonement*, but it also functions as an object of the everyday. In the latter case, the fountain, wave, vase or window is filled in with McEwan's empathic attention to things and with his Woolfian references, and in case of the reader, these seemingly empty containers need to be filled with several intertexts and

[174] *TCA*, 1.
[175] Ibid.

McEwan's versions of modernism. McEwan's close attention to and layering of Woolfian objects illustrates his love of fictional order. This minute attention to modernism and its objects, often crafted into a haptic aesthetics is a way of extending, alongside ethical considerations, the aesthetic circles of empathic attention to modernism. The next chapters of this thesis further expand the circles of aesthetic and intersubjective empathy in relation to fictional control, but while Ciaran Carson lifts the pressure of narrative ordering by channelling an expansive attention to others and things in a Joycean mode of encyclopaedism, Zadie Smith locks it into Forsterian symmetries.

Chapter Two

Ciaran Carson and James Joyce: attention, empathy, and encyclopaedism

> After years they have reconstructed the whole of the Falls Road and now
> Are working on the back streets: Lemon, Peel and Omar, Balaclava, Alma.
>
> They just about keep up with the news of bombings and demolition, and are
> Struggling with the finer details: the names and dates carved out
> On the back bench of the Leavers' Class in Slate Street School; the Nemo Café menu;
> The effects of the 1941 Blitz, the entire contents of Paddy Lavery's pawnshop.
>
> (Ciaran Carson, "The Exiles' Club")

In his 1912 public lecture at Trieste, Joyce discussed the realism and idealism of Daniel Defoe and William Blake. He distinguished between the two authors on the basis of their approach to reality, arguing that Defoe works with precision and "admirable clarity" in his encyclopaedic attention to the material world, while Blake looks beyond this materiality in his "attendance to the artistic matters of form and correspondence."[1] Joyce's encyclopaedism in *Ulysses* arguably incorporates both these approaches to reality in its attention to *realistic* details and formal organisation. When Joyce famously remarks that he gives "a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city suddenly disappeared," it could be reconstructed from the pages of *Ulysses*,[2] he evokes Diderot's encyclopaedic tradition, where the encyclopaedia's primary motivation is knowledge-preservation in the face of catastrophe.[3] For Diderot, the *Encyclopédie* aims for a level of comprehensiveness that

[1] James Joyce, "Realism and Idealism in English Literature (Daniel Defoe – William Blake)," trans. Conor Deane, in *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 170; Jeri Johnson identifies Defoe's and Blake's tradition as the twin drive of *Ulysses* in both generic and critical terms (Jeri Johnson, introduction to *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), xvii).
[2] Joyce talking to Frank Budgen, in *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses," and Other Writings*, Frank Budgen (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).
[3] Paul Saint-Amour explains that modernists were trained in the Diderotian tradition, and interprets Joyce's remark in a less ironic way than many critics. In Saint-Amour's argument, "preserving knowledge in the face of catastrophe" is the central motivation of the French *Encyclopédie* (Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 17).

would in the event of a disaster serve as the basis of knowledge reconstruction, as a link back to pre-catastrophic times: "What gratitude would not be lavished by the generation that came after this time of troubles upon those men [...] who had taken measures to ward off [the] worst ravages [of disaster] by collecting in a safe place the knowledge of all past ages!"[4] Ciaran Carson's poem, the "The Exiles' Club" speaks in the face of an ongoing disaster, the Northern Irish Troubles, where encyclopaedic reconstruction and (literal) destruction happen simultaneously, and a comprehensive retrieval of Belfast is a matter of careful retrospective attention.[5]

In the poem, a group of Irish emigrants in Australia are trying to reconstruct a mental picture of Belfast, keeping up "with the news of bombings and demolition," or with the constantly changing map of the city during the Troubles. They are struggling to remember streets and shops in encyclopaedic detail, recalling impossibly minute parts of their Belfast lives. The group's retrospective act of piecing together Belfast is not informed by an encyclopaedic anticipation and urge to collect everything in a "safe place" (memory, in this case); it is rather a serious exercise in awareness and attention. The group retrospectively attends to the elements of their immediate environment in Belfast (precise descriptions of streets, the Nemo Café's menu, the contents of Paddy Lavery's pawnshop) of which they were certainly aware, but did not necessarily focus on or purposefully memorize while they were living there. The poem redirects this effortless awareness or even non-attention to one's immediate environment into a careful and deliberate engagement with minute, intimate details.

Carson himself admits his indebtedness to Joyce in his encyclopaedic reconstructions of the city, emphasising his interest in Joyce's focus on the particular. He

[4] Qtd. in Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 183.
[5] Ciaran Carson, *The Irish for No* (Loughcrew: The Gallery Press, 1987).

says that "Joyce has always interested me, as much as for his rendering of the music of the city – sounds of traffic, printing shops, cutlery in restaurants, songs, fragments of speech – as for any overarching narrative, more *Ulysses*, perhaps, than *Dubliners*. I love his delight in the particular, and I'm sure it lies behind many of my own attempts to render the actuality of things." [6] Several critics agree that there is a "similar desire" in the works of these authors "to represent the city both comprehensively and in its infinite particularity."[7] However, these arguments do not aim to trace specifically the kinds of attentive patterns Carson finds in Joyce's texts. This chapter argues that Carson scales down Joyce's encyclopaedism in order to connect formal techniques with an empathic awareness to details. In his novels, just as in "The Exiles' Club," Carson explores the attentive mechanisms involved in encyclopaedic narratives through his descriptions of characters' empathic experiences. In *The Star Factory* (1997), one of his early novels, Carson offers a labyrinthine description of Belfast, whereby characters inhabit their past and present selves; *Fishing for Amber* (1999) deconstructs the sectarian mindset through Dutch art and minute cityscapes; in *Shamrock Tea* (2001), characters identify with the figures of the Flemish painter, Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*;[8] in *The Pen Friend* (2009), the two main characters are trying to step into the situation of others, and of each other. In all of these novels Carson moves away from the monumentality, vastness, and capaciousness of encyclopaedism by focusing on the careful, receptive attention that empathic awareness entails, perhaps creating a sense of capaciousness at a different scale, in details. By looking at empathy and encyclopaedic

[6] Ciaran Carson, "For All I Know: Ciaran Carson in Conversation with Elmer Kennedy-Andrews," in *Ciaran Carson: Critical Essays*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 20.
[7] Neal Alexander, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing*, Liverpool English Texts and Studies 58 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 2; Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce: Reading Modern Irish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); David Butler, "'Slightly Out of Synch': Joycean Strategies in Ciaran Carson's *The Twelfth of Never*," *Irish University Review* 33.2 (2003): 337–55.
[8] Art historians commonly refer to the painting as the *Arnolfini Wedding*, the *Arnolfini Double Portrait*, or the *Arnolfini Portrait*. Carson opts for the last two versions, due to debates about whether the painting actually represents a wedding. As the narrator Carson's uncle explains: "Since the theory that this painting represents a marriage contract is open to reproach, let us not call it the Arnolfini Wedding, but the Arnolfini Double Portrait" (*ST*, 52). I shall refer to it as the *Arnolfini Portrait* (or *Portrait*) here.

fiction through the lens of attention, this chapter explores the larger questions of how readers and critics attend to novels, and how novelists read modernism. Secondly, it suggests a more nuanced understanding of empathy as a form of knowledge and care. I first focus on *The Star Factory*, *Fishing for Amber*, and *The Pen Friend* to define subject-object relationships and the ways in which the narrator attends to others and to things around him. In the second half of the chapter I specifically focus on Carson's *Shamrock Tea,* which portrays most explicitly characters' aesthetic empathy – one's projection into a work of art – through an encyclopaedic format.[9] Here Carson uses van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* as the basis of his miniature encyclopaedia of colours, and as the frame for characters' empathic experiences with art.

I will start by briefly outlining subject and object relationships within the longer history of empathy, and the ways in which this history plays into Carson's attentive mechanisms in his novels. To explain the links between empathy and encyclopaedism as forms of attention, I first give a brief overview of twentieth-century theories of attention and distraction, establishing the kinds of reading encyclopaedic narratives, and specifically Joyce's *Ulysses*, demand. Then I connect the encyclopaedic agenda with critiques of empathy, arguing that empathic awareness counterbalances empathic selectivity. In highlighting Carson's move from descriptions of characters' empathic experiences to a formal empathic awareness, I examine the ways in which Carson's *Shamrock Tea* reworks Joyce's associative patterns in *Ulysses.* By looking at the way we read encyclopaedic details and the way lists resist clarification, I will demonstrate how Carson foregrounds Joyce's lists as the ultimate examples of an evenly-hovering empathic awareness, which, besides hinting at Carson's (modernist) critique of empathy, I will argue, reclaims a rich empathic heritage.

[9] Ciaran Carson, *Shamrock Tea* (London: Granta, 2001), henceforth referred to as *ST*.

Looking "closer into things": ways of attending in *The Star Factory, Fishing for Amber,* and *The Pen Friend*

Carson's novels build on similar narrative patterns – they are all, in some way or another, encyclopaedias of Belfast's streets, of objects, of colours, and of words. They follow an encyclopaedic structure signalled to a greater or a lesser degree, where each chapter elaborates the etymology and the various stories and histories of its title. *The Star Factory*'s chapters follow the names of Belfast's streets, squares, and buildings; *Fishing for Amber*'s table of contents is made up of words for each letter of the alphabet; *Shamrock Tea'*s chapters are names of colours; and *The Pen Friend*'s chapters feature a postcard and a picture and name of the pen with which the narrator has written them. Another narrative technique common to these novels is their cyclical frame story, which Carson uses to highlight the artifice of fiction. Each of these novels are an interesting mix of memoirs, stories, folk-tales, dreams, myths, legends, religious references, historical events, and art historical details, and it is Carson's associationism that holds them together.[10] His use of this large amount of information is very different from what we have seen in McEwan's case. As opposed to McEwan's focus on strict documentation and factual precision, where facts are inherent parts and creative triggers of the plot (think McEwan's shadowing of a neuroscientist), Carson looks for correlations and connections, foregrounding the invisible and arbitrary threads that hold objects, things, and stories together. Carson scrupulously collects and arranges every shade or layer of association that the words or objects he talks about bring up. His writing practice is a curious case of control, artfulness, and sense of randomness, aiming for an effect of serendipitous relations. This is precisely his point: to draw out or reveal connections between things. This is something that is not entirely

[10] *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* is one of the major influences here, as we will see, but Carson's religious references are only a part of the story. In the *Acknowledgments and Permissions* sections of his books, he lists a range of dictionaries as his sources, and *The Catholic Encyclopaedic Dictionary* remains one of the constants throughout his books.

exclusive to his fiction, though it is arguably most elaborately tackled there. His writings in general betray an excitement about serendipitous relations. In the *Author's Note* to his rewritings of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, for example, Carson mentions that on his first attempt at translating these poems in 1998 he felt defeated by the task; "Then, on 3 April 2012 (Shrove Tuesday, as it happened), I received an email […], asking if I might be interested in doing versions of seven of the prose poems from *Illuminations.* […] I had not done any kind of poetry for some time, and the invitation seemed serendipitous. On Spy Wednesday I had a kind of illumination of my own" about possible ways of starting the translation.[11] This logic continues throughout the preface, and the great importance Carson gives to temporal coordinates, as we will see, is especially relevant to all his novels, which engineer serendipitous relations between times, things, and places.

So, whereas McEwan searches for facts and certainties in his fiction, observing the world in order to reconstruct something specific about it, Carson looks at the world to reveal its hidden patterns. This preference of links over facts might be rooted in Carson's attentiveness to shades of meaning in different languages. He says in one of his interviews that: "I could say, being brought up bilingually, that I was always uncertain of what I was saying, because to say one thing in Gaelic, means a totally different thing in English. To say that I believe the words are true, to the extent that they are the actual expression of a real event, to me is very uncertain. I can't affirm that the words that express my experience are exactly what the experience was or is. They're only a way of saying things, like in the news."[12] This sense of uncertainty defines his way of writing and thinking, or what he refers to as "realm of unknowing" in another interview. He further explains there why factuality is problematic: "Nobody will ever agree on exactly what happened, so the job is to get some

[11] Ciaran Carson, *In the Light Of: After Illuminations by Arthur Rimbaud* (Loughcrew: The Gallery Press, 2012), 12.
[12] Ciaran Carson, "Inventing Carson: An Interview," interview by David Laskowski, *Chicago Review*, June 22, 1999, 96.

information here and there. I can't come out and say in a poem what the thing actually was. I can't say if it's appalling, I can just be an eye and an ear, and say hey, this is what I heard."[13] Also, there is a reason for the politically committed Carson's stance: it would be dangerous to commit to one side, to one way of telling the events. So he is rather committed to the multiple ways of telling rather than to the facts of a story.

Carson's accumulation of details also recalls and is certainly influenced by Sebaldian logic. In a review which places Olivia Laing's debut novel *To the River* (2011) in the Sebaldian tradition, Jonathan Bate warns against (the irrelevance of) such accumulation of details: "there are clear dangers in being [Sebald's] daughter. The temptation to over-write, for a start […] And then the desire to include every last bit of obscure knowledge: there is a logic to the progression" of the book, "but do we really need to know that another Edwardian Sussex man of letters, EV Lucas, owned a formidable stash of pornography as well as editing the works of Charles Lamb?"[14] For Carson, however, narrative digression is novelistic principle. The question here is not relevance, but a championing of a way of looking that is more patient and gradual, and allows for unexpected connections to unfold. Such a close looking, as art historian James Elkins writes in his visual training book *How to Use Your Eye*, is a training in "learning to use your eyes more concertedly and with more patience than you might ordinarily do. It's about stopping and taking the time simply to look, and keep looking, until the details of the world slowly reveal themselves."[15] And this is precisely Carson's technique. His details do not primarily aim to add up to a finished product (which they will eventually) or intently reconstruct something, but to reveal the workings of attention. Perhaps this is why Carson's writings are sometimes uncategorizable as novels; it

[13] Ibid.
[14] Jonathan Bate, "*To the River* by Olivia Laing – review. Virginia Woolf haunts this well-trodden path to the sea," *Guardian*, 17 Jun 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jun/17/river-woolf-olivia-laing-review.
[15] James Elkins, *How to Use Your Eye* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1.

is hard to decide where his narrative poetry and discursive writings end and his novels begin.[16]

His focus on the associative routes between objects or ideas bears a striking resemblance to early twentieth-century notions of empathy. In his essay *On the Optical Sense of Form*, Vischer based his aesthetics of empathy on Karl Reinhold Köstlin's "notion of 'associations of ideas.'"[17] According to Köstlin, Vischer quotes, "'All quantitative characteristics of form recall their corresponding qualitative ones; all sensuous characteristics remind us of the corresponding mental characteristics of form'. 'Just as the human mind is sufficiently active to be reminded of something by seeing something similar, it is also sufficiently occupied with, directed toward, and conscious of itself to find everywhere resemblances between external things and its own mental states, experiences, sensations [*Empfindungen*], and passions. It finds in everything a counterpart to itself and a symbol of its humanity.'"[18] Here Köstlin's influence is clearly discernible on Vischer's and following empathy theorists' ideas about empathy being a projection of life into the thing perceived. Early notions of empathy were clearly based on associationism, and an associationism with a hint of negative capability constitutes the writing principle behind Carson's books.

Among Carson's first novels, *The Star Factory* establishes his fascination with the interlaced stories of details. It is a novel about Belfast's streets and objects during the

[16] At his interviewer's question, "Do you see a clear distinction between poetry and prose, or are they simply parts of a continuum?" Carson answered: "I see myself as a writer, whether writing poetry, prose, memoir, essay, or translation. Of course, there are differences in these genres, but common to them all is that they should be done as stylishly as possible. Prose should be written at least as well as poetry" (Ciaran Carson, interview by Jon Michaud, *New Yorker*, May 18, 2009, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-exchange-ciaran-carson).

[17] Robert Vischer, "On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics," in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center, 1994), 91; for the relationship between Vischer and Köstlin, see Barbara Titus, *Recognizing Music as an Art Form: Friedrich Th. Vischer and German Music Criticism, 1848–1887* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016) 74.

[18] Vischer, "On the Optical Sense of Form," 91.

Troubles, where the narrator wanders in and through his (mostly childhood) memories of the city. The book's chapters are named after different streets and places of Belfast, marking Carson's narrative trajectory, as he adopts a bookworm's perspective, "ruminating through the one thousand, five hundred and ninety-six pages of the [Belfast Street] Directory in teredo mode, following my non-linear dictates, as I make chambered spirals in my universe, performing parabolas by browsing letters and the blanks between them."[19] This browsing entails dream-like scenes, memories of everything the narrator encounters in Belfast. Early in the novel, the narrator also emphasizes his interest in stamps, explaining that

> Being the son of a postman, I was perhaps naturally inclined to become a stamp-collector, later attaining the status of a philatelist of sorts. Philately […] implies study, the classification of minutiae, of variations in dies, fonts, paper, watermarks and perforations; in this Lilliputian world, flaws and errors are as eagerly sought after as genetic mutations by microbiologists, or quarks by physicists.[20]

This Lilliputian world of Carson's encyclopaedism clearly marks his wide-ranging and minute attention to things, and prefigures *Shamrock Tea*'s miniature colour lexicon, and *The Pen Friend*'s highly self-reflexive and minute description of the narrator's pen collection. Some pages later the narrator himself comments on his attentive mechanisms while recalling a childhood memory where a mishandled hurley-ball's long-lasting effects will, eventually, define his way of seeing and of writing: "I attribute some of my steadily progressive myopia to that accidental, or mishandled ricochet. It requires me to look closer into things."[21] Looking "closer into things" epitomises Carson's way of attending to details in his novels, and, ultimately, his representations of empathic attention.

The Star Factory is a story about zooming in, about "looking closer into things" (stamps, abandoned factories, memories, photographs, discarded objects), as the narrator walks the reader through his attentive processes, describing what arrests his attention, how

[19] Ciaran Carson, *The Star Factory* (London: Granta, 1997), 8. Hereafter cited as *TSF*.
[20] Ibid., 30.
[21] Ibid., 44.

he attends to the world around him, and what kind of associations places and objects trigger. All these meanderings are minutely depicted, and abound in verbs that express seeing, looking, attending, staring, and observing. In the "Moorland" chapter, for example, the narrator finds a photograph in a volume that might feature his father: "I'm browsing through the latter volume when all of a sudden my eye is caught by a photograph of Castle Place, in August 1952 [...]. What arrests me is the figure in middle right foreground."[22] He then goes on to recall his father's love for trams and his repetitive dream about missing the tram, and his father's memory of his childhood. In other instances, he associates his father's cigarette fume with storytelling hooks: "instant-recall hologram in all its cursive loops and spirals of DNA red neon"; he is then reminded of his childhood dreams about visiting the past, and ends the chapter with his reminiscence of his father's smoking habits. Each object opens up new associations, as the narrator enters "yet another dimension" of his Belfast memories, and the text becomes just as much an encyclopaedia of objects and Belfast streets as a compendium of the narrator's attentive mechanisms and memories.[23]

The narrator immerses himself into the associations that objects evoke, or even immerses himself into the objects themselves. When looking at photographs in "The Panoramic Photograph Company" chapter, for example, Carson gives a panoramic description of Belfast photographs from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, filtering them through his own memories of the places pictured.

> Castle Place and High Street, looking east, 1968
>
> It must be a wet Sunday afternoon. Castle Place is deserted, and the only signs of animation are the dummies in Robb's shop windows, where a solitary red bus is parked. I see it as red, even though the photograph is monotone, just as I know it is bound for the Antrim Road, since I used to court a girl resident there about that time. I might have boarded this very bus […] and, to pass the time, I would remember the driver winding the movie-camera handle of the closed, interminable loops of routes and termini.[24]

[22] *TSF*, 26.
[23] Ibid., 193.
[24] Ibid., 187.

The monotone photograph becomes the site of Carson's memory – a possible fragment of his own experience of the red bus heading to the Antrim Road, and a comment on his textual meandering through Belfast's "interminable loops of routes and termini." Writing in the aftermath of Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, Carson's photographs reconstitute relations between public sites of memory and personal experience – Barthesian *studium* and *punctum* – to show how memory, or a reoriented awareness to details (and to absence, in Barthes's terms) animates the stillness of the photograph.[25] His narrator gradually fills in the lost presences of the photograph through colour and movement. In the "Moorland" chapter, he looks at a 1952 photograph of Castle Place, and projects himself into the trams on the picture: "the two trams have an indomitable, upright presence, like Mississippi steamboats sailing nobly past each other, or vehicles invented by Jules Verne. I visualise the dark blue of their livery, the blue of many fathoms deep; and get the leather perfume of upholstered seats which let out a small gasp as you sat on them; and I remember my father taking me on the tram, on one of its last routes."[26] This multisensory immersion into the picture becomes the core of *Shamrock Tea,* a narrative built on the layers of the *Arnolfini Portrait*. The photograph with the two trams carries another deeply personal resonance for the narrator: he sees a postman in the picture who could be his father: "What arrests me is the figure in the middle right foreground […]. Although his back is turned towards the camera, I strongly suspect, from his postman's uniform […] that this is my father."[27] Looking closer into the photograph, however, eludes clarification: "The more I peer into the reproduction of the photograph, the more it disappears, as it becomes all dots and chiaroscuro, as I read narratives where there are none, ignorant of all the teeming others, and their names and destinations."[28] The narrator

[25] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010).
[26] *TSF*, 28.
[27] Ibid., 26.
[28] Ibid., 29.

acknowledges that he might be projecting inexistent personal narratives onto the "teeming" public memory of Belfast. What is remarkable is how this subsuming of the personal by narratives of public memory happens through an intense zooming in, whereby the photograph's shapes become elusive and meaningless. *Shamrock Tea*'s chiaroscuro, as we will see later, gives access to something else, precisely to the multitude of "teeming" stories that the layers of paint contain.

Losing oneself in objects echoes Lippsian ideas of empathic exchange. In relation to how one attends to a work of art or an object, Lipps argued that "In aesthetic experience […] a sensuous object distinct from me 'expresses' [*ausdruckt*] something interior or soullike."[29] David Depew explains that this does not mean that one shares the object's feelings; rather, one projects their feelings into the object on the basis of similarity. He writes that "The aesthetic object amounts to an ex-pression, an out-pressing, a squeezing out, as of grapes to make wine. […] we press out our feelings onto external objects.[30] Similarly, in Titchener's psychological discourse, empathy referred to the feelings and emotions that an art work creates in viewers. Thus there is a charged space between subject and object, where projection or impression and expression work both ways: the work of art expresses something that the observer receives and perceives and projects into the object. This two-way traffic between subject and object involves a simultaneous hubris and humble receptivity on the subject's part. Carson nicely defines this exchange between subject and object in one of his interviews on *The Star Factory* mentioned at the beginning of this thesis,

[29] Theodor Lipps, *Aesthetik: Die ästhetische Betrachtung und die bidende Kunst* (Hamburg: Voss, 1906), trans. in Depew "Empathy, Psychology, and Aesthetics: Reflections on a Repair Concept," *Poroi* 4, no. 1 (2005): 16.

[30] Depew explains that "we must not mistake this for willows pressing their feelings into us. From our perspective, that would be an im-pression: an in-pressing like the type face printing onto a page or John Locke's stylus of experience pressing into the blank slates of our minds. In aesthetic experience, however, according to Lipps and company, we project *our* feelings onto willows. Presumably we do this on the basis of schematic similarities – the drooping leaves, for example – that make willows "expressive" of our feelings. For Lipps, aesthetic experience is a placing of *our* feelings into willows. It does *not* refer, however obscurely, to any fact about the experiences of willow trees. *A fortiori* it does not mean that we share the same feelings as the occasioning objects. We, not the willows, feel sad" (Depew, "Empathy, Psychology, and Aesthetics").

saying that "you'll never get there, you can never explain the world. You can only go half the way. [...] I think one should write out of this state of not knowing, explore that realm. I'm very sceptical of guys who think they know the answer, who think they're the 'real' thing."[31] Although "going half way" has important implications for encyclopaedic fiction's urge to record everything (and the limitations of this all-encompassingness), it is more interesting to see what it means in terms of Carson's representation of subject-object relations, and how he rewrites Joyce's portrayal of such relations. Carson's conviction that one should write out of a state of not knowing relates to new ethical theories about empathy as less a forceful deciphering and more an unconditional care, something that Judith Butler, among others, theorised as a suspension of a "want to know" in favour of the act of caring that does not depend on understanding the other.[32] In another interview Carson says that

> I am a lapsed Catholic… The sounds of the Latin Mass, the smell of candle wax and incense […] still linger in my consciousness, as does the idea that there is a language beyond language, or things inexpressible in ordinary language.
>
> Besides this aesthetic, I'm drawn more to mysticism and dogmatism. 'The cloud of unknowing.' In my case, the outcome of Catholicism seems to have been agnosticism, or atheism. Or at least not knowing, as indicated by the title of the book of poems I finished in the summer of 2007, *For All We Know*."[33]

Here we get a clearer idea of what he meant by *not knowing* in the previous interview, as a way of practicing a detached, almost impersonal attention to the world around. Carson mentions *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a mystical work written in Middle English that

[31] "Inventing Carson," 96.
[32] Butler writes that "this suspension of judgement brings us closer to a different conception of ethics, one that honors what cannot be fully known or captured about the Other" (Judith Butler, "Values of Difficulty" in *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena*, ed. by Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 208); also see Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics"; Kathleen Lundeen, "Who Has the Right to Feel? The Ethics of Literary Empathy" and James Phelan, "Sethe's Choice: *Beloved* and the Ethics of Reading" in *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory*, ed. by Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 83–92; 93–109.
[33] "For All I Know," Ciaran Carson in Conversation with Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, in *Ciaran Carson*: *Critical Essays*, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 16.

encourages a reach toward God through a fresh, intense thought-free contemplation.[34] *The Cloud* is influenced by Augustinian Neoplatonist thought, the idea that Godliness emanates through every detail of the world, and it is one of Carson's distinct influences in *Shamrock Tea*'s dense network of relations between details. A specific type of patient and impersonal contemplation defines Carson's prose in general, where connections between details unfold through a prolonged process of careful attention.

In the following I will closely examine several examples of the ways in which Carson attends to objects in *The Star Factory*, *Fishing for Amber*, and *The Pen Friend*, in order to define this empathic space or distance between subject and object. *Fishing for Amber*, an alphabetically arranged story of names of flowers, substances, and mythical figures, centres on Irish folk-tales and the Dutch Golden Age. Delightful fairy tales told by the narrator's father punctuate the story at regular intervals, and interrupt the narrator's associative flux of memories, etymologies, and compendia of myths and hagiographies. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator finds himself in a small art gallery in Amsterdam, and "marvel[s] at the precision with which the artist has depicted the various attributes of his profession."[35] He thinks of the artist's objects as a "kind of currency: emblems which negotiate the distance between things, how they might be represented, and whatever value might be assigned to them."[36] In this section I am interested in how Carson negotiates the distance between things (and readers' perception of these distances) in their extremely minute and convoluted details, and how he portrays moments of aesthetic empathy (expression–immersion) as possible exchanges between subject and object. I explore the novels' attention to minute objects, works of art, and narrators' and characters' attention to others.

[34] See William Johnston, *The Mysticism of The Cloud of Unknowing* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).
[35] Ciaran Carson, *Fishing for Amber* (London: Granta Books, 2000), 8. Hereafter cited as *FFA*.
[36] *FFA*, 9.

The three novels' encyclopaedic entry-like design and associationism characteristically juxtapose numerous layers of meaning: different geographical, historical, art historical, and literary contexts. *Fishing for Amber'*s "Berenice" chapter-entry, for example, ranges from the etymology of the word and Queen Berenice's amber hair and the city named after her to categories of rose scent, and a short history of Tulipomania in Holland (with famous tulip bulbs named Berenice) and its effects on poetry and prose at the time.

The Star Factory's once-inhabited space or "interactive blueprint," the "Zone," epitomises Carson's associative narrative style, and represents the book's microcosm of object stories: "there were dynasties of paths and destinations. Each family would tend towards certain entrances or adits, and the abstract space within was riddled with swarming wormholes of their past and present [...]. They had no thread of Ariadne. Of necessity, the story they had entered comprised many stories, yet their diverse personal narratives and many-layered time-scales evinced glimpses of an underlying structure, like a traffic flow-chart with its arteries and veins and capillaries."[37] The intertwining paths or the "traffic" of stories within stories is Carson's preferred narrative technique, and derives from his poetics of Belfast as an ever-changing labyrinth. This interweaving of stories also defines his attention to things. In the Zone, he sees abandoned objects as "metaphors for past lives," and his attention to objects in his novels entails layers of stories from past and present times. Objects become palpable remnants of another's reality or mediators of intersubjective experience.

In *The Pen Friend*, characters' wish to step into the situation or lives of others is marked by objects. The narrator and his remembered lover, Nina, often try to imagine "what must it have been like" to be another person in the past. For example, Nina talks about her heroine, Lee Miller, "the only woman war correspondent in Paris when it's liberated" and

[37] *TSF*, 62.

asks "what must it have been like?" to be in her situation: "I used to put myself in her shoes, the long graceful avenues crowded with flags, girls, bicycles, kisses and wine, and around the corner sniping, bursting grenade and a burning tank, the bullet-holes in the windows like jewels, the barbed wire stung like decorations in the boulevards, urchins playing in the wrecked German war machines."[38] Or, when the narrator retells Nina's story of Miller's visit to Colette, he says that "you'd imagined yourself there in Lee Miller's shoes, you'd memorised whole sentences of her *Vogue* piece, as if you had stepped back in time up the staircase into Colette's third-storey apartment in the Paris Royal gardens."[39] Later in the novel, Nina mentions that "whenever I'm in Paris I imagine I see it through Lee Miller's eyes, I see photographs on every street, I think my eye is a camera, and I have only to blink to capture it."[40] Here Nina's empathic experience is mediated and described through objects – her insistence on putting herself into Miller's *shoes* is suggestive in this respect – as she sees and inhabits Paris through Miller's mind, body, and camera. Photography, for her, is an empathic filter of the past: a way of imagining Miller's way of looking and her photographic attention to Paris through an aestheticized and panoramic photographic imagination.

In the narrator's case, writing and rewriting enact an empathic connection with the other: "as I transcribed Zamenhof's words from the screen before me, in pen and ink, I felt, as my hand moved across the page that I was somehow guided by the spirit of Zamenhof, that I felt as he felt, knowing just a little of the linguistic despair was his, that his words were both his and mine."[41] Moreover, *The Pen Friend*'s ending reveals that the entire novel has been prompted by an imaginary exchange of postcards and letters with Nina. The novel's apropos is a fictional invitation – a series of postcards – by the narrator himself in the name of Nina, for the narrator's memoir of their love. This apparent exchange of letters – a

[38] Ciaran Carson, *The Pen Friend* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2009), 135. Hereafter cited as *TPF*.
[39] *TPF*, 161.
[40] Ibid., 135.
[41] Ibid., 111.

narrative of reaching out to the other by writing from her perspective – serves as the novel's framing technique.

Carson's attention to his pen collection is an important case in point here. In the second chapter, for example, the narrator (apparently) receives a postcard of a caption of a nineteenth-century Japanese painting, *Two Dutchmen and Two Courtesans*, and chooses his pen for this chapter as follows: "Given the Dutch connection, I thought it only proper to write this with a Merlin pen, made in the Netherlands in about 1984, the year of my birth and of your father's marriage to a Yorkshire woman, Eleanor Birtwhistle. [...] The body of the Merlin is patterned in shimmery layered feathery lines of tawny brown and cream, like the plumage of the bird it was named for; and I consider again how many fountain pens are of avian nomenclature."[42] This attention to the pen's features and the coincidental connections between the pen and the narrator's personal life is followed by a description of the pen's manufacturing history, and the history of Dutch-Japanese connections. It seems that Carson's minute attention to the pen is at once an immersion into the object and an attention to its associations. Here the pen plays on the etymology of attention as a "stretching out" to something, functioning as an extension of the body, a tool of recording one's extensive attention to everything, and as a way of connecting with others. This *extension* of one's attention to objects, to others, and to a network of associations foreshadows the kind of aesthetic attention that we find in the following sections of this chapter. *The Pen Friend* balances a focused attention to the pen itself and a distraction from it, an encyclopaedic attention to the arbitrary associations the pen triggers. Thus Carson's minute attention to the objects themselves shifts to an interest in the connections, paths, exchanges between objects and other things, or between objects and people.

[42] *TPF*, 20.

Carson's Neoplatonic philosophy of "everything being bound up with everything else" is characteristic of his repeatedly highlighted serendipitous associations between things. For instance, in one of Carson's minute descriptions of a Dutch painting in *Fishing for Amber*, a Hermes statuette recalls, among Hermes's numerous functions as god of tradespeople, of mining, and of sleep and dreams, his role as a protector of fishers of amber, the idea that he invented the alphabet, and that "every serendipitous event, every happy chance, every unexpected find, is known as a Gift of Hermes."[43] This list contained or triggered by a Hermes statuette in the backdrop of a painting encompasses the novel's pivotal narrative techniques – alphabetic entries and serendipitous associations, and also suggests the narrator's way of attending to things. Carson attends to one thing in depth, until he exhausts its etymological and personal references. In illuminating every detail in a different light, *Fishing for Amber* demonstrates how everything is interconnected, and, consequently, how demarcating distances between things becomes increasingly difficult. The implications of diminished distances in representing Belfast streets and objects is, needless to say, a political choice for a committed Belfast poet and novelist. In *The Star Factory*, Carson muses about the arbitrariness of geographical juxtapositions in the Belfast Street Directory, where "the arbitrary power of the alphabet juxtaposes impossibly remote locations,"[44] but also underlines a possible logic between these arbitrary juxtapositions. Thus *The Star Factory* and *Fishing for Amber*'s insistent attention to everyday objects – the Belfast Street Directory (the map – a trope underlying Carson's poetics), stamps, names of streets and colours – is embedded in the political. Interestingly, Carson does not necessarily fabricate a moralistic undertone to these musings about objects. He rather aligns himself with a Kantian disinterested interest in reclaiming a rich history of empathy, going back to

[43] *FFA*, 13.
[44] *TSF*, 8.

the roots of empathic understanding when empathy was not ethically or morally conditioned.[45]

When describing seventeenth-century Dutch painter, Pieter De Hooch's *Woman Drinking with Soldiers*, Carson mentions the painting's moral questions: "we see the raised overhead shutter, the carefully organized perspectives and dimensions. We are left to judge the implications of the arrested attitudes and gestures of the figures, as if we were a fourth, moral wall."[46] However, he does not explore this moral wall, choosing instead to capture the painting, zooming in to its most intricate details. He describes two paintings in the painting, and looks closer to discover a playing card on the floor, "hardly visible at first glance," and a succession of rooms leading to other rooms: "through the open doorway in the back wall we get a telescopic view through a room through another open doorway to another room in which there is a chest on which are placed a jug and a statuette of Mercury."[47] The novel expresses this picture-in-the-picture effect also through its frame narratives, the narrator's father's stories of a Captain and his sailors ("It was a sleepless night in the Bay of Biscay, and the Captain and his sailors were seated around the fire. Suddenly one of his sailors said, Tell us a story, Captain. And the Captain began, It was a sleepless night in the Bay of Biscay, and the Captain and his sailors were seated around the fire. Suddenly one of his sailors said, Tell us a story, Captain"[48] and so on). Zooming endlessly in expresses a specific mode of empathic attention, where Carson certainly projects his associations into things, but at other times he becomes non-projective, trying to stay detached in his descriptions. This hovering between immersion and distributed attention, between zooming in and out, between attention to the minute and distraction from it to the associative networks objects contain or are contained in, defines Carson's understanding of empathy and its ties to encyclopaedism:

[45] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1914).
[46] *FFA*, 11.
[47] *FFA*, 12.
[48] *FFA*, 350.

his novels are aiming for inclusiveness through a panoramic attention that is conscious of the selective nature of empathy. The next two sections explore how this attention is Joycean and examine Carson's version of the empathic in *Shamrock Tea.*

Encyclopaedism, empathy, and attention

In "Ithaca," Leopold Bloom meditates about a perfect poster "of magnetising efficacy to arrest involuntary attention, to interest, to convince, to decide"; he imagines "a poster novelty [...] reduced to its simplest and most efficient terms not exceeding the span of casual vision and congruous with the velocity of modern life."[49] Here Bloom links questions of attention and distraction to the pace of modern life, thinking about the poster's mechanisms which would efficiently and quickly distract, and thus divert viewers' attention. In searching for the ideal way of representing information in order to convert one's involuntary attention to engaged focus, Bloom echoes then-current psychological research in the workings of attention. Research in attention at the end of the nineteenth century was of central importance to the newly formed discipline of experimental psychology, but also, more broadly, it played an essential role in wider cultural contexts.[50] As Titchener stated, experimental psychology realized "that the doctrine of attention is the nerve of the whole psychological system."[51] Joyce incorporated ideas from Howard Bridgewater's *Advertising, or the Art of Making Known* (1910) in writing about Bloom's musings on the psychology of advertisements, and thus had been indirectly acquainted with new research on attention.[52] In

[49] James Joyce, *Ulysses: The 1922 Text*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 672. Referred to as *U* in the following.
[50] For discussion see Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 23.
[51] Titchener, *Lectures on the Elementary Psychology of Feeling and Attention*, 171.
[52] Matthew Hayward, "'To Arrest Involuntary Attention': Advertising and Street-selling in *Ulysses*," in *James Joyce in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Nash (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 113–128; Howard Bridgewater, *Advertising, or the Art of Making Known. A Simple Exposition of The Principles of Advertising* (London: Sir Issac Pitman & Sons, 1910).

his "Notes on Business and Commerce," Joyce recorded a few key principles of attention in advertising from Bridgewater's book: "Statistics show 4 visual limit. Headlines 4 limit. Absence of counter attractions."[53] These notes refer to the "casual span of vision" when looking at a poster, suggesting that one can only focus on a limited number of impressions for a limited time amidst millions of "counter attractions" or distractions that one faces on a daily basis. Bloom's ideal poster should be convincing enough to impinge itself upon the viewer's imagination and ultimately, become the focus of attention. Several psychologists argue that the cause of distraction can become the focus of attention if one decides to take action by either looking in that direction or thinking about the source of that particular distracting element.[54] In this sense, distraction is a suddenly changing and involuntary attention. In connecting distraction to the velocity of modern life in Bloom's dreams about the most efficiently distracting poster, Joyce directly addresses the effects of modern life on one's reduced attention span, and evokes, perhaps unknowingly, distraction as the "mood of modernity."[55]

Ulysses itself is a study in attention, tracing the wandering or distracted mind through Dublin with intense focus on every instance of distraction.[56] Distraction has been long established in cultural criticism as one of the defining experiences of modernity; and the "age of distraction" became a clichéd term for both twentieth and twenty-first-century experiences of information overload.[57] Theorists we associate with modernism make the

[53] James Joyce, *The James Joyce Archive*, vol. II, ed. Michael Groden, Hans Walter Gabler, David Hayman, A. Walton Litz, and Danis Rose (New York: Garland, 1977–79), 605.
[54] Wayne Wu, *Attention*, New Problems in Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2014); Christopher Mole, *Attention Is Cognitive Unison: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[55] Andrew Ellis Benjamin, "Boredom and Distraction: The Moods of Modernity," in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum International, 2005), 156–170.
[56] Bloom's dream of the perfect poster is just one instance in *Ulysses* of the multiple distractions the novel stages from "Sirens" to recurrent textual objects.
[57] Robert Hassan, *The Age of Distraction: Reading, Writing, and Politics in a High-Speed Networked Economy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012); Alan Jacobs, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

idea of distraction crucial to their discussions of modernity; as Jonathan Crary notes, "Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried, Kracauer, Theodor Adorno, and others presumed that a distracted perception was central to any account of subjectivity within modernity."[58] Here it is worth recalling Crary's argument about the interweaving of "aesthetic perception" with "the processes of modernization that made the problem of attention a central issue in new institutional constructions of a productive and manageable subjectivity."[59] The emphasis on a productive and attentive subjectivity naturally values sustained attention over distraction. Paul North argues that the value of sustained concentration is understood in relation to its counterpart in distraction – something that obstructs concentration and clear focus.[60] Similarly, Crary explains that the negative connotations of being distracted today can only be understood in relation to the rise of late-nineteenth-century "ideals of sustained attentiveness."[61] While both Crary and North agree that seeing distraction in terms of attention is itself due to the politicized value attached to attention, North proposes forms of distraction which cannot be defined (or devalued) in terms of attention. He calls these distractions "non-attentional distractions," referring to Aristotle's "not-always-thinking," among others, and sees distraction as liberating and even necessary for the creative subject. *Ulysses* stages attention and distraction without setting them into opposition. Bloom's ideal poster nicely enacts one's quickly changing attention, or hovering between distractions which redirect involuntary attention; *Ulysses* stages the process of attending to something rather than the value of sustained focus – while, of course, practicing an intensely minute attention.

[58] Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 48.
[59] Ibid., 2.
[60] Paul North, *The Problem of Distraction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).
[61] Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 2.

These ways of attending in and to fiction that do not equivocally side with either sustained attention or "scattered perception"[62] are an illuminating lens for reading Joycean legacies in Carson. Bloom's ideal poster represents a way of reading *Ulysses*: several allusions in *Ulysses* "of magnetising efficacy" temporarily distract readers from linear reading to what they are alluding to. As Liesl Olson says, "because *Ulysses* demands so much from a reader, it also can be fatiguing. *Ulysses* risks losing a reader's attention. [...] *Ulysses* makes us aware of what we notice, and makes sure that even the most conscientious reader will leave something out."[63] Thus reading Joyce requires both a focused attention to the text, and an attention (outside it) to its myriad allusions, or, in other words, a constant distraction from linear reading and from the text itself in order to consult Gifford's notes and other encyclopaedic works explaining the allusions the novel makes. Jeri Johnson likens Joyce's opposition between the realism of Defoe and the idealism of Blake to the two initial schools of *Ulysses* criticism: "one group formed of those interested in the book as a novel [...]. Here we find lovers of realism, of facts, [...] of fictions which mask their fictiveness. The other group preferred patterns, parallels, systems, symbols, myths, literature which proudly declared its 'literariness.'"[64] However, reading *Ulysses* involves hovering between an attention to and a distraction from the text.

A reading which involves attention to the text and its distracting mechanisms might usefully be connected to an empathic awareness (as we have seen in the introduction). Lou Agosta proposes the idea of an "evenly-hovering non-attention" after Freud's psychoanalytic concept of an "evenly-hovering attention."[65] Agosta explains that a "kinder, gentler, evenly suspended attention that actually avoids concentrating one's attention" is

[62] Ibid., 48.
[63] Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 46.
[64] Johnson, introduction, xiv.
[65] Lou Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy: Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 77, 79.

necessary for a greater chance of understanding the other.[66] In this sense, empathy is a form of knowledge requiring both attention and non-attention (or indiscriminate attention), and, in a literary context, it means a careful, slower reading, where the reader attends to every detail of the text. According to Peter Brooks, we read with an anticipation of retrospection, with the expectation that the narrative closure will clarify the plot.[67] This way of reading requires a sustained attention to the elements of the novel, as it might not be clear from the outset what will become essential in deciphering the plot. Certainly, a trained reader can guess early on what will be "important" in the plot, at least in the case of classic realist novels. However, both Carson and Joyce deliberately complicate such assumptions through their ostensibly excessive accumulation of details. Carson emphasizes serendipitous relations and randomness in his novels, foregrounding the importance of details in the text and the difficulty of knowing what will turn out to be significant in the end. By miniaturizing Joyce's encyclopaedism, Carson draws attention to the ways in which *Ulysses* connects encyclopaedic attention with empathic awareness.

Both empathy and encyclopaedism hold an interesting relation to questions of attention and distraction: the encyclopaedia responds to the age(s) of distraction in its (arbitrary) ordering of information despite the overload; empathy has become "the cornerstone of humanity," one of the most valued ways of attending to the world, and yet it is critiqued for its exclusive, selective attention.[68] Just like Joyce, Carson problematizes

[66] Ibid., 79.
[67] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
[68] Empathy is biased and necessarily selective because one cannot attend to and care for everything. See: Jesse J. Prinz, "Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?" in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Richard J. Davidson and Anne Harrington, "Empathy-Related Emotional Responses, Altruism, and Their Socialization" in *Visions of Compassion: Western Scientists and Tibetan Buddhists Examine Human Nature*, ed. Richard J. Davidson and Anne Harrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 131–64; Suzanne Keen summarizes key concerns about empathic experience: complete identification threatens to subsume the other (hyperempathy); it might not lead to action (failed empathy); and it could possibly create misunderstandings of others (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 168).

questions of selectivity in the way we read – what do we attend to and what do we leave out when we read – through the encyclopaedia as a necessarily selective format. At the same time, he gestures towards the selectivity of empathic thought (as it is impossible to care for everything and everyone), by offering evenly-hovering non-attention as empathic awareness at the level of form as an alternative to empathic selectivity. One of the differences between the two encyclopaedic agendas of recording motivated by an anxiety of knowledge loss and organizing against the fear of information-overload is that the former calls for monumentality and all-encompassingness,[69] while the latter requires scaling down to miniatures.[70] As König and Woolf explain, the encyclopaedia's "frameworks and structuring principles" were of crucial importance to the kind of picture compilers wanted to give of the world.[71] Thus encyclopaedic ordering, as a mechanism of managing distraction caused by excess of information, mirrors encyclopaedists' way of attending to the world and their strategies of guiding readers' attention. This encyclopaedic ordering is crucial to how encyclopaedic elements guide readers' attention in fiction.

Although there has been a significant renewed interest in encyclopaedic narratives,[72] few critics have explicitly addressed the *attentive* demands of modernist and contemporary

[69] The encyclopaedia responds to overwhelming distraction and conversely, it also encourages distraction, for its cross-references can drift the reader far away from her initial point of reference. Besides its motivating premise of anticipating loss, the encyclopaedia also aims to manage excess of information through its careful ordering of human knowledge (Jason König and Greg Woolf, eds., *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[70] That Carson's novel is backed up more by an anxiety against uncontrollable amounts of information is visible in the template he uses to convey encyclopaedic comprehensiveness.

[71] König and Woolf mention the "ongoing and often ingenious experimentation with different frameworks and structuring principles, as different compilers tried out different ways of articulating the God-given order of the world" (König and Woolf, *Encyclopaedism*, 34).

[72] Narratives aiming for encyclopaedic comprehensiveness exhibit a long tradition, from 'anatomies' (Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* or Northrop Fry's *Anatomy of Criticism*) to works like *Moby-Dick*, and, arguably, the encyclopaedic finds its apotheosis in Joyce. The first to introduce the concept of encyclopaedic narrative, Edward Mendelson set Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* into an organic lineage with Dante's *Commedìa*, Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Goethe's *Faust*, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*. Mendelson's canon had been reconsidered by different theorisations of encyclopaedic novels, such as Frederik Carl's "Mega-Novel," Tom LeClair's "systems novel," and Franco Moretti's "world text." Most recently, Stefano Ercolino proposed the term maximalist novel to denote postmodern and contemporary "long, superabundant, hypertrophic narratives" such as David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001), and Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004). Ercolino defines these novels primarily in terms

encyclopaedic novels. David Letzler argues that the abundance of information in contemporary novels either risks losing reader's attention or teaches the reader to navigate between what is relevant and irrelevant in the text.[73] This is similar to Martha Nussbaum's argument that encyclopaedic details in realist fiction train one's attention.[74] However, Letzler and Nussbaum do not reflect on how encyclopaedic details – lists, catalogues, enumerations, genealogies – manipulate or guide reader's attention, or the ways in which they determine narrative rhythm and the reading process. Just as encyclopaedias achieve a level of coherence through cross-references, the modernist and contemporary encyclopaedic narratives discussed here build on a rich network of allusions. In what follows, I explore how Carson's *Shamrock Tea* depicts and employs a miniaturized encyclopaedic attention informed by empathy and Joycean modernism.

Carson and empathic attention

Carson works with a concept of empathic receptivity which, in Agosta's terms, involves both a careful attention to the other and a suspension of attention. Carson connects encyclopaedism's excessive details with a consciously exercised empathic attention by reconciling the encyclopaedia's vastness with minute imagery. His novel *Shamrock Tea* (2001) foregrounds the encyclopaedia's connection with empathy as a form of attention. The novel is about three children in 1950s Ireland and Flanders: Carson, the narrator,

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of their encyclopaedic mode, paranoid imagination, intersemioticity, and ethical commitment (Stefano Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel: From Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow to Roberto Bolano's 2666* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014)). For the encyclopaedic novel's continued relevance see: Petrus van Ewijk, "Encyclopedia, Network, Hypertext, Database: The Continuing Relevance of Encyclopedic Narrative and Encyclopedic Novel as Generic Designations," *Genre* 44, no. 2 (2011): 205–222; Luc Herman and Petrus van Ewijk, "*Gravity*'s Encyclopedia Revisited: The Illusion of a Totalizing System in *Gravity's Rainbow*," *English Studies* 90, no. 2 (April 2009): 167–179.

[73] David Letzler, "Encyclopedic Novels and the Cruft of Fiction: *Infinite Jest*'s Endnotes,' *Studies in the Novel* 44, no. 3 (2012): 314.

[74] Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Maeterlinck, his friend, and Berenice, Carson's cousin. They are trying to bring peace to Belfast by "entering" van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*, and getting hold of a special tea, Shamrock Tea, which would dissolve human conflict. Entering the painting means that Carson and Berenice become the figures in the painting, and they find themselves in Ghent, where van Eyck painted the *Portrait*. Towards the end of the novel, ready for their mission to retrieve Shamrock Tea, the three children enter the painting hoping that it will lead them into fifteenth-century Ghent, but they set foot in the nineteenth century instead. After this they get lost in separate temporal dimensions, and never meet again. The conclusion reveals that the narrator Carson had written the entire story retrospectively after losing his friends, and he assumes Maeterlinck's name, and learns to become another person in a world similar but not identical to his own.[75] Here Carson rehearses a familiar narrative technique (also favoured by McEwan: in *Atonement* we find out that Briony had been the narrator all along; similarly, *Sweet Tooth* reveals that it has been written from the main character's perspective by her boyfriend), which itself suggests the self-consciousness of writing as an exercise in empathy, in the sense of projecting oneself into the situation of the other. Carson as a Belfast poet is certainly interested in the consequences of identification, and he also alludes to the question of what novels can do through Shamrock Tea's mission in dissolving conflicts between the inhabitants of Belfast. However, *Shamrock Tea*'s project to bring peace to Belfast ultimately fails, and Carson is more interested in questions of aesthetic empathy rather than empathic experiences between characters.

Characters' identification with the painting is the literalized version of aesthetic empathy or *Einfühlung* (one's projection into the object of art). As we have seen, theories of

[75] Becoming someone else is an overarching theme of the novel. For example, the narrator becomes the librarian of the Hospice Library in Gheel, a town where everyone is trying to be someone else: "My position in Gheel allows me to explore the mystery of personality; for in Gheel it is difficult to say who is mad and who is sane. My closest friends call themselves by names they have learned from books; and, versed as I am in literature, I can perfectly accommodate their pictures of themselves" (*ST*, 301).

aesthetic empathy focus on an embodied knowledge of or reaction to art, highlighting the imitative nature of fellow feeling. Titchener, in his *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes* (1909) mentions motor empathy in terms of a "kinaesthetic imagery."[76] *Shamrock Tea* turns characters' attention to the *Arnolfini Portrait* into embodied experience. The children literally become the figures in the painting, feeling the weight of clothes and scent of oranges in the room: "We floated slowly upwards. When our heads were level with those in the picture, we became the figures in the picture. [...] There was a scent of oranges in the painted room. I felt the dangling weight of the rich garments which clothed me, the cool damp lining of the ponderous hat."[77] It is the *Arnolfini Portrait*'s extremely realistic depiction which "produces attentiveness"[78] in the narrator: "Van Eyck's painting shimmers, as if composed of overlapping, full colour stereoscopic slides. It is like being hypnotized by precious stones, or gazing into luminous, deep water. Van Eyck duplicated with the brush the work of goldsmiths in metal and gems."[79] By having the children become the characters in the painting in an intense aesthetic empathic moment, Carson ridicules the idea that there is a translatability between aesthetic and intersubjective empathy: the first is not portable into the second because in this scene Carson erases all kinds of pretence to intersubjective experience. The children do not identify with the thoughts or the presumable situation of the characters in the painting, they just assume their bodily position.

Shamrock Tea is in its essence about the narrator Carson's attending to the *Arnolfini Portrait* in encyclopaedic detail, as the novel's encyclopaedism draws on and mimics van Eyck's extremely realistic detailing. Van Eyck's work is arguably one of the most innovative in Flemish Renaissance art: he perfected the technique of oil painting to confer realistic

[76] Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes*, 21.
[77] *ST*, 33–37.
[78] Crary explains that "'good' form had the capacity to produce attentiveness in a subject" (Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 158).
[79] *ST*, 63.

representation and the illusion of three-dimensionality.[80] Art historians emphasize the "incredible depth and detail of colour, light and texture" in his paintings, achieved through the layering that oil painting permits.[81] The oil medium allowed artists to "create richer colour than previously possible, giving their paintings an intense tonality, the illusion of glowing light, and glistening surfaces. [...] Flemish painters built up their pictures by superimposing translucent paint layers on a layer of underpainting."[82] Carson draws attention to these thin layers of van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* by telling the story of each colour as I shall describe below. Through foregrounding the materiality of the medium, Carson dismantles the painting's realist mode. His insistence on the medium also signals his move away from empathy as a description of characters' intersubjective experiences to empathy as a formal characteristic, as the dominant mode of attention of the text. The narrator describes his aesthetic empathy with the painting through an evenly-hovering empathic awareness to its details, and he highlights this awareness by extending empathic attention, dissolving empathy's selective focus into a more capacious attention to things. Whereas in *The Star Factory* and *The Pen Friend* photography serves as a site of animated loss, in *Shamrock Tea* the painting acts as a source of ostensibly inexhaustible detail, a wellspring of narrative abundance. As opposed to photographic flatness, the layers of the paint give access to a sense of three-dimensionality (there is more depth to zoom into); it seems as if the painting can hold more details (because of this layeredness) than the photograph. This is especially interesting in relation to a van Eyck painting's reality-effect. Though van Eyck had extreme attention to detail and exquisite handling of reproduction of light, his intensely *real* detailing seem unreal or superreal in many ways.[83] Carson certainly draws on this aspect

[80] Craig Harbison, *Jan van Eyck, the Play of Realism* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991).
[81] Harbinson notes that "observers are struck by the careful differentiation of detail in van Eyck's works" (Harbison, *Jan van Eyck*, 14.)
[82] Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art through the Ages: A Global History* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016), 558.
[83] Harbison, *Jan Van Eyck: The Play of Realism*, 78.

through the novel's magical and transcendent themes. Most importantly, his handling of the *Arnolfini Portrait* and Belfast photographs might disclose his changing attitudes towards the *real*. He consciously undermines the idea that the photograph is the ultimate realist, focusing instead on the material stuff of the novel and of attention through the processes of artistic production.

Carson attends to the *Arnolfini Portrait*'s process of creation, for he even follows the painter's colour palette; the novel is structurally based on one of van Eyck's methods, described in the novel's epigraph:

> He divided a panel into a hundred squares and marked them down, with numbered figures, in a small book, then painted these squares with various colours, various shades, greens, yellows, blues, flesh tints and other mixtures, giving the shaded tint of each one in so far as he could, and writing it down in the little book aforesaid. (Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, Haarlem, 1604)

Carson reproduces these hundred squares as chapters of real or fabricated names of colours, with an additional hundred-and-first chapter entitled *Blank*, and mimics the complexity of the painting by his minute rendering of the stories of these colours. Each chapter describes different aspects of a colour – its origin, pigments or ingredients – referring to, for example, Greek and Roman mythology, literature and history together with Christian imagery, contemporary viewpoints and childhood memories. The chapter "Blue Rocket," for instance, contains references to Irish history, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Greek botanist, Dioscorides's observations, Pliny's *Natural History*, and the Bible:

> Henbane [...] is the source of hyoscyamine, which Dr Crippen used to poison Mrs Crippen. It was known to Dioscorides as Pynthonion; Pliny considered it a dangerous medicine. When, according to Ovid, the Scythian women sprinkled their bodies with it, they grew feathers. [...] Sweet Flag [...] is called Green Flag in Ireland, where it is thought to offer second sight. It is one of the ingredients of the Holy Ointment delivered to Moses by God.[84]

[84] *ST*, 35.

All these pieces of information about henbane open up paths to other chapters and topics in the novel. For example, flying, suggested by the feathered body of the Scythian women, and the idea of 'second sight' become recurrent topics, being linked to the narrator Carson's experience with van Eyck's painting. *Shamrock Tea* mimics the thin layering of van Eyck's oil painting by creating a palimpsest of references from Biblical times to contemporary understandings of each colour it describes. Carson's novel can be considered as a set of quasi-encyclopaedic entries on the *Arnolfini Portrait*'s shades, pulled together by the story of the narrator's experiences with perception and art. All the entries serve as parts of a story about serendipitous associations, demonstrating how everything is interlinked in the eye of the beholder. The narrator's uncle, Celestine, who guides the children in their mission to bring peace to the city, describes "a world in which everything connects [...]. There will be no division, for everything in the real world refers to something else, which leads to something else again, in a never-ending hymn of praise. The world is an eternal story."[85] This quotation reads as the microcosm of the book: all its entries create a dense network of cross-references, where "everything refers to" and leads to "something else."

In its network of cross-references, *Shamrock Tea* builds on associative patterns of *Ulysses*, specifically emphasizing serendipitous relations between things. As Neal Alexander notes, just like Carson's *Star Factory*, *Shamrock Tea* is "a story about stories and storytelling, relishing serendipitous discoveries and producing a panoply of connections and coincidences that multiply with every turn of the page."[86] In *Ulysses*, "everything refers to something else," and Joyce critics often locate Joycean serendipity in the ways in which random details prefigure or add up to later episodes of the novel.[87] This is visible, for

[85] *ST*, 236.
[86] Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, 164.
[87] Hugh Kenner famously calls this technique of postponing or deferring meaning an "aesthetic of delay" (Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987)); Michael Groden emphasizes that in his revisions Joyce constantly added correspondences to strengthen internal allusions (Michael Groden, *Ulysses in Progress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977)).

example, through Bloom's interpretation of chance and coincidences. As Thomas Jackson Rice argues, "Bloom repeatedly sees himself inhabiting a world where things happen 'accidentally by design.'"[88] In "Ithaca," Bloom sees the betting tickets for the horse race and thinks that the previous events of his trajectory in the city all add up retrospectively to predict the result of the Gold Cup: "What reminiscences temporarily corrugated his brow? Reminiscences of coincidences, truth stranger than fiction, preindicative of the result of the Gold Cup."[89] Bloom's belief in serendipity is one of the ways in which *Ulysses* stages the reading process of its dense allusions and apparently random details.

Carson creates seemingly disparate, redundant correspondences which fall into place towards the end of the novel. When the children prepare for their mission to enter the painting and land in the fifteenth century with the goal of obtaining Shamrock Tea, they end up in the nineteenth century instead. They find themselves in a room with Colonel James Hay, a nineteenth-century Scottish soldier who owns two identical copies of the *Arnolfini Portrait*. Colonel Hay tells the children the story of how he got the two *Portraits*, and discloses that the children's real mission was to liberate him from the spell of the paintings. In his story, the Colonel carefully links every detail of the painting's journey to hagiographic details and sacred dates. At this point, the novel reveals the importance of feast days described in previous chapters: the reader is already familiar with all the hagiographic details necessary to understand the Colonel's references. For example, the feast days of Bernard of Clairvaux, the patron saint of bees, and St Ambrose, the patron of beekeepers, featured earlier in the novel in relation to the clarity of vision the *Arnolfini Portrait* requires, mark the dates when van Eyck's two identical paintings are reunited in the Colonel's story. This clarification of the importance of dates and hagiographies towards the end of the novel

[88] Thomas Jackson Rice, *Joyce, Chaos, and Complexity* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 89.
[89] *U*, 628.

initiates a retrospective reading, as the reader pays closer attention retrospectively to the details the Colonel mentions. The feast day of a saint, for example, coincides with a legendary occurrence, which is, in its turn, a reminder of a historical event that can be connected to another saint's life centuries before, which is reminiscent of the initial event's emblems and becomes crucial to the narrator's experiences. This almost reactive chain of "pure coincidences"[90] upholds narrative sequences (also modelling the workings of the reading process), and sustains the novel's divergent networks of details.

Shamrock Tea draws attention to the way these serendipitous associations open up numerous narrative paths where one motif triggers a chain of further associations. In this way the novel foregrounds its narrative design and, through its accumulative details, suggests the difficulty of guessing early on what will be prioritised in the novel. By being self-reflexive about its own reading process, *Shamrock Tea* contests empathic selectivity, emphasizing relations between things. The chapter "Gallaher's Blue" lists ingredients of the cigarette of its title, among which lavender then has the next chapter dedicated to it, and tobacco comes two chapters later. Between "Lavender" and "Tobacco" one finds "Pearl," mentioned in "Gallaher's Blue" in relation to Uncle Celestine's retouching techniques. In the chapter "Pearl," Berenice's notes recall the legend of St Joseph of Cupertino, the flying friar. Flying and levitation, as mentioned before, are overarching topics in the novel, linked to the narrator's own experience of flying and his research in the literature of psychotropia. "Pearl" opens with a description of Berenice's "brilliant pearl-drop white" teeth,[91] and goes on to characterize St Joseph in his youth as "famously absent-minded," standing with his mouth hanging open on the streets, thus nicknamed "Boccaperta." Emphasis on teeth and the mouth foreshadow eloquence in later chapters (in "Black Silk," the story of St Vincent

[90] *ST*, 168.
[91] *ST*, 19.

Ferrer, "whose subsequent eloquence in the pulpit led to the rumour that bees had swarmed into his mouth when he was a baby"),[92] in a way evocative of Joyce's ironic conjunction of Chrysostomos (Greek for golden mouthed, an epithet for orators)[93] with Buck Mulligan's golden teeth in "Telemachus." This move from literal (golden teeth) to connotative (eloquence) meanings is characteristic of the associative patterns Carson uses to describe the colours of the *Arnolfini Portrait*.

When discussing *Ulysses* as a "kind of encyclopaedia" in his letter to Linati, Joyce mentions that in *Ulysses* he wanted "to allow each adventure (that is, every hour, every organ, every art being interconnected and interrelated in the somatic scheme of the whole) to condition and even to create its own technique."[94] *Shamrock Tea* stresses the centrality of (Neoplatonic) connections between things – stories, narrative paths, details – and strikingly, in many cases, the relationship between chapter titles and chapters in Carson is similar to that of the colours in Joyce's Linati schema and their presence in *Ulysses*. David Butler shows that Carson in his poetry draws on Joyce's metonymy of colours.[95] As mentioned before, Carson admits his interest in the overarching narratives and details of *Ulysses*, and, though it might be difficult to say whether Carson has intended his colour-stories as concrete references to *Ulysses*, his work is certainly in dialogue with Joycean colour metonymy, specifically focusing on the way in which colours hover between their textuality and materiality (which is another modernist move in Carson's emphasis on the medium). In "Telemachus," for example, the two colours, gold and white, correspond to theology and appear from Buck Mulligan's "white teeth glistening here and there with gold points," white corpuscles in Buck's mockery of the mass, and a white china bowl besides the deathbed of

[92] *Ibid.*, 230.
[93] Johnson, *Ulysses*, 769.
[94] James Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. I., ed. Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1966), 146–147.
[95] Butler, "'Slightly Out of Synch,'" 337–55.

Stephen's mother to milk, sugar, butter, honey, and the "white breast of the dim sea."[96] The associative chain between these golden and white things relies on a series of metamorphoses. In Mulligan's mimicry of the mass, the white corpuscles refer to transubstantiation, followed by changes in the material states of whiteness, with a gradual emphasis on fluids (milk, sea) over solid objects (white teeth and china). This pattern, whereby Mulligan calls the sea "our mighty mother," Stephen gazes at the whitening mirror of the water, the "white breast of the dim sea," and remembers his mother, ends with the condensed "wavewhite wedded words shimmering on the dim tide."[97] The colour white in this episode denotes very different material states, from the very concrete white objects of "Telemachus" to the metaphorical "wavewhite words."

Saint-Amour argues that *Ulysses* "plays restlessly with how things travel between the literal and the figural; the particular and the universal; the mundane and the transcendental; the fictional, the factual, and the counterfactual."[98] In *Shamrock Tea,* colour appears as the attribute of an object and as the object itself, as in the case of tobacco, pearl, raven, milk, smoke, honey, parchment. These colours become three-dimensional through their oscillation between object-like and immaterial states of consistency. The chapter title "Wittgenstein Blue," for example, refers to the peculiar blueness of Wittgenstein's eyes that Carson notes, and it is about Wittgenstein's precision and wit, and his ability to see beyond the surface of things; "Gallaher's Blue" recalls the cigarette of Lord Duncairn in a "microscopic study of the apparent texture of the ash,"[99] and enumerates the ingredients of the cigarette. All these colours exist in their own right by the association they invoke in the narrator – that is, are only "visible" together with their object of reference, suggesting the integral relationship

[96] *U,* 9.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Paul Saint-Amour, "Symbols and Things," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ulysses,* ed. Sean Latham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 201.
[99] *ST,* 14.

between perception and the thing perceived, or, in other words, the inseparability of immateriality and matter. This attention to the process and focus of perception foregrounds Carson's emphasis on the mechanisms of attention and reading.

Chapter titles in Carson are also Joycean in their propensity to extend language. Carson extends his description of the painting's possible shades by making up names of colours which are either word plays, synaesthesias, or refer to a specific object with which the narrator has associated them. Examples of these names are the yellow pages yellow, redcoat red, ultra-violet, seasick green, permanent black or Dorian Gray. *Shamrock Tea*'s gardener philosopher Wittgenstein explicitly poses the question of "what is to happen when you run out of names?" Maeterlinck's answer is to "make up new ones."[100] When Maeterlinck looks around from the church tower in Ghent, and starts recalling the names of all the streets he sees from above (Rue du Canard, Rue des Foulons, Rue des Baguettes, Rue du Paradis, etc.), he soon enough realizes that the streets seem interminable: "the city was inexhaustible, and there were quarters which resisted all my powers of language."[101] Carson's pairing of the seeming inexhaustibility of things with the exhaustibility of naming contradicts the well-known Wittgensteinian axiom that "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world." The fictional inexhaustibility of streets also refers to the novel's play with the possibility of realistic depiction. Evidently, the language of lists proves useful in widening the narrator's linguistic horizon, and lists are, in the context of the entire novel, one of the primary modes of translating Carson's knowledge and understanding of the *Portrait*. This way of attending to the painting is embedded into the narrator's aesthetic empathy, his experience of becoming the painting, which he also describes through his hagiographic and botanic listings. Ultimately, *Shamrock Tea* questions whether it is possible

[100] *ST*, 110.
[101] Ibid.

to exhaust the painting by knowing all its details, and whether a realist approach is a viable way to describe the painting. In other words, Carson's novel questions whether an encyclopaedic attention that aims for realist depiction can form the basis of one's knowledge of the world, and whether evenly-hovering non-attention as empathic awareness can overwrite the non-selectivity of a realist worldview or the necessary selectivity of attention and novelistic design.

Reading details

Carson, the narrator, aims at a comprehensiveness which goes beyond simple awareness of the surface of the painting, and he himself goes beyond the flatness of the canvas by entering the painting. Saint-Amour argues that in the case of *Ulysses*, comprehensiveness defies coherentism, for Joyce "calls on encyclopedic form to model comprehensiveness without coherentism, a view of the whole that insists on the partiality of synoptic viewing."[102] Here Saint-Amour refers to the fact that Joyce's encyclopaedism always draws attention to its own fragmentedness as a way of critiquing the encyclopaedia while aiming to give a comprehensive picture of Dublin. I extend Saint-Amour's argument, by arguing that through this double focus on form, *Ulysses* hovers between readings that constantly zoom in to minute details (the throwaway, for example) and zoom out, referring to the bigger picture (the throwaway's place in Bloom's system of coincidences and its textual reappearance at certain points of the text). Carson's novel thematises this simultaneous view of the whole and its parts in its empathic attention to the *Arnolfini Portrait*. Carson emphasizes the connection between the view of the whole and its parts by showing how the shades of the painting contain the whole picture through palimpsests of

[102] Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 225.

stories and histories. Empathy in this case is manifested as an oscillation between concentrated attention (on the exquisite details of the painting's unique shades) and a willing suspension of this attention (through the chains of stories which wander from one topic to another).

In his book on visual arts in contemporary fiction Allan Hepburn explains how details both arrest attention and obstruct narrative progression:

> Because they condense and displace meaning, details imply hiddenness and ambiguity as much as they imply revelation and aesthetic completion. By arresting the attention of observers or readers, details disturb visual fields and narrative sequence. In the hide-and-seek relation that they bear with regard to meaning, details sometimes thwart cognition, which accounts for their arresting quality. As aspects of the material world and its representation, physical details exist prior to apprehension. By recognizing and organizing details, readers understand narrative order in a fashion similar to viewers' construal of details in an oil painting.[103]

He continues to explain that "To understand the alterity of the object, the viewer segments it into component features: colour, texture, material, shape, value," and this is precisely Carson's technique. *Shamrock Tea* zooms into the minute details of the *Portrait* while zooming out to refer to the whole picture through writing about the characters' repeated encounters with the painting. As opposed to Joyce's encyclopaedism which builds horizontally to represent the sounds, events, and thoughts of Dublin, Carson takes a vertical approach, selecting a piece of knowledge as the subject of his novel's comprehensiveness, and examining it in detail. These horizontal and vertical ways of attending to the world delineate the kind of reading *Ulysses* and *Shamrock Tea* provoke through their encyclopaedic detailing.[104]

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[103] Allan Hepburn, *Enchanted Objects: Visual Art in Contemporary Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 46.

[104] Frederic Jameson, in his introduction to *The Ideologies in Theory*, clarifies that he shifts his interest from *vertical* to *horizontal* approaches to a text, going from "an interest in the multiple dimensions and levels of a text to the multiple interweavings of an only fitfully readable (or writable) narrative; from problems of interpretations to problems of historiography" (Frederic Jameson, *The Ideologies in Theory. Essays 1971–1986. Vol. 2: The Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xxix). Though I am using Jameson's concepts of vertical and horizontal reading, I follow Saint-Amour's understanding of vertical reading as a way of looking at the symbolic layers of the text, and horizontal reading as a way of looking for connections among the details of the text (Saint-Amour, "Symbols and Things").

Ulysses criticism has discussed the nonsensical, excessive, grotesque listing of the novel, and the lists' claim to comprehensiveness. Lists in *Ulysses* symbolise what Crary identifies as the paradox of attention, saying that "attention always contained within itself the conditions for its own disintegration, it was haunted by the possibility of its own excess."[105] Olson and Saint-Amour agree that lists enact "the tendency of a supposedly total model," but while Saint-Amour argues for the self-reflexivity of lists, Olson observes their openness in representing the ordinary: "Lists in *Ulysses* attempt to register and record the variety of ordinary moments that flood experience, while gleefully acknowledging realism's defeat."[106] Lists, catalogues, inventories, enumerations, and genealogies can be read both horizontally and vertically in the two novels. Horizontal reading (which aligns with the actual sequential reading process) entails an expansive attention which concentrates on the relations between the lists' elements and their place in the text, thus it is also a search for cross-references; vertical reading means a focus on symbolic significance. Saint-Amour argues that "*Ulysses*'s contribution lies not in the vertical operations of symbolism but in its restoring certain broken horizontal links" between people and things.[107] Thus Saint-Amour stresses the importance of the relations between the elements of lists. I conclude this chapter by focusing on this horizontal reading of lists in *Ulysses* and *Shamrock Tea*, and on the kind of patterns of attention and distraction that Carson's empathic awareness entails.

Empathic awareness, beyond receptivity, presupposes that every element of the list is equally important. Liesl Olson explains that "the equality of the list works against the desire to read and interpret particular elements of the novel as more or less important."[108] Lists, due to their format (conjunctive syntax)[109] and inclusivity, are the ultimate patterns in

[105] Crary, 47.
[106] Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 35.
[107] Saint-Amour, "Symbols and Things," 206.
[108] Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 35.
[109] Julia Kristeva, "Joyce's 'The Gracehoper' or Orpheus's Return," in *New Maladies of the Soul*, translated by Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 172– 88.

expressing an evenly-hovering non-attention, which refuses to give more importance to any one item over another. In this, lists draw attention to and offer an alternative to empathic selectivity, and they are empathic for they draw attention to or question the possibility of knowing others. As Jean-Michel Rabaté observes, list can be a short form of listen in *Ulysses*: "They list. And in the porches of their ears I pour,"[110] and it is precisely this connection between lists and listening, between lists and their reading I focus on here. The two main questions of this concluding section are related to the ways in which encyclopaedic details read as disruptions from or enablers of narrative progression, and to the kind of understanding these accumulative details facilitate, not least because they recall another meaning of *list* as leaning or inclination to someone or something.[111]

To start with lists' function of enabling or disrupting textual continuity, in both novels, lists are simultaneously distractions from the story and the very narrative matters of the novels themselves. *Ulysses's* encyclopaedic elements disrupt the reading process in the sense that they send the reader to explanatory critical guides, or encourage her to pause reading to search for cross-references in the book. In this way the non-linear reading of both Joyce's and Carson's cross-referencing lists reflects a distraction from sequential reading or conventional plot-development (or expectations of such development), which in fact reinforces an extremely careful attention to the novels, redirecting the reader's enriched insight into the text. Carson dismantles the canvas of the *Portrait* by attending to its colour-stories, inviting the reader to assemble these pieces into a new, richer view and version of the painting; Joyce unsettles interpretive paths, allowing the reader to take part in the re-writing process of the text itself. Stephen's enumerative "Dance of Death" in "Circe," for example, recapitulates in a whirling manner pieces of previous episodes:

[110] Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Joyce upon the Void*: *The Genesis of Doubt* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 119.
[111] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "attention," accessed April 6, 2018, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/12802.

> (*Bang fresh barang bang of lacquey's bell, horse, nag, steer, piglings, Conmee on Christass, lame crutch and leg sailor in cockboat armfolded ropepulling hitching stamp hornpipe through and through. Baraabum! On nags hogs bellhorses Gadarene swine Corny in coffin steel shark stone onehandled Nelson two trickies Frauenzimmer plumstained from pram falling bawling. Gum he's a champion. Fuseblue peer from barrel rev. evensong Love on hackney jaunt Blazes blind coddoubled bicyclers Dilly with snowcake no fancy clothes. Then in last switchback lumbering up and down bump mashtub sort of viceroy and reine relish for tublumber bumpshire rose. Baraabum!*[112]

References to the horse race, to father Conmee and the onelegged sailor he blesses, baby Boardman's pram, Dignam's coffin, and numerous other prior episodes, follow the rhythmic repetitions of this episode, interspersed with Blazes Boylan's occasional ringing (barang), and the gradual condensation of the "*bell, horse, nag*" variation into "*nags hogs bellhorses*."

Carson's encyclopaedism assumes a Joycean model of cross-references, with wandering pieces of information in the narrator's story and the three pre-written books (Yellow, Green, and Blue) out of which *Shamrock Tea* is 'made.' In the Yellow Book, the novel assembles several details literally, as objects in the handbag of Carson's mother:

> Mother's handbag: shoulder-strapped, green mock crocodile skin, slightly scuffed at the edges with an intertwining snakelike metal clasp. Contents: rouge, lipstick, nail-scissors, etc., a small mirror-backed hairbrush, a tortoiseshell comb, a red leather diary with a miniature pencil in its spine, a Belfast Corporation gas bill, a plastic vial of Lourdes water in a shape of a figurine of the Virgin Mary, [...], three Miraculous Medals attached to a safety-pin, [...], a holy picture of St Lucy proffering a pair of eyes on a saucer, [...] and a street photograph of mother and child, taken outside Robinson & Cleaver's department store in the summer of 1952.[113]

The snakelike metal clasp invokes previous instances of the snake symbol in the novel; the Lourdes water recalls Carson's fascination with miraculous potions and plants; St Lucy reiterates a previous list in the novel of a library's books; and the colours of the objects mimic the colours of the chapters. This bag with a metal clasp literally holds together pieces of objects and events elaborated earlier in the story. These lists, instead of accelerating reading, tend to slow it down, for each constituent compresses and expands a story of its

[112] *U*, 538.
[113] *ST*, 187–188.

own. Rabaté writes that in Joyce "each list engenders or summarizes stories, for each title is a potential tale."[114] This is the technique of *Shamrock Tea*, where each colour entry, and each element of the lists these colours invoke, contains and leads to further stories.

Olson argues that lists are "the language of nonevent […] and not of plot development," and *Ulysses* attempts to turn lists into narrative by including plotless texts.[115] Olson goes on to discuss how lists mediate relationships between characters, but does not address how each list assumes a narrative of its own. Nonevent turns into event in Joyce exactly through the unfolding stories and cross-references of lists. One of the early and shorter examples of lists in the novel introduces "Lestrygonians," and foregrounds several elements of the episode thematically, linguistically, and literally. "Pineapple rock, lemon platt, butter scotch," besides foreshadowing Bloom's search for food and reappearing in different formats in the text, miniaturize the episode's linguistic games and associations.[116] The consonants and vowels of these three sweets demarcate the alliterative pattern of the sentences that follow, with an abundance of the variations of *sc, sh, ch* in "A sugarsticky girl shovelling scoopfuls of creams for a christian brother. Some school treat," and an emphasis on the *o*-s (present in all three candies, and also in "food" and "Bloom"). In the list itself, the letters of these candies make them stick together phonetically, for each of them contain the *a, e, o* or *e, o* vowels from Lestrygonians, with a successive eating away of the *e, o, i, a* (of Lestrygonians and pineapple rock) into *e, o, a* (lemon platt) and *e, o* (butter scotch).

Lists, as opposed to sentences, are not demarcated by hierarchic syntactic relations, they are only defined by coordination.[117] This coordination between the elements of a list creates a sense of synchronicity, which also applies to the way one interprets these lists. Besides their extreme expansion (lists of saints, Irish heroes, trees, etc. in "Cyclops"),

[114] Rabaté, *Joyce upon the Void*, 119.
[115] Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 53.
[116] *U*, 144.
[117] Kristeva, "Joyce's 'The Gracehoper.'"

Joyce's lists are accumulative through their allusions and cross-references. Reading Joycean lists thus requires an evenly-hovering attention to the elements of a list, their immediate contexts, and the other instances they recall. "Pineapple rock, lemon platt, butter scotch" become comprehensive through miniaturizing the many allusions to the episode's theme of hunger, and not comprehensive in the sense of an exhaustive recording of reality. Liesl Olson argues that *Ulysses* acknowledges its "inability to trace and catalog every aspect of an individual's life."[118] This takes us to our second question concerning lists in their role in facilitating understanding through their bid for comprehensiveness, or, more broadly, to the idea of whether or not encyclopaedic comprehensiveness enables a better understanding of the world it describes, and how far comprehensive details foster better understanding of others. In other words, besides lists' function of encouraging an empathic attention in reading, do lists also foster empathic experience between characters?

Lists in both *Ulysses* and *Shamrock Tea* strive for an accuracy that does not necessarily aid the understanding of what they describe. In *Shamrock Tea,* Carson's depiction of the ingredients of flying potions and herbs which induce "clearer vision" (Henbane, Aconite, and Sweet Flag) do not explain his actual empathic experience of the painting. After Carson and Berenice enter the *Arnolfini Portrait*, they fly above the Silent Valley's lake: "As we hovered above it, the pewter-coloured surface began to shimmer, as if coming to a boil. […] Before we knew it, we were falling. We smashed through the pane of water. […] Then everything went black."[119] Carson describes this experience of the painting in two chapters, inserting between them "Blue Rocket," an exhaustive account of the literature on psychotropia: "One formula [of flying potion] involves Parsley, Poplar leaves and soot; another, Water Parsnip, Deadly Nightshade, Cinquefoil, and bat's blood," and his list goes

[118] Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 36.
[119] *ST,* 39.

on.[120] Carson's blurry experience of the painting is at odds with the precision of the lists he produces. Hence relations among accuracy, comprehensiveness and understanding are constantly displaced in the novel. Nevertheless, lists of colours, saints, mythical figures, and herbs do become the narrator's preferred mode of describing and understanding, thus empathically projecting himself into the *Arnolfini Portrait*.

Similarly, in *Ulysses*, the (mock-)exacting language of lists governs many of the episodes after "Cyclops," without the aim of offering a better understanding of what lists stand for. The list describing the topics discussed by Bloom and Stephen in "Ithaca," for example, does not disclose the actual mood of the conversation between the two: "Music, literature, Ireland, Dublin, Paris, friendship, woman, prostitution, diet, the influence of gaslight or the light of arc and glowlamps on the growth of adjoining paraheliotropic trees, [...] the study of medicine, the past day, the maleficent influence of the presabbath, Stephen's collapse."[121] At the end of Bloom and Stephen's catalogued discussion, the reader is still unsure about the nature of their relationship.[122] The abundance of lists distances Bloom and Stephen's actual conversation, either suggesting that lists cannot replace the immediacy of an actual dialogue, or even conferring a predominantly neutral, detached mood upon their dialogue. While lists in this case seem to disrupt the concept of understanding as rational, analytical clarity, they still feature as carriers of empathic care in human relationships, because they end on a personal note, with "Stephen's collapse." Thus, there is a human content to what seems to be an impersonal, disinterested flow of topics, as the list suddenly folds back into the personal. Even though lists elude comprehensiveness and refuse to aid rational understanding, they still become the predominant mode of grappling with interpersonal experience towards the end of *Ulysses*.

[120] *ST*, 34.
[121] *U*, 619.
[122] Olson argues that "the lists of 'Ithaca' aim to disclose but also to dramatically hold back information, more often than not omitting what a reader may really want to know" (Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 50).

Ulysses scholarship has long regarded Bloom as the compassionate, empathetic character of the book in his ability to "put himself in the position" of others.[123] Rabaté connects Bloom's compassion to Joyce's interest in Umwelt theory; Fritz Senn and others argue for Bloom's empathy for women.[124] The episode "Calypso" introduces Bloom through a list emphasizing interiority: "Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls. He liked thick giblet soup, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liverslices fried with crustcrumbs, fried hencods' roes."[125] As Neil Davidson puts it, from the very beginning, Bloom's love of inner organs establishes his "tendency toward internalization" in a grotesque way.[126] In this light, knowing Bloom through lists and later reading a catalogue of his conversation with Stephen is not completely unexpected.

Another heavily catalogued conversation is that between Bloom and the citizen. "Cyclops," one of the most prolific chapters in terms of lists, features one of the most unempathic characters of the novel. The citizen is described through lists, reads lists, speaks in lists, and is ridiculed by lists. At every given opportunity he misunderstands Bloom, who is constantly forced to explain his point. But, ironically, the lists themselves are there to explain Bloom's empathic approach. Early on in the chapter, the citizen's list of Irish heroes including Captain Boycott, Dante Alighieri, Christopher Columbus, and Patrick W. Shakespeare, parodies his xenophobia. Instead of backing up the citizen's nationalist views, the expanding lists of heroes, saints, and symbols of Ireland get carried away into ridiculous hyperboles. The magnificent facecloth showing forth legendary landmarks of Ireland, the

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[123] Fritz Senn and Christine O'Neill, *Inductive Scrutinies: Focus on Joyce* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1995), 44; Luca Crispi, *Joyce's Creative Process and The Construction of Characters in Ulysses: Becoming the Blooms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[124] See also: Janina Levin, "Empathy, Cuckoldry, and the Helper's Vicarious Imagination in *Ulysses*," *James Joyce Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (Spring 2013): 635–654; Sam Slote, "Loving the Alien: Egoism, Empathy, Alterity, and Shakespeare Bloom in Stephen's Aesthetics," *Joyce/ Shakespeare*, ed. Laure Pelaschiar (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 128–39; John Lee Moore, "'With a glance of motherwit helping': Empathy and Laughter in 'Oxen of the Sun,'" *Joyce Studies Annual* (2014): 143–63.

[125] *U*, 53.

[126] Neil R. Davison, *James Joyce, Ulysses, and the Construction of Jewish Identity: Culture, Biography, and the 'Jew' in Modernist Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 207.

citizen's relic of Irishness, includes hotels, jails, and breweries. These parodic lists thus resist (or engulf, in Bloom's terms) his narrow-mindedness, and also mimic Bloom's attempt to avoid the citizen's insults. So lists care for Bloom in a caring, distracting, floating way; they shield him, they feed him, and they offer a way of speaking or an exposition of Bloomian thinking. Trying not to react to what the citizen says, Bloom distracts himself by looking away:

> —The strangers, says the citizen. Our own fault. We let them come in. We brought them in. The adulteress and her paramour brought the Saxon robbers here.
> —Decree *nisi*, says J. J.
> And Bloom letting on to be awfully deeply interested in nothing, a spider's web in the corner behind the barrel, and the citizen scowling after him and the old dog at his feet looking up to know who to bite and when.[127]

Bloom's willingness to get distracted is characteristic of the lists of "Cyclops" as a whole. Between the expansive lists, the narrator signals his repeated return to the events in the pub with "so anyhow," as if acknowledging lists as digressions and distractions from the main (pub) plot. In "Cyclops," and in *Ulysses* more broadly, lists are not there to pin down something or reach conclusion or understanding, but simultaneously draw and distract the reader from the contexts they appear in. Through the lists' refusal to aid understanding Joyce critiques empathic selectivity, and directs attention to an evenly-hovering awareness that empathy ideally requires.

Carson's encyclopaedism also refuses to become a form of totalizing knowledge. Lists' resistance in Joyce to facilitating rational understanding whilst staging an evenly-hovering non-attention is central to Carson's encyclopaedism. Carson stages the way lists resist comprehension and cataloguing through his miniature lists about every shade of the *Arnolfini Portrait*, which, in the end, fail to explain the narrator's experience with the painting. *Shamrock Tea*'s entries, which at first seem to serve the purpose of clarification (in understanding van Eyck's painting), instead overwhelm the reader with their continuous

[127] *U*, 310.

accumulation of details. The *Arnolfini Portrait*, rather than being an end in itself (or an endpoint in Carson's attempts to understand its shades), serves as a door to wrong realities: not the fifteenth century, where the children were supposed to arrive, and then not their way back to their regular lives, as the three children lose each other, and Carson ends up in a world unknown to him. Carson suggests "realism's defeat" – as Olson says in relation to Joyce's lists[128] – through a double move: through moving away from encyclopaedic details' propensity to explain the world, and through shifting from intersubjective empathy to aesthetic empathy – and doing so by emphasizing empathic awareness as an evenly-hovering non-attention at the level of form. *Shamrock Tea* miniaturizes Joycean encyclopaedism by its minute attention to Joyce's associative patterns, cross-references and the ways in which encyclopaedic details and lists work as modes of distraction and focused or distributed attention. As such, by scaling down Joyce's encyclopaedism in *Ulysses*, Carson gives a reading of a typically modernist crisis about different forms of empathy, foregrounding the limits of empathic experience through the possibilities of empathic representation.

[128] Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 35.

Chapter Three

Zadie Smith and E. M. Forster: the randomness and symmetry of empathy

The opera-like comings and goings, the reversals of fortune, the outrageous meet cute coincidences […] *To me they were only roads leading to the dance. The story was the price you paid for the rhythm.* (*Swing Time*)

Ten years after collaborating on the opera *Billy Budd* (1948–1951), composer Benjamin Britten and the two librettists E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier sat down for a conversation to reminiscence about their collaboration. They discussed the practicalities of writing a libretto and composing music for it, and recalled the difficulties of matching text to music. Crozier said that the first draft of their libretto resembled a play that "could perfectly well be acted and spoken as dialogue […] but from the libretto [point of view] that was irrelevant, perhaps a little too verbose, perhaps not direct enough," and Britten had to constantly cut down the number of words they used. While thinking about the relation of words to music, Forster admitted that "although I've got this deep devotion to music, I know nothing at all about its technical requirements. I wrote in, as far as I remember you see, a great deal of emotion; I knew that music was somehow or other to be attached to my words, and whether this somehow got into the words and put them into the right order, I don't know."[1] Later on, in his essay written for Forster's ninetieth birthday, Britten recalls that during their collaboration Forster "was worried that his writing in prose would inhibit

[1] Benjamin Britten, "Discussion on Billy Budd (1960)" in *Britten on Music*, ed. Paul Kildea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 201; it is worth noting that Britten did not start composing music until the libretto was in good shape; Forster wrote that "The work has restarted well. Eric Crozier is here and doing his stuff without jibbing, and I seem able to turn honest English prose with duetinnos or arias when required to do so. Luckily nothing has to rhyme. I would like to hear some musical notes from Ben, but apparently they don't start yet – only musical ideas" (Mervyn Cooke and Philip Reed, *Benjamin Britten: Billy Budd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 56).

music," but Britten "found his terse, vivid sentences, with their strong rhythms, melodically inspiring."[2]

A worry about reconciling narrative order with musical rhythm can be traced back to Forster's preoccupation with music in his literary criticism and novels, where music becomes a metaphor for form, and musical scenes often drive the story. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* culminates in an opera scene; *A Room with a View* is permeated with music, mostly through Lucy's piano playing; *The Longest Journey* opens with Cambridge undergraduates listening to the "Prelude to Rheingold," and the novel has Wagnerian overtones throughout; *Howards End* introduces different ways of listening to music during Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. Britten believed that Forster used music innovatively, observing that "the construction of Forster's novels often resembles that of the 'classical' opera (Mozart–Weber–Verdi) where recitatives (the deliberately un-lyrical passages by which the action is advanced) separate arias or ensembles (big, self-contained set pieces of high comedy or great emotional tension)."[3] Here Britten chooses the "big musical episode" of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* to prove that Forster used music "not so much to colour a character as to push on the action […] to dent deeper Philip Herriton's defences by confronting him with Gino at his gayest and most ingenious."[4] Britten sees this scene at the opera as part of the novel's classical opera-like, symmetrically fluctuating design (ensembles punctuated by recitatives). However, when summing up Forster's musical tastes, Britten reiterates Forster's preference for a Romantic exuberance over a Classical balance:

> Forster prefers music based on striking themes, dramatic happenings, and strong immediate moods, rather than on classical control and balance, beautiful melodies

[2] Benjamin Britten, "Some Notes on Forster and Music (1969)" in Kildea, *Britten on Music*, 319.
[3] Ibid., 317.
[4] Ibid.; for criticism on Forster and music see Michelle Fillion, *Difficult Rhythm*: *Music and the Word in E. M. Forster* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Andrea K. Weatherhead, "*Howards End*: Beethoven's Fifth," *Twentieth Century Literature* 31, no. 2/3 (1985): 247–64; Josh Epstein, *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); David Deutsch, "Reconnecting Music to *Howards End*: Forster's Aesthetics of Inclusion," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 21, no. 3 (2010): 163–186.

> and perfection of detail; music which benefits from being listened to closely and from some knowledge of it. He prefers the Romantic to the Classical. And why shouldn't he? – he was brought up musically at the end of the nineteenth century.[5]

There is a sense in Forster's fiction as well as non-fiction – and Britten would agree here – that Forster preferred Beethoven to Mozart. Arguably, Forster's preference for "striking themes, dramatic happenings, and strong immediate moods" in music would certainly be an accurate depiction of his fiction as well, where his plots are guided by strong interventions of coincidence and chance (sudden deaths and changes of characters' fortune). In addition, his novels are also deeply invested, as Britten observes, in the classical opera's "control and balance," through symmetrically engineered relationships between families, places, and events. Forster himself defines narrative structure in musical terms, through his distinction between pattern and rhythm – which, as this chapter aims to show, is consequential to his depiction of character relationships and empathic experiences.

Zadie Smith establishes her reading of Forster early on in relation to the "emotional, erratic and unreasonable in human life," emphasizing her interest in "his narrative structure [which] is muddled also; impulsive, meandering, irrational."[6] She is interested in Forster's representation of chance and empathy in narrative, while carefully recreating Forster's symmetrical patterns in her novels through paralleling *On Beauty*'s (2005) families with the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels, and through creating an overdetermined pattern of London in *White Teeth* (2000) and *NW* (2012). Smith's conception of good novels, novels that "are rarely entirely closed," that are moving and resonating beyond themselves, clearly echoes Forster's well-known musically inspired idea that the novelist should aim for "expansion... Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out. When the symphony is over we feel that the notes and tunes composing it have been liberated, they have found in the rhythm of the

[5] Britten, "Some Notes on Forster and Music (1969)," 316–321.
[6] Zadie Smith, "Love, Actually," *The Guardian*, November 1, 2003.

whole their individual freedom."[7] Moreover, Smith is certainly attentive to Forster's musical preference and the possible imprints of this on his fiction when she chooses Mozart instead of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* in *On Beauty*'s close rewriting of the concert scene from *Howards End.* Choosing Mozart can be read as a hint that in Smith's novels, "classical balance" will prevail over Romantic "striking themes, dramatic happenings, and strong immediate moods," for Smith reduces dramatic chance events to a controlling, even symmetrical yes or no question. In *White Teeth*, for example, the openness and manifold possibilities of chance are reduced to Archibald Jones's coin flipping, where 'heads or tails' define his actions. One of the most important consequences of chance locked into symmetry in Smith's novels is that empathy between characters stops being a matter of responsibility. Archie does not save the Nazi doctor for the second time at the end of the novel because he is empathetic towards him, but saves him automatically, Smith emphasizes. This chapter argues that Smith dramatizes the tension between a comedy of arbitrariness and a tightly symmetrical plot, both borrowed from Forster, relegating empathy to a question of accident, and reducing chance and randomness to simple dichotomies. Exploring musical and narrative symmetries, she ultimately asks whether empathy – in its more common understanding as an imaginative step into the other's situation – is necessary for urban coexistence.

Smith chooses a paragraph about randomness from Forster's first novel as *White Teeth*'s second epigraph, which stands as a salient example of an empathic, evenly-hovering non-attention. In Freud's terms, evenly poised attention means that the analyst (in our case, the reader) pays attention to everything he hears, never knowing what will turn out to be important in the end. Smith quotes Caroline's words from *Where Angels Fear to Tread*:

> Every little trifle, for some reason, does seem incalculably important today, and when you say of a thing that 'nothing hangs on it' it sounds like blasphemy. There's never

[7] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1949), 161.

> any knowing – how am I to put it? – which of our actions, which of our idlenesses won't have things hanging on it forever.[8]

This epigraph encapsulates *White Teeth*'s central theme of arbitrariness, primarily demonstrated through Archie's life events, which are all subject to his flipping of coins, and Marcus Chalfen's FutureMouse project, where Chalfen wants to eliminate the uncertainty of fate through controlling a mouse's life at a molecular level. The epigraph is also relevant to Smith's subsequent novels: *On Beauty*'s carefully rewritten Forsterian coincidences, *NW*'s criss-crossing life paths, and the diverging fates of the two childhood best friends in *Swing Time* (2016). Philip's response in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, though not quoted in *White Teeth*'s epigraph, epitomises Smith's exploration of empathic responsibility. Philip successfully erases self-blame and his sense of responsibility through projecting a series of benign probabilities into the near future:

> He assented, but her [Caroline's] remark had only an aesthetic value. He was not prepared to take it to his heart. All the afternoon he rested – worried, but not exactly despondent. The thing would jog out somehow. Probably Miss Abbott was right. The baby had better stop where it was loved. And that, probably, was what the fates had decreed. He felt little interest in the matter, and he was sure that he had no influence.[9]

The fact that Caroline's remark has "only an aesthetic value" to Philip has serious consequences towards the end of the novel, where Gino's baby dies; thus Philip's interpretation (which amounts to non-involvement – "he was sure that he had no influence") of Caroline's heavily moralised ideas about responsibility ends tragically. Smith questions the relationship Forster suggests here between empathy and responsibility by introducing "Fate" as the main governing force in characters' lives. Essentially, Smith rethinks (what Philip would see as) a morally unconditioned modern history of empathy, highlighting the contingent nature of empathic thought through narrative design.

[8] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Penguin, 2001), 1. Hereafter cited as *WT*.
[9] E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (London: Dover Publications, 2016), 97–98.

As opposed to Carson's staging of an evenly-hovering non-attention and focus on not knowing that gives a sense of serendipitous narrative threads, Smith makes this clash between narrative control and staged randomness straightforward. She also establishes clear links between empathic attention and control in her novels differently from McEwan's engineered narrative plots, because she does not stage empathy as characters' violent imposition on other lives. Smith frees empathy from questions of moral responsibility (making it random in that sense), whilst locking it into a carefully constructed symmetrical design. And, as we will see, it is precisely because of this symmetry that characters cannot empathise with one another.

Among all three contemporary novelists discussed in this thesis, Smith is the most explicit in her rejection of an ethical consideration of intersubjective empathy. For Carson, the free-floating form of encyclopaedic juxtapositions is a way into Joycean logic and forms of attention, and, for McEwan, musical and visual empathy offer a reconnection with modernist thought. In Smith, however, a strong move away from intersubjective glorifications of empathy give way to modernist forms of living in the city, and her depiction of musical and visual empathy offer a way back into modernism's attentive processes. In her recent collection of essays *Feel Free* (2018), she admits that she writes about "a mixed reality", for "a reader who, like the author, often wonders how free she really is, and who takes it for granted that reading involves all the same liberties and exigencies as writing.[10] This interplay between creative freedom and constraint defines her approach to empathies as random or willed acts and her vision of a relaxed, even if somewhat regulated, peaceful urban coexistence.

Essentially, there are three empathies at work in her novels that she is deriving from Forster: musical, visual, and social or intersubjective. If she is ambivalent about musical

[10] Zadie Smith, *Feel Free* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2018), xii.

empathy, she is less ambivalent about visual empathy, and, in a surprising move, in her novels social empathy is incidental good. In what follows, I first explore musical empathy in terms of 'intellectual' and 'inattentive' ways of listening in Forster's essays and novels in order to isolate the different versions of empathic understanding with which Smith's novels engage (or abandon in favour of others) and to show how Smith's working through these empathies leads her to conclusions about narrative design. After highlighting Smith's critical distance from a generalised liberal humanist view of Forster in her novels, I examine how she rereads the intellectual history of empathy through her symmetrical juxtaposition of musical, visual, and intersubjective empathies in *On Beauty*. In the last section of the chapter, I focus on the tension between symmetry and chance that Smith's novels dramatize, looking at how empathy becomes a question of chance, and examining how symmetrical relationships ridicule the possibility of chance in *White Teeth* and *Swing Time*. My broader argument is that, whilst composing forms of aesthetic empathic immersion, Smith's insistence on symmetrical narrative patterns suggests an urban model of society free from morally coded empathic relations. Smith's engagement with Forsterian empathy and design ultimately raises questions about levelling realisms and types of empathy against restrictive narrative patterns, whilst finding ways to an empathic, attentional freedom to art and others in a comfortable but determined space. Forster's worry about music and narrative design thus points to an untrodden path between narrative rhythm as realist restriction, and moments that are "melodically inspiring."

Knowing music

Feb. 11, '80. – At a good concert to-night in the foyer of the opera house, Philadelphia – the band a small but first-rate one. Never did music more sink into and soothe and fill me – never so prove its soul-rousing power, its impossibility of statement. Especially in the rendering of one of Beethoven's master septettes [*sic*] by the well-chosen and perfectly-combined instruments (violins, viola, clarionet [*sic*], horn, 'cello and contrabass), was I carried away, seeing, absorbing many wonders. Dainty abandon, sometimes as if Nature

laughing on a hillside in the sunshine; serious and firm monotonies, as of winds; a horn sounding through the tangle of the forest, and the dying echoes; soothing floating of waves, but presently rising in surges, angrily lashing, muttering, heavy; piercing peals of laughter, for interstices; now and then weird, as Nature herself is in certain moods – but mainly spontaneous, easy, careless – often the sentiment of the postures of naked children playing or sleeping. It did me good even to watch the violinists drawing their bows so masterly – every motion a study. I allow'd myself, as I sometimes do, to wander out of myself. The conceit came to me of a copious grove of singing birds, and in their midst a simple harmonic duo, two human souls, steadily asserting their own pensiveness, joyousness.

(Walt Whitman, "Beethoven's Septette")

Walt Whitman's multisensory immersion into Beethoven's *Septet* calls up a rich, Romantic imagery, where every movement of the music recalls parallel movements in nature.[11] "Never did music more sink into and soothe and fill me," Whitman admits, carefully attending to "the violinists drawing their bows so masterly – every motion a study," while wandering through the associations that Beethoven's music elicits in him. Forster uses Whitman's description in his Harvard lecture "The Raison D'Être of Criticism in the Arts" (1947) to illustrate visual reaction to music. He considers this a "type of criticism," which "usually describes the state into which the hearer was thrown as he sat on his chair at the concert and the visual images which occurred to him in that sedentary position."[12] Forster in fact echoes a specifically turn-of-the-century concern with musical empathy that originates in a Romantic aspiration to achieve unity with art.[13] Musical empathy, in Henry Bergson's terms, involves an "intuition to recapture, to get back to the movement and rhythm of the

[11] Walt Whitman, *Complete Prose Works* (Frankfurt am Main: Outlook Verlag, 2018), 154.
[12] Forster, "The Raison D'Être of Criticism in the Arts," in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Penguin, 1972), 117.
[13] Vincent Sherry, among others, maps the origins of empathy in Romanticism (Vincent Sherry, *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)); Vischer, in his theorisation of empathy quotes Köstlin in relation to his 'symbolism of form' based on 'association of ideas': "The author began his analysis by referring to music, where the aural forms evoke a living, 'reminiscent' visualisation of 'themes,' which 'in themselves specifically characterise' these (aural) forms, so that upon hearing them, 'we can believe that we see and perceive these themes together with the sound' ('sweet, mild' tones are conductive to mental tranquility). Further, music 'indirectly imitates the theme symbolically through allusions to the imagined theme.' With regard to spatial phenomena, we are also conscious that 'one form can remind us of another, can be a symbol of another form, as when body size becomes the symbol of spiritual greatness, significance, and maturity'" (Vischer, "On the Optical Sense of Form," 91).

compositor, to live again creative evolution by being one with it in physical sympathy."[14] Musical empathy also means, as Ihor Junyk explains, that "the Bergsonian self can flow beyond its own borders and enter into a kind of pantheistic union with nature itself."[15]

Whitman's confession clearly exemplifies this pantheistic union with nature through music. As Vincent Sherry writes in his exploration of musical empathy and the avant-garde, "Empathy finds its likeliest opportunity in the response to music. The movements of sound are heard to correspond to the motions of the vital spirit; the auditor becomes one with the living current of acoustic sensation."[16] However, as Forster explains, even though Whitman "has allowed himself to wander out of himself," he does not wander "into Beethoven's self, his presumable goal."[17] Rather, Forster continues, "He has evoked the visual images congenial to him, and though in the closing phrase there is a concert it is not the one he attended, for it took place in the Garden of Eden."[18] Here Forster points to two interesting things in relation to musical empathy: firstly, he notes that Whitman does not achieve empathic unity with the composer; secondly, he finds it problematic to see Whitman's pictorial wanderings as attention *to* music. These two points – a distinction between one's object of empathy and a circumscription of "legitimate" ways of attending to music – will be peculiarly important for Smith, because they allow a more practical take on empathic immersion into music. In this section I will outline Forster's consideration of musical

[14] Henry Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: George Allen and Co., 1913, facsimile reprinted by Adamant Media Corporation, 2005), qtd. in Sherry, *Radical Modernism*, 13.
[15] Ihor Junyk, *Foreign Modernism: Cosmopolitanism, Identity, and Style in Paris* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 37.
[16] Sherry, *Radical Modernism*, 11.
[17] To merge with a famous composer or writer seems to be a predominantly Romantic aspiration. Bruce McConachie writes that "The Romantics believed that *Einfuhlung* could help them solve imaginative problems such as how a poet might temporarily merge his identity with a famous Renaissance figure or how a romantic painter could come to feel what is it like to be a gnarled tree on a hilltop. From their point of view, this aesthetic notion of identification and mystical merging involved conscious projection and the temporary loss of the self in another object or person" (Bruce McConachie, *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 120).
[18] Forster, "The Raison D'Être of Criticism in the Arts," 118.

empathies in his essays and novels to establish the kinds of thinking about empathy that Smith rewrites through precisely repositioning Forsterian narrative structure.

To start with Forster's observation about (non-)attention to music, his essays on not listening to music and not looking at pictures are helpful in elaborating his ideas about artistic attunement further. In "Not Listening to Music" (1939), Forster admits that "during the greater part of every performance I do not attend. The nice sounds make me think of something else". "Music that reminds" one of something, writes Forster, serves to "open the door to that imp of the concert hall, inattention. To think of a gray-green tapestry is not very different from thinking of the backs of chairs."[19] Here Foster defines a kind of inattention that is not necessarily the same distractedness as one faces in an art gallery. In "Not Looking at Pictures" (1939), he argues that "Ours is an aural rather than a visual age, we do not get so lost in the concert hall, we seem to be able to hear music for ourselves, and to hear it as music, but in galleries so many of us go off at once into a laugh or a sigh or an amorous daydream."[20] He continues,

> In vain does the picture recall us. 'What have your obsessions got to do with me?' it complains. 'I am neither a theatre of varieties nor a spring-mattress, but paint.' Back we go – the picture kindly standing in still meanwhile, and being to that extent more *obliging than music* – and resume the looking business. But something is sure to intervene – a tress of hair, the half-open door of a summer-house, a Crivelli dessert, a Bosch fish-and-fiend salad – and to draw us away.[21]

It might seem that Forster contradicts himself by at first talking about how one gets distracted while listening to music, and then arguing that music is something one can more readily listen to than look at a painting. However, the difference between not listening to music and not looking at pictures is that in the case of music, distraction happens within and through the musical notes, one can immerse oneself in what Britten calls the inexplicit, or what Whitman refers to as music's "impossibility of statement." It is the "nice sounds" that

[19] Forster, "Not Listening to Music," in *Two Cheers*, 133–135.
[20] Forster, "Not Looking at Pictures," in *Two Cheers*, 138.
[21] Ibid. [my emphasis]

make listeners think of something else. In contrast, the picture defies such inattentive immersion, for it does not, Forster seems to suggest, allow for an empathic projection of one's "obsessions" onto it: "What have your obsessions got to do with me?' it complains. 'I am neither a theatre of varieties nor a spring-mattress, but paint.'" The painting is more inflexible, more static, "more obliging than music," Forster thinks. There is more freedom to think oneself into music (where sounds recall something), because sounds are not visually fixed.[22] And though Forster sees this as an inattention to music (in the case of Whitman's musical empathy, he does clarify that Whitman did not attend to the actual music in the concert hall, but the images that this music recalled in him), he defines a state of distraction "within" music, and one utterly drawn away from the painting. In *Howards End*, for instance, music becomes a platform of what Walter Benjamin famously calls "reception in a state of distraction,"[23] for characters are either distracted by it, or distracted from it: Leonard Bast cannot enjoy the music, because he constantly worries about everything else around him; Mrs Munt's and Frieda's attention to the symphony is distracted by their national pride; and we do not know much about Margaret's reaction to the music up until later. Helen is the only one who is completely absorbed by the symphony, and thus paradoxically distracted – she cannot pay attention to things around her, and takes Bast's umbrella without realizing.

The increased distance that Forster sees between viewer and painting as opposed to the more immediate but distracted perception of music points to an important distinction between visual and aural perception, and, consequently, between different levels of empathic projection. Sherry explains that in early twentieth-century discourses on musical and visual empathy, the eye was seen to separate the viewer from the object, whereas the ear lent itself

[22] Sherry, *Radical Modernism*, 11.
[23] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin, 2008).

to a more immediate, direct unified experience with music: "While music appeals to aural empathy, drawing the correspondent motions of the vitalist soul into union with the living current of sound, the eye thrives at a linear distance from its object of attention."[24] Tracing the perceived superiority of the eye over the ear in the modernist period, Sherry outlines turn-of-the-century French critic Julien Benda's political aesthetics which argues that:

> the first condition of intellectual activity is visual distance: 'Sensations of sight impose upon the subject the idea of something outside of himself' […]. While the eye relies on separation to form a picture of the object, and thus attains the conceptual clarity that is its privilege, separation works equally strategically between the objects in view. Benda exalts these acts of visual distancing and intellectual definition in direct contrast to the effects of musical empathy, which 'reject[s] all intellectuality' and gravitates to the lower sensual order of the ear and tongue […]. The ear serves the demand 'that art shall avoid any attempt to distinguish between things, all clean-cut separations and definite outlines, and shall present them in their indistinctness, in their inter-penetration, in their mobility, in their fluidity.'[25]

When Forster says that painting demands more and a different attention than music, he echoes this tradition of visual distance being a "condition of intellectual activity." However, he does seem to opt for the predominance of the aural – what Benda sees as the ear's unifying, muddling, and equalising quality – over the eye's conceptual clarity: "an aural rather than a visual age." Hearing music as music would be Forster's indirect response to Benda – a vindication of the possibility of a critical, "intellectual listening," rather than a pictorial immersion into music. If one further presses these concepts, however, Forster's argument remains vague.

Attending to music itself, Forster contends, is a more valuable intellectual activity than empathically immersing oneself into what music recalls for the listener. He admits that he does occasionally listen to music the way Whitman describes it, but adds that "I do prefer 'music itself' and listen to it and for it as far as possible."[26] He concludes his essay on not

[24] Sherry, *Radical Modernism*, 19.
[25] Sherry, *Radical Modernism*, 20.
[26] Forster, "Not Listening to Music," 135.

listening to music by saying that "music that is *itself* seems on the whole better than music that *reminds*";[27] "music which is untrammelled and untainted by reference is so obviously the best sort of music to listen to; we get nearer to the centre of reality."[28] Later on, however, in his 1947 essay "The Raison D'Être of Criticism in the Arts," he states that even though visual reaction or empathic projection into music "has no interpretive value," it helps "sharpening" one's attention: "Those who hear music will always interpret it best. But those who don't hear it after the first few notes have also their use. Their wanderings, their visual images, their dreams, help to sharpen us. They recall us to the importance of sounds, and, their inferior in other ways, we may perhaps manage to listen to the sounds longer than they did."[29] Ultimately, other people's empathic projection into music serves as a stepping stone for one's becoming more perceptive to music *itself* – and surprisingly, one becomes more perceptive to music through a pictorial immersion into it. Thus, not listening to music is a little like not looking at painting: the listener attends to the images that the sounds recall in her.

This pictorial listening is most obvious in *Howards End*, where Helen's vision of goblins and elephants takes centre stage: "The music summed up to her all that had happened or could happen in her career. She read it as a tangible statement, which could never be superseded. The notes meant this and that to her, and they could have no other meaning, and life could have no other meaning."[30] Knowing music, on the other hand, is Margaret's and Tibby's way of attending: Margaret listens to music itself, and Tibby is interested in a technical knowledge of music. Even though both ways of listening are closer to an 'intellectual,' critical stance that Forster ends up preferring later in his career, it is Helen's visual meandering that the novel lingers on and seems to valorise. Tibby misses the point in

[27] Forster, "Not Listening to Music," 136 [my emphasis].
[28] Ibid., 135.
[29] Forster, "The Raison D'Être of Criticism in the Arts," 119.
[30] Forster, *Howards End* (London: Penguin: 2012), 34. Hereafter cited as *HE*.

his unwavering attention to musical notes ("the transitional passage of the drum"), and even Margaret's listening to 'music as music' cannot appreciate such technical fixations: "He makes me angrier than anyone, simply furious. With him I daren't even argue."[31] In Britten's view, there is a general tendency in Forster "to mock at any intellectual approach on the part of the listener […]. Thus in *Howards End* the novelist is determined to paint Tibby black, or dark grey […] and one of the ways of doing this is to make him 'intellectual' about music, and therefore not 'feel' it; it is 'dangerous' to know a lot about it."[32] He concludes in relation to Forster's musical preferences that Forster does not opt for "music which benefits from being listened to closely and from some knowledge of it."[33] Thus the best way to listen to music remains unsettled, even though the listening to music as music approach seems to be the most valuable one according to Forster's essays.

Besides an unease about intellectual and inattentive ways of listening to music, Forster's novels also question the idea that music can induce unity between listeners. For musical empathy, beyond uniting the listener with the composer or the rhythms of nature, is also capable of unifying its listeners.[34] Sherry explains that Benda and his contemporary Rémy de Gourmont proposed that "Music reaches the vitalist core of the listener […] and joins all members of the audience in a spurious but formidable unity. The fellow feeling induced in this way represents a form of mob bonding."[35] Here it is useful to recall Edith Stein's distinction between empathy as *Einfühlung* or feeling with someone and Lipps's version of empathy which she coins *Einsfühlung*, a complete identification with the other.[36] In this case, *Einsfühlung* (rather than empathy) would be a more precise description of what

[31] *HE*, 39.
[32] Britten, "Some Notes on Forster and Music (1969)," 318.
[33] Ibid., 319.
[34] Sherry explains that in the eighteenth century, certain critics thought that "music drew the auditor into physical union, first with the acoustic stimulus, then with other listeners" (Sherry, *Radical Modernism*, 4).
[35] Ibid.
[36] Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Other Minds, On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. Waltraut Stein, 3rd edn. (Washington: ICS Publications, 1989).

the French critics saw as the "melding through sound" of the masses. In Forster's novels, though, such feelings of oneness or *Einsfühlung* through music rarely occur. In fact, Forster's musical episodes reinforce a distancing from music and from others; no one in the audience feels the same or can understand the other's point of view. In *Howards End*, for example, Mrs Munt cannot grasp why Tibby stresses the importance of "the passage of the drums"; Margaret cannot agree or truly understand Tibby's approach to music, nor Helen's, just as Helen is unable to engage with their approach to music.

There is, however, a different unity through musical empathy that Forster's 1908 novel *A Room with a View* seems to suggest. Lucy becomes herself only when she plays the piano; she takes on a more adventurous life that she cannot initially accomplish outside music. The novel introduces her piano playing at the Bertolini pension, where a "very wet afternoon […] permitted her to do the thing she really liked":

> It so happened that Lucy, who found daily life rather chaotic, entered a more solid world when she opened the piano. She was then no longer either deferential or patronizing; no longer either a rebel or a slave. The kingdom of music is not the kingdom of this world; it will accept those whom breeding and intellect and culture have alike rejected. […]
>
> […] She took no notice of Mr. Emerson looking for his son, nor of Miss Bartlett looking for Miss Lavish, nor of Miss Lavish looking for her cigarette-case. Like every true performer, she was intoxicated by the mere feel of the notes: they were fingers caressing her own; and by touch, not by sound alone, did she come to her desire. […]
>
> […] Lucy never knew her desires so clearly as after music. [37]

Here Lucy immerses herself completely in the music she plays, not attending to anything outside it. Playing music offers her the only time for clarity of thought and introspection, as she comes to grips with a more solid understanding of the world "by touch, not by sound alone." At the same time, Lucy seems to disappear under this passage's magniloquent and discursive tone. In line with this linguistic disappearance, Lucy's grip of her thoughts and feelings through music remains untranslated into conceptual clarity. As the novel says, it

[37] Forster, *A Room with a View* (London: Penguin, 2012), 31.

would be admirable if the person playing the piano would "translate his visions into human words, and his experiences into human actions. Perhaps he cannot; certainly he does not, or does so very seldom. Lucy had done so never."[38] As Reverend Beebe's comment goes: "If Miss Honeychurch ever takes to live as she plays, it will be very exciting both for us and for her."[39] This seems to be another plea for the portability of aesthetic experience, but beyond that, Forster suggests a way of understanding music – beside the conceptual, pictorial, and technical – through tactile experience. He argues in the last paragraph of "Not Listening to Music" that it is only when he plays the piano can he understand music better. He explains that his "performances upon the piano"

> compel me to attend […] and they drain off all non-musical matter […]. Playing Beethoven, as I generally do, I grow familiar with his tricks, his impatience, his sudden softnesses, his dropping of a tragic theme one semitone, his love, when tragic, for the key of C minor, and his aversion to the key of B major. This gives me a physical approach to Beethoven which cannot be gained through the slough of "appreciation." Even when people play as badly as I do, they should continue: it will help them to listen.[40]

Perhaps this unwavering concentration takes Forster the closest in answering his own query about understanding music – and to Bergson's definition of musical empathy: an "intuition to recapture, to get back to the movement and rhythm of the compositor, to live again creative evolution by being one with it in physical sympathy." Knowing Beethoven in this case does not necessarily mean a transcendental empathic projection into or identification with his creative process – but refers to a more practical, physical, tactile take on musical experience achieved through focused attention and practice. There is also an embodied aspect to this repetition of the moves imagined by the composer in performance. This is reminiscent of Vernon Lee's ideas about motoric empathies and, most strikingly, Lipps's definition of empathy as a form of imitation.[41]

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[38] Ibid., 31.
[39] Ibid., 32.
[40] Forster, "Not Listening to Music," 136.
[41] See, for example, Lipps, "Empathy, Inner Imitation and Sense-Feelings."

This takes us to the second point Forster makes about Whitman's musical description. Forster clarifies that Whitman does not empathically identify with the composer, he does not wander "into Beethoven's self, his presumable goal."[42] Here Forster, perhaps unknowingly, makes an important distinction between different versions of empathy that reach into contexts beyond the aesthetic: he distinguishes between intersubjective experience and aesthetic attention to a work of art (sensorial immersion into music). Conflating intersubjective and aesthetic understandings of empathy is very much ingrained in the term's conceptual history, where, by the end of the nineteenth century, empathy meant both a projection into a work of art and another person, and, shortly after, empathy became the conceptual successor of sympathy, imbued with all the ethical and moralistic apparatus of its antecedent.[43] Through a pronounced concern about the translatability between music and words, and art and life, Forster's novels implicitly tackle bodily imitation, aesthetic reception, intersubjective understanding, or, empathy as aesthetic, motoric, and intersubjective experience. In *Howards End*, for example, Helen's visual empathic immersion into Beethoven's symphony is not necessarily a manifestation of her empathic behaviour with the others around her; in *A Room with a View*, Lucy's excellent piano playing blocks everyone else out (and the tone of the scene's description is inconsistent with her insecure behaviour); in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the opera scene erases Philip's responsibility. However, besides questioning the portability of aesthetic understanding, Forster's novels present a rather particular case of how Edwardian sympathy and early conceptualisations of the "psychology of aesthetic attention" worked at the time of empathy's conception.

[42] Forster, "The Raison D'Être of Criticism in the Arts," 118.
[43] See the introductory chapter, particularly the "Histories of not looking: empathy, ethics, and Victorianism" and "Modernism's empathic attention" sections.

Smith reclaims a rich history of empathy – and the conceptual confusion of multiple forms of empathic understanding – through dramatizing Forster's narrative design. Beyond addressing Forster's "pessim[ism] about the relationship between art and ethics,"[44] as Andrzej Gasiorek writes, Smith explores multiple forms of empathic understanding hinted at in Forster's deliberation about attention to music and pictures. *On Beauty*'s concert scene establishes musical empathy as a space of distraction, highlighting Kiki's momentary pictorial immersion; Forster's critique of 'intellectual' listening to music itself translates into the main character Howard Belsey's exaggerated intellectual stance towards art and everyone around him. In *Swing Time*, Smith addresses Lucy Honeychurch's (and Forster's) embodied, tactile experience of music through dance performance, when watching a clip of Fred Astaire's famous tap dancing scene in the movie *Swing Time* generates the narrator's retelling of her childhood. In all these novels, Smith deliberately confuses different understandings of empathy, showing how empathy cannot stand as a generalised term for intersubjective goodness: characters who possess an affinity to art might or might not be able to transport this skill into their relationships with others, and vice versa.

"Repetition of a single (in)consequential line": empathy with music and painting in Smith

By staging the confusion of different empathies, Smith engages with Forster's concept of novelistic rhythm and pattern, to ultimately devise a form of urban coexistence independent of empathic constraints. Randomness and symmetry in her novels work similarly to Forster's rhythm and pattern in *Aspects of the Novel*, where pattern is rendered akin to a geometrical shape – continual, round, closed, and unbroken – "an attempt to elevate

[44] Andrzej Gasiorek, "'A Renewed Sense of Difficulty': E. M. Forster, Irish Murdoch and Zadie Smith on Ethics and Form," in *The Legacies of Modernism*, ed. David James, 178–179.

the plot to Aristotelian symmetry."[45] Rhythm is "repetition plus variation"; it is "broken," and it creates "surprise and freshness and hope."[46] Symmetry between characters' relationships and actions in Smith's novels, like pattern, "remains more or less inflexible and immutable throughout," representing unity in the novel,[47] whereas randomness (characters' surrendering themselves to fate) becomes a dramatized version of rhythm. Smith dramatizes randomness by introducing "repetition plus variation" into her novels through a series of repeated events. This section looks at how Smith intertwines randomness (rhythm) and symmetry (pattern) by establishing correlations between musical, visual, and intersubjective empathies, to arrive at, as the final section will show, detached markers of urban coexistence.

Among Smith's critics there is an exclusive focus on a more generalized picture of Forster as the champion of liberal humanist thought, specifically, of the empathic axiom to "only connect."[48] This view easily identifies Smith's ideas on empathy with Forster's – not least due to marketing strategies preceding Smith's first book. As Philip Tew explains, *White Teeth* was largely "misunderstood" due to the "distorting prism" of marketing strategies championing the novel as a celebration of ethnicity and hybridity.[49] Tew says that "Smith's book was much hyped well in advance of publication in terms of a specifically 'hybrid identity' that was marketed very hard."[50] Consequently, reception was shaped by "essentialisms concerning ethnic identity and hybridity."[51] Indeed, critics define the connection between Forster and Smith broadly in terms of an "update" concerned with

[45] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel,* 43.
[46] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel,* 43.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Smith certainly recognizes that to "only connect" in Forster is already an uncertain, problematic endeavour. *A Passage to India* tellingly ends with "not yet," and in *Howards End* the connection between the Schlegel sisters and the Basts proves to be disastrous for both families.
[49] Philip Tew, "Samad, Hancock, the Suburbs, and Englishness: Re-reading Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*" in *Reassessing the Twentieth-Century Canon: From Joseph Conrad to Zadie Smith,* ed. Nicola Allen and David Simmons (London: Palgrave: 2014), 294–309.
[50] Tew, "Samad, Hancock, the Suburbs, and Englishness," 294.
[51] Ibid.

ethics, cultural hybridity, and empathy, and, specifically, as an optimistic reiteration of the "only connect" principle. They mostly agree that in *On Beauty* Smith transposes Forsterian ethics into a twenty-first-century cosmopolitan, multicultural milieu, and that she does not fully achieve the complexity of Forster's liberal aesthetics. What critics mean by this is that Smith is not fully attentive to Forster's nuanced understanding of morality and aesthetics. Catherine Lanone traces how the "Condition-of-England novel is turned into a Transatlantic Campus novel"; Christian Moraru sees *On Beauty* as "cosmopolitanism redux"; Fiona Tolan spots a "sustained ethical enquiry [...] prompted largely by Forster but also indebted to contemporary moral philosophers" in all of Smith's novels; and Maeve Tynan argues that *On Beauty* "updates rather than challenges the concerns of" *Howards End*.[52] As opposed to these arguments, Gasiorek explains that Smith's rewriting "isn't a pastiche but one writer's tribute to the continuing relevance of another."[53] While Ann Marie Adams broadly agrees that Smith gestures toward "the continued relevance of Forster's liberal aesthetic," she complains that Smith "cannot recreate that aesthetic in the present moment."[54] The evaluative nature of these approaches sidesteps exactly what is interesting in Smith's purported failure in repositioning Forster's aesthetics and politics into the present. I argue that Smith's choice to "reduce" Forsterian aesthetics and ethics questions the portability of narrative ethics through an exaggerated insistence on minutely relocating and paralleling Forsterian symmetries and situations.

[52] Catherine Lanone, "Mediating Multi-Cultural Muddle: E. M. Forster Meets Zadie Smith," *Études Anglaises*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2007): 185-197; Christian Moraru, "The Forster Connection or, Cosmopolitanism Redux: Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*, *Howards End*, and the Schlegels," *The Comparatist* 35 (2011): 133–147; Fiona Tolan, "Identifying the Precious in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*," in *British Fiction Today*, ed. Philip Tew and Rod Mengham (London: Continuum, 2006), 128–38; Maeve Tynan, "'Only Connect': Intertextuality and Identity in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*," in *Zadie Smith: Critical Essays*, ed. Tracey L. Walters (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 73–89.
[53] Gasoriek, "'A Renewed Sense of Difficulty,'" 175.
[54] Ann Marie Adams, "A Passage to Forster: Zadie Smith's Attempt to 'Only Connect' to *Howards End*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 52, no. 4 (2011): 384.

Clearly, Forster's liberal aesthetics, especially the idea that reading novels can offer moral growth does recur in Smith's non-fictional as well as fictional writings, in close alliance with Nussbaum's Aristotelian ethics.[55] Smith broadly agrees with McEwan that empathy is the cornerstone of humanity and the basis of the creative process, contending that "when we read with fine attention, we find ourselves caring about people who are various, muddled, uncertain and not quite like us (and this is good)."[56] Peter Childs and James Green argue that Smith's novels "invite ethically responsive reading," and this invitation is amplified through her Forsterian allusions.[57] However, the purported relationship between reading and becoming more empathic has been largely criticised, precisely because of the uncertain translatability between fictional and real world affect.[58] David Bradshaw argues that *Howards End* "spotlights not the sturdiness of Forster's liberal values, but their relative frailty. Patently a novel of contrasts, *Howards End* is no less fundamentally a novel of contradictions."[59] This is the kind of approach Smith takes when rewriting Forster. Smith is less interested in optimistic or moralizing versions of Forsterian empathy; empathy and morality are not equivalent, nor does appreciation of art result in better understanding of others. Smith's liberal humanist belief in empathic experience is far more critical than her critics suggest. She admits that "of course, it is not possible to guarantee that when we read, employing that Jamesian quality of fine awareness, we will a priori become richly responsible."[60] Her novels certainly invite ethical, moralizing readings of their representations of empathy, but it would be a mistake to dismiss the more complicated versions of empathy, where "reading with fine attention" and "awareness"

[55] For a brief discussion of a new ethical reclaiming of such Victorian ideals see the introductory chapter's "Histories of not looking: empathy, ethics, and Victorianism" section.
[56] Zadie Smith, "Love, Actually," *The Guardian*, November 1, 2003.
[57] Peter Childs, James Green, *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty-First Century British Novels: Zadie Smith, Nadeem Aslam, Hari Kunzru and David Mitchell* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 57.
[58] Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2007).
[59] David Bradshaw, "Howards End," in *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster*, ed. David Bradshaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 171.
[60] Smith, "Love, Actually."

becomes the testing ground for Smith's exploration of the limits and limitations of empathic experience.

Smith's concept of "reading with fine attention" is primarily indebted to Elaine Scarry's notion of "perceptual care" in her *On Beauty and Being Just.* Scarry argues that "beautiful things have been placed here and there throughout the world to serve as small wake-up calls to perception spurring lapsed alertness back to its most acute level. Through its beauty, the world continuously recommits us to a rigorous standard of perceptual care."[61] It is precisely this heightened awareness and "rigorous standard of perceptual care" that defines empathic awareness, and, in Lou Agosta's term, evenly-hovering non-attention. Smith articulates this fine attention herself by carefully rewriting Forster, reworking nuanced aesthetic and intersubjective understandings of empathy in her novels.

To begin with one of the episodes in Smith most obviously invested in questions of musical empathy, *On Beauty*'s concert scene gives a clear indication of the nature of Smith's rewriting of *Howards End*, and of Forster's fiction more broadly. Music is one of the things that Smith's characters choose not to attend to, in a way that recalls the Schlegel sisters in *Howards End*. Though *On Beauty*'s concert scene carefully mimics, and indeed almost symmetrically recreates the audience of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* in Forster's novel, it chooses to avoid the most empathetic – in the aesthetic sense of the word – responses to music, and Margaret's listening to "music itself." Smith explores Forster's idea of "not listening," for *On Beauty* dramatizes music as a space of distractedness: Zora listens to an explanation of the music; Howard sleeps; Levi disappears; Jerome cries about the Kipps family moving into town; Kiki gets tired in the effort of attending to music. Forster's narrator says that the *Fifth Symphony* can accommodate a lot of things – "all sorts of conditions are satisfied by it": national pride, technical knowledge, music with images,

[61] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (London: Duckworth, 2006), 81.

music without images, but in Smith's novel, there is not much to accommodate as the *Requiem* is mostly unattended to by the majority of the Belseys.

In her *Music and the Word in E. M. Forster,* Michelle Fillion argues that music in *Howards End* defines the novel's internal logic.[62] She explains how Forster carefully selected Beethoven and Brahms to suggest the internal progression of the novel: "Beethoven's symphony, renowned as a masterpiece of musical integration, and Brahms's song cycle, with its dialectical progression from despair to hope, provide fitting musical analogies to the 'connected' life for Forster's concert-goers."[63] In Smith, even though Mozart's *Requiem* might reflect a "dialectical progression from despair to hope" in Kiki's vision ("what is the sea of love" compared to one affair); it rather emphasizes dispersion and fragmentedness, turning 'connected lives' into coexistent ones. More than that, it encapsulates the novel's symmetrical pattern, for parts of the *Requiem* are generally characterised in terms of symmetry.[64] The concert is not an occasion for bringing characters together, but a space for further alienation: Levi disappears after his father's ironic mimicry of his musical style; Kiki and Howard's discussion after the concert (which scales down Margaret's soliloquy to Leonard Bast about musical interpretations) emphasizes the fragmentedness of the *Requiem's* composition: Carl "wanted to add something just then, a point of information […]. Mozart died before he finished the thing, right? So someone else must have finished it."[65] The concert in Smith is designed as a family outing, organized by Jerome, "ever the peacemaker […] as an opportunity for everybody to be nice to each other."[66] While in Forster, the concert scene values Helen's aesthetic empathy, Smith's concert is a space of failed empathy as the family members, with the exception of Kiki,

[62] Michelle Fillion, *Difficult Rhythm*: *Music and the Word in E. M. Forster* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 79.
[63] Ibid., 80.
[64] Hermann Abert, *W. A. Mozart* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 1334.
[65] *WT*, 72.
[66] Zadie Smith, *On Beauty* (London: Penguin, 2006), 61. Hereafter cited as *OB*.

refuse to connect with each other. Smith questions how far music can function as an empathic space that allows for the establishment of a connection between art, life, and the characters themselves. She introduces characters through their inability to attend to music, foreshadowing the kind of empathies the novel will tackle. Empathy in *Howards End* is mostly projection into art and objectification of people; in Smith, the projected space (into art or others) remains empty, only momentarily inhabited by the novel's characters.

Kiki's momentary pictorial projection into music, though not equivalent with Helen's vision of heroes and goblins, does echo Helen's feeling of "panic and emptiness" and her conviction that Beethoven's symphony sums up her life. Whereas Forster portrays Helen as a viewer of the great vision, Kiki participates in the music. The first line of this chapter "Mozart's *Requiem* begins with *you* walking towards a huge pit"[67] shifts the music to Kiki's personal concerns, as opposed to Helen's vision of the symphony as a staged performance, where the third movement "started with a goblin walking quietly over the universe, from end to end."[68] For Kiki, the music raises a retrospective judgement upon her decisions in life so far, for the family outing happens after Howard confesses sleeping with another woman:

> Mozart's Requiem begins with you walking towards a huge pit […]. Your death is awaiting you in that pit […]. The closer you get to the pit, the more you begin to have a sense that what awaits you there will be terrifying. Yet you experience this terror as a kind of a blessing, a gift. Your long walk would have no meaning were it not for this pit at the end of it […]. In the pit is a great choir […]. It is also every person who has changed you during your time on earth: your many lovers; your family; your enemies, the nameless, faceless woman who slept with your husband; the man you thought you were going to marry, the man you did. The job of this choir is judgement […] it *is* a debate […] It is surprising how dramatic the fight for your measly soul turns out to be.[69]

This scene dismantles a causality present in Forster, where Helen foreshadows her family's meeting with the Basts. In *On Beauty*, Kiki's vision becomes a symbolic folding line of a

[67] *OB*, 69. [my emphasis]
[68] *HE*, 33.
[69] *OB*, 69.

symmetrical pattern in the Belseys' marriage: Kiki already knows about Howard's infidelity, which will recur later on in the novel when he sleeps with Monty Kipps's daughter. However, the terrifying image of judgement ceases as soon as Kiki's attention wanders, and while she struggles to catch up with the help of the programme notes, the music ends: "For minutes at a time you are walking deep into it, you seem to understand. Then, without knowing how or when exactly, you discover you have wandered away, bored and tired from the effort, and now you are nowhere near music. You refer to the programme notes. The notes reveal that the past fifteen minutes of wrangling over your soul have been merely a repetition of a single inconsequential line."[70] Thus Kiki's effort to understand music parallels her moments of introspection, of which she quickly tires. Therefore, the mere "repetition of a single inconsequential line" and the images induced by it (the choir's judgement) have no consequence, Kiki thinks. However, Howard's infidelity will force Kiki to re-evaluate her decisions, as her marriage becomes a repetition of Howard's betrayals.

The random, flexible interpretations that the "repetition of a single inconsequential line" allows suggests a tension between fixed structure and randomness, which is *On Beauty*'s central preoccupation. The repetition of an "inconsequential line" itself echoes the main idea of *White Teeth*'s Forsterian epigraph, where "there's never any knowing […] which of our actions" will be consequential in the future. Both *On Beauty* and *White Teeth* are built on the tension between chance or randomness and the symmetrically engineered plot. Unsurprisingly, therefore, given how many events and relationships have their parallel in *On Beauty*, Kiki's reverie finds its counterpart in Howard's listening to Mozart's *Ave Verum* at Carlene Kipps's funeral. Howard is moved by the music, but strangely, he does not realise this until he feels his salty tears on his face:

[70] *OB*, 70.

> Howard gripped the arms of his chair and tried to regulate his breathing in case this was an asthmatic episode or a dehydration incident, both of which he had experienced before. But this was different: he was tasting salt, watery salt, a lot of it, and feeling it in the chambers of his nose; it ran in rivulets down his neck and pooled in the dainty triangular well at the base of his throat. It was coming from his eyes.[71]

This alienated, outside-in approach to his feelings represents Howard's personality, his politics and aesthetics devoid of "un-intellectual" feeling. His aloof, controlled attitude to art vanishes in this episode, for he is "powerless to stop" his uncomfortable bodily expressions of feeling:

> He did not even get the opportunity to check the booklet in his hand; never discovered that this was Mozart's *Ave Verum*, and this choir, Cambridge singers; no time to remind himself that he hated Mozart, nor to laugh at the expensive pretension of bussing down Kingsmen to sing at a Willesden funeral. It was too late for all that. The song had him.[72]

This sudden "downpour" of music takes him by surprise, and he is unable to slip into the hardened layers of his disillusioned persona.

This empathic reaction to music culminates in a sudden realisation of his love for his family. He cannot take his eyes off Carlene's coffin; nor stop his thoughts that are haunted by visions of death: "His thought fled from him and rushed down their dark holes. Zora's gravestone. Levi's. Jerome's. Everybody's. His own. Kiki's. Kiki's. Kiki's. Kiki's." This repetition of his wife's name indicates one of his first sincere acts of care for her before the end of the novel, where he starts to "see" paintings and his wife's beauty simultaneously. After leaving the funeral mid-ceremony, he ends up at his father's place, which he has not visited for years, led by the "the fear or force" that engulfed him at the funeral. As much as Howard's interests are entrenched in the visual, as Tew rightly suggests, it is this case of musical empathy that foreshadows Howard's hope for an experience of visual empathy at the end.[73] Moreover, it is musical reception in general that stirs his emotional numbness.

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[71] *OB*, 287.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Tew, "Samad, Hancock, the Suburbs, and Englishness."

When he attends a formal college dinner with Victoria Kipps, he almost explodes with laughter during the glee club's performance. In these cases, Smith evokes the aural versus visual perception debate that Forster was invested in. Through Howard and Monty Kipps's expertise in Rembrandt, she dramatizes the eye's intellectual distance, contrasting it with occasional situations where the immediacy and penetrative nature of music take effect. The novel transposes this penetrative motion of music to painting in the final scene, where Howard keeps zooming in Rembrandt's *Hendrickje Bathing* (1654), the last painting on his slide show, until the painted veins of Hendrickje's skin become visible.

This last scene of the novel is very suggestive in terms of the embodied nature of empathy and the potential exchangeability between visual and intersubjective empathy, paralleling the figure of Hendrickje with Kiki, and Howard's appreciation of art with his appreciation of his wife. The dynamics of exchanged looks between Howard, the audience, and Kiki animate the characters' empathic relations, which were previously intermittently engaged through music. This happens in a novel where seeing and hearing music are equally embedded in characters' states of inattention or distraction. Even in this case, Howard is extremely distracted from the job at hand, unable to attend to anything but the painting and his wife.

> On the wall, a pretty, blousy Dutch woman in a simple white smock paddled in water up to her calves. Howard's audience looked at her and then at Howard and then at the woman once more, awaiting elucidation. The woman, for her part, looked away, coyly, into the water. She seemed to be considering whether to wade deeper. The surface of the water was dark, reflective – a cautious bather could not be certain of what lurked beneath. Howard looked at Kiki. In her face, his life. Kiki looked up suddenly at Howard – not, he thought, unkindly. […] Howard made the picture larger on the wall as Smith had explained to him how to do. The woman's fleshiness filled the wall. He looked out into the audience once more and saw Kiki only. He smiled at her. She smiled. She looked away, but she smiled. Howard looked back at the woman on the wall, Rembrandt's love, Hendrickje. Though her hands were imprecise blurs, paint heaped on paint and roiled with the brush, the rest of her skin has been expertly rendered in all its variety – chalky whites and lively pinks, the

> underlying blue of her veins and the ever present human hint of yellow, intimation of what is to come.[74]

Through this chain-reaction of looks, Smith reveals delicate symmetries between visual and interpersonal empathy, mirroring in detail gestures and thoughts. Howard stands as the scene's symmetrical line, uniting the painting and his wife's symmetrical gestures: Kiki smiles and looks away, just as Hendrickje is depicted "coyly" looking away. Hendrickje "seemed to be considering whether to wade deeper," just as Kiki's smile brings a ray of hope for their relationship to continue. The scene offers a moment of introspection for Howard – in line with his characteristic outside-in approach to his emotions – in terms of surfaces: that of the painting, Kiki's face, and an insistence on the skin. Even if zooming in does not reveal further depths to either the painting or Howard's thoughts, it does make "the ever present human hint of yellow" of Hendrickje's skin visible. Howard sees his life summed up in Kiki's face, and the painting itself foregrounds self-reflection as Hendrickje looks into the water, possibly seeing herself mirrored in its "dark, reflective" surface. This closely paralleled scene of mirrored aesthetic and bodily surfaces brings together aesthetic and intersubjective empathy in benign ways, staging the translatability between the two through exchanges of looks and gestures. This scene in *On Beauty* is an exception in Smith's novels, showing that aesthetic and intersubjective empathies cannot be decoupled. Smith's overarching preoccupation with empathy suggests that even if aesthetic empathies serve a moral and romantic function, they do not serve a social one.

In Forster, surprisingly, the juxtaposition of the two kinds of empathies can become threatening. In these cases, it is not the failure of empathy that takes centre stage, but the confusion of different versions of empathy, with unwanted consequences. A classic example of this is the Schlegel sisters' empathy for Leonard Bast, where Bast becomes the Schlegels'

[74] *OB*, 442–443.

"project" or even object of projection. Here the Schlegel sisters' idealistic and generalised empathy for humanity and their love of art finds a concrete case in Bast, ultimately destroying his life. *Howards End* gives an objectified image of Bast after he meets the Schlegels for the second time: "One guessed him as the third generation, grandson to the shepherd or ploughboy whom civilization had sucked into the town; as one of the thousands who have lost the life of the body and failed to reach the life of the spirit. Hints of robustness survived in him, more than a hint of primitive good looks."[75] In *On Beauty,* Howard sees Carl as a figure from a Rubens painting: "'Rubens,' said Howard suddenly. 'Your face. From the four African heads. Nice to meet you, anyway. / Howard's family stared at him. Howard stepped off the sidewalk to wave down a cab that passed him by."[76] As Alberto F. Carbajal argues, "Carl is mainly defined by the Belseys' exoticizing gaze," where Howard's "dehumanizing aestheticisation" is mirrored in Zora's thoughts ("What a thing he was to look at!"), who labels Carl "an object of aesthetic beauty."[77] This flattening of Carl's image into a painting or an object of aesthetic gaze, might comically and literally echo Forster's idea of flat characters, and, though very differently, Bast's flatness. Bast's flatness of character means his inability to develop, change, grow, as many critics have noted;[78] Smith portrays Carl's flatness in exceedingly aesthetic terms, pointing to threatening symmetries between characters' relationship to paintings and to others.

On Beauty's insistence on flatness and surfaces articulates characters' stance towards empathic projection in both aesthetic and intersubjective terms. When preparing for the lecture that might land him a tenured job, Howard looks at Rembrandt's *The Staalmeesters*

[75] *HE*, 120.
[76] *OB*, 77.
[77] *OB*, 137; Alberto Fernández Carbajal, *Compromise and Resistance in Postcolonial Writing: E. M. Forster's Legacy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 182.
[78] See for instance L. Driscoll, *Evading Class in Contemporary British Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 66.

on his computer, and reiterates the critical ideology which renders empathic immersion into the painting impossible:

> In this painting, six Dutchmen, all about Howard's age, sit around a table, dressed in black. […] In his rendering of each face the painter offers us a slightly different consideration of the problem at hand. […] This is what *judgement* looks like: considered, rational, benign judgement. Thus the traditional art history.
>
> Iconoclastic Howard rejects all these fatuous assumptions. How can we know what goes on beyond the frame of the painting itself? […] What moment of judgement? Nonsense and sentimental tradition! […] We want to believe these Staalmeesters are sages, wisely judging this imaginary audience, implicitly judging us. […] The Staalmeesters are not looking at anyone; there is no one to look at.[79]

Despite his rejection of the possibility of knowing "what goes on beyond the frame of the painting," in the next moment Howard finds himself looking carefully at the painting, and feeling judged by the six figures, unknowingly recalling his wife's vision of the choir's judgement during the *Requiem*. He yearns for a moment of insight, wanting to see himself through the eyes of the Staalmeesters:

> On that day, forty-three years ago, he was an uncultured, fiercely bright […] schoolboy who came from nowhere and nothing and yet was determined not to stay that way – *that* was the Howard Belsey whom the Staalmeesters saw and judged that day. But what was their judgement now? Howard looked at the men. The men looked at Howard. Howard looked at the men. The men looked at Howard.[80]

These repetitive, apparently reciprocal looks try to establish Howard's interaction with the painting, and though there is no explicit revelation, Howard's "forehead's all wet" when Levi enters the room. This might be a suggestion that Howard re-evaluates his life through the judgemental looks of the painting, as he zooms in "until he was involved only with the burgundy pixels of the Turkey rug."[81] Zooming in seems to be Howard's way of finding meaning and depth in the painting and his life. The fact that he zooms in the Turkey rug, implies his identification with the Staalmeesters' judgemental stance and object of judgement, for their job was to assess "whether [the] cloth put before them was consistent

[79] *OB*, 383–384.
[80] Ibid., 385.
[81] Ibid.

in colour and quality."[82] Thus Howard's *involvement* with the painting foreshadows his empathic moment at the end of the novel, where a similar rhythm of looks reiterates itself, and zooming in allows for introspection, for empathic engagement with art and others. In this case, instead of offering an evenly-hovering attentional perspective, the novel illustrates that zooming in allows focus on one thing but makes everything else disappear. It reveals, at this point, Howard's limiting perspective.

Howard's self-scrutiny and fear induced by his projection into the painting (as the object of the judgemental looks of the six faces) explains his ban on representational art in his house, and is "motivated by," as Gasiorek argues, his "fear of affect and the contingent nature of human life."[83] Gasiorek says that Howard's "aesthetic theory […] functions as a defensive psychological strategy that enables him to block his emotions and to avoid the demands placed on him by his family."[84] Howard fears that representational art lends itself more easily to empathic projection, and consequently, to introspection. Therefore, his fear of representationalism equals his self-professed anti-empathic stance towards art (there's nothing beyond the frame) and others. Worringer's theorisation of abstract and realist art might explain Howard's preference for abstraction. As we have seen in the introduction, Worringer argued that as opposed to empathy, which entails projecting life into the object of art, abstraction breaks away from life into a certain stillness and timelessness, because life disturbs aesthetic enjoyment. Worringer further explained that the tendency towards abstraction is born out of the desire to remove the work of art from life, which requires getting rid of its arbitrariness: "taking the individual thing of the external world out of its arbitrariness and seeming fortuitousness, of eternalising it by approximation to abstract forms and, in this manner, of finding a point of tranquillity and a refuge from appearances."[85]

[82] Ibid., 383.
[83] Gasiorek, "'A Renewed Sense of Difficulty,'" 181.
[84] Ibid., 180.
[85] Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 16.

In other words, in Worringer's understanding, empathy allows for randomness (just as our definition of empathy as evenly-hovering non-attention does), and abstraction erases the arbitrary, the particular. It is this dilemma between these two types of approaches to art that *On Beauty* articulates. In Howard's case, it is abstraction (abstract theories and art) that allows him a materialist critique of art, and a defence from the realities of his life. Kiki needs to remind him that "this is *real*. This life. We're really here – this is really happening. Suffering is *real*. When you hurt people, it's real."[86] Getting rid of art's arbitrariness means denying its particularity – and Howard feels threatened exactly by this particularity which translates into personal terms.[87]

Through Howard's preference for abstraction over representation, *On Beauty* dramatizes connections between visual and intersubjective (anti-)empathic behaviour. Howard hates the charcoal painting of his father, hung in Langham house, "as he hates all representational art – and his father."[88] When he is fighting with his wife – Smith compares them to "two formal, unrelated, full-length portraits turned so as to face each other," thus abstracting them – and slips into abstraction ("*We're not in your class now.* Are you able to talk to me in a way that means *anything*?"), the novel purposefully places him under an abstract painting:

> Howard stopped underneath an abstract painting on the wall. Its main feature was a piece of thick white plaster, made to look like linen, crumpled up like a rag someone had thrown away. This action of throwing has been caught, by the artist, in mid-flight, with the 'linen' frozen in space, framed by a white wooden box that thrust out from the wall.[89]

This stylised linen is reminiscent of Howard's association with the rug the Staalmeesters examine in Rembrandt, and parallels his inability to understand his wife: "I can't understand

[86] *OB*, 394.
[87] Gasiorek says that "Belsey's inability to engage with otherness is the counterpart of his unwillingness to accept the particularity of art and the challenge it can offer to preconceived ideas" (180).
[88] *OB*, 18.
[89] *OB*, 204, 206.

you,' he said, looking at her at last. 'You're not making any sense to me.'"[90] It is no coincidence, therefore, that at the end of the novel, Howard's anti-empathic approach to art and others symmetrically slips into the opposite of both; his appreciation of beauty in art happens in conjunction with his sentiment of care for Kiki. Howard is afraid of exactly what Forster's characters are hoping for: empathy with art equalling goodness in life. This is also seemingly what Smith's novel stages in a Scarry-esque note.

The painting in the novel that epitomises the interplay between empathic immersion and a fear of empathic connection through its merging of abstract and realist elements is surrealist Hector Hyppolite's *Maîtresse Erzulie* (c. 1945-1948), Carlene Kipps's gift to Kiki. Kiki attends to the painting during her visit to Carlene:

> In the centre of the frame there was a tall, naked black woman wearing only a red bandanna and standing in a fantastical white space, surrounded all about by tropical branches and kaleidoscopic fruit and flowers. […] It was painted in a primitive, childlike style, everything flat on the canvas. No perspective, no depth.[91]

Lanone observes that the painting allows the two women to talk about Howard's infidelity, offering Kiki a choice between revenge and forgiveness (as Erzulie, the Voodoo goddess stands for both), and it reappears under Levi's bed right before Kiki finds out about Howard's second betrayal, this time with Victoria Kipps. Lanone also sees this painting as the counterpart of Hendrickje, as both figures are looking away, standing in water.[92] This Forsterian rhythm (or leitmotif) of the painting's strategic positioning also becomes crucial when Kiki sees the painting in Carlene's room, without consciously looking at it. She thinks about her marriage with Howard, and recalls how she likes to remember that when they first met with Howard, Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' was playing on her record player.

> When, on an earlier wedding anniversary, Jerome had played his parents an ethereal, far more beautiful version of 'Hallelujah' by a kid called Buckley, Kiki had thought yes, our memories are getting more beautiful and less real every day. And then the kid

[90] Ibid., 206.
[91] *OB*, 174–5.
[92] Lanone, "Mediating Multi-Cultural Muddle," 29.

> drowned in the Mississippi, recalled Kiki now, looking up from her knees to the colourful painting that hung behind Carlene's empty chair. Jerome had wept: the tears you cry for someone whom you never met who made something beautiful that you loved.[93]

Jerome's thoughts remind us of the kind of empathy with the composer that Forster thinks Whitman never managed. Kiki looks up at Hyppolite's painting between two moments (the death of Buckley, the creator of a beautiful rendition of their song, and Jerome's compassion for his death), as if looking up to the painting clarifies her memories about their marriage. Then Carlene interrupts her, asking if she likes the painting: "You were admiring her, I thought," foreshadowing that Kiki will eventually be strong enough (as a parallel image of Erzulie, the "mystère of […] vengeance and discord") to leave Howard.[94]

Beyond this Forsterian rhythm of symmetrically staged coincidences that the painting punctuates, *Maîtresse Erzulie* also balances different empathic approaches as a telling reiteration or counterpart of the house Howards End in Forster's novel. Ruth Wilcox's spiritual legacy, the Schlegels' literal shelter (Howards End) becomes a metaphor for empathic connection in Carlene's note to Kiki, which her son finds attached to the painting: "There is such shelter in each other."[95] However, Smith insists on *Maîtresse Erzulie*'s flatness: "everything flat on the canvas. No perspective, no depth," continuing *On Beauty*'s play on affective and empathic flatness, which might imply a difficulty in aesthetically inhabiting the painting (or forging empathic connections between the two women) as opposed to the three-dimensionality of the house, which can be literally inhabited. Both the house and the painting are initially empty: Howards End is abandoned for years before the Schlegels move in; *Maîtresse Erzulie*'s flatness and "fantastical white space" suggests, as Edouard Glissant says, a "swollen emptiness," where "One senses that the flatness of space

[93] *OB*, 174.
[94] *OB*, 174.
[95] *OB*, 93.

is both shrewd and naive. That the 'naïve' element is necessary. For it conveys and allows the emergence of a basic feature: redundancy."[96] The empty Howards End will be inhabited; the two-dimensional Erzulie becomes a symbol of Kiki's life, though without an explicit empathic projection. In Forster, the house represents the spiritual legacy of Ruth; in Smith, the painting is an expression of Kiki's dilemma. Kiki, as she complains to Howard, is stranded in a sea of white people, just like Erzulie in a "fantastical white space," trying to decide whether to forgive Howard or not. Playing with literal and empathic shelters, Smith points to the slippery conceptual history of empathy, where the same word can refer to projection into a work of art, or object, or others.

These empathic encounters happen through Smith's careful planning and positioning of distances and closeness between characters and between characters' perception of music and painting (recalling Forster's ideas on visual distance and musical immediacy). In *On Beauty and Being Just*, Scarry explains that "beautiful things give rise to the notion of distribution, to a lifesaving reciprocity, to fairness not just in the sense of loveliness of aspect but in the sense of 'a symmetry of everyone's relation to another.'"[97] This "symmetry of everyone's relation to another" that leads to fairness refers to, in Scarry's terms, equality in society. While in *On Beauty*, Smith symmetrically juxtaposes characters' aesthetic and intersubjective empathies, *White Teeth* (though retrospectively) and *Swing Time* seem to be particularly engaged with the relationship between ethics and the equality of symmetrical relationships, specifically asking how empathy fits such symmetrical relationships. In the final section I look at Smith's novelistic design, examining how an exaggerated version of Forsterian symmetry and coincidence affects empathic relationships, and ends up in a preference of coexistent lives over connected ones.

[96] Edouard Glissant, "On Haitian Painting," in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, ed. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 155–157.
[97] Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, 95.

"By an odd chance – unless we believe in a presiding genius of places": Symmetry versus empathy

Most of Smith's novels emphasize their preoccupation with chance and randomness from the outset, whilst gradually revealing symmetrical relations that are at odds with the manifold possibilities of chance. *White Teeth* starts with giving Archibald Jones a second chance in life: "Whilst he slipped in and out of consciousness, the position of the planets, the music of the spheres, the flap of a tiger-moth's diaphanous wings in Central Africa, and a whole bunch of other stuff that Makes Shit Happen had decided it was second-chance for Archie."[98] *NW* opens with Leah Hanwell trying to write down a motivational line she hears on the radio "I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me,"[99] which becomes a prelude to her chance meetings with her now adult neighbourhood friends who lead very different lives; *On Beauty* begins "with the hint of randomness prefacing Forster's brief pastiche of epistolary novels – 'One may as well begin with…'";[100] a random viewing of a movie clip triggers the narrator's memoir in *Swing Time*. By staging with geometric precision narrative worlds hinged on chance events and randomness, Smith engages with a long line of coincidence plots from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel's fascination with chance to modernism's preoccupation with contingency and postmodern fiction's focus on randomness and narrative determinism.[101] Being primarily interested in Forsterian "impulsive, meandering, irrational" narrative structure and the "erratic and unreasonable in human life," Smith dramatizes Forster's use of chance and coincidence in its relation to his notions of pattern and rhythm.[102]

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[98] *WT*, 4.
[99] Smith, *NW* (London: Penguin, 2013), 3.
[100] Lanone, "Mediating Multi-Cultural Muddle," 187.
[101] Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[102] Smith, "Love, Actually."

In his chapter on pattern and rhythm, Forster talks about the "conflict between the novel's intensely human quality and its aesthetic exigencies," criticising Henry James for excluding life from his novels.[103] Forster engages with the debate between James and H. G. Wells, which polarised the intensely human character and the rigidly formal symmetry of novels. As Rukun Advani explains, Forster thinks that "If the novelist concentrates too much attention upon revealing character, the action of his novel cannot proceed and the symmetry of his plot suffers. Conversely, if his major concern is symmetry of action, this will tend to deprive characters of their vitality."[104] In *A Room with a View*, the narrator comments on one of Florence's famous squares, exclaiming that "By an odd chance – unless we believe in a presiding genius of places – the statues that relieve [the piazza's] severity suggest, not the innocence of childhood, nor the glorious bewilderment of youth, but the conscious achievements of maturity."[105] Seeing the square's planned design in terms of "an odd chance" could be read as an analogy for the designed nature of contingency in a story, or an aspiration for a less contrived sense of chance in fiction. Forster's preference for realistic representation over "Aristotelian symmetry" sheds light on his difficulty in reconciling characters' vitality and contingency with aesthetic form. Through rewriting Forster, Smith tests this difficulty, comically overemphasizing pattern and rhythm, whilst giving a realist, detailed depiction of London life. Conscious of the "designed nature of narrative fundamentally at odds with chance,"[106] she explores the tension between randomness and symmetrical design, exaggerating Forster's symmetrical precision by depicting both randomness and characters' empathies as repetitive, polarized, and geographically determined.

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[103] Ann Henley, "'But We Argued About Novel-Writing': Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster and the Art of Fiction," *Ariel* 20, no. 3 (July 1989): 79.
[104] Rukun Advani, *E. M. Forster as Critic* (London: Routledge, 2016), 136.
[105] Forster, *A Room with a View*, 58.
[106] Steven Belletto, *No Accident Comrade: Chance and Design in Cold War American Narratives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

In *White Teeth*, *On Beauty*, and *Swing Time*, relationships and events are carefully engineered into symmetrical patterns. Just like the intensely polarized Schlegel–Wilcox (then Schlegel–Bast and Wilcox–Bast) pairs, the Belseys and the Kippses mimic relational symmetries of Forster's novel: Jerome falls in love with Victoria Kipps just as Margaret falls in love with Mr Wilcox's son; Kiki becomes friends with Carlene Kipps just as Margaret becomes friends with Mrs Wilcox; Howard has an affair with Vee and Monty has one with one of Zora's fellow students, just as in Forster's novel Helen has an affair with Leonard Bast, and Henry turns out to have had an affair with Jackie Bast. Similarly, in *White Teeth*, there are two families, the Iqbals and the Joneses, where Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal are old friends, and their wives and children become friends; later these two families interfere with a third one, the Chalfens, where relationships are doubled: Irie Jones wants to blend into Chalfenism, Mrs Chalfen cares dearly for Millat Iqbal, just as Mr Chalfen cares for Irie at first and then switches to Magid Iqbal. The twins, Magid and Millat are two antithetical characters, but they are confused at the end of the novel as possible fathers of Irie's child. *Swing Time* focuses on the lives of its two childhood friends, Tracey and the narrator, where Tracey's white mother and the narrator's Jamaican mother represent opposing principles (just as their daughters will), and Tracey's black father is never at home, just as the narrator's father will eventually get alienated from his family.

These symmetries are supposed to create empathic exchange, and even force empathic understanding, but they cannot fulfil this task. In *Howards End*, even though the novel shows Helen's affair with Leonard Bast as the symmetrical counterpart of that of Henry Wilcox with Jackie Bast, Henry is refusing to understand Helen, precisely because he is forced into such a symmetry of experience. The broader pattern into which these experiences are embedded is characters' spatial proximity within the city. Here it is worth taking a closer look at how such symmetries work, because Smith views characters'

empathies as part and parcel of their environments, and, counterintuitively, these intensely symmetrical spaces pave the way in Smith to more relaxed (non-empathic) relations. In Forster, the Wilcoxes move across the street from the Schlegels; in *On Beauty*, the Kippses move to the Belseys' neighbourhood, and Monty Kipps starts working at Howard Belsey's faculty; in *White Teeth*, Samad moves to the same quarter of London as Archie. In *Swing Time*, Tracey and the narrator live in the same neighbourhood; the two attend the same dance classes, and end up going to the same school. Woolf, in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," finds, as Ann Henley puts it, that Forster "cement[s] his characters too firmly to their surroundings and to his own morals, struggles, and protests."[107] This closeness between characters and their surroundings is precisely what Smith tests in connection with empathic relationships. Arguably, the intense symmetry in her novels creates a deterministic pattern of the city which restricts characters' relationship with one another empathically and ethically, but also offers benign coexistence.

Several critics agree that Smith's London "traps the individual in a single overdetermined neighbourhood."[108] Alsana and Samad move to a different neighbourhood, only to find themselves in a similar situation: "Samad and Alsana Iqbal […] lived four blocks down on the wrong side of Willesden High Road. It had taken them a year to get there […] from the wrong side of Whitechapel to the wrong side of Willesden."[109] Hortense Bowden does not leave her neighbourhood for decades; her grandmother's place is a shelter from the rest of the world for Irie; in *On Beauty*, Howard's father rarely leaves his house. Moreover, London, as a place for new "roots" determines characters' identity as well.[110]

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[107] Ann Henley, "'But We Argued About Novel-Writing:' Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster and the Art of Fiction," 76.
[108] Laurent Mellet, "'Just Keep on Walking in a Straight Line': Allowing for Chance in Z. Smith's Overdetermined London (*White Teeth, The Autograph Man* and *On Beauty*)," in *(Re-)Mapping London. Visions of the Metropolis in the Contemporary Novel in English*, ed. Vanessa Guignery (Paris: Publibook, 2008), 188.
[109] *WT*, 55.
[110] Mellet, "'Just Keep on Walking in a Straight Line.'"

This is most visibly true for Millat who is "*originally*" from "Whitechapel [...] Via the Royal London Hospital and the 207 bus."[111] Similarly, Levi longs to belong to the *street*, refusing to admit that he lives in a posh area of Wellington: "You think this is America? [...] You go into Roxbury, you go into the Bronx, you *see* America. That's *street*."[112] As much as these repetitive circles of London/Wellington existence define characters, overdetermined neighbourhoods are not the only cause of their determination.

This is to say, in Smith, just as in Forster, certain characteristics are not simply malleable on the basis of places or events, for there are characters who remain the same throughout the narrative because of who they are. Henry Wilcox is unable to become the person that Margaret hopes he can be. Forster relies on people being what they are and not what happens to them; certain attributes are fixed in characters and not determined by formal or geographical design. Archie's stability of selfhood is certainly an aspect that Smith borrows from Forster. When Archie meets Clara, he feels he is completely transformed, but this transformation does not actually take place in the novel:

> something happened that led to the transformation of Archie Jones in every particular that a man can be transformed; and not due to any particular effort on his part, but by means of the entirely random, adventitious collision of one person with another. Something happened by accident. That accident was Clara Bowden.[113]

The "entirely random, adventitious collision" of the two does not change Archie: he continues to spend all his evenings at Mickey's with Samad, his love for Clara fades, and he does not have a meaningful relationship with his daughter either. As the quotation stresses, the momentary transformation happens without any effort on Archie's part, passivity being intensely typical of him.

Though geographical symmetry does not necessarily determine characters' identity, spatial proximity certainly plays an important role in the way characters interact with one

[111] *WT*, 319.
[112] *OB*, 63.
[113] *WT*, 23.

another. Instead of encouraging chances for empathic connections, proximity further restricts these chances in most cases. The narrator talks about a "mixing up" of lives, a comfortable "slipping into" one another's lives, after evoking a playground as the "condition of England" scene:

> This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. It is only this late in the day that you can walk into a playground and find Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O'Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. Children with first and last names on a collision course.[114]

Later the novel continues: "you can find best friends Sita and Sharon, constantly mistaken for each other because Sita is white (her mother liked the name) and Sharon is Pakistani (her mother thought it best – less trouble)."[115] This "mixing up" that several critics call optimistic or failed multiculturalism, cultural hybridity, cosmopolitanism, humanism, or "illegible suburban"[116] existence is in fact a very well planned, geometrically perfect constellation of characters and neighbourhoods in the overdetermined novel. *Swing Time* revisits this scene with a focus on social class, and instead of casting a panoramic attention on diversity, it divides everyone into two groups through Tracey's characteristically limiting perspective.

> It took Tracey moving to my classroom for me to understand what my classroom really was. I had thought it was a room full of children. In fact it was a social experiment. The dinner lady's daughter shared a desk with the son of an art critic, a boy whose father was presently in prison shared a desk with the son of a policeman. The child of a postal officer shared a desk with the child of one of Michael Jackson's backing dancers. One of Tracey's first acts as my new desk mate was to articulate these subtle differences by way of a simple, compelling analogy: Cabbage Patch Kids versus Garbage Pail Kids. Each child was categorized as one or the other […]. There could be no real friendship between Cabbage Patch and Garbage Pail, not right now, not in England.[117]

Tracey's opinion completely cuts off empathic connections between the two groups, focusing from the outset on irreconcilable difference. However, the structural design of both

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[114] *WT*, 326.
[115] *WT*, 282.
[116] Ged Pope, *Reading London's Suburbs: From Charles Dickens to Zadie Smith* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).
[117] Zadie Smith, *Swing Time* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2016), 53. Hereafter cited as *ST*.

novels breaks difference and sameness into symmetrical patterns, and spatial proximity concludes in coexistence rather than empathic connection.

In *White Teeth*, the prospect of empathic exchange, and even basic interaction, becomes a threat. Rather than comfortably slipping into each other's lives, Londoners deny eye contact with each other: "Londoners have learnt not to look, never to look, to avoid eyes at all times."[118] This contact is potentially dangerous, because it could imaginarily "tip" them into another life as in McEwan's London in *Saturday*. In these terms, even empathic relationships are symmetrical, but not mutual, for there is no actual reciprocity, exchange of care for one another's lives. In Forster, Margaret chooses in the end not to attend to the random fate of the Basts; Helen is terrified by the fate of the poor. In Smith's London, Mad Mary reinforces Londoners' habit of not looking, for she terrifies everyone who looks at her by cursing them. As such, Londoners in *White Teeth* avoid eye contact which threatens a collision (or just a consideration of this collision) of separate lives, or an empathic proximity, preferring a less consequential coexistence.

Mad Mary, "a black voodoo woman with a red face whose territory stretches from Kilburn to Oxford street,"[119] ultimately criticizes such unwritten urban agreements. Londoners' civil inattention – acknowledgement of the other without imposing on them[120] – becomes impossible when Mad Mary is around. She compels eye contact, "making eye contact from a hundred, two hundred, even three hundred yards away, and if she catches you doing the same she roars down the street, dreads and feathers and cape afloat, Hoodoo stick in hand, until she gets to where you are, spits on you, and begins."[121] Her forced encounters with others are motivated by her ability of "seeing connections in the random (for discerning

[118] *WT*, 174–175.
[119] *WT*, 174.
[120] Erving Goffman, *Behaviour in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: Free Press, 1963).
[121] *WT*, 175.

the whole world in a grain of sand, for deriving narrative from nothing) to riddle you, to rhyme you, to strip you down, to tell you who you are and where you're going […] and why."[122] So when she spots Samad walking down with Poppy (his possible lover and son's music teacher) on the street, she immediately stalks them. Samad feels "guilty and vulnerable" for asking out Poppy, and knows that Mad Mary's "vicious truth-telling" does not fall on him by chance.[123] Samad sees that

> Mad Mary was looking at him with *recognition*. Mad Mary had spotted a *fellow traveller*. She had spotted the madman in him (which is to say the *prophet*); he felt sure she had spotted the angry man, the masturbating man, the man stranded in the desert far from his sons, the foreign man in a foreign land caught between borders […] the man who, if you push him far enough, will suddenly see sense. Why else had she picked him from a street full of people? Simply because she recognised him. Simply because they were from the same place, he and Mad Mary, which is to say: *far away.*[124]

Thus Mad Mary's encounters are not there to elicit empathy or care for her, they force self-recognition and self-judgement. Mary stands as a mirror (looking into her eyes means facing oneself), rather than an object of empathic projection. This version of Mad Mary's mirroring transposes Londoners' defensive inattention to avoid the "dreaded question 'What you looking at?' and its pitiful, gutless, useless answer – 'Nothing'" into an inattention to one's own thoughts. In Smith's model of a willing distractedness of urban life, avoiding encounters with others is just as desirable as avoiding introspection. Thus Mad Mary reinforces the symmetry of relationships as an unproductive or mostly absent mirroring, devoid of empathic reciprocity.

This is the novel's main point: civil inattention works well as a model of urban coexistence, because even if one's – detached but aware – inattention momentarily ceases, it does not facilitate empathic care. This inattention epitomises *White Teeth*'s model of coexistent lives in a city where overdetermined symmetries do not give way, in any case, to

[122] *WT*, 174.
[123] Ibid., 175.
[124] Ibid., 177–178.

empathic exchanges. Such inattention maps onto questions about the connections between empathy, responsibility, and the nature of friendships in the novel. Distractedness is most prominent in the case of Archie, who is completely unwilling to think about the rationale behind his actions, or their consequences. None of his actions are consciously justified; he seems to be guided by chance occurrences. The novel ridicules Archie's attitude (and characters' polarized perspectives in general) by reducing randomness and characters' multiple choices to simple dichotomies.[125] Even if Archie's coin-flipping seems to allow for randomness and looks like his surrendering to chance, it reduces Archie's possible choices to two. At the beginning of the novel, when he is searching for a parking spot to commit suicide, he approaches a forking road and "he slows down, checking his undistinguished face in the wing mirror, and quite indiscriminately choses a route he's never taken before."[126] In the car, between conscious and unconscious moments, "a little green light flashed in his eye, signalling a right turn he had resolved never to make. [...] He had flipped a coin and stood staunchly by its conclusions."[127] Heads or tails, left or right, yes or no are constantly Archie's questions and decisions which he leaves to his coin to decide. Surrendering to the will of the coin, Archie refuses to take responsibility for his decisions, or to willingly engage with others empathically. His job is the epitome of his lifestyle; he folds things in a printing firm:

> He had a good eye for the look of a thing, for the shape of a thing, and that's how he had ended up in the job at Morgan*Hero*, twenty years and counting in a printing firm in the Euston Road, designing the way all kinds of things should be *folded* – envelopes, direct mail, brochures, leaflets – not much of an achievement, maybe, but you'll find things need folds, they need to overlap, otherwise life would be like a broadsheet: flapping in the wind and down the street so you lose the important sections. Not that Archie had much time for the broadsheets. If they couldn't be bothered to fold them properly, why should he bother to read them (that's what he wanted to know)?[128]

[125] Mellet argues that Smith's overdetermined London restricts characters' paths and choices (Mellet, "'Just keep on walking in a straight line'").
[126] *WT*, 18.
[127] *WT*, 3.
[128] *WT*, 15.

The double-sidedness of symmetrical folding acts as the novel's structural principle, underlying *White Teeth*'s empathic agencies. Overlap between families, neighbourhoods, fundamentalists rarely results in empathic understanding; folds are like clashes, engendering misunderstandings and conflicts instead of fellow feeling. Magid and Millat, once good brothers, clash in every possible way; Archie and Samad never really understand each other; Samad cannot find a way to reconcile with his Islamic roots, and this results in his excessive repetitions of Mangal Pande's story.

Repetition means a failure to deal with one's past and present in *White Teeth*. Samad is confined to his failed heroic image of the past, being obsessed with his ancestor, Mangal Pande's story. He recalls comically often Mangal Pande's fortuitous, unsuccessful deed of starting a revolution, but his verbal repetition of Pande's heroic act is his way of self-validation, of coping with what he sees as an unfulfilled life. Pande's story represents his only way to a heroic life he has always imagined for himself. Ironically, it is Samad's son who attempts to act at the end of the novel, "reaching like Pande"[129] for his gun. For Peter Brooks this Forsterian "repetition plus variation" is a necessary plot device to suggest narrative progress. Brooks argues that narrative is always in a state of repetition, and that repetition acts as a process of binding and generating significance. In addition, Brooks emphasizes that repetition is also a form of remembering, thus it takes one both backward and forward, or, more precisely, it "moves us forward by taking us back."[130] In this sense, repetition itself becomes a metatextual middle, the folding line between symmetrical sides of the narrative. Samad's reiteration of Pande's story is both a "return of and a return to" his past ideals, but it is also, like Archie's track cycling, an unproductive progress without progress. *White Teeth* employs multiple "end-of-the-world" stories which act as "returns of

[129] *WT*, 533.
[130] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 125.

and to" something: Archie meets Clara at an "End of the World" party, after he is randomly saved by the butcher's assistant; Hortense Bowden, Clara's mother, strongly believes that the world will end exactly when the Jehovah's Witnesses foretell, and when their calculations fail, she hopes that next time they will be more precise. Thus repetition both ridicules and reinstates chance in Smith's highly symmetrical narratives. However, the binary structures and varied repetitions of both *White Teeth* and *On Beauty* leave little place for randomness, and randomness could allow for empathic experiences, to recall Worringer's idea of empathy.

It seems that lives in *White Teeth* are folded inwards; no unfolding, no empathic attention towards the external or the other can be made in a story where characters cannot reconcile with their pasts (or "root canals"). Symmetrical relationships are folded into parallel narrative temporalities in *White Teeth*'s chapters: Archie 1974, 1945; Samad 1984, 1857, together with the following chapters, all tell corresponding stories of the present and the past. Archie's pre-paper-folding endeavours were also constantly wrapped into circularity: he could not beat his Olympic track cycling record, scoring the exact same time at every trial. Even his heroic act of saving Dr Perret at the FutureMouse exhibition results from his circular, closed-up life: he spares the doctor's life for the first time in his youth after the war is over, and he has to perform the same act again at the exhibition, fifty years later, taking the bullet through his thigh, exactly like last time: "So Archie is there, in the trajectory of the bullet, about to do something unusual, even for TV: save the man twice and with no more reason or rhyme than the first time."[131] Archie allowed for randomness by giving a chance to the doctor one time, only to find himself in the situation of saving him again. Whether Archie's surrendering to his coin-flipping habit comes from an empathetic urge towards the other or it is pure disinterestedness or indecisiveness is questionable.

[131] *WT*, 540.

Though it seems that Archie is unable to decide in his youth, it is unclear whether his hesitation in shooting Dr Perret comes from his fear or unwillingness to kill. He feels "he could *fold* this man instead of killing him. Fold him up and put him in his pocket."[132] Saving the doctor for the second time does not reveal an empathetic urge in Archie, as he saves him for no reason whatsoever. It is as if randomness and coincidence in his life manifest themselves through unaltered repetition, folded into the same narrative patterns. He gets the bullet through his thigh and falls onto the glass box of the exhibited mouse, setting the mouse free. Unlike the rewritten concert scene of *On Beauty*, this ending is not a reiteration of Forsterian homage. Though it could be considered an optimistic, Forsterian ending, with Irie's baby who can hope for a society where roots do not matter anymore, and she can feel "free as […] a puppet clipped of paternal stings,"[133] the novel ends with chaos, distraction, and ultimately, a denial of randomness. Archie carefully traces the mouse's scurrying and thinks that at least the mouse is set free from its determined circles: "*Go on my son!*"[134] However, the mouse is already pre-programmed to live the life of its engineered genes, and as such, it cannot escape into unpredictability. It can only escape its viewers' confirmation of the experiment's success or knowledge of what happens next.

This classic, highly orchestrated ending is a gathering of mutually exclusive interests or pseudo-empathies. An intense care for the mouse is, conversely, fuelled by an exaggerated misanthropy: several groups hate Chalfen's genetic experiment for different reasons. Millat and his extremist gang plan a gun attack on an apparently religious basis; the environmentally-minded Joshua Chalfen actually feels betrayed by his father (and his family in general) who chooses to admire Magid; the Joneses and the Iqbals feel they have lost their children to the Chalfens; Hortense Bowden, Clara's mother, and Ryan Topps, her childhood

[132] *WT*, 534.
[133] *WT*, 541.
[134] *WT*, 542.

love, see it as an end of the world testimony. This sets Magid, who helps Chalfen, and Millat into further opposition, amplifying the misunderstandings between the children's families and the Chalfens, and, within the Chalfens, between Marcus and Joshua. All those characters who actually care for the mouse do so because of their belief in life's randomness, but they fail to apply this knowledge in their relationships with others.

At the beginning of the exhibition, it is not the mouse in its glass box that grabs Archie's attention; he is more interested in the *s* shaped chairs in the room. Looking at the chairs, he realises that he has never been involved into anything at such a high level of design: "there's these chairs, plastic but without legs, curved like an *s*; they seem to work by means of their own fold; and they fit together, about a hundred of them in rows; and they snake around you when you sit in them – soft yet supportive! Comfy! Modern! And you've got to admire folding like that, Archie thinks, lowering himself to one, a far higher level of folding than he'd ever been involved with. *Very nice.*"[135] Archie admires precise folding in a narrative which is about the external, visible surfaces of folds between narrative temporalities, between geographically determined friendships, and between non-empathic experiences. Archie's coin is the epitome of folding, for it represents two sides of the same thing without revealing any connection between its sides. However, *White Teeth* occasionally reveals what keeps the fold's inner sides (the ones which face each other) together showing how the novel "works by means of its own fold" like the folded chairs in the exhibition room. The FutureMouse scene, even though embedded in multiple parallels between past and present (Archie, Samad, and Millat), reveals the truth about Archie and Samad's friendship. Archie gets in between the fold: "he is *there*, he is there with no coin to help him, he is there with no alibi, he is there between Millat Iqbal's decision and his target, like the movement between thought and speech, like the split-second intervention of

[135] *WT*, 520.

memory or regret."[136] This moment itself is textually located between Archie's recalling of the scene from his past, and the novel's "endgames," acting as another fold in the narrative. Though Archie and Samad are best friends, they do not empathize with each other. Samad only realizes at the end of the novel that Archie has lied to him for decades:

> the cornerstone of their friendship was made of nothing more firm than marshmallow and soap bubbles. That there is far, far more to Archibald Jones than he had ever imagined. He realizes everything at once [...]. And then, [...] he gets to the fundamental truth of it, the anagnorisis: *This incident alone will keep us two old boys going for the next forty years.* It is the story to end all stories.[137]

Their shared secretive marginalized war story (they did not know that the war was over for months) thus turns out to be based on false grounds. A reiteration of the event in front of a large public is needed to clarify Archie's character for Samad after almost half a century. For Samad, Archie resembles a student in need of constant guidance; for Archie, Samad is his unattainable mentor. Their view of the other exemplifies one of the major critiques of empathic experience: the fact that one cannot imagine another's situation as the other, but only as oneself. Samad cannot understand that Archie was incapable of killing the doctor in their youth. For him, as for Archie, empathic understanding concentrates on their own selves; even though they try to understand the situation as the other would, they are confined to their own polarized perspectives. But this is good in the conception of the novel; they can be friends without an empathic understanding of the another's situation.

Smith uses the example of symmetrical folding to symbolize the fact that lives in *White Teeth* only overlap, they do not engage in an empathetic exchange.[138] Just as Archie does not like to look at unfolded large broadsheets, characters are incapable of a panoramic, expansive, evenly poised attention. Broadsheets give a wider perspective to their reader, but Archie only wants foldable things, perfectly folded, so one page, rather than uncovering the

[136] *WT*, 533.
[137] *WT*, 532–533.
[138] As *On Beauty*'s epigraph states: "We refuse to be each other."

truth, simply covers the other. The end of the novel reinscribes its dual perspectives by literally dividing the public at the exhibition into two groups: "those whose eyes fell upon a bleeding man, slumped across a table, and those who watched the getaway of a small brown rebel mouse."[139] This suggests that the public cannot feel for both the man and the mouse, thus cannot exercise an empathic evenly-hovering, inclusive attention. It has to be one or the other, in a similar way that every event, relationship, and place has its symmetrical counterpart in the novel. It is ultimately the narrative's forceful symmetrical format that denies the possibility of empathic exchange between characters.

Smith's wish to sidestep empathic frames is also visible in *Swing Time*. Here the narrator has no name, because, as Smith explains in one of her interviews, she did not want to pin down or define her character:

> it's within my capacities and interest to write a very different kind of narrator; like the kind of narrator we have become very familiar with who is a personality in themselves […] kind of *A Confederacy of Dunces* type arc of character. And I think for me it was a kind of personal objection […]. I felt that at the moment that kind of persona […] is very very common in the culture […]. I wanted to write something existential, I wanted to write about being alive rather than performing a personality to somebody. So I just left her completely empty, I wanted it to be empty. And the things that make her a person are the decisions she makes […] and your reader is left quite free to judge her, but I wanted it that way rather than 'here's an incredibly charming, funny person who maybe as a reader you are like or not like, you relate to or don't relate to.' I kind of wanted to cut that all off at the pass. Not that I don't think it's a worthwhile relation, but I think there's so much of in the culture that maybe it would be okay not to have it my novel, to try and pursue something else.[140]

The narrator's namelessness dismisses reader's empathy symbolically, for Smith does not aim to create a narrator who is empathically relatable. The narrator in turn confesses that when looking at her favourite musicals, she is not interested in the plot: "The opera-like comings and goings, the reversals of fortune, the outrageous meet cute coincidences […]. To me they were only roads leading to the dance. The story was the price you paid for the

[139] *WT*, 541.
[140] Zadie Smith, interview with Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, 92Y, December 8, 2016, accessed April 10, 2016, http://92yondemand.org/zadie-smith-reads-new-work-swing-time.

rhythm."[141] Contrary to this, through rewriting Forsterian randomness and coincidence, Smith deliberately sacrifices empathy for narrative design.

Smith's experiment with Forster's narrative design itself sets up symmetries with Forster's novels, without banalising them. Smith's dramatization of detail amounts to an urban landscape free from the moral necessity of empathic understanding. Characters do not empathise with each other, they coexist, and Archie's and Samad's friendship means that there are good ways of being in the world besides empathic relationships. ("Only connect," Smith echoes Forster, without going further than that.) This distance from empathic projection chimes with Paul Bloom's recent critique of empathy. Bloom argues for a less affectively involved, more rational take on human relationships, where rational compassion seems more useful than empathic involvement.[142] Smith's dramatization of Forster's narrative design leads to an experiment in rewriting realism, asking how far can one take Forsterian tension between coincidence and symmetrical relationships or juxtapose geometrical precision and randomness and still give a convincing model of contemporary urban life. Smith essentially articulates a Forsterian dilemma to find a balance between restrictive narrative form and a realistic description of characters, embedded in a modernist motivation to create coexistent lives in the city. For Smith, this Forsterian dilemma ultimately becomes liberating; flattening out empathies is a way into creatively and sociologically more freeing intersubjective and aesthetic relations.

[141] *ST*, 24.
[142] Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (London: Random House, 2017).

Conclusion: Modernist exercises in attention

In 1983, a famous Hungarian novelist Péter Esterházy made a very interesting tribute to the celebrated late modernist and alleged forefather of a generation of contemporary Hungarian novelists, Géza Ottlik (1912–1990), for his seventieth birthday. He transcribed Ottlik's four-hundred-page seminal novel on to a single piece of paper, layering text on text. The paper acquired a solid black texture, visually thick from all the layers of writing on it. It is intricate if looked at closely; homogenously black if viewed from a distance. Esterházy admits that after a while he realised that he had got himself into a very tiring enterprise, but he decided to follow through with his plan. Ottlik, needless to say, was surprised by the gesture, and not quite sure how to take it. After all, his novel was lost, made unintelligible in this dense transcription. Esterházy explained that he simply wanted to offer him a substantial present, and knew that words written on top of each other create beautiful patterns. However, he mentions in one of his interviews, while writing it he realised that rewriting this novel had been a valuable exercise in Ottlik's rhythmic thought and sentence patterns and language.[1] It had also become a morning ritual, an at times automatic task that governed his days during the three hundred and sixty hours he spent transcribing the text.

Esterházy's gesture reveals many ideas about the nature of transcription and repetition, about the possibilities of rewriting, about the physicality and frailty of homage, influence, and inheritance, and about a symbolic release from them. Connecting all these implications is, very distinctly, a careful, rigorous exercise in empathic attention. As we have seen, early empathy theorists defined empathy as affective-cognitive and motoric imitation, an imaginative "acting out" of the forms and shapes of a work of art, the stories of an object, or the situation of another person. We have seen how, in *A Room with a View*,

[1] Péter Esterházy, interview with Erzsébet Schäffer, *http://ludens.elte.hu/~tir/nov/ester.htm.*

Lucy's performance on the piano showed a specific form of empathic imitation as musical performance, where, as Forster clarified, playing the piano does not mean a transcendental empathic unity with the composer. It rather reflects a tactile practice in listening to and understanding the composer's taste, style, and minute gestures through concentrated attention and rigorous repetition. To recall Forster's words, his own "performances upon the piano" inevitably "compel me to attend […] and they drain off all non-musical matter […]. Playing Beethoven, as I generally do, I grow familiar with his tricks, his impatience, his sudden softnesses […]. This gives me a physical approach to Beethoven which cannot be gained through the slough of 'appreciation.' Even when people play as badly as I do, they should continue: it will help them to listen."[2] Playing Beethoven, then, is a practical, embodied reconnection with his "creative process." Esterházy's transcription of Ottlik's text is a very similar performance, a "physical" focus and practice in listening that surpasses the "slough of 'appreciation,'" redrawing uncertain lines between literary inheritance and irreverence. Rewriting Ottlik's novel into a black, textured image is a patient, thorough, and demanding exercise in attention, rather than an obliteration of the original work of art. Though it seems like an aggressive act of rewriting as well as an act of homage, Esterházy's intent was not, of course, to obliterate Ottlik's novel; he rather demonstrated a minute empathic attention to the text. A very similar careful training in empathic attention defines Ian McEwan's, Ciaran Carson's, and Zadie Smith's rewriting of modernism. For them, empathic rewriting offers a Forsterian tactile grasp of modernism.

This thesis has shown how their close attention to modernist perceptions and representations of empathy and the modernist novel's attentional demands has been a central creative force in their novels. Just as in Carson's "The Exiles' Club" a group of Irish emigrants in Australia consciously recall and reconstruct the minutest details of their past

[2] Forster, "Not Listening to Music," 136.

everyday lives in Belfast, these contemporary novelists extend a patient attention to recall, reimagine, and bring into their novels the objects and everyday of modernist thought. And they are doing so because they see modernism as a useful formal and philosophical predecessor in dealing with their concern for empathy and attention.

Their experiments with the creative expansiveness of modernism happen through a *detailed* attention: McEwan attends to Woolfian self–other and subject–object relations, carefully repositioning scenes, vases, and windows into his novels; Carson reworks Joycean colour, word, and thought-patterns; Smith focuses on Forster's musical and narrative symmetries and representations of randomness in relation to empathic attunement with art. In all these cases, the very closeness of attention to the modernist text proves creatively most productive. It steers these rewritings away from the pitfalls of pastiche, because these modernist details and concerns with empathy are inherent to their novels, resonating with the narrative, thematic, and formal anxieties of contemporary fiction. They are not embellishments or decorations of the texts, they are its very material. This is perhaps most visible in the case of Carson, who subtly reworks the kinds of empathic associations *Ulysses* makes between, for example, the shape, material, and sound of a colour. Here Carson, just like McEwan and Smith in their rewritings, reclaims modernist ways of thinking alongside formal characteristics.

My chapters' analysis of different levels of closeness or intensity of attention in McEwan's, Carson's, and Smith's rewriting of modernist texts has also revealed these novelists' predominant approaches to modernism. I have argued that McEwan exaggerates the ordering tendencies of Woolfian characters, Carson miniaturises Joycean encyclopaedism, and Smith dramatizes the tension between Forsterian control and randomness in reclaiming the rich history of empathic thought. These approaches inevitably create certain versions of modernism. McEwan reads Woolf's modernism through her

representation of interiority and perspectival shifts; Carson works with a Joycean modernism characterised by excessive associative patterns; and Smith sees Forsterian musical empathy imbued with narrative design as her version of modernism. In all these cases, McEwan, Carson, and Smith are attentive to modernist fascination and crises about different forms of empathy.

Initially, we would expect that contemporary novelists' predominant concern with empathy would ultimately cause them to turn modernism into a much more humanistic and sentimental project than modernists themselves conceived it to be. However, McEwan's, Carson's, and Smith's complex understandings of empathy do not necessarily exhibit a homogenous sentimental humanist modernist project that is continuous with a nineteenth-century literary sensibility. Their consideration of intersubjective, potentially sentimental models of empathy goes hand in hand with a thorough formal and thematic interrogation of the process of aesthetic attention. They explore collisions between aesthetic and interpersonal forms of empathy, where aesthetic empathy to things often involves an almost impersonal, detached, alienated attention. In the last chapter, Zadie Smith's essential reconnection with the modernist project happens through an abandonment of moral versions of empathy, recalling a more authentically modernist project of writing and creating coexistent lives in the city. Whilst these authors criticize moralising versions of empathy, they also show that an aestheticized thinking or looking at things does not exclude notions of care. In these cases, novelists knowingly or unconsciously reintegrate a critical image of the modernist novels' ethical and aesthetic quests.

Smith talks most explicitly about the kinds of freedom from moral empathic excess, narrative control, and ideologies that her writing aspires to. She mentions, we remember, that her novels create "a mixed reality," questioning the "liberties and exigencies" of reading

and writing.[3] Her staging of clashes between narrative control and contingency, alongside Carson's and McEwan's very similar concerns, are a way of conceptualising forms of attentional, empathic, and creative freedom in relation to fixed structures of thought and narrative patterns.

This call for freedom, one might think, simply rehearses Romantic conceptions of literature as a refuge from reality. It points, however, to serious considerations of what it means to write in a post-truth world. Carson, Smith, and McEwan are aware that balancing different forms of freedom and constraint has become an increasingly dangerous enterprise. Their novels are also probing how empathic exchanges can happen in the present moment – as Saul Bellow's *Herzog* thinks in *Saturday*'s epigraph – "Under organised power. Subject to tremendous controls" under "the pressure of human millions." In their sense, a literature beyond postmodernism, besides its drive towards ideals of reconstruction and a new belief in grand narratives, is intensely aware of the deterministic socio-political patterns that this faith in reconstructing certainties involves.

McEwan's, Carson's, and Smith's preoccupation with forms of narrative, creative, and attentional freedom is integral to their expansive view of empathy as artistic, formal, intersubjective, and objective attunement. Their wide-reaching concept of empathy has contributed to their encouragement of a more patient way of reading. They propose a thorough, evenly-hovering, unfixed attention to reading modernism and their own works that hovers between distraction and attention to accommodate but also broaden, twenty-first-century attention spans. Carson's gradual accumulation of details and serendipitous associations is one of the most important examples here, because it stages the ways in which reading Joyce is an almost simultaneous process of zooming in and out (to the details and the contexts) of the text. His attention to Joycean lists ultimately attests to how this

[3] Zadie Smith, *Feel Free* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2018), xii.

panoramic, evenly-hovering attention works in a gradually unfolding narrative sequence – the list, and the novel itself.

This thesis aimed to show how McEwan's, Carson's, and Smith's wide-ranging concept of empathy defines their version of modernism, and how this rewriting is in essence, just like Esterházy's transcription, a very precise and careful attention to and an exercise in the narrative and thought patterns of modernism. To metaphorically extend Esterházy's gesture that turns text into image, these contemporary novelists, rather than offering a visually impenetrable image of the modernist novel, expound the attentional mechanisms through which they unravel its layers. In their hands, the glossy black, lacey-wired tangibility of the Ottlik novel unfolds through time in the process of attention, revealing the expansiveness of the modernist text. This double move – rewriting while unravelling – defines contemporary novelists' reworking of modernism. Ultimately, by articulating modernism's empathic concerns in the twenty-first-century, they extend our notions of what it means to write and read with a patient, expansive, and caring attentiveness.

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