

# Growing Up Globally: Form and Genre in the Anglophone Bildungsroman

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Abstract: The scholarship surrounding the anglophone Bildungsroman has been to this point largely divided by national and periodized boundaries. This approach to the coming-of-age novel highlights tightly-knit clusters of texts that share geospatial contexts but precludes the possibility that texts from outside these demarcated groupings share essential features that might transcend the borders of nations and literary periods. In the supposed age of literary cosmopolitanism, it is perhaps time for a new approach to the Bildungsroman. I contest that, by approaching various Bildungsromane on the level of their form and structure, new constellations of texts emerge that bring forth new questions and challenges to the conventional narrative of the rise and fall of the Bildungsroman throughout the long history of the novel globally. Each of the texts I discuss fuses a common literary form—the oral tale, the Gothic, literary naturalism, the national allegory—with the coming-of-age novel which inflects and informs its familiar plot, creating cross-cultural and cross-temporal patterns as practitioners of the genre take it up in vastly different circumstances and contexts. Each manifestation of these hybrid Bildungsromane represents new fields on which the experimental potentialities for individual subjectivity and agency in modernity might ensue, from the early 1840s to the turn of the twenty-first century. In texts which incorporate the chronotope of the oral tale,

I argue that authors use the genre to create space for individual agency in a globalizing world. In the inclusion of the Gothic, I suggest, the Bildungsroman resituates the human on the periphery of the text, thrumming with increasingly animate places and things that crowd the individual subject out of her own development. I then question the entropy spirals present in literary naturalism as they temper and trouble the linear development plot, and offer insights into texts that use this fused form to preclude Bildung and texts that use the forces of naturalism to create subterranean structural narratives that reassert its latent potential. I then take the national allegory, a genre with a complex relationship to the Bildungsroman, and argue that the individual subject comes to hold an almost mythic position which comes to be either dissolved or monstrously reasserted in dark reflections of late colonial and postcolonial national imaginations. Finally, I argue that through fantastical realism, a utopian formal play emerges in the narration of the Bildungsroman that creates the narrative space for unique representations of multilayered, open-ended identities at the end of the text.

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## **DEDICATION**

For Mom, Dad, Grandma, and Grandpa, who read to me. And for Kristina and Rufus,  
who were there every step of the way.

## INTRODUCTION: A COSMOPOLITAN APPROACH TO THE BILDUNGSROMAN

It is likely fair to say that more ink has been spilled writing about the Bildungsroman than has been used writing Bildungsromane. The genre, the name of which is infamously difficult to accurately translate from German, has come to represent one of the most popular subfields in literary studies as well as one of the thorniest: debates have abounded for close to a century about what novels might count as Bildungsromane, which subsets of texts are precluded definitionally, and, in some cases, whether the genre really exists at all. Some scholars push for a very narrow definition that threatens to vanish into nothing, citing the supposedly standard generic elements that, in the actual corpus of novels, never quite manifest in any one platonic text (Redfield). Others have suggested a wider set of texts, incorporating those novels that fall more broadly under the “coming-of-age” umbrella, a much greater number that, in turn, threatens to spill over into incoherence because of the sheer quantity of material that might be categorized collectively as Bildungsromane (Graham). This introduction will provide an overview of some of the positions taken by influential thinkers across philosophy and literary studies before proceeding to an outline of what I hope is not another study determining the limits of the Bildungsroman, but rather, a novel approach to an infamous novelistic genre that traces its manifestations through the centuries and across the continents.

Most writers on the Bildungsroman tend to agree that it begins formally with Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*), his 1795 novel

of vocation, but beyond that ur-text, all bets are off. Wilhelm's familiar struggles in interpersonal relationships, his aspiring acting career, his life and dreams of learning in the Tower, and his gradual maturation make up the raw material of the thousands of novels that would follow in its wake, all, to some extent, owing debts to Goethe's original model. Thus, so the story goes, Goethe writes a text that puts to paper the energies of modernity, modern thought, and life successfully lived, and later authors from Charles Dickens to V.S. Naipaul picked up the pen decades or centuries later to write into being, essentially, Wilhelm's children and grandchildren, spread across the world but still carrying in their genetic legacy the thoughts, dreams, mores, and spark of potential they have inherited from Goethe's *Bildungsheld*. The map laid out, the waters of modern life charted, Wilhelm struggles so that his struggling might provide a model for what Goethe likely could never have dreamed would erupt from his text.

This story is charming in no small part because morphologically it resembles the *Bildungsroman* itself: one generation struggles, strives, and imparts wisdom and guidance to the next generation who have yet to undergo their own *Bildung*. There is a distinctly stagist flavor to it: out from Germany, to France, England, Italy, Russia, and later out into the colonies and post-colonial states that rise after the great empires wane. Ironically, this narrative rarely makes it beyond the introductions of many of the manuscripts on the *Bildungsroman*. Despite the genre privileging continuity through its focalizing biographical form, most studies of the *Bildungsroman* draw attention to

*discontinuity*: some use conventional period markers, others national borders, and still others biographical details and identity categories, but all studies to date, by my reckoning, attempt to divide the genre up so that it is at once more manageable (there are fewer texts to consider after *Wilhelm* that “count”), and so that the point of rupture from Goethe’s original presents a unique jumping-off and landing point for yet another study on the Bildungsroman. These monographs and articles have proliferated over the years: any interested party might find studies of the Bildungsroman in its original German context (Swales), studies that consider the German novels from Goethe to Mann and beyond, pan-European studies pointing towards discontinuity between national traditions (Moretti), tracts on the “modernist” or “postcolonial” Bildungsroman, both working within and without the frame of national tradition models (Esty and Castle, respectively), as well as texts on the African Bildungsroman (Austen), Native American Bildungsroman (Enrique), and more.

In the subsequent pages, I will provide an overview of the scholarship as it stands, and offer some preliminary thoughts on the comprehensive and excellent work done by scholars from the early twentieth century to the present. Before doing so, I will offer a possibility that will be taken up at extensive length throughout this project: what if, like *Wilhelm*, we privilege continuity, exploration, and potentiality over divides and discontinuity? This would entail moving across national borders and across the borders of conventionally defined literary periods, putting authors and their novels into conversation

because of a shared commitment to the Bildungsroman as a *form*, inflected and informed by other genres but still, at the core, participating in the centuries-old tradition of Bildung. There is a familiar risk of conflating texts, arguing in a misinformed vein that these novels all “do the same thing” or can be charted into a schema that, like Casaubon’s ill-fated *Key to All Mythologies*, collapses all difference and ignores specificity. I believe, however, that the Bildungsroman has shown its adaptability in the primary and secondary literature, and that the genre offers a gateway into a historically informed, historically conscious formalism. This methodology would draw from adaptations of literary forms that novelists share, creating new arrays of novels that would have lived literary lives isolated from each other without this shared generic mesh.

This, really, is what is at stake: I propose a cosmopolitan approach to the Bildungsroman, connecting texts to a wider global tradition using the twin lenses of genre and form. The authors I treat in this study all turn to the Bildungsroman as the form most suited to represent and make sense of modernity as they perceive it, with all the messiness and incongruities inherent in “modernity” as it manifests across the anglophone world from England to its former colonies and beyond. Novelists do so by fusing the Bildungsroman with other established literary genres, ranging from the oral tale to the Gothic, bringing together their national heritages and a globe-spanning literary tradition that exploded far beyond Germany in the eighteenth century. The novels, each a generic fusion, can be clustered together through their authors’ appropriation of the

Bildungsroman in their unique sociohistorical contexts without adhering to conventional literary periods or working within national borders. Through the heteroglossia of the novel form, novels and their authors might be brought together through their adaptations and distortions of the teleological Bildung plot.

### **Building on the Bildungsroman: The Field to Date**

It is prudent to provide a brief sketch of the work done to date on the Bildungsroman, beginning with various definitions of the genre and its supposed function before moving to some of the typical types of studies that inform this project. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the Bildungsroman “can be designated in the most general sense as the novel of human *emergence*,” bringing the single human life into the ideological center of the novelistic storyworld (“The *Bildungsroman*” 21). In these novels, he continues, changes “in the hero himself acquire *plot* significance, and thus the entire plot of the novel is reinterpreted and reconstructed. Time is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his destiny and life” (21). Joseph Slaughter, in *Human Rights, Inc.*, writes that “the plot and form of the classical *Bildungsroman* bridges the transition from ritual, feudal, agricultural and cyclical time to modern, secular historical time, when evolution itself becomes the dominant hermeneutic for plotting human social events and establishes the syntactical patterns by which similarity and difference may be identified across time” (109). Jeffrey Sammons suggests that the form takes an “early bourgeois, humanistic concept of the

shaping of the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of modernity” and, of course, maturity (“The Bildungsroman” 41). Lisa Downward and Giovanna Summerfield remark that “the concept of Bildung is highly nuanced, and at times contradictory from its inception, as it is defined as both religious (Pietist), and secular and encompasses both the passivity and activity of humans in their development” (2).

Despite the diverse plots that feature in these novels, Jerome Buckley, in his 1974 study, outlines key elements that recur throughout the corpus of Bildungsromane: “childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy” (18). In what is likely the most influential study to date, Franco Moretti’s bravura *The Way of the World*, Moretti argues that the Bildungsroman emerges as the “symbolic form” of modernity and modern life, lending it the “‘formlessness’ of the new epoch” (5). In these novels, and unlike “the usual nineteenth-century novel...the ending and the aim of narration coincide...The happy ending, in its highest form, is not a dubious ‘success’, but this triumph of meaning over time” (Moretti 55). For Moretti, the Bildungsroman “will of necessity be *intrinsically contradictory*” because it attempts to contain youth’s boundless dynamic potential in a readable form while using that potential to give shape to the experience of modernity (6, emphasis in original). All of the above studies draw at least implicitly from Hegel, who stated in his lectures that in “the modern world [the hero’s]

struggles are nothing more than years of apprenticeship [*Lehrjahre*]...and thereby acquire their true significance” (Vol 1. 593). Throughout this apprenticeship, “the subject sows his wild oats, accommodates himself with his wishes and opinions to existing relationships and their rationality, enters the concatenation of the world, and acquires for himself an appropriate attitude to it” (Vol. 1 593).

Despite what seems a strong definitional framework, much debate has abounded concerning which novels to include (or exclude) in the category “Bildungsroman.” Moretti, for example, suggests that the Bildungsroman was dead and buried by the First World War, and had been a zombified form for several decades prior. His erudite monograph begins with Wilhelm and ends, largely, by the mid-nineteenth century. Buckley, by contrast, moves from Dickens to Lawrence to Hardy and is more open to a broader temporal span than Moretti. James Hardin, in the introduction to his monograph, writes that “hardly any other term is applied more frequently to a novelistic form and scarcely any is used more imprecisely” (x). Similarly and famously, Marc Redfield writes that “the *Bildungsroman* seems to constitute one of those quagmires of literary study in which increased rigor produces nothing more tangible than increased confusion...is certainly true that under the lens of scholarship this genre rapidly shrinks until, like a figure in Wonderland, it threatens to disappear altogether. Even *Wilhelm Meister* has proved resistant to being subsumed under the definition it supposedly inspired” (Redfield 41). Despite this, Redfield writes, monographs “on the

*Bildungsroman* appear regularly; without exception they possess introductory chapters in which the genre is characterized as a problem, but as one that the critic, for one reason or another, plans either to solve or ignore; and despite the variety of solutions proffered, the definition of the *Bildungsroman* that emerges in study after study usually repeats...the self-referential structure of...aesthetic synthesis” (41-42).

Redfield is looking backward at previous studies, but his suggestion is also quite prescient, and the questions of definition and scope persist some thirty years later. Perhaps, somewhat facetiously argued by Jeffrey Sammons, the *Bildungsroman* genre consists only of “*Wilhelm Meister* and maybe two and a half other examples” (237). On the other extreme, the narrative elements Buckley lists might lead us to a definition that is, simply, “a novel about a young person facing the challenges of growing up,” stripping it of its specific late-eighteenth-century German context, but considerably opening the pool of novels one might think of as *Bildungsromane* (Graham 1). Most scholars, Michael Ormsbee writes, “seek a middle ground for their working definitions, one that allows them to include at least *some* narratives without the apparently embarrassing necessity of including them all” (Ormsbee 1956). Todd Kontje, taking a refreshing approach, wrote that he would “not rehearse the tired debate as to whether or not particular texts examined here ‘count’ as *Bildungsromane*. Obviously I think they do” (Kontje 17).

Kontje's approach is perhaps the most generative because it avoids the needlessly apologetic disclaimers that tend to populate the introductions of studies of the Bildungsroman. Rarely if ever are such rigid boundaries drawn around sets of texts in, say, studies of detective fiction, or science fiction: it would seem to me silly to spend pages and time quibbling over whether Wilkie Collins reaches some universal truth in *The Moonstone* that Arthur Conan Doyle does not in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, disqualifying Sherlock Holmes from the title of detective. Even if some of the generic elements do not translate across time, or if authors adapt or subvert them, generations of readers have taken Collins, Doyle, and Agatha Christie in continuity with each other.

Rather than dismissing a century of Bildungsroman scholarship, Kontje is in actuality returning to the argument made by the originator of the term "Bildungsroman," the somewhat obscure German philosopher Johann Morgenstern. Speaking in the early nineteenth century, and in theory in the prime position to create a narrow and exclusionary definition of Bildung shortly after Goethe's ur-text was written, Morgenstern does precisely the opposite: he argues that

We may call a novel a *Bildungsroman* first and foremost on account of its content, because it represents the development of the hero in its beginning and progress to a certain stage of completion, but also, second, because this depiction promotes the development of the reader to a greater extent than any other kind of novel. The objective and work-encompassing goal of any poet

who produces such a novel will be the pleasurable, beautiful, and entertaining depiction of the formative history of a protagonist who is especially suited to such a development...the poet is at the same time a human being who...strives in his capacity as a human being to follow the foundational law of morals and to aim for the good in himself and in others. For this reason, the novelist will wisely aim to unite the purpose of art, which is to please and to entertain by means of the beautiful, with the strictly human purpose to serve, to instruct, and to better—in a word, to *form* [*bilden*]"

(Morgenstern 654-655).

He suggests that these texts might be “drawn not only from German but also from Italian, Spanish, French, and British literature” (Morgenstern 658). Tobias Boes, who translated Morgenstern’s lecture, claims that the philosopher “regards the *Bildungsroman* as a universal subcategory of the modern novel and supports his definition with references to an astounding variety of novels from a number of national traditions” (“Introduction” 648). Citing its “sweeping scope and almost utopian enthusiasm,” Boes sees in this lecture an invitation to continue expanding the scope of the *Bildungsroman* to include texts written not only after Morgenstern but also after the nineteenth century and beyond (“Introduction” 648).

Despite this early invitation to consider the *Bildungsroman* as a potentially globetrotting and open novelistic subgenre, and perhaps because of the scholarship

admonishing uses of the term as an unstable, evolving classification category, most studies to date break the corpus of Bildungsromane down and focus on smaller geographic or temporal areas, often distilling a smaller subset of coming-of-age novels to a more localized essential identity. It is not at all uncommon to designate *Wilhelm* or some other text(s) as the baseline from which the subset of treated texts will deviate in a way common to them: Wilhelm, white, male, German, of the eighteenth century, might find himself contrasted with American women of the 1910s, poor Black Caribbean men in the 1950s, or upper-middle class Russian students growing up amidst revolution. These studies are by no means flawed on account of their scope: their attention to detail and readings of the novels situate the treated texts into coherent, helpful categories such as The Irish Bildungsroman or The Postmodern Bildungsroman. However, the organizing structures they use necessarily push out other texts and divide Morgenstern's wide open ocean into clusters of harbors with strict visas required for entry. Martin Swales, for example, remarks that "the German Bildungsroman is not an easily accessible novel tradition for the Anglo-Saxon reader...its tentative relationship to practicalities, the lack of plasticity in its treatment of personal development, its obstinate tendency towards narrative discursiveness" (ix). This seems to me emblematic of the larger trend in the scholarship, and also quite reductive: there is scarcely any scholarship on the Bildungsroman that does not address German novels directly in the very first pages of the introduction. On the other hand, Swales' move makes perfect sense: he is able to stake a

claim to uniqueness, a smaller, more arcane tradition that both predates and excludes other texts from his chosen set, which includes *Wilhelm*, *The Magic Mountain*, *The Glass Bead Game*, and other German novels bridging towards the mid-twentieth century.

The national tradition model is pervasive, and many scholars other than Swales flock towards it. Moretti's study for example breaks the genre down into national European models and relegates the Russian and American traditions to long discursive notes. He suggests for example that the British (particularly, the Victorian) Bildungsroman "strives to prove, in explicitly egalitarian fashion, that *everyone*—bastard child, woman, drunk, fugitive, pauper—has the right to tell her/his side of the story, to be listened to, and to receive justice. More exactly: these novels do not simply state that everyone 'has a right' to justice; they maintain instead that everyone, in fact, *receives* justice" (Moretti 213, emphasis in original). A 19th-century British novel, to simplify Moretti's larger argument, becomes demonstrably a "Victorian Bildungsroman" because it adheres to a moralistic code Moretti reads as fundamentally Victorian. Other, more contemporary, studies in the national tradition model include Ralph Austen's "Struggling with the African Bildungsroman" and Lisa Steiner's *For Humanity's Sake: The Bildungsroman in Russian Culture*. These studies operate within the generic logic of what Jed Esty called the "soul-nation allegory," the binding of national destiny to personal biography in the Bildungsroman (39-40). The youth becomes not only a model for upward mobility and success (or failure, in some cases) but also a stand-in for the status

and merit of the nation and its civic and global projects. Thus, failed Bildung becomes the literary representation of failed nation-building, and success reflects positively on the nation and its political trajectory.

There are likewise studies that cut across time rather than space, falling into conventionally defined, widely accepted literary periods.<sup>1</sup> These periods and their definitions are of course constructs, and their construction is politically motivated: Marshall Brown reminds us that “the uses to which we put periods depend crucially on how we delimit them...The art lies in the cutting. From thence derive the kinds of stories we tell about periods” (315). From the cutting, many possible permutations of period divisions emerge. Does the nineteenth-century British Bildungsroman have one coherent identity, or should it be divided into pre-Victorian and Victorian slices? Familiar to any reader of Conrad or Wilde, should *Lord Jim* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* be best considered late manifestations of the nineteenth century, dying gasps of the waning regime, or radical texts heralding a nascent modernism? Gregory Castle’s *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* and Jed Esty’s *Unseasonable Youth* typify this genre of scholarship, negotiating space for literary modernism in the novelistic genre of modernity. In a savvy move, Esty uses the “age of empire” as the container for his chosen texts, indicating what he calls a “multipronged discursive model centered in the 1880-1920 period” (22). This distinction helps to connect Esty’s chosen literary period to

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<sup>1</sup> While authors of such studies might define the peak years of literary modernism, for example, differently, such studies will invariably refer to “the modernist Bildungsroman.”

actual material conditions, especially significant as he takes as his chosen subjects novels and Bildungshelden occupying liminal spaces between colonizer and colonized, empire and periphery. Sara Lyons points out the lack in Esty's study, namely that "All of [Esty's] chosen writers are of white European descent and most could, to varying and complicated degrees, be considered beneficiaries or agents of colonialism, rather than victims of it" (Lyons 9). Thus, a study that might have used its temporal scope as a way to liberate the Bildungsroman from its original European context could be argued to reinforce such a reading by virtue of the canonical authors Esty takes up. Lyons' point is well-taken, and she is certainly correct to point out that even Esty's chosen "colonial" authors write very close geographically to the center of the British Empire. On the other hand, Esty paves a road that is very helpful, namely that a discursive model might be given order if another lens is used to organize what seems at first to be a random selection of texts.

Also worth considering about the periodized studies are the politics that enter into the period delineations. Susan Stanford Friedman is quick to point out that period categories such as modernism often lead to a "pernicious effect on modernisms outside the West," removing "agencies of writers, artists, philosophers, and other cultural producers in the emergent postcolonial world just as their new modernities are being formed" (427). She advocates "a move from singularities to pluralities of space and time, from exclusivist formulations of modernity and modernisms to ones based on global linkages" in modernist studies, which is a move that would likewise be beneficial in

formulating more cosmopolitan approaches to the Bildungsroman (426). Nathan Brown, investigating the Marxist model of periods (pre-modern, modern, late-modern, postmodern), offers an alternative periodization that I find particularly useful, extending “modernism” through the present, arguing that, rather than a clean break from modernity in “postmodernism,” we are still firmly in late modernity (17). From Moretti’s model of the Bildungsroman as a genre inextricably linked with modernity and the experience of living in it, then, the lifespan of the form might actually run longer than Moretti initially theorized, and its several of its most formally radical practitioners might emerge from cultures he precluded because of the temporal and spatial limits of his study. Authors across the globe and in a variety of positions relative to the global empires of the nineteenth century might turn to the Bildungsroman to represent the experience of *their* modernity, one data point amongst the many that make up the myriad modernities across the centuries and the planet.

There is another type of study I am somewhat more skeptical of: those that use as their corpus texts centered on Bildungshelden who share one or more immutable identity categories and, perhaps reductively, distill essential truths from the matrix of novels selected. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland’s influential *The Voyage In* offers one such model, and certainly, one of the stronger exemplars of the identity-driven study, integrating “gender with genre” by identifying “distinctively female versions of the *Bildungsroman*” (5). Admirably, their study takes the genre from its

earliest roots to contemporary texts, tracking changes over time and in many cultural contexts. Other scholarly texts in this mold include Penny Brown's *The Poison at the Source*, which takes up female-authored Bildungsromane with a female Bildungsheld, all written by British women writers of the early twentieth century; Susan Friaman's *Unbecoming Women*, considering authors including Austen, Brontë, Eliot, and Fanny Burney; Sarah Bolaki's *Unsettling the Bildungsroman*, wherein she reads contemporary American ethnic women's fiction. In addition to gendered readings of Bildung, texts such as Greta LeSeur's influential *Ten is the Age of Darkness* and Bonnie Wasserman's recent *Coming of Age in the Afro-Latin American Novel* consider racial identity categories, uniting texts and authors under the banner of shared ethnicity. These studies tend to be somewhat limited because, like the national traditional reading of the Bildungsroman, they privilege continuity within the chosen corpus of texts, but reject continuity beyond that scope. There might be, to create a sense of continuity across texts through identity, a through-line connecting Nella Larsen to Toni Morrison, but not to Tsitsi Dangarembga, or through Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri but not, say, V.S. Naipaul. Bolaki's text, interestingly, makes note of the "contact zones between genres," something which will greatly inform this study, but, by her own admission, takes "the *Bildungsroman* as a more or less stable vessel or container in which all the other forms are being poured, creating a certain power relationship" (13). What I hope to unsettle in this helpful reading of the Bildungsroman is the hierarchical relationship that Bolaki gestures towards: it is

precisely, I will contest, the “contact zones” between forms, literary traditions, and texts which unsettles the primacy of the Bildungsroman as a Western novelistic genre, repurposing its telos for new voices and new audiences.

These studies are helpful, thought-provoking, and, frankly, extremely comprehensive. My intention is to provide a sketch of the work done to date without dismissing it outright: there are hundreds of authors and texts I leave unmentioned, as even a cursory search of preexisting scholarship makes clear that there is simply too much material to give ample credit and space to each project predating this one. There is hardly a national tradition, identity group, or slice of time that hasn’t been considered in the long history of the Bildungsroman in relative isolation. Indeed, much of the work here is dependent on the decades of scholarship that precedes this study: without the *terra firma* provided by these thinkers, I would not attempt to approach the Bildungsroman in a more global, period-spanning study. In the reading of each novel that follows, what I hope emerges is a model that takes the best from each of the aforementioned studies, accounting for the national heritage, historical and social circumstances, and identities of each author that invariably inform any reading of their work. These authors, separated by time and geography, all turned to the Bildungsroman for an explicit purpose and operated within a tradition that predates them to participate in an ongoing dialogue on citizenship, sovereignty, and the role of the individual in the shifting categories of nation, society, and globe.

## **Genre and the Globe: New Approaches to Form**

In addition to earlier studies on the Bildungsroman, I will draw from significant work on form, literary networks, genre, and, by extension, canonicity. Caroline Levine's recent book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* implicitly informs much of the work done here. Her neoformalist approach pulls from design theory and uses the concept of "affordances" to think through forms. That is to say, for example, that "A fork affords stabbing and scooping. A doorknob affords not only hardness and durability, but also turning, pushing, and pulling. Designed things may also have unexpected affordances generated by imaginative users: we may hang signs or clothes on a doorknob, for example, or use a fork to pry open a lid, and so expand the intended affordances of an object" (6). These forms are also, naturally, limited: a fork can't be used to clean a mirror or paint a fence. In literature, these forms are "abstract organizing principles" that are "portable. They can be picked up and moved to new contexts...A novelist takes from epic poetry the narrative structure of the quest" (7).

It is through form that I approach the varied Bildungsromane in this project. The authors of these novels have adapted and moved the form of the coming-of-age novel into their own contexts and for their own purposes, inflecting the plots within with other forms that warp the familiar maturation narrative. With the conventional affordances of the Bildungsroman—a focalizing force in its protagonist, a teleological plot, narrative movements, and ethical quandaries meant to educate and challenge readers—come its

limitations, namely its truncated scope (the single human life) and potential failures to live up to high standards of bourgeois success and heteronormative family making in modernity. The other literary forms that authors graft to the Bildung plot, including naturalism, the Gothic, and more, likewise bring affordances and limitations. When woven together into the narrative mesh that makes up these unorthodox novels, these fused forms draw attention to the contrivances and presuppositions that undergird the idea of Bildung, often exposing limitations in the Bildungsroman that had been paved over by careful narrative guile in the earlier novels taken as exemplars.

Wai Chee Dimock's 2006 monograph *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* has likewise proven an invaluable aid in shaping this project and provides a model for representing a broad textual corpus that bridges literary periods and national borders. It is a happy coincidence that her chosen material—American literature broadly—had roughly the same temporal range as the Bildungsroman did from Goethe to the present, approximately two and a half centuries. Dimock argues that the conception of time as a “spatialized image” with “fixed segments, fixed unit lengths, each assignable to a number” is flawed in no small part because of the “uneven pace of modernity” (2). She suggests instead, as a way to connect the relatively short life of America (and American literature) compared to not only world literatures but also deep time,

input channels, kinship networks, routes of transit, and forms of attachment—connective tissues binding America to the rest of the world. Active on both ends, they thread America[n] texts into the topical events of other cultures, while also threading the long duration of those cultures into the short chronology of the United States. This double threading thickens time, lengthens it, shadowing in its midst the abiding traces of the planet's multitudinous life.

(Dimock 3).

Dimock's use of 'traces' is particularly useful in a study of genre and generic echoes through the centuries of life a literary form might have. Even if, in the strictest understanding of the Bildungsroman, the form loses something vital as it departs Germany in the 1790s, the traces of the raw material that went into those first novels endure. There is something universal about the coming-of-age novel, even if the process of Bildung isn't itself universal or ubiquitous. In a very tangible way, to borrow Anis Bawarshi's adaptation of Foucault's author-name function, "genres are implicated in the way we experience and enact a great many of our discursive realities...Thus how we come to perceive and rhetorically act within those realities—and in doing so, how we reproduce these realities and ourselves within different kinds of texts—become relevant questions to the study of genre" (339). The awareness of the Bildungsroman—at any point, on any continent, in any language—informs future Bildungsromane, and gives recognizable shape to the story forms that take up the phenomenological questions

surrounding the individual wading into the seas of modern life. For Dimock, this cross-cultural thinking contributes to a “loosening up” of “the chronology and geology of the nation” (4). More than that, it lights the path toward a genuinely cosmopolitan textual network through the pairing of genre and form.

Tobias Boes writes that current theories of cosmopolitanism “tend to focus no longer on ‘the world’ in its planetary sense, but rather on ‘worlds’ in the plural—on shifting spaces (both actual and conceptual) that cut across national borders and provide a home to the cosmopolitan individual” (*Formative Fictions* 32). Form and genre offer a way to navigate these shifting spaces, lenses through which similarities and differences emerge between seemingly disparate spaces and periods. In what David Damrosch called a “Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age,” it is now more important than ever to revitalize formalist approaches to literature, paving a continuity across continents that includes a polyphony of voices (43). In his influential theory of genre, Tzvetan Todorov argues that

Dealing with any text belonging to ‘literature,’ we must take into account a double requirement. First, we must be aware that it manifests properties that it shares with all literary texts, or with texts belonging to one of the sub-groups of literature (which we call, precisely, genres) ... Second, we must understand that a text is not only the product of a pre-existing combinational system (constituted by all that is literature *in posse*); it is also a transformation of that system

(Todorov 6-7).

This to me seems to be what has been lacking in the secondary literature on the Bildungsroman. Because the nature of past studies has, perhaps by necessity, been contained to a period or region, continuity and evolution are constrained—and mapped almost as if mapping a human life—to that period or area. *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* becomes a sort of ancestor figure, and perhaps a few paragraphs in the conclusion will gesture towards the wider world or later texts, but the “essence of the Bildungsroman,” so to speak, is always at the heart of the chosen domain and it waxes and wanes over the course of the monograph. My goal then is to illuminate constellations of novels that have, to date, lived separate and rich lives through extensive critical studies in the secondary literature. Working both with and beyond the text-based formalist criticism of the twentieth century, I hope to illuminate a potentially vital new strain of formalist thinking that unites writers who share common literary forms despite geographical and chronological distance. The authors who write these novels, I will argue, take up the Bildungsroman across literary periods and across the globe because it is a powerful and portable form that endures and makes legible and utterable the incomprehensible magnitude of modernity and all that it entails.

I will argue that there is a clear through-line that links *Jane Eyre* to *The God of Small Things*, from the heart of the British Empire at the peak of its power to the postcolonial states that emerge as its global footholds weaken and disintegrate. I choose

anglophone texts for this study because—and this is indeed a large concession—English has become during the history of the Bildungsroman the great language of world literature, usurping, for better or worse, French, German, and other tongues. Although the net cast in this study is wide, it is indeed still finite. My hope is that this concession is taken up later in future work on the Bildungsroman, which might advance a yet more radical, global, multicultural approach to the coming-of-age novel. Although the anglophone tradition is limited compared to an approach drawing from many languages, it still offers an incredibly robust, evolving, and dynamic corpus of texts to draw from, many of which draw attention to their own conspicuous use of English and participation in the anglophone tradition in quite compelling ways.

What these anglophone authors are ultimately doing in their novels is metaphorically grafting the experience of modern time's passing to a single life as they understand it from their own relative position within it. Authors of the Bildungsroman trap tempests in tea kettles, and capture a snapshot of infinity in the pages that they write. Unlike several predecessors to this project, I will not proclaim that the Bildungsroman is dead, approaching death, or changed in some way as to make it unrecognizable: I am confident that the genre will survive into perpetuity because, so long as there are writers who feel acutely the alienation of life in modern nations, there will be stories of precocious, superlative, ordinary youths who bear the torch of Wilhelm Meister into uncertain futures. The contribution that this project makes to the study of the

Bildungsroman is that it takes seriously the authors who come later and work through and around the knotty tradition of the coming-of-age novel as it applies to their historical context and heritage, across oceans and divided by time, but still, at their heart, recognizably novels of development and becoming. Each author treated here experiences the potential disorientation of life in modern time and a level of ambivalence towards their place in ongoing history. This product of capitalist modernity is universal in its transcending of nations and periods. It is time to treat the Bildungsroman as it should be treated: these novels are, at their core, trying to make sense of the place of the individual in global modernity, and they should be read and grouped by their formal approaches to this task rather than by the time or place of their composition.

In the first chapter, I argue that Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* both negotiate space for heroism in modernity through their use of the oral tale in their novels. Both texts engage very conspicuously with the oral mode of storytelling, a departure not only from the modern novel but particularly from the Bildungsroman, identified by Walter Benjamin as the form *par excellence* heralding the death of the storyteller. Conrad's narrator Marlow tells the story of Jim's life primarily orally, and the structure of the story he tells harkens back to the Greek Romances which date as far back as the first century A.D. as he attempts to make meaningful Jim's futile, failed development plot. By having Marlow attempt to resurrect the chronotope of this ancient form, I will argue, Conrad shows the impossibility of the ancient form of heroism

Jim—and Marlow—recognize as the gold standard to exist in the age of global imperialism. Tutuola, conversely, uses the Bildungsroman to provide structure for the Yoruba folktales that he feels are at risk of fading away, weaving them together through the titular drinkard as a focalizing presence. Rather than resurrecting a dead genre, Tutuola operates within the confines of the Bildungsroman to preserve his national literary heritage, fusing the genres in a tapestry that is powered by one of the most innovative protagonists in any Bildungsroman from Goethe to the present. The drinkard has a foot in the folktale and a foot in modernity, and through him, Tutuola brings the nimbleness and potency of the folkloric hero to the modern novel without rupturing its form.

In the second chapter, I examine three novels that take up the Gothic genre and combine it with the Bildungsroman: Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. These novels, respectively, place their protagonists in storyworlds that typify the Imperial-, Late Imperial-, and Postcolonial Gothic. In each text, the Bildungsheld becomes minor in his or her own development plot, surrounded by objects and dwarfed by the homes that they inhabit, which take up the narrative agency that they gradually lose throughout their lives. Dorian becomes both curator and exhibit in the motley museum of his own design, made static in the opening pages of the novel by his infamous Faustian bargain. Throughout the text, rather than development of any kind, Wilde details—to excess—the things that

Dorian collects and purchases, replacing the human in the Bildungsroman with global commodities. Bowen's novel depicts the world of the Irish Civil War through the Anglo-Irish Big House, Danielstown, which houses the heroine Lois Farquar's extended family. Adrift and largely aimless, Lois is frustrated by the plotting of the novel and its very syntax, as development becomes impossible and Bowen's vibrant matter makes still lives of the human characters in the text. When, at the novel's end, Danielstown is burned to the ground, Lois is left with no home to call her own and no nation to develop in, caught between warring factions and forces far greater than she is. *The God of Small Things*, written a century after Wilde's novel and half a century after Bowen's, takes up these same concerns—the inability to develop in modernity, the systems of global capital, the legacies of empire—and concedes that the phenomenal agency of the Bildungsheld is an impossibility while still offering a trick solution, suggesting through its complicated timelines that, through the infinitesimally small joys of life amidst widescale suffering, hope for a better future might yet spring forth.

In the third chapter, I examine four novels through the lens of literary naturalism. The first two novels, treated at considerable length, are Thomas Hardy's bleak *Jude the Obscure* and Jean Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark*, both of which are centered on protagonists who distance themselves from their own lives and become, paradoxically, spectators of their own failure to develop. Both texts show, using a crude phrase, Bildung gone wrong, binding the entropy plots familiar in naturalist novels by authors such as Stephen Crane

and Theodore Dreiser to the positive, telos-driven Bildungsroman. The stunning effect of this hybrid is a world without the protections built into—but always unremarked upon in—the traditional Bildungsroman: whereas the protagonist of the Bildungsroman often repeatedly fails and errs but ultimately succeeds, Jude Fawley and Anna Morgan are never able to recover from each compounding bad decision until, at novel's end, they are left with nothing but their own misery. Reproduction fails, marriages and relationships fall apart, and success in vocation or intellectual pursuits is perpetually out of reach. The second pair of texts, George Moore's *Esther Waters* and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, share the same commitment to the bleak, uncaring world of the naturalist novel, but work beyond its limits by using the Bildungsroman form as a wellspring for future potential. The entropy spiral of naturalism meets its match as, I argue, these novels are strangely more Darwinian than the former novels, committing themselves to the future and the potential that it might bring even as their present moment appears unwaveringly desolate.

Chapter Four pairs the hypercanonical *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie with Richard Hughes' largely forgotten *A High Wind in Jamaica*, and reopens the discussion around the national allegory begun by Fredric Jameson nearly fifty years ago in *Fables of Aggression*, his study of Wyndham Lewis, and continued more famously in his 1986 essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." Jameson's conclusion—that all third-world literature is necessarily national allegory—is

ill-advised, but the genre itself is still a potentially powerful metaphor if used in compelling ways. Rushdie, I will argue, actually circumvents the national allegorical mode while coyly operating within it, overwhelming the reader with allegory, metaphor, and symbolism until the ultimate effect is the dissolution of coherence as Saleem Sinai's physical body dissolves. Hughes' nautical children's adventure, on the other hand, is best read as a national allegory, reversing the formulation set out by Jameson in that the supposedly "first-world" novel is actually laying out a nightmarish vision of the eventual fate of England by using the child protagonists as allegories for the next generation of British citizens, outwardly angelic but internally corrupt, violent, and ultimately unrecognizable and unknowable. This novel can be read as a fantastical and unrealistic adventure novel, but taken as an allegory rather than an untroubled piece of children's literature, the development plot within becomes a series of unstoppable lurches toward the future, using the futurity implied by the structure of the coming-of-age novel as a thinly-veiled threat rather than a comforting and uplifting final note.

In the final chapter, I examine two novels at the endpoints of this study's textual timeline, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. Both authors use fantastical realism to create narrative space for each text's narrator to reimagine the space of the *Bildungsheld* and the other characters populating the storyworld in their fictional autobiographies. Brontë, through Jane, uses the language, motifs, and structure of the fairy tale to create a plethora of identities that Jane will subsequently reject: only

after each has been cast aside can Jane find something truly unique and novel for herself at the end of her Bildung plot. This is accomplished through the distance between Jane the character and Jane as she narrates her life, as her fictional authorial hand makes sense of her life and lays out the events she has lived through as a gradual slope from powerlessness towards self-determination. Okri, through a subtle frame narrative in *The Famished Road*, likewise carves out a unique space for his narrator Azaro, but a space that through what I have termed “monophonic heteroglossia” allows the voices of a community to share in the linguistic register and structure of the Bildungsroman. Both novels subvert the conventions of nineteenth-century realism to accomplish these goals. Jane, at the end of her narrative, has become truly singular and unique, creating for herself an open-ended identity that eludes simple classification; Azaro, at the end of his, has metaphorically incorporated the voices of his entire nation into his autobiography. Although these seem like opposite moves, I will suggest that both texts engage in a similar utopian formal play that leaves open-ended the novel of development.

## CHAPTER 1

### TIME, TRADITION, AND THE LAST OF THE STORYTELLERS: ROMANCE

#### AND FOLKLORE IN CONRAD AND TUTUOLA

The Bildungsroman is no monolith: throughout its history, other literary genres with powerful historical legacies and recognizable forms have been used to augment or inflect the Bildung plot. This emerges in the fairy tale elements familiar to readers of *Jane Eyre*, or the naturalist decay present in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, which will be taken up in later chapters. This chapter will take up an initial constellation of authors who, in the national-historical model of the Bildungsroman, would likely never come into conversation, Joseph Conrad and Amos Tutuola. Both authors formally fuse the oral tale, the oldest storytelling genre of them all, with the written tradition of the biographical novel. In their respective novels *Lord Jim* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the resultant fusion of the Bildungsroman and oral tale returns to ancient chronotopic arrangements which call into question the space for individual heroism and the potential for oral storytelling in the twentieth-century novel.<sup>1</sup> In putting sustained attention on both novels' formal eccentricities, the spectacular potentiality of the fusion between oral and written storytelling forms emerges in newly illuminated narrative spaces that both block traditional developmental pathways and also open new possibilities for development plots in modernity.

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<sup>1</sup> By chronotopic arrangements, I mean not only the arrangement of time and space in the story world of each novel, but also the conspicuous and recognizable story forms that stem directly from the chronotope. In a travelogue, for example, the deployment of narrative time is tied to a series of locations (on the third day of the month I made port in Monaco); in the fairy tale, time follows a relational logic to a series of narrative flats linked together by proximity on the page (Once upon a time...and then...and then...eventually).

Conrad's *Lord Jim* and Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* are an admittedly odd couple. Only a lone chapter by Dorota Goluch about the Polish translation of Tutuola's novel exists linking the two, and the connection there is faint. But, through their common usage of the oral tale and the Bildungsroman forms, the two texts reveal their parallel ethos. Perversely, independently, both Conrad and Tutuola reject the model of linear progress into modernity while appropriating the Bildungsroman. Conrad's Patusan romance and Tutuola's repurposing of Yoruba folklore take the reader further and further from the trappings of the modern realist novel with dazzling arrays of formal effects: stasis, empty time, and the dissolution of the individual ego in Conrad, and a mythic reaffirmation of the individual in Tutuola that raises the potential for decidedly un-modern representations of time in the novel.

The authors have more than only their genres in common. Both men published in English despite the language not being their mother tongue, which is vitally important to the conception and reception of both texts. Both authors turn to the oral tradition of storytelling within the novel genre associated by Walter Benjamin and others with the downfall of the oral mode, choosing to house these oral features in the novel. Both authors push their story worlds past the limits of the metropole and outside the realm of conventional realism. There is a danger of totally conflating Conrad's and Tutuola's literary projects, particularly as Conrad writes from a position of privilege in England at the turn of the twentieth century, while Tutuola was raised and educated under the British colonial regime in Nigeria some decades later. I think, however, it is worth the risk. To quote Gayatri Spivak's influential passage from *Aesthetic Education*, I am not

“suggesting a collapsing of boundaries. I am proposing that the complexity of their relationship, collaborative/parasitical/contrary/resistant, be allowed to surface” (44). Taken together, the striking and bizarre formal eccentricities particularities of *Lord Jim* and *Palm-Wine Drinkard* reimagine what is possible in the Bildungsroman. In treating each text, I will establish how and why both authors turned to the anglophone Bildungsroman as a form, considering the affordances and limits of this genre. In a reading of *Lord Jim*, I will approach the second half of the novel, the Patusan romance, as an anachronistic manifestation of Bakhtinian “adventure time.” I will proceed to a reading of the structure of *Palm-Wine Drinkard*, accounting for Tutuola’s adaptations of the Yoruba folklore tradition, which typically goes unremarked upon in favor of the style and contexts of the novel. I will then bring the two novels together in their deployment of older chronotopes as a methodology for moving backward in time yet forward through modernity.

### ***Lord Jim*, Modernity, and the Adventure Chronotope**

Responding to Hugh Walpole’s famous claim that Conrad “thought in Polish, arranged his thoughts in French, and expressed them in English,” the novelist responded that he hadn’t yet mastered the English language as late as 1918, decades after his literary career began and years after his most famous works were written (Young 8). Conrad “was very sensitive about his poor accent and linguistic limitations,” turning down offers to lecture as late as 1922 explaining “I am not very anxious to display my accent before a large gathering of people. It might affect them disagreeably” (Pousada xx, Najder 408). Despite this, Conrad’s insistence on English bordered at times on the obsessive: he wrote

that English was “for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head...All I can claim...is the right to be believed when I say that if I had not written in English, I would not have written at all” (*A Personal Record* v-vi). For Conrad, when “speaking, writing, or thinking in English, the word ‘home’ always means for me the hospitable shores of Great Britain” (Baines 79). How ironic, in Conrad’s case, that the first draft of what would become *Lord Jim* was written in English in his grandmother’s hand-copied book of poetry written in Polish (Najder 284). From the jump, *Lord Jim* was conceived and dreamed in English by an author who looked to the language, perhaps, to afford “further possibility: the words [were] not burdened with irrelevant associations...they are fresh and pristine” (Forster 66). Despite later translations into many other languages, *Lord Jim* is first and foremost an anglophone Bildungsroman. Although Conrad pulls the text into other genres and the narrative into other places less familiar to readers of Dickens, Fielding, and Eliot, *Lord Jim* engages with the tradition and legacy of the anglophone Bildungsroman even as it questions and undermines many of its core principles.

*Lord Jim* begins in ways familiar to the reader of the nineteenth-century British Bildungsroman. With lofty dreams of his own incipient importance, Jim faces a catastrophic professional failure and must begin anew: he has abandoned his post about the Patna because he believed that the ship would sink, abandoning the passengers, and faces great shame. He seeks to rebuild himself so that, presumably, he might be considered worthy of the title of first mate and the post he failed to live up to aboard the Patna. At stake, ostensibly, are redemption and the ability of the individual to change and

grow despite the omnipresent possibility that one's aspirations might yet be thwarted by interior and exterior forces. *Lord Jim* is thus set up as a text that will, in its plotting, negotiate narrative space for Jim to seek redemption as the narrative walls around him close in and he (and later Marlow) chafe against them. The biographical novel is a natural form for this type of story, balancing personal and professional trials, successes, and failures. What the Bildungsroman offers here more than any other literary form is the lens through which and a battlefield on which Jim's status as protagonist, his heroic ideation and aspiration, can take place. In the decades before *Lord Jim* was written, the Bildungsroman provided the symbolic form through which authors manage the inevitability of time's passing and the turning over of generations and epochs in a controlled literary form. A form, it is worth remembering, that not only allows for telos and order but structurally depends on it. Following from Lukács' assertion that, "we might almost say that the entire inner action of the novel is nothing but a struggle against the power of time," these texts provide structure to the temporal infinity outside the novel that would threaten total narrative incoherence within it (*Theory of the Novel* 122). *Lord Jim* typifies this struggle, demanding that readers bear witness to Marlow's attempts to navigate and ultimately reverse course in the murky temporal waters he uses to arrange the events of Jim's life into something resembling a development plot.

The Bildungsroman was historically deployed as a genre that mediated the space for the individual ego within proper society, fitting the hero with a vocation and a purpose in life that would be both satisfying for the individual and fit within the established social order rather than revolutionizing it. According to Hegel, "the

individual man stands in dependence on external influences, laws, political institutions, civil relationships, which he just finds confronting him, and he must bow to them whether he has them as his own inner being or not” (149). Not necessarily so in the novel of development after Goethe and Austen and Dickens. The Bildungsroman in its later manifestation becomes for Conrad a genre that, without the promise of coherent resolution, pits the individual ego directly against the very rational thoughts that there are other stories worthy of consideration, and limits to the capacity of a singular, even superlative, individual. The premise of *Lord Jim* is an overwhelming rejection of Hegel’s premise, played out over several hundred pages. It is easy—too easy—for Marlow to will into being a fantastical colonial playground on the edge of the empire where Jim can enact his fantasy of “a stirring life in the world of adventure” (*Lord Jim* 3). What place is there for heroic derring-do at the turn of the twentieth century in a text that supposedly conforms closely to realism? Where on the map, asks H. Rider Haggard, “will the romance writers of future generations find a safe and secret place...in which to lay their plots?” (Haggard 239, printed in Brantlinger). Marlow creates Lord Jim the character and “Lord Jim” the story within the novel by attempting against logic and common sense to take that question seriously.

The Bildungsroman had been used as a useful literary tool to represent the integration of the individual into a larger society (the community, the nation-state, the empire) as he ages. Marlow insistently refuses to capitulate to the genre of the tale he is crafting both in his function in the narrative (he is the driving force of Jim’s career after the Patna doesn’t sink, the “doer” of the *fabula*) and in his role as its storyteller (he is the

narrator after the fifth chapter of the novel, the organizer of the *syuzhet*). Jim is to Marlow “a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom” (*Lord Jim* 201). Marlow breaks from the supposed tradition of the realist Bildungsroman with its concessions to broader society and its integration plot and enacts the vision of an endless epoch outlined by Johannes Fabian in *Time and the Other*. *Lord Jim* shouldn’t be read as engaging with a tradition of integration into society which ultimately fails, but as a stalwart refusal to handle time and space in anything resembling “modern” ways. According to Esty, Jim “is a romantic hero stuck in a naturalist plot,” with “social conditions...calculated to break his heroic self-conception,” but his ego is so perfectly insulated that such a thing is impossible (Esty 85). What Marlow has fashioned out of the events of Jim’s coming-of-age is in fact an oral rendition of the ancient Greek novels<sup>2</sup> separated by thousands of years and thousands of miles from their original context. The second half of the novel, in its entirety, is chronotopically shifted to what Bakhtin termed “adventure-time,” rejecting modernist style and modernity broadly.

With Marlow’s question which begins the twenty-first chapter of the novel, “I don’t suppose any of you have ever heard of Patusan?” the novel irrevocably crosses the generic Rubicon and pushes its form to a breaking point (164). In Jameson’s influential reading of *Lord Jim*, this turn “marks the vain attempt to conjure back the older unity of the literary institution” (*Political Unconscious* 208). In one of his most tremendous magic

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<sup>2</sup> *Leucippe and Clitophon* and the *Aethiopica* are two typical examples of the form in that they contain its core generic features including narrative structure, typical events, and stock characters. The chronotope of these novels is also present in some eighteenth-century fiction including Voltaire’s *Candide* as an element of satire.

tricks, Conrad has written some forty thousand words where *nothing has happened*. The Patna *did not sink*. Jim *is not killed*. Jim can't—won't—admit to fleeing the supposedly sinking ship, telling Marlow in one of the most jarring moments in the text, “‘I had jumped . . .’ He checked himself, averted his gaze. . . . ‘It seems’” (*Lord Jim* 83). In the syntax of the line, Conrad builds in multiple sets of ellipses, rejecting progression or action of any kind. This remains a significant section of the text in the scholarship and to any reader seeking to understand Jim's thoughts and actions. Less remarked upon is Marlow's quiet thought after Jim's “admission” of guilt: “I was oppressed by a sad sense of resigned wisdom, mingled with the amused and profound pity of an old man helpless before a childish disaster” (83-4). Marlow enters the story, prepares to arrange its events to make them meaningful, and finds the jewel in the center of the narrative diadem to be a childish disaster. The first half of the novel, all the dazzling *syuzhet* that plays out in its structure and form Jim's sense of alienation and the disorganization of modernity and modern society, obscures a *fabula* that amounts to nothing with a hero who cannot recognize why he has failed so spectacularly.

The black hole at the center of *Lord Jim*, its un-event, balloons into its second half which, through Marlow's retelling, manifests as a protracted attempt to fill that which is empty. Tobias Boes writes in a study of his early fiction that Conrad famously “never intended *Lord Jim* to spiral out of control in the way that it did...It seems only plausible to speculate that this relentless dynamism of his plot is the result of...the frantic desire to suture a gap in the fabric of the narrative that Conrad himself perhaps did not consciously comprehend” (Boes 127). Boes is correct, and his point is perhaps even

understated: episode after episode in Patusan, the botched assassination attempt, the jailbreak, and the battles, form a cavalcade that threatens to perpetuate endlessly because there is, ultimately, no meaning to any of it. Marlow has tried to suck Jim out of time, and so he comes to exist only in the space of pure action without reason or tempo. The second half of the novel, rather than a degraded romance as Jameson termed it, is the inverted mirror of the first: it is pure *fabula*, a narrative without time or order, and therefore lacks the elements associated with meaning-making in the realist tradition of the novel.

The so-called ancient Greek novels aren't read as frequently as they were in the nineteenth century and earlier, but their structures are immediately recognizable in the Patusan romance. In those novels, events happen seemingly without rhyme or reason, including virginity tests, kidnappings, battles, and narrative twists and turns, which are connected only because they are adjacent on the page. The ancient novel lives on through the centuries to the picaresque and other traditions, but its chronotopic structure remains the same. Without a storyteller, these texts would be totally unrelated short stories that happen to share one or more characters. "In these [ancient] novels," says Bakhtin, "we find a subtle and highly developed type of *adventure-time*, with all its distinctive characteristics and nuances" (*Dialogic* 87, emphasis in original). In adventure-time, says Bakhtin, everything between the first word of the novel and the last, "the gap, the pause, the hiatus between these two strictly adjacent biographical moments and in which as it were, the entire novel is constructed is not contained in the biographical time-sequence, it lies outside biographical time...It is, precisely, an extratemporal hiatus between two moments of biographical time" (89-90). In this arrangement of time, in this chronotope,

“nothing changes: the world remains as it was, the biographical life of the heroes does not change...people do not even age. This empty time leaves no traces anywhere, no indications of its passing” (91). Using this adventure-time is in *Lord Jim* a double move, in the construction of the novel and in Marlow’s telling of the story contained in it. Conrad strips away from Jim agency and the potential to act and progress meaningfully, which leaves Marlow to aspire to and fail to reach the untroubled “conventions of omniscience” which Michael Levenson argues “were breaking down” in the modern novel by attempting unsuccessfully to assert himself as chief organizer of events and maker of meaning (*Genealogy* 5).

This has a jarring effect on the structure of the second half of the text as its *fabula* and *syuzhet* seem, frankly, at odds. Peter Brooks explains that any story “is *made out of* events to the extent that plot *makes* events *into* a story” (14, emphasis in original). Following from Brooks, the entire second half of *Lord Jim* is event after event which Marlow tries and fails to make meaningful, to put into a larger organized structure. Perhaps, it goes unsaid, Jim could have been a hero, in another time and place, which is precisely what Marlow attempts to do by spiriting Jim away from the metropole to a supposed colonial backwater tailored to him. Unconventional though it might sound, *Lord Jim* is as much a modernist novel as it is an anti-myth. Lévi-Strauss describes the function of myth, which is inverted in *Lord Jim*: “what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future” (*Structural Anthropology* 209). Patusan, rendered by Marlow with Jim playing the double part of the ancient hero and the modern chief, is timeless only

because it cannot exist in real historical time. There *is no* untroubled island that is the perfect location for young Englishmen to come of age in the waning “age of empire” that is simultaneously untouched by the empire.

Patusan as it is described in the novel could exist only in the imagination of a character like Marlow at this historical moment, in the final days of the nineteenth century discussed over cigars and brandy overlooking the Thames. Pushing up against the anachronistic absurdity of his oral stories, according to Olakunle George, Marlow “cuts himself short at the very moment...of insight...It is as if Conrad’s alter ego is terrified of his own observation; and so, he stops himself, trailing off” (George 47). Marlow’s line in *Heart of Darkness*, “[g]oing up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world,” is typically—and correctly—read as Marlow categorizing Africa as a primitive world, “the terrain of the Other” typical in the late imperial romance (*HoD* 33, McClure 8). The jungle, according to Meg Furniss Weisberg, “embodied the outer extremes of colonial expansion...less to do with a set of geological or topological elements than with a set of psychological and emotional reactions” (173). I want to suggest that Marlow needs that Other not only so that he can categorize himself against it—as civilized, English, modern—but also because the world he knows back home has become hollowed out of its meaning and symbolic import. Meaningful protagonism at home has become an impossible fool’s errand, so Marlow yearns for a version of untroubled time and space. Of course, it is explicitly the colonizing enterprise that has made this arrangement of time and space impossible, and that feeds into the violent egoism present in *Lord Jim*.

Two telling passages from the novel come when Jim springs himself out of captivity after being jailed and in a subsequent conversation between Jim and Marlow. The first begins in a flurry of “amazing interrogatories”:

“The Rajah wanted to know whether the white man could repair a watch?”

They did actually bring out to him a nickel clock of New England make, and out of sheer unbearable boredom he busied himself in trying to get the alarum to work. It was apparently when thus occupied in his shed that the true perception of his extreme peril dawned upon him. He dropped the thing—he says—“like a hot potato,” and walked out hastily, without the slightest idea of what he would, or indeed could, do. He only knew that the position was intolerable. He strolled aimlessly beyond a sort of ramshackle little granary on posts, and his eyes fell on the broken stakes of the palisade; and then—he says—at once, without any mental process as it were, without any stir of emotion, he set about his escape as if executing a plan matured for a month.

(191-2).

This passage is the novel in miniature. Jim is doing nothing, being inactive actively, and is faced with a physical representation of modernity in the clock and his own dysfunction in its dysfunction. Only then, faced with broken time, does his “extreme peril” dawn on him. Like one of Haggard’s heroes, finally, he leaps “like a bird” over the fence, and “the earth seemed fairly to fly backwards under his feet. He took off from the last dry spot, felt himself flying through the air,” and, at last, “he came to himself” (192). Presented with the broken timekeeper which serves as the perfect metaphor for the entire Patusan fiasco,

Jim *acts*. For a fleeting moment, Jim faces the actual possibilities of narrative temporality outside of empty adventure-time, What Jesse Matz identified as the “diverse kinds of time that narrative structures have the potential to perform...the complexity developed by the simplest act of narration in its way of bespeaking differences in time” (25). Faced with broken time, Jim recognizes his position and tries to chart a path forward that might see him escape the narrative vortex that is his fictional life.

This cannot last. In an earlier chapter, but later in Jim’s life, he and Marlow sit as Jim narrates his triumphs. Mid-rant, after Jim “tossed his head fearlessly,” Marlow confesses:

for the first and last time in our acquaintance I perceived myself unexpectedly to be thoroughly sick of him. Why these vapourings? He was stumping about the room flourishing his arm absurdly, and now and then feeling on his breast for the ring under his clothes. Where was the sense of such exaltation in a man appointed to be a trading-clerk, and in a place where there was no trade—at that? Why hurl defiance at the universe? This was not a proper frame of mind to approach any undertaking; an improper frame of mind not only for him, I said, but for any man.

(178).

Jim hasn’t been functioning as a *Bildungsheld* ought to function, and Marlow admits as much: his story threatens to fail, to collapse, if the egoistic center of the genre fails to live up to any meaningful standard of heroism. Jim is failing to perform any didactic function for Marlow’s audience, his conduct is improper “for any man,” and his development is

stagnant; Marlow brushes up—but does not probe further—against the reality that *he* was the one who foolishly arranged for Jim to be appointed into his clerkship. Jim has failed, and Marlow can recognize as much, but Marlow never has the distance a proper storyteller needs from the story to recognize his own part within it.

Marlow soon tells Jim, recognizing perhaps the silliness of the entire affair,

“Don’t be foolhardy,” I said, rendered uneasy by his threatening tone. “If you only live long enough you will want to come back.”

“Come back to what?” he asked absently, with his eyes fixed upon the face of a clock on the wall.

I was silent for a while. “Is it to be never, then?” I said. “Never,” he repeated dreamily without looking at me, and then flew into sudden activity. “Jove! Two o’clock, and I sail at four!”

(179).

Again, faced with a clock, Jim goes into a flurry of activity after absently staring off, waiting for something to happen *to him* rather than driving the narrative meaningfully. According to Esty, Patusan is a “bounded space and stopped time,” but time does beat, here and elsewhere, only without apparent meaning (87). It is a bizarre fusion of “the premodern and the hypermodern,” borrowing Esty’s terms, which shows only in brief glimpses—the watch, the clock—the modern as such (Esty 90). The “come back to what?” that Jim asks Marlow could be understood as “come back to *when*?” Cast adrift in a place bounded by a very specific moment in time and yet mystically conceived of as

outside of it, Jim is far from home in every meaning of the word: spatially, in his identity, and in the backward chronology of adventure-time dressed in the trappings of a modernist narrative.

It is fitting that another Englishman, a double for Jim in *Gentleman Brown*, finally ushers in Jim's death. Though Marlow never admits it, he and Jim are very much the same as Brown, performing pillaging both literal and figurative in Patusan. In this reading of the second half of the novel, Jim's death isn't of much consequence: the novel had to end, Jim had to end, and so he does, opting for what amounts to ritual suicide, "to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct" (*Lord Jim* 318). There "is nothing in real life that serves as narrative beginning," and although charming, according to Paul Ricoeur, "the narrative unity of life" should "be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience" (*Oneself as Another* 160, 162). Unlike, say, the organizing hand of *Jane Eyre* who imbues her fictional written life with meaning and order, Marlow sits in the space between Conrad and Jim and acts out the impossible task of making cohesive the myriad fragments, largely of Marlow's own making, as a character in his own story. By returning to an older genre in the romance and an older form of storytelling by positioning Marlow as an oral storyteller in a written text, Conrad calls attention in the Bildungsroman to what, in Foucault's formulation, "was previously considered immobile," fragmenting "what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself" (*Language* 147). The bounded enclosure of the Bildungsroman, welcome as it is to sub-genres and fragments, heteroglossic as it had proven through the nineteenth century in the anglophone tradition,

finally shows what it must necessarily exclude: either Jim's "exalted egoism" must be thwarted, removing from him what made him appear "to [Marlow] symbolic," or Marlow must admit that Lord Jim was a fabrication, no more "one of us" than the ancient heroes Jim aspired to (*Lord Jim* 318, 201, 318). Choosing neither, unable to reflect on himself, Marlow ends the narrative by contemplating Stein's rapid onset of old age and his collection of butterflies.

### ***The Palm-Wine Drinkard: Romance and Deification***

Perhaps dwarfing even Jim's monstrous ego is the ego of the unnamed protagonist of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* who refers to himself, often and gleefully in the early sections of the text, as the "Father of gods who could do anything in this world" (Tutuola 200). The drinkard is a rich layabout who drinks all day; when the man tasked with tapping countless trees for palm-wine for his lazy and boozy days dies, what else is the drinkard to do but journey across the world and past its edge into the dead's town to find him? His status as *Bildungsheld* hinges entirely on an unfortunate event of pure chance, and his tendency to laziness compels him to act at once, decisively, rather than have to do his own work in the future. Unconventional though its premise is, *Drinkard* is very much participating in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, chronicling the journey of the drinkard beyond death and back, his adventures seeking and finding a wife, and this ascent to folk heroism along the way. My reading of *Drinkard* hews closest to the structure of the novel, largely left as tertiary behind its compelling style and content: the formal arrangement Tutuola deploys—the tethering of very old Yoruba folktales to a brand-new folk hero in a novel—is a genuinely hybrid literary form that uses the legacies

of his oral tradition to propose a solution to the apparent bind Marlow is unable to escape in *Lord Jim*.

The decision to publish in English is fraught for authors writing from the position of colonial or postcolonial subject. Pascale Casanova's familiar bind, that such authors must "affirm their difference and so condemn themselves to the difficult and uncertain fate of national writers...or to betray their heritage and, denying their difference, assimilate the values of one of the great literary centers," must be considered here (180). Tutuola, educated under the Standard Six education, did not have perfect grammatical mastery over standard written English, and trusted his publishers to "take care of his grammar" (Ngũgĩ 79). Faber did not honor Tutuola's request, leaving his grammatical constructions largely untouched, and the resulting novel does not conform to standard English grammatical conventions. This became one of the most controversial elements of Faber's publishing of the novel, leading to "substantial evidence...to indicate that Faber saw their publishing investment as essentially of anthropological" rather than purely literary value (Low 22). On the one hand, Tutuola risked becoming an anthropological spectacle for his white audience in Europe and elsewhere, his request totally unhonored by his publisher.

On the other hand, in Tutuola's own words: "So far as I don't want our culture to fade away I don't mind about the English grammar" (Lindfors *Blind Men* 143). In a letter correspondence with Russell Potter, Tutuola explains:

Although I wrote (and still do) in English, my writings, looking back now, are still *in* Yoruba, my mother tongue. *In* here is deliberately put in italics. The

medium in which my ideas are expressed is English, but what I write, the ideas I express, the atmosphere I create and as reviewers of my works (perhaps rightly) maintain, the gestures readers encounter on the pages of books I write are *Yorubaish*. Thus I think it can be said that beyond being a Yoruba writing in English, my works are *African* in conception.

(Potter 26, emphasis in original).

He, according to Potter, “knew that writing in English would avail such a writing [*PWD*] opportunities to be read by a greater number of people than would probably read them if written in Yoruba,” but also “tried, on at least one occasion, to write a book in his native Yoruba. He found, oddly enough, that this was not as satisfying, and that in some sense his writing in English was more ‘Yorubaish’ than what he wrote in Yoruba” (26, 23). The editors at Faber, in fact, “by seeing Tutuola as simply writing folktales, failed to see that he was in conversation with the very nature of Englishness and that he was extending and improvising over texts at the heart of the colonist’s culture” (Ngũgĩ 79). Thinking through the novel’s structure, as I will argue, Ngũgĩ’s claim is indeed very accurate: Tutuola’s novel is no mere series of folktales, and this element of the text is perhaps its most compelling.

Tutuola’s occasional remarks that he ought to “go back and learn to speak and write in Standard English,” happen to intersect in a particularly ironic way with Conrad’s decision to write in English rather than Polish or French (Ngũgĩ 79). Ngũgĩ writes, “writers talk about improving technique, experimentation, or other aspects of their writing—but not of improving their command of the language itself. For example, one

can imagine Joseph Conrad telling a friend he is working on improving his English when he is unpublished and young, but not after he is established and world-renowned” (79). As previously suggested, however, Conrad, too, grappled with his command of the language, despite publishing exclusively in English. Both novelists therefore came to English for a sort of linguistic refuge, a space for their literary projects some steps removed from their native tongues and in a genre most associated with the Western European literature of the nineteenth century in the coming-of-age novel. For his part, Tutuola’s quickly rising star in European literary circles perhaps hides how genuinely radical this pair of decisions would be.

The aforementioned textual elements and Tutuola’s identity led to the (in)famous reception of *Drinkard* after its 1952 London publishing. Dylan Thomas called the novel “brief, thronged, grisly and bewitching,” written in “young English” (7, reprinted in Lindfors *Critical Perspectives*). Arthur Calder-Marshall described it as “very curious,” with “much in common with other primitive literature” (9, reprinted in Lindfors). Eric Larabee wrote that it was “unschooled but oddly expressive,” “written in English, but not an English of this world”; Selden Rodman called Tutuola a “true primitive” (11, 15, reprinted in Lindfors). The British and American reception to the text mirrors the above sampling, something between a curiosity and an exhibit of the “true Africa.” There was certainly a market for Yoruba stories: Elphinstone Dayrell, a British-appointed District Commissioner in Southern Nigeria, had published a collection of folktales with an introduction by Andrew Lang himself, famous for his books of English language fairy tales, in 1910 that had seen several editions before Tutuola’s novel was

written. Tutuola's reception in Africa was less positive, as his contemporaries largely saw his style and the jerky grammar of the novel as playing directly into the stereotype of the primitive African writer, packaged for and consumed by a reading public on other continents.<sup>3</sup> The balancing act that Tutuola has undertaken should not be understated and renders *Drinkard* a difficult text to classify in light of the ethics of its publication and its complicated global reception.

The choice of genre for Conrad may have been an easy one, as much of the basic plot of the first half of *Lord Jim* emerged from that earliest draft of a coming-of-age plot written in his grandmother's poetry book, but Tutuola's tying together of some several dozen Yoruba folktales into a Bildungsroman is worthy of further consideration. David Cunningham suggests that the novel genre is "inherently anti-generic: a mongrel 'form' that can have only a 'negative' identity...fragments and combinations of other forms," and there are many subgenres of the novel other than the Bildungsroman (17). Given infinite possibilities, perhaps even a collection of folktales without any frame narrative, Tutuola chose the Bildungsroman, chose "recourse to the biographical form," borrowing Lukács phrase, limiting the world of his unnamed hero to that "hero's possible experiences" and the "orientation of his development" (*Theory of the Novel* 81). It is a significant decision to bind a people's folklore to a single biographical narrative: it opens new affordances, of course, but also limits the more nebulous potentiality of myth outside and beyond a single life. Everything in the Bildungsroman, in Paul Ricoeur's conception

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<sup>3</sup> These and other reviews are likewise reprinted in Lindfors' helpful *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*.

of narrative time, comes “at the expense of the plot...seems to turn on the self-awakening of the central character...throughout this development, what was essentially asked of the narrated story was that it knit together social and psychological complexity” (*Time and Narrative* 9). Stories themselves, particularly in a novel such as Tutuola’s which could become only pure, unfiltered stories, are charged with making significant that one human life; likewise, the stories are charged with the potential of that life, made powerful by their grafting onto a recognizable and teleological form.

in the Bildungsroman, this narratological move of taking events and turning them into a story must sieve through the superlative individual, the protagonist, to generate significance, rather than anything inherent to the plotted events (“Narrative Time” 171). Put plainly by Moretti, seemingly unrelated events “*become* meaningful: that is the point...[they become] so because someone—in the *Bildungsroman* usually the protagonist—*gives it meaning*” (45, emphasis in original). The Bildungsroman, taken up by Tutuola, is a double reimagining. He repurposes a genre that was used in the prior century to perpetuate a myth of genteel generational European progress in a new century, on a different continent, from a truly unique perspective that, surely, Fielding and his contemporaries could never have imagined. Simultaneously, he reshapes his heritage and tradition not as a mere museum exhibit, but “with a sense of readership and medium,” maintaining “contextual specificity and human animation of that tradition” (Hogan 127). *Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a dynamic novel because Tutuola fuses the energies of folklore with a novel genre that is an engine of potentiality.

Readings of the text, however, have often been less than comprehensive concerning its complexities. Peter Kalliney explains that the vast majority of readings of the novel “rely heavily on the *first few sentences* Tutuola ever published...This fascination with the earliest impression of Tutuola’s writing has been a constant feature of the secondary literature” (156-7, emphasis in original). He insists that this “critical habit, common to scholars of all political affiliations and theoretical interests, effectively recreates or reenacts the asymmetrical economic, political, and cultural systems of the late colonial period...The tension evoked by reading Tutuola is no longer between metropolitan and non-metropolitan critics, but between the plenitude of the text...and the distribution of critical energy expended on its component parts” (157). Kalliney is right about the secondary literature, and right also to draw our attention to the worlds and words beyond the first page of the novel. Critics frequently make mention of “excellent illustrations of the transmutation of oral art into written art,” as well as the “seemingly out-of-place reference[s] to a European object or concept such a bomb, a razor blade, or soccer” (Lindfors *Comparative Approaches* 11, Tobias 70). The first is a theoretical exercise that I admittedly performed with *Lord Jim*. The second, again, is a parsing of the novel only for parts. These approaches leave open a much larger structural question: how does the novel, in all of its parts, function as a whole?

The answer lies in the chronotope of *Palm-Wine Drinkard* coupled with Tutuola’s novelization of folklore. The “Perfect Gentleman” episode is particularly useful because critics have spent more time on it than any other adapted folktale in the novel despite missing to this point arguably the most spectacular thing Tutuola has done with

his oral heritage. The folktale begins with a young woman who doesn't want to be married to any of her suitors and is bewitched by an exceptionally handsome gentleman, whom she decides to marry. Horrifyingly, the man casts off his body parts one by one as he leads his bride-to-be through a hundred miles of jungle: he has rented his body parts for money from other creatures. He is revealed to be only a skull amongst a flock of skulls, traps the girl in his cave, and threatens her. Here is where Tutuola's version starts to differ from the source material: in the original tale,<sup>4</sup> the girl befriends the skull's mother, who arranges her escape, and she marries a nice man her father picks for her, righting her initial wrong by listening to her father. In Tutuola's version, the drinkard, wholly a creation of Tutuola's, rescues and weds her himself after transformations, trickery, and guile. Dayrell's version of the tale, packaged for English audiences, as well as D.L. Ashliman's version, runs just under a thousand words (Dayrell 38). Tutuola's version runs over four thousand words, inclusive of his chapter titles, adding of course the drinkard but also additional narrative elements and internal thoughts related to the reader. Designating him a mere transcriber of folklore, or the novel a loosely held-together catalog of tales, is a horrible disservice: if an author took "Bluebeard," multiplied its length, and transliterated it into an element of a Bildungsroman, we would not call the resulting novel a transcribed fairy tale, we would call it *Jane Eyre*.

In just the "Perfect Gentleman" story, the drinkard reveals interiority and the capacity to surprise us. Tutuola "does not moralize and he is never sentimental" (Beier

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<sup>4</sup> I admittedly have only read several English renderings of the original tale, but each (Dayrell's and Ashliman's specifically) function identically.

54). Stepping back for a moment, it seems clear that the initial version of the tale follows the pattern of familiar European stories like “The Corpse-Eater” or “The Vampire”<sup>5</sup> wherein the young woman needs to learn to listen to male authority, lest she fall victim to her youthful foolishness; the purpose of this story, its didactic function as a tale, is obvious, and also very misogynistic.<sup>6</sup> Even its name, printed in anthologies, typically resembles Dayrell’s title, “The Disobedient Daughter Who Married a Skull” (38). The drinkard, however, thinks to himself, “I could not blame the lady for following the Skull as a complete gentleman to his house at all. Because if I were a lady, no doubt I would follow him to wherever he would go, and still as I was a man I would jealous him more than that” (207). In his printing of West African stories, Paul Edwards remarks that this gesture “reflects his sympathy with the individual against society...however misguided, against severe, clear-cut virtue” (96). This is true, but more importantly, it shows the capacity of the drinkard to imagine himself as someone other than himself. He can show sympathy, and humor. Shortly thereafter the drinkard “ran to a corner of the market and I cried for a few minutes because I thought within myself why was I not created with beauty as this gentleman, but when I remembered that he was only a Skull, then I thanked God that He had created me without beauty” (207). Kalliney reads this and other episodes as a manifestation of “perpetual underdevelopment” in “human and monstrous characters alike,” but what Tutuola has actually created is a folk hero who finds himself in a

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<sup>5</sup> Both designated under ATU (Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index) type 361.

<sup>6</sup> Abigail Temidayo Ojo remarks on the didactic purpose of Yoruba tales: “What is expressed in Yoruba folktales find[s] practical applications in real life” (3). While one might take issue with my reading of the original, this is a common type of story across global folklore and the type has been read by Bettelheim and others as serving a specific function in childhood development. See: Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (Vintage: 2010).

Bildungsroman and who is perfectly adaptable—amenable even—to its confines (170). The drinkard performs the actions we expect of a hero of both genres with a wink and a nod, revivifying the doomed protagonism of the Bildungsroman in the twentieth century. His ego—he does designate himself as one above all the gods, and claims he can do anything he wants—is matched and tempered by his humor and his empathy.

Holding everything together is the chronotope which powers the novel. The drinkard will ultimately cross over into the land of the dead looking for his tapster and return empty-handed, but along the way, the world of myth rejects as an anathema strict timekeeping. The aforementioned anachronistic objects which seem to pop up randomly in the folklore world are disorienting by design. Time in *Palm-Wine Drinkard* is the mythic time of national folklore as described by Mark Freeman, “neither cyclical nor linear but evolutionary or developmental,” iterating on itself through humor and Tutuola’s fusion of the tale and the novel (35). The drinkard plays out something that Marlow attempted through Jim, a knitting of “the narrative fabric of the self” back into modernity legibly (Freeman 48). Though the novel has an ending, it is not interested in endings: myth always leaves, according to Lévi-Strauss, “something...unfinished. Myths, like rites, are ‘in-terminable’” (*Raw and the Cooked* 6). Reality, represented in *Drinkard*, “is more than meets the eye; it is larger than logic...physical and metaphysical, rational and irrational, objective and subjective...making it impossible for anything to be one without also being the other” (Nyamnjoh 39). The insertion of myth and mythic time into the Bildungsroman transcends the medium—*Palm-Wine Drinkard* certainly isn’t realist, or even a novel in the tradition of magical realism—while coyly operating within it.

According to Achille Mbembé, there is in Tutuola's "ghostly paradigm... neither reversibility nor irreversibility of time. There is only *unfolding* and folding over anew [*déroulement/enroulement*] of experience...Furthermore, the same event can have more than one distinct beginning" (22). As with time, so too with space: throughout "the novel, space is figured in dynamic terms, subverting the illusion of stasis perpetuated by colonial conceptions and the accompanying rhetoric of stabilization" (Krishnan 334). Tutuola uses this in-between form of time to permit "us to see the violation of hegemony at the level of literary form...a glimpse of a class of modern African subjects who are neither Westernized, nor yet representatives of some putative authentic Africa. He thus represents and re-presents a culture in motion" (George 136-7). *Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a novel that doubles as a perpetual motion machine. There is no wasted energy—the form won't allow it, as Tutuola through the drinkard hops from story to story, event to event—binding the inherent dynamism of the Bildungsroman to an oral tradition that re-animates both forms. Everything in *Drinkard* is "a freakish, worldly multitude, a melding of bacteria, television screens, maggots, and flashing lights...part of a global system in perpetual motion" (Omelsky 67). Whereas Conrad's novel privileges hard divides—England and Patusan, the first half of the novel and the second, self and Other—Tutuola allows for fluidity and ambiguity between forms and borders.

In a typical—and the final—episode in the novel, the drinkard and his wife return home, and find a famine waiting for them. Through a magic egg that produces food, the drinkard temporarily alleviates the problem, but, after the egg breaks, he has no choice but to send someone to give a sacrifice to Heaven. The final words of the novel

are telling: “But when for three months the rain had been falling regularly, there was no famine again” (302). It’s unclear if this refers to only the present famine or all famines moving forward, but Tutuola ends the narrative with a promise of life and prosperity, of the world continuing to chug along. The drinkard may have further adventures beyond the limits of the novel, as this possibility is never precluded, but it is apropos that what we might expect from the watershed moment in the text, the drinkard’s meeting with his tapster in the land of the dead, is merely one blip amongst many in a long journey. Tutuola, essentially, rejects the possibility of absolute telos in the Bildungsroman: any point is a fine ending point, just like any point is a fine beginning. The symbolic importance of any event is merely what the reader or listener makes of it, and the drinkard, the consummate storyteller, knows as much. The teller of the story recognizes his part within the story and leaves the task of deducing its meaning(s) to the audience.

Both of these novels place at their heart a character who, from the respective premise of each, has a path by which he might come of age. Both extensively contemplate the process, but neither settles decisively on something like the didactic mid-century developmental plot which was the backbone of the Victorian and continental exemplars of Bildung. The constructed orality of both texts generates an ironic distance, which allows Conrad and Tutuola to play with the tradition without capitulating to it fully or becoming utterly unrecognizable from it. The drinkard participates in a living (albeit, in Tutuola’s estimation, at risk) oral tradition, and relocates it to a time and a form that exists both in the mythic time of folklore and in the modern moment; Marlow rebels against time and his place in it by his delivery of Jim’s story in an oral tradition that he

largely fabricates piecemeal from older models of storytelling in vain attempts to assert control over the uncontrollable.

It would be foolish and over-simplistic to assert that Marlow fails to do what the drinkard does, rendering *Lord Jim* a dud, because his failure is precisely the point of *Lord Jim*, just as the drinkard's triumph as a narrator and as a character is precisely the point of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Absent thus far has been Walter Benjamin, and his essay "The Storyteller" fittingly sits chronologically between the publishing of *Lord Jim* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. He writes about the death of storytelling as "a concomitant symptom of the secular productive forces of history, a concomitant that has gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech" ("Storyteller" 364). The Bildungsroman, he claims, is the genre which, if not the nail in the coffin of the storyteller, certainly harkens his end. Replacing the didactic community the storyteller speaks for and speaks to, it "does not deviate in any way from the basic structure of the novel. By integrating the social process with the development of a person, it bestows the most frangible justification on the order determining it. The legitimacy it provides stands in direct opposition to reality. Particularly in the *Bildungsroman*, it is this inadequacy that is actualized" ("Storyteller" 365). Structure and form; content and delivery. Benjamin could have been fresh off Marlow's boat when he wrote those words, watching a blustering attempt to reassert the primacy of the storyteller in an artificially constructed context created only so Marlow might deliberately misconstrue it. The biggest leap that Tutuola makes is indeed deviating from the "basic structure of the novel." Whether a given reader finds it effective or compelling or not, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a literary

experiment that returns to an old form and draws from a tradition that predates the novel to push into something new, a Bildungsroman that *does* challenge the ability of the novel as a form to contain everything within itself seamlessly.

The new shape that *Drinkard* takes and the ethos it embodies allow for a novel solution to the difficulties that crop up when authors writing in or after colonial regimes turn to the literary forms of their colonizers. Responding to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Partha Chatterjee questions his formulation of the nation as it relates to the formerly colonized subjects who might find themselves "perpetual consumers of modernity" rather than "true subjects of history" (5). He asks, "If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?" (5). Faced with a similar literary problem—and the Bildungsroman as a genre has always been linked with systems of power, domination, and national identity (Esty 200-203)—Tutuola materializes a new form from the material of the old. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* transcends the problematic formulation of "foreign form and local content" that Ramazani outlines as a persistent and pervasive model for world literatures because it remakes the foreign form entirely, not merely importing it but making it anew (116). The result, according to Chantal Zabus, "is a new register of communication which asserts itself as a third code located outside of the European language/African language dualism and linguistically epitomizes the conceptual interface between two systems of patronage" (7). Unlike a model or proposed system which does not go "beyond the basic problems of modernity," Tutuola offers a literary path forward,

to quote SN Eisenstadt's introduction to *Multiple Modernities*, "aware that no answer to the tensions inherent in modernity is final" (21). Marlow's inability or unwillingness to reflect on his own position in history despite perpetually bumping up into is the direct antithesis of the drinkard's carnivalesque barrage of themes, objects, and organisms, presented with the absurdity of it all at the fore. What Conrad has done in highlighting the "imaginative geographies," to borrow Said's term, of the empire and colonial project metaphorically, Tutuola has done literally: any attempt to make sense of the traveling the drinkard does will leave the would-be cartographer frustrated and disoriented (*Orientalism* 49-73).<sup>7</sup> *Drinkard* is by my estimation best read not as an attempt "to undermine assumptions of the West" or demonstrate an "oppositional relationship with the West," something Byron Caminero-Santangelo suggests has been a trend in reading postcolonial literature, but as a vibrant and daring novel that emerges from and questions the grand narratives of the unquestionably violent colonial enterprise (1-2).

All of this is possible only in the Bildungsroman: the representations of modernity and incorporated orality of both texts depend vitally on the tethering of narrative and plot to the biographical form. Swimming against its modernizing currents, both Conrad and Tutuola re-explored the genres of the past and reimagined what might be possible in their contexts. Marlow, destined to fail and destined to stare endlessly at the sea wondering why, is more tragic than Jim himself: his fatal flaw is his inability to reflect on his complicity in the circumstances that have made his enterprise impossible. Tutuola, by using the novel genre as a vehicle to bring the oral tradition he preserves into

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<sup>7</sup> See Also Said, "Yeats and Decolonization" in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* p. 77.

modernity, repurposes the biographical development plot as a concretized vehicle to ensure the continued existence of his cultural heritage into the future. The starkly different initial impression that each novel gives eventually reveals a formal turn backward which looks forward, grafting the literary past onto the present to weave a distinctly fused structure from the narrative mesh of the oral tale and the Bildungsroman. In each, the narrative space once afforded to the protagonist is challenged and tested, while new arrangements that might allow his continued existence shimmer under the textual surface.

Conrad and Tutuola are brought together under the generic umbrella of the Bildungsroman and each author's adaptation of the oral tale, and their temporal and spatial distances, as well as their very apparent differences in identity and ideology, inflect their hybrid texts. The experience of reading each novel is starkly different, but the similarities that they do share suggest an engagement with a tradition that predates both authors and, indeed, the novel as a genre. This approach to reading form broadly through the generic lens of the Bildungsroman does not divide or compartmentalize novels into isolated traditions but offers instead a formalist methodology that brings texts together without erasing their historical specificities. The following chapter will continue exploring the potentials and uses of methodology and its implications in the larger canon of Bildungsromane by taking up another literary genre with a long life, the Gothic, and tracking its use in three Bildungsromane published between the years of 1890 and 1997.

## CHAPTER 2

### BILDUNG(S) IN THE RUINS OF HISTORY: WILDE, BOWEN, ROY, AND THE GOTHIC BILDUNGSROMAN

“In a novel,” writes Irving Howe, “there is no ‘once upon a time...’ There is London in the 1840s, Moscow in the 1950s. The clock rules” (185). Although there are exceptions to this rule, it is by and large a good one: a historical specificity locates novels in a time and place. Without necessarily proposing a new and totalizing historical model, authors of Bildungsromane who either felt a juncture or break or perceived the end of their own historical moment were uniquely positioned to comment on it through this generic form. These authors wrote novels that simultaneously eulogized a time they felt to be fading through thwarted development plots while also crafting out of the framework of their texts a sort of narrative ruin that could, in theory, outlive the epoch that engendered it. This required a shift in how biographical narratives were told, reversing the focus from the central character onto the *things* that had often gone unremarked on around him or her, or that were secondary to the driving force of the development plot. For lack of a more erudite phrase, these authors changed what, rather than whom, their Bildungsromane were about.

But what *are* novels about? To state the obvious, with very few exceptions,<sup>1</sup> novels are about characters who act in various ways, have some amount of fictitious agency to shape their plot and create a fictional future, and have pasts that are likewise

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<sup>1</sup> Such as the ‘it-novels’ of the nineteenth century (*The History of a Book*, *The History and Adventures of an Atom*), which feature anthropomorphized object narrators that are arguably characters as much as any human character.

represented in the narrative either explicitly or implicitly. The Bildungsroman is the genre that most readily and fully ties the narrative and all narrative significance to *character* and which functions on that level. In the previous chapter, Conrad's *Lord Jim* stood out as a novel that divorces narrative action from narrative significance, with Jim plucked almost out of the real world into a fantasy world of pure ego. In this chapter, I will examine a strain in the history of the coming-of-age novel that is perhaps more formally incongruous with its predecessors, novels that have the Bildungsheld watch as he or she becomes minor in his or her own Bildung, replaced by personified objects and spaces that swallow up the narrative life and agency she cedes. These novels imagine, through the introduction of the Gothic, what a Bildungsroman with an objectified heroine and static storyworld might look like.

The Gothic, unlike the oral tale in the previous chapter, is a genre inextricably linked to the novel. Several authors who wrote hybrid Gothic Bildungsromane asked readers to imagine, through the plotting of their texts, the end of (a) history alongside the protagonist, who simultaneously exists within that history and as an onlooker relative to it. She lives in and looks at, in effect, the ruins of a history, constructed through narrative artifice. It goes without saying that "history," including breaks, periods, and boundaries imposed by those living through it, is itself a construct: these novels draw attention to the fractures in periodized history while still using the conventions of the linear developmental historical model, stripping Bildung and futurity away from the heroine by grafting her agency onto a cavalcade of increasingly animate objects and spaces which gain power and narrative focus as she loses it. This simultaneous process of

objectification and reification happens in the setting that Benjamin has called the ruin: as the heroine loses agency and becomes, to borrow the formulation from Bill Brown's "Thing Theory" more and more the "thing," unknown and unclassified, the vivified objects and houses become first enchanted with life before succumbing to the decay that is grounded in these narratives of failed development (3).

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* each transmute the narrative matter of the novel into a ruin, a monument to a dead or dying age, as defined by Benjamin:

The word 'history' stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience. The allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history, which is put on stage in the *Trauerspiel* [tragedy], is present in reality in the form of the ruin. In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things. This explains the baroque cult of the ruin.

(*German Tragic Drama* 177-178).

Within the Gothic Bildungsroman, the storyworld becomes a ruin, infused with history even as that history loses symbolic meaning as its homogenous narrative atrophies in light of passing time and changing circumstances. The anxiety couched in the fin-de-siècle, waning imperialism of *Dorian Gray*, for example, reflects the perceived reality of

the British subjects who felt their age to be at an end: its narrative repurposes Dorian's failed Bildung plot as a ruin he creates and inhabits, resulting in a meditation on the legacy of empire in the form of the novel. Through this interconnected give-and-take relationship, the Bildungsheld, living in the ruin, is simultaneously part of it and removed from it as an observer. This is made literal in *Dorian Gray*: the portrait rots, ages, and takes on history instead of the human body, and Dorian becomes an observer of his own historical moment, gazing at it from an ironic distance. The Gothic Bildungsroman is a genre of/in ruin, re-presenting history as what Benjamin called "the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]" ("Theses on the Philosophy of History" 261). The homogeneity of the vector-progress model of time is halted, and the "now" overwhelms the narrative in an endless and overspilling present.

Far from a surprising tragic fall, Wilde's novel charts the logical and existentially disturbing possibility that Dorian's moment is the "end" of the Victorian way of life and that Dorian is its final product. What if Dorian is the end result of the empire's enterprise, wealthy, wicked, and motivated only by raw hedonism? What if nothing else comes after? While the historical circumstances are different in the latter two novels, each of the three raises an "Anthropocenic anxiety...as a means through which to express concerns about human impotence, hubris, and our future disappearance" (Weinstock 19). In the case of Dorian, at the juncture of the worldly commodities he surrounds himself with and the familiar conventions of the Gothic novel, Victorian ruins emerge, the perceived end of Victorian history. Everything is motionless and unchanging, preserved indefinitely, but

both narrative inertia and human progress are absent. These are Gothic novels that play on the fear not of invasion or the unknown, but of that which is known all too well: the endless progress model, the path of history pointing ever upward, has ceased to function as the symbol of inexorable destiny.

The threat to the Bildungsroman as a symbolic form should be fairly obvious: without narrative motion, teleological destinies, or the possibility to change the course of history, the characters within these texts cannot undergo their coming-of-age at all. Their space in the storyworld as well as their dynamism is shifted instead to the objects they have collected from across the globe and to the places they inhabit. This is where the Gothic tradition emerges as a logical place for authors to turn to: Andrew Jeffrey Weinstock, writing about the junction between Object-Oriented Ontology and the Gothic, explains that the genre “since its beginnings has been consistently preoccupied with the nature of matter itself and the relation of the human to the nonhuman” (2). Castles, crypts, evil dolls, certainly, but also old family homes filled with commodities and artifacts taken from across the world, removed from their contexts but haunted by the legacy of the imperial violence that enabled and encouraged their removal.<sup>2</sup> In a double move, returning to Benjamin, these objects are themselves “mortified,” which is “not

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<sup>2</sup> Adherents to Object Oriented Ontology may object to this reading of the interplay between objects and humans as, once again, privileging human subjects. Through the symbol of the ruin, I suggest that I read them on largely equal footing, even to the point of total narrative dissolution and collapse. Because the Bildungsroman centers the human, deviation from this paradigm is a radical reorientation: through the lens of this genre, I would suggest, history and lived time can interface with what Graham Harman argued, that even “inanimate things only unlock each other’s realities to a minimal extent, reducing one another to caricatures” (2).

then—as the romantics have it—awakening of the consciousness in living works, but the settlement of knowledge in dead ones” (182).

The term “mortification” is strange, and worthy of consideration. Alexander Gelley, reading Benjamin’s work on the ruin, argues convincingly that what “mortification” suggests “is not only death but also a parceling and fragmentation, a preservation in which destructive and utopian impulses are held in tension” (493). The overall thrust of the Gothic Bildungsroman is then: (a.) the recognition of a dying or fading age, and the construction of a narrative ruin that displaces the Bildungsheld from the center of his plot, (b.) the transferral of narrative primacy to objects and things which the Bildungsheld inhabits and curates as a living ruin, before (c.) those objects themselves, irrevocably connected to and irreconcilable with the Bildungsheld and his failed development plot within a ghostly crypt-like world, are presented under the sign of decay without truly dying. This unlife, or perhaps a vivified existence flickering between life and death, is the tension at the center of the Gothic Bildungsroman, a tension which is inevitably ruptured in its conclusion. Once the Bildungsheld has been fully displaced from his development, and the spaces and things that surround him have in turn become subject to his permeating narrative stasis, the narrative ends with either a final, fracturing implosion that signals the end of the epoch which the ruin stood as last testament to and monument for, or with a whimper as the ruin reveals itself hollow and empty of significance, a kind of false historical simulacrum.

Each text treated in this chapter typifies a different position in the long history of imperialism, providing different but interconnected vantages. In *Dorian Gray*, Wilde

pens a late imperial Gothic which centers the fears of “individual regression,” as well as the threat of invasion “by the forces of barbarism or demonism,” manifested by the Yellow Book and countless foreign luxuries Dorian purchases and fills his home with (Brantlinger 230). The growth of moral character familiar to the developmental plot and the space it is afforded in the narrative has been replaced by the amassing of commodities. *The Last September* typifies something perhaps best termed a post-Imperial (but not postcolonial) Gothic, “shadowing forth the larger, gradual disintegration of British hegemony” through the burning of Danielstown and the way of life that it represented (Brantlinger 253). In *The God of Small Things*, there emerges a postcolonial Gothic which according to Sarah Illott, “appropriates the language of the Gothic and abrogates its ideologies, while displacing the central concerns of the imperial Gothic by centralising those who were once marginalised” (20). The places and things in Roy’s novel, using Gina Wisker’s model of the postcolonial Gothic, “are haunted by the ghosts of those who were hidden and silenced...and those who now still might occupy a parallel universe, unheard, unspoken, unwritten,” personified and given inner lives as history happens around them (402). In these novels the networks of characters that emerge can only be understood through their relationships with the things they interact with and the spaces they inhabit, often replacing human interaction with a turn toward the inanimate.

Each author takes up in their text questions of history and progress, and the possibility for human agency at the perceived end of epochs. In the end, it is not the vain struggle to stall history indefinitely, to maintain an epoch or the perception of an epoch against the passage of time which triumphs, if it can be said that there is any kind of

triumph at all in these novels of failed Bildung. It is instead the representation of latent possibility that can only emerge in the wake of narrative ruin, the reemergence of the human despite the goliath forces of history and time that suppress her.

### ***Dorian Gray and the Art of Doing Nothing*<sup>3</sup>**

Heretically, Jeff Nunokawa writes that “there is still a secret left to be told about *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a secret no less open, only less sensational, than the scandalous passions all but named in the novel that all but exposed the secret of its author’s own. Let’s face it, the book is boring: for all the thrill of *Dorian Gray*, long stretches of the story are almost unbearably uninteresting” (71). In Wildean fashion, there are long passages featuring, perhaps ironic, debates about art and philosophy: these, undoubtedly, stall the narrative. But when one lays out the sensational events of the text, one thinks there must be thrills throughout. There are murders; two suicides; trips to opium dens; sordid behavior of many kinds; existential fear and paranoia. Largely, however, Nunokawa is right on the mark. Jed Esty, likewise, argues that the “combination of lyrical description, epigrammatic discourse, and dramatic dialogue that we find in the opening chapter is characteristic of the entire text...at the level of syntax and structure, as well as the level of plot and character” the novel “delay[s] and distort[s] the linear temporality and narrative logic of biographical realism” (105). Esty’s subsequent reading of the introduction of a raw and dominant capitalist ethos into the novel which—seemingly—crowds out the development plot of the novel provides an excellent basis for further exploration into the late Victorian materialities that form *Dorian Gray*.

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all passages from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* come from the 1891 edition of the text. Both are reproduced in the Norton Critical Edition.

Oscar Wilde, like his 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, occupies a curious and tenuous position. Typically described as Anglo-Irish but perhaps not typifying the identity as one might expect from a prolific writer of his repute, it is questionable how much of his fiction is meant to be taken seriously at all, and how much only plays into what Declan Kiberd identified as a “critique of the manic Victorian urge to antithesis... not only between all things English and Irish, but also between male and female, master and servant, good and evil, and so on” (38). Nils Clausson outlines the curious generic reception history of the novel, detailing contemporary readers and reviewers who considered the novel some combination of romance, parable, morality play, and other things besides (339-343). Clausson also reminds us that this is no empty debate, as “*Dorian Gray* has always provoked contradictory interpretations, but underlying the disagreements about the work’s meaning there has persisted a more fundamental debate about what *kind* of novel it should be read *as*” (339-340, emphasis in original). Couched under layers upon layers of irony and conflicting perspectives, even “the quintessentially Wildean notion of making one’s life a work of art comes in for scrutiny,” according to Andrew Christensen (168). By choosing to read the novel as a Bildungsroman, I am consciously reading Wilde’s deferrals of the narrative in favor of long lists of objects and their descriptions as a form of unnarration which ossifies Dorian while emphasizing the complex legacies and histories of the objects he purchases. In effect, Wilde objectifies Dorian in triplicate: he becomes his portrait, the narrative space for his development is instead granted to the objects he owns, and the novel *Dorian Gray* becomes itself a still

life, overcrowded and florid but representing the end of an epoch from a position of impotence.

The terms non-, un- and dis-narration are perhaps more familiar from studies of Henry James' fiction but are very significant in reading the Gothic Bildungsroman, which achieves its petrifying formal effects by sustained acts of *not* narrating. In James' novels, narrators "practice narrative refusal either by saying they cannot or will not tell what happened...or else telling what did not happen in place of what did" (Warhol 259). However, at "the same time, narrative refusal works to critique generic expectations and to push out the boundaries of genre" (Warhol 260). Because the reader is already familiar with the coming-of-age story, Wilde's refusal to capitulate to the generic expectations of that story creates a shadow beneath what is actually presented on the page, namely the lack of development that goes unremarked on in the novel. Lord Henry's ironic statement that the "aim of life is self-development" flies like an albatross over the entire text, as Dorian does anything but develop, and the narrator does anything but remark upon it (Wilde 19). Writing about James' novel *The Spoils of Poynton*, Christine McBride argues that James does not repress these unnarrated events, but "indulges this fantasy in his novel's plot, even as he critiques it in narration. This contradiction is never finally resolved; narration does not *overwrite* the plot so much as enable it, even coming to resemble it" (255, emphasis in original). This argument about James dovetails nicely with Esty's argument about Wilde. *Dorian Gray* sets out to stall, rather than move forward, and the pauses in narrative come to infect the narration itself until the plot and the narration both resemble the titular frozen youth. The familiar move in the early Victorian

Bildungsroman—that *Jane Eyre* is Jane Eyre—is mimicked and distorted by Wilde. Beyond this, and by my reckoning equally important, borrowing from John Paul Riquelme, Dorian’s “poisonous, self-negating confluence” is “not his alone. He shares it with others in the narrative and with the fantastic quality of his story,” and, I would suggest, with the contemporary reader who may unwittingly find in Dorian a mirror of England (610).

Wilde’s hybrid identity—the Dublin-born London socialite—afforded him the position to look at the waning Victorian period inside its metropolitan hub with some level of distance. This is embodied by Dorian’s bargain, whereby he can dabble with “notions of the corrosive effects of modernity” familiar to degeneration theory without actually physically degenerating: as the novel continues, Dorian organizes his home into a cacophonous “primeval past identified with the colonies” which co-exists with the “future identified with the march of capitalism” (Agathocleous 178). When Basil remarks offhand that he “had been chattered about in the penny newspapers, which is the nineteenth-century standard of immortality,” he is really commenting on the transience of his own existence within the confines of that system which he is both beneficiary to and is entrapped by (Wilde 10). His skewed view of history emerges from his position as artist/creator in the fin-de-siècle, a position which he articulates by saying, “there are only two eras of any importance in the world’s history. The first is the appearance of a new medium for art, and the second is the appearance of a new personality for art” (13). Reducing history to art and subjects for art, Basil is one half of the philosophy that feeds into Dorian’s later hoarding impulse. The second half, of course, is Lord Henry, who says

disparagingly that the ideal modern man is “well-informed,” with a mind “like a bric-à-brac shop, all monsters and dust” (15). As he leaves Basil’s curated garden, Dorian’s lack of Bildung follows from the logical result of these twin philosophies. Dorian buys increasing quantities of foreign items that represent the “exotica of the world outside the West” as he loses his interpersonal relationships and becomes more and more an object amongst his growing collection, isolated from the world (Gagnier 110). Wilde shows this transition most vividly between chapters ten and twelve of the novel when nearly two decades pass: Dorian goes unchanged, but his collection grows and overtakes his place in the story of his life.

Upon realizing that his portrait will bear his sins and his age in his stead, Dorian turns immediately to material goods:

His eyes fell on a large, purple satin coverlet heavily embroidered with gold, a splendid piece of late seventeenth-century Venetian work that his grandfather had found in a convent near Bologna. Yes, that would serve to wrap the dreadful thing in. It had perhaps served often as a pall for the dead. Now it was to hide something that had a corruption of its own, worse than the corruption of death itself—something that would breed horrors and yet would never die.

(Wilde 98-99).

The painting, for Dorian, is something worse than death that also festers perpetually, a legacy that can only rot further and decay into more decrepit ruins of its initial splendor. It is telling that he hides it with an opulent coverlet that has already outlived generations of his family: his sins have been immortalized in art, and he covers those sins with

something that has outlived generations of humans. At the beginning of the tenth chapter, shortly before this passage and usually unremarked upon, there is a curious section in the 1891 edition of the text: “After a few moments, in her black silk dress, with old-fashioned thread mittens on her wrinkled hands, Mrs. Leaf bustled into the library. He asked her for the key of the schoolroom” (98). The two characters have a short conversation, and Mrs. Leaf vanishes forever less than ten lines down the page. She is the definition of a minor character, occupying very little space on the page or in the reader’s attention: what Dorian is doing is, of course, far more interesting. She fetches the key, and she leaves the narrative: Mrs. Leaf “lingered for a few moments, and was garrulous over some detail of the household...She left the room, wreathed in smiles” (98). Curiously, the 1890 edition gives Mrs. Leaf considerably more narrative import. In an almost Dickensian vignette, she and Dorian contemplate her life as a servant to his family, and he tells her, “You must always call me Master Dorian, Leaf. I will be very angry with you if you don’t. And I assure you I am quite as fond of jam now as I used to be” (253). For almost two full pages, Mrs. Leaf and Dorian chit-chat. Dorian even goes so far as to tell her “I hope your rheumatism is better,” and laughs several times (253). She is, in the older edition, “a dear old lady in a black silk dress, with a photograph of the late Mr. Leaf framed in a large gold brooch at her neck, and old-fashioned thread mittens on her wrinkled hands” (252).

It is well-known that Wilde added to the text as he edited it for the 1891 edition. The 1891 edition is approximately twenty-five thousand words longer than the 1890 edition, many thousands of which concern Dorian’s possessions and collections. And yet

here, Wilde subtracts. The gesture in the earlier edition towards Dorian's personal history, a woman to whom he has real, human connections, sees her reduced in the later edition to a mechanical actor who hands him a key. Putting aside the suitability of the Mrs. Leaf vignette at this point in the novel, Wilde centers the coverlet and its origins and makes peripheral Mrs. Leaf. Wilde *does not* narrate that personal history, shifting the focus off of Dorian the person, connected to other people in the storyworld, and onto Dorian the art collector, the aesthete. Logan Wiedenfeld has identified that the Bildungsroman tends to operate "within a 'restrictive' narrative economy," where "there is no 'throwaway' scenes or characters, no chaff, no looseness. Every event and more significantly, every character is sublated by the protagonist's *Bildung* plot" (303). Without a real Bildung plot, absent development, Mrs. Leaf becomes superfluous, even as an already minor character. It is all the more striking that Wilde adheres to this principle of a restrictive narrative economy with characters, and abandons it with inanimate objects, which take over the narrative despite stalling, rather than advancing, any potential development Dorian might undergo.

The considerable length of the passages chronicling Dorian's collecting rivals any Homeric catalog. For some seven pages, nothing happens at all, as far as the *fabula* of the novel is concerned. Dorian "would now study perfumes," and "another time he devoted himself entirely to music...he used to give curious concerts in which mad gypsies tore wild music from little zithers, or grave yellow-shawled Tunisians plucked at the strained strings of monstrous lutes"; "on one occasion he took up the study of jewels" and then he "discovered wonderful stories, also, about jewels" (111, 112, 113). He thinks about stories, collects them in print, and then "turned his attention to embroideries, and to the

tapestries that performed the office of frescoes” (115). He has “a special passion, also, for ecclesiastical vestments” which he also collects (116). The objects come from across the globe, spanning Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Particularly disturbing are the concerts Dorian puts on, bringing in people to perform in what is almost a living museum amidst his opulent displays of commodities. According to Rita Felski, Dorian, despite his aspirations, has “a continuing dependency on the commodity culture against which he appears to position himself. [His] search for ever more arcane objects not yet trivialized by mass reproduction echoes the same cult of novelty which propels the logic of capitalist consumerism” (99). Here the form of the novel truly blends with the narration: at his most insipidly narcissistic, in his absolute refusal to meaningfully do anything, the supposed story of Dorian’s self-fashioning becomes a long parade of objects stripped of their context and presented haphazardly by Dorian in the storyworld and haphazardly to the reader.

Because his obsessive collecting has precluded any meaningful possibility for Dorian to develop by crowding out not only the capacity to act but also crowding out the people around him, Dorian’s home, which he finds himself less and less willing to stray from, becomes a motley tomb. To Dorian, “these treasures, and everything that he collected in his lovely house, were to be to him means of forgetfulness, modes by which he could escape, for a season, from the fear that seemed to him at times almost too great to be borne” (Wilde 117). Soon, “he could not endure to be long out of England,” and despite the phenomenal freedom afforded to him by his extended youth and wealth, Dorian abandons development entirely (Wilde 118). Wilde, through Dorian, inverts the

credo of self-development, replacing it with “an undirected and largely alogical process of accretion” (Arata *Fictions of Loss* 61). While this section comes only roughly halfway through the novel, the remainder of the text treads and retreads this familiar ground: Dorian comes to view “the whole of history” as “merely the record of his own life, not as he had lived it in act and circumstance, but as his imagination had created it for him” (Wilde 121). Dorian has “finished” history in his home, collecting a veritable Noah’s Ark of inanimate objects which, to him, will stand for history; when he kills himself, this history ends. Christine Ferguson’s theory that, while failing “on one register, the decadent subject achieves a dark success on another...such conclusions logically culminate an attempt to master, dissect, and transcend conventional modes of epistemology” is compelling if one were to try and make meaning out of the back half of the novel and its explosive ending (471-472). If, however, we understand the form of *Dorian Gray* as a ruin from the moment that Dorian trades places with his portrait, slowly degrading until its eventual collapse under the impossible narrative weight it bears, then Dorian’s very failure *is* the success, a novel where nothing much happens with a protagonist who slides from subject to curator to object.

### ***The Last September and the Frustration of Narration***

If, as Nunokawa suggested, nothing much happens in *Dorian Gray*, perhaps the Anglo-Irish author Elizabeth Bowen’s 1929 novel *The Last September* one-ups Wilde with how extensively prose and plot can work together to avoid action. Her novel is almost too true to the inanities and banal frustrations of everyday life to be believed, both in its form and content. *The Last September* tells the story of the titular last September at

the Big House Danielstown approximately a decade before the novel's publication date, shortly before Irish soldiers would burn it to the ground. Bowen's wealthy Naylor clan sips tea, plays tennis, and, largely, ignores the war that is happening around them. They are the stereotypical inhabitants of the Irish Big House and the Big House genre. Even contact with soldiers in the British army (and two later run-ins with Irish resistance fighters) doesn't seem to break the placid calm at Danielstown which, one can tell from the novel's title alone, will have to shatter. Lois Farquar, the heroine, floats through days and weeks of dances and courtship by the British-aligned soldier Gerald, the future always seeming infinitely far away from her. The novel is written—to the point of frustration—in a way claustrophobically true to life: characters interrupt each other, dialogue goes unfinished often, and the Naylor ignore reality even as it is on their doorstep. Characters skirt around problems and leave issues unresolved. Bowen described her writing as a form of “verbal painting,” and it is this methodology that guides my reading of the novel (“Autobiographical Note”). *The Last September* is as much a series of paintings as it is a novel, still lives of sterile characters who move from scene to scene without seeming to really inhabit the setting they are described as occupying.

With the benefit of hindsight, something Wilde lacked in *Dorian Gray*, Bowen is empowered to spin threads of a post-imperial Gothic into the novel with knowledge of the outcome of the burnings that would sweep through Ireland throughout the revolutionary period spanning 1919-1923. Whereas Wilde created a stalled and thwarted narrative to present a crystalline, object-first picture of the end of Victorian history, Bowen's ruin is a way of life that really did cease to exist, a historical narrative that *did*

play out in reality, but which she herself cannot take fully ironic distance from. Caught between the height of the empire and its fuller dissolution later in the century, *The Last September* is a Bildungsroman centered on frustration and limitation, a narrative about the inability of narrative to capture the fullness of human history and experience, presented through the dual temporality of the Big House which is simultaneously doomed to burn and already burned down.

Bowen was described in a eulogy as “heart-cloven and split-minded...consistently declaring herself born and reared Irish, residing mostly in England, writing in the full European tradition; no wonder all her serious work steams with the clash of battle between aspects of life more easy for us to feel than to define” (O’Faoláin 15). She is one of many occupants of the Anglo-Irish class who Maria DiBattista argues, “with their hyphenated identity and divided loyalties, represent a special case in the history of colonialism” (DiBattista 228). They were both “determined to imagine new forms of individual and social life that would be emancipated, yet still connected to the living strains of tradition” (DiBattista 228). I am hesitant to take DiBattista’s proposition up fully, as there are many writers from colonies and former colonies with split allegiances or troubled connections to either England or their own culture, but the proximity and long history between England and Ireland certainly make the relationship unique. There was for some writers and artists a vision of Ireland as “a country whose beauty is unnaturally preserved in a green and frozen youth” (Mahaffey 53). What Joseph Valente called the “metrocolonial” situation of Ireland, both colonial other and proximate to the center of power, further complicates the hyphenated identity that Bowen and Wilde both held

(3-4). Edna Duffy's point on this proximity is well taken, as he argues that "Irish modernism and Irish postcoloniality were parallel projects, and the closeness of the cultural and the political realms fostered a tense intimacy between Irish modernism and Irish readers" (195).

Without denying the complexities in the Anglo-Irish hybrid identity, some of this discourse veers towards a persistent trend concerning the "real Irish" and "real Ireland," a trend identified by Jim Hansen that in "the criticism we often find a nostalgic longing for a kind of patriarchal Irishness untouched by British hands...This critical approach often imagines Anglo-Ireland as the lone name for colonial false consciousness, rather than as one hybridized component of a more complicated cultural and socio-political matrix" (9). According to Siân White, for Bowen, "the doom of the Anglo-Irish class was certainly a foregone conclusion by 1929, and as a staunch conservative Bowen herself longed to preserve a bygone way of life—the tension between the focalized present and the project of looking back suggests an ambivalent mixture of lamentation, critique, and tentative responsibility" (46). Bowen, split between identities and pulled in several directions, chronologically removed from the revolutionary period but still sharply feeling its effects, is the perfect case study for working through these complexities and contradictions. Annaliese Hoehling helpfully provides readings of the actual, literal ruins that appear in *The Last September*, which "don't merely stand in for a general idea of colonialism in Ireland....Rather, the ruins create a space in the text where multiple historical trajectories and related ethical meanings collide" (112). Her reading of the "text-as-ruin," I believe, is useful but ultimately limiting precisely because it imagines the ruin as something finished

rather than as a site of continuing signification that undergoes further decay (113). Danielstown, emblematic of the wealthy Anglo-Irish that populate the text, well before it burns, is already a ruin. Lois is thereby both witness to and victim of the de-centering that the Anglo-Irish gentry undergoes in the period.

As a young woman, Lois's *Bildung* plot is particularly well-served to illustrate the dual function of narrative in *The Last September*. In the female Bildungsroman it has been argued that often the "tensions that shape female development...lead to a dysfunction between a surface plot...and a submerged plot, which encodes rebellion" (Abel et al. 12). In older Bildungsromane, this might manifest itself as the righteously indignant and powerful inner life of a female character contrasted with the forced humility and meekness she is obliged to put on in public; in the case of *The Last September*, Lois's internal life, her experience of external stimuli, her sharp and powerful potential to *act* is tamped down and bound by the fading, ghostly remnants of her family and their legacy. In one of many telling passages, Lois imagines her extended family inside Danielstown in the "shuttered-in drawing room, the family sealed up in lamplight, secure and bright like flowers in a paper-weight" (*LS* 41-2). Sarah Townsend points out that "the slow narrative time of the Bildungsroman is a luxury that the subjects of peripheralized literatures—whether under pressure of political coercion, economic necessity, or cultural and psychic urgency—can rarely afford" (337). With the title of the novel indicating that time is running out, and Bowen's remark in the preface that the characters and settings in the novel "reflect the glow of a finished time," the image of pressed flowers is particularly vivid (*LS* vii). In *The Last September* Bowen frequently

passes over, metaphorically and through punctuation, representations of Lois's internal spirit, and defrays the narrative space she may have been afforded to Danielstown and the objects gathered inside it.

Maud Ellmann once described Elizabeth Bowen as "addict[ed] to personification," and said her style "creates the sense that every object has a psyche; in fact, her object even have neuroses" (6). The scenery has "seemingly human emotions... Her lifelong interest in discovering the secret lives of things formed the basis of the literary animism she developed" (Inglesby 306). Early in the novel, a description of the parlor and its lives contrast sharply with the Naylor and Montmorencys:

The high windows were curtainless; tasselled fringes frayed the light at the top. The white sills—the shutters folded back in their frames—were blistered, as though the house had spent a day in the tropics. Exhausted by sunshine, the backs of the crimson chairs were a thin, light orange; a smell of camphor and animals drawn from skins on the floor in the glare of morning still hung like dust on the evening chill. Going through to her room at nights Lois often tripped with her toe in the jaws of a tiger; a false step at any time sent some great claw skidding over the polish. Pale regimental groups, reunions a generation ago of the family or neighbourhood, gave out from the walls a vague depression. There were two locked bookcases of which the keys had been lost, and a troop of ebony elephants brought back from India by someone she did not remember paraded along the tops of the bookcases.

*(LS 7).*

The personification jumps off the page, but of equal importance are the geographical associations each part of the parlor is ascribed. The house had “spent a day in the tropics,” and a tiger pelt adorns the floor. The elephants, a persistent motif, have been brought back from India by *someone*, but Lois, and the reader, don’t know who. It is almost as if the house, on its world tour, snatched them up itself. The simile to flowers pressed into a paper-weight renders the entire family as another object inside (and part of) Danielstown, rather than its owners and curators. For all the life that Bowen’s objects have, her characters fade away, frozen in history, as the last passengers on a sinking ship.

Jeannie Im remarks that “description overwhelms the characters, who experience ‘intensification’ of personality without being able to convert these intensifications into intentions” (462). Lois “had surprised life at a significant angle in the shrubbery,” after she runs into a soldier digging up guns on the Danielstown ground, but, rather than a pivot in her narrative, a jumping-point for development or experience, she thinks that at “a touch from Aunt Myra adventure became literary, to Uncle Richard it suggested an inconvenience; a glance from Mr. Montmorency or Laurence would make her encounter sterile” (*LS* 43). Im points out that “Lois’s life is so embedded in the violent realness of her world” that this repeated frustration of intentions causes her to “virtually fad[e] into its landscape” (462). If Dorian was an attempt to imagine and frustrate the purest form of late-Victorian self-cultivation, Lois is the frustration of being born between eras, between identities, stunted out of growth by those around her while the world itself changes seismically. On the one hand, she might experience the world and be subject to its violent realities, as will later happen to her suitor Gerald; on the other, she could become part of

Danielstown's *tableau vivant*, a still-living piece of a dying way of living. In both cases, she typifies the ruins of the Anglo-Irish way of life.

That way of life is under siege from inside the walls of Danielstown as much as it is by rebels outside of it. Persistent allusions to things that are conceived and aborted, sterility, and virginity permeate the text. A conversation between the men in Lois' family:

"Talking of being virginal, do you ever notice this country? Doesn't sex seem irrelevant?"

"There certainly are a great many unmarried women," said Mr. Montmorency, looking doubtfully through the net at the Miss Hartigans.

"It is: 'Ah, why would we?' And indeed why should they? There is no reason why one should not so one never does. It applies to everything. And children seem in every sense of the word to be inconceivable."

(54-55).

The double meaning of "inconceivable" draws attention to the permeating sterility of Danielstown. Not only are children unlikely, and the young men and women unmarried, but they are outright inconceivable. Every parlor chair and lamp flickers with ghostly life, but the prospect of actually creating real human life lies outside the realm of possibility. This passage likewise calls attention to the convention of the female Bildungsroman which tethers the young woman's maturation to her eventual marriage at the novel's end. The frequent double negatives ("no reason why one should not so one never does") confuse and obfuscate the actual meaning of the words, one of many frustrated

conversations which take up considerable space on the page without actually generating anything.

Further frustrating narrative development are two powerful formal elements of Bowen's writing in her frequent use of em-dashes and ellipsis, both in and out of the dialogue. In a novel that features so much dialogue, remarkably little is communicated. A later passage between Lois and her aunt draws attention to the implausibility of Lois ever maturing:

“I don't think about marriage, I—”

“Then you can have no conception—”

“I read,” said Lois with dignity.

“Girls nowadays do nothing but lend each other these biological books.”

(246).

The characters talk past each other, and the double meaning of ‘conception’ only emerges precisely because Lois interrupts her aunt. A sentence that likely would have been written to the effect of “Then you can have no conception of marriage” instead resonates with the same sterility the rest of the family has already accepted, the impossibility of conception generally. More visually distracting, and arguably more important to the novel-long commitment to preclude any possibility of Lois undergoing *Bildung*, are the two hundred and fifty-one sets of ellipses, deployed by Bowen at key moments both in dialogue and in narration. In her study of the usage of ellipses, Anne Toner writes that punctuation “becomes conspicuous mainly through aberrant practice” (Toner 2). Burying plot and communication, both from the narrator to the reader and from character to character,

within punctuation, is very aberrant, particularly as the ellipses frame further confusion. In an “almost proposal” rivaling the most convoluted in English literature, Gerald asks Lois, “Look here, no one matters. Don’t let’s talk...I mean...don’t let’s talk. Lois, there’s so little time now, I’m desperate. I don’t see when I am going to see you, ever. Lois, this miserable waiting; even happiness never lets one alone. When shall we be quiet?” (253). Returning to the idea of the characters in a Bildungsroman serving as narrative capital for the heroine, Bowen gleefully deploys what can only be described as forged currency throughout the novel. Gerald, an upstanding if bumbling soldier and love interest, doubles back on his words repeatedly, and ends his rambling speech by asking for quiet. The frequent refrain “I mean” throughout the novel ought to clarify meaning, but it seldom if ever does.

Declan Kiberd argues that “Bowen’s ladies and gentlemen find themselves caught in a crisis of perpetual anticipation followed by inevitable disappointment, with all their days an expensive preparation for some splendid epiphany which never transpires” (377). That epiphany, I would argue, is contained in that which is not narrated in *The Last September*, the world off of the estate and in history as it is happening. Lois’s maturation and a sense of futurity isn’t the only thing lacking from the pages of *The Last September*. John Greaney points out that the Troubles and the War of Independence are “two terms which do not feature in the text,” but that taken together “apparently for[m] its fabric” (223). The list of what goes unnarrated in the novel is arguably longer than what is narrated. Twice, however, the bubble around Danielstown bursts. Twice Lois has contact with rebel soldiers, and the middle section of the text titled “The Visit of Miss Norton”

actually, for a moment, offers the epiphany that will not come. Lois and Marda Norton encounter an unknown man in an old mill, and Marda's hand is injured during the encounter. The man, brandishing a pistol, tells the girls, "It is time" "that yourselves gave up walking. If yez have nothing better to do, yez had better keep within the house while y'have it" (181). For all the empty dialogue in the text, here in two simple sentences, the rebel soldier explains the stakes of the situation as it stands, and the inevitable fate of Danielstown and Lois's family. After the encounter, Lois thinks to herself, "I must marry Gerald" (182). For the duration of a thought, Lois gestures towards the expected path for her coming-of-age narrative. Rejecting sterility and embracing marriage, realizing perhaps the precarity of her present situation and the circumstances of the war, Lois is shocked out of the reverie that characterizes the listless days in the Big House. But, it is not to be. Marda leaves, and the novel's anti-developmental plot resumes where it left off.

Near the end of the novel, Gerald is killed by a shot to the head. The information is relayed to the characters, and the reader, obliquely: "The world did not stand still, though the household at Danielstown and the Thompsons' lunch party took no account of it. The shocking news reached Clonmore about eight o'clock. It crashed upon the unknowingness of the town like a wave that for two hours, since the event, had been standing and toppling, imminent" (292). Befitting his inability to communicate anything, Gerald's death and its resonances rob Lois of the chance for closure and also her ability to communicate. At the end of the novel, she is reduced in stature to one amongst many in Danielstown, not the chief character, but another onlooker in the final days of the house,

the fate of which has overtaken the *dramatis personae*. Her cousin insensitively remarks, “I expect—I don’t know—one probably gets past things” (299). Lois replies, “But look here, there are things that one can’t—” and, in parentheses, “(She meant: he loved me, he believed in the British Empire)” (299). The narrator steps in and reveals Lois’s thoughts, but in the novel’s final pages Lois recedes, and stumbles.

Lois is sent off to the continent unceremoniously. The final page of the text contains the actual burning of Danielstown, a very sharp contrast to the panoptic conclusions of earlier Bildungsromane which speak to, one by one, the fates of the characters contained within.<sup>4</sup> At the end, “in February, before those leaves had visibly budded, the death—the execution, rather—of the three houses, Danielstown, Castle Trent, Mount Isabel, occurred in the same night. A fearful scarlet ate up the hard spring darkness; indeed, it seemed that an extra day, unreckoned, had come to abortive birth that these things might happen” (303). The abortive birth of the bright fire causing a pseudo-day is a compelling final image for a text so committed to the implausibility of reproductive futurity. The Anglo-Irish class, already early in the text shadowy object-presences meandering through Danielstown, relics of an earlier era, are “executed” along with the house that had become their identity. Lois is largely a bystander to history-in-motion, brushing up occasionally against violence outside of Danielstown. The post-Imperial Gothic reorients the focus away from the heroine through a double-distancing effect: the reader knows what will eventually happen, and thus the inevitability of the ending colors each interpersonal interaction contained within the novel, and Lois is

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<sup>4</sup> Typical examples of this panoptic concluding section include *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, and *Middlemarch*.

herself distanced from the historical conditions which will lead to the immolation. In a country at war with itself and with England, Lois becomes a narrative tool deployed by Bowen to enable a melancholic eulogy sustained through the last sentences of the novel, gradually losing status as the crown jewel of a Bildungsroman. In *Dorian Gray*, Wilde constructs and thwarts a potential end to history, while in *The Last September*, a very real history and class of people live out the last days in a fictional landscape that comes to typify a sterile museum before eventually falling into ruin. In *The God of Small Things*, a postcolonial Gothic emerges which is no less troubled, through which Roy reimagines the potential networks of relationships between characters, commodities, and history. Unlike the preceding novelists, however, Roy offers what may be a trick solution to the decentering of the human at the end of her Bildungsroman, recognizing the impossibility of the individual shaping history without losing sight of the humans struggling within it.

### ***The God of Small Things and Small Histories***

Arundhati Roy's 1997 novel *The God of Small Things* took the literary world by storm. In a review written shortly after the novel's publication, Aijaz Ahmad remarked that a "key strength of Arundhati Roy is that she has written a novel that has learned all that there is to be learned from modernism, magic realism, cinematic cutting and montage and other such developments of narrative technique in the 20th century" ("Reading Arundhati Roy"). His phrasing is curious but very apropos: he places the learning done onto the novel itself, rather than its author. This is quite fitting for a novel brimming with the animated inanimate. According to Roy herself, the novel was written "out of sequence," from a single image: "the sky blue Plymouth with the two twins inside it, a

Marxist procession surrounding it. And it just developed from there. The language just started weaving together, sentence by sentence” (“Arundhati Roy”). At the crossroads of commodity, history, and the twin protagonists, *The God of Small Things* emerged, spiraling out through multiple chronological frames. Several elements inherent to the text and its author distinguish it from the earlier novels treated in this chapter. First, it was written nearly sixty years after Bowen’s novel, and over a hundred years after Wilde’s. This affords Roy a wider contextual base and a wider view of history and the emergent historical narratives of the twentieth century. Second, Roy is an Indian writer, whereas both Wilde and Bowen are Anglo-Irish. Third, compellingly, *The God of Small Things* lacks a singular protagonist. I have argued that Dorian and Lois are eventually rendered inert, but both novels do begin with the familiar construction in the Bildungsroman, a singular agent of focalization. Roy’s novel features twins, Estha and Rahel, as the apparent protagonists, but approaching the text as a Bildungsroman doubled might also be too simplistic. According to Roy, regarding a main character, there “is no reason for there to be one. In fact, I think the center is everyone...they are all the core” (“Arundhati Roy”).

The novel’s narrative does support a possible reading of multiple simultaneous Bildung plots, woven through the family drama and political commentary that undergirds them. The story unfolds across two distinct chronologies, with the twins Estha and Rahel at seven and thirty-one years old in 1969 and 1993, respectively. The happenings in those chronologies are largely traumatic. The twins’ cousin, Sophie Mol, drowns, and the twins are marked forever by this experience. Estha is later sexually assaulted in a movie theater

by an older man, the family drives through the aforementioned communist procession, Ammu, the twins' mother, falls in love with Velutha, a member of the Untouchable caste, and Velutha is later beaten to death by police. Ammu dies, sick and alone, at thirty-one. The twins engage in incestuous sex as adults. Roy weaves these and other events together into a loose development narrative that follows the twins and other members of their family, but there is a curious feeling through the entire text that time isn't flowing linearly, or at least isn't experienced that way.

A Bildungsroman that totally eschews linear temporal progression is a curious case, and the two snapshots in time become in the narrative a kind of ruin that the twins inhabit and reflect on through simulated simultaneity: like Dorian and Lois, they both inhabit the narrative ruins in their fictional lived time, but the echoes and atemporality of memory inflect their Bildung with historical pasts both personal and national. A common device in Gothic fiction, this act of narrative tethering coupled with the achronological deployment of the plot draws attention to the inescapability of history, and the inability of individual agency to transcend the overwhelming burden of living through it. In the History House, the site of much of the personal and historical trauma in the novel, Roy works through the tension between the individual's development plot in the Bildungsroman and that which should be its diametric opposite, the insignificance of any individual in the global world of late capitalism. The twins are ultimately put into states of suspended development while the History House becomes the emblem and agent of their personal trauma, and the cause of their arrested teleology; it also represents a macabre promise for future generations that replaces the hopeful, future-oriented project

of the typical coming-of-age plot. Despite this, or, perhaps *because* of the sheer gap in scale between the twins and the forces that cause them harm, the novel ends with hope that finds its way through the narrative's cracks.

Like Bowen, who chooses actively not to name the Troubles or the War of Independence, Roy, according to Paul Jay, “pays very little overt attention to the history of colonialism and decolonization in India” (96). Instead, she is “more interested in exploring the contemporary and disruptive effects of economic and cultural globalization” (Jay 96). Rather than clear binaries, Roy privileges “an extremely heterogeneous network of relationships,” according to Michael Meyer, “in which distinctions remain relevant to purposes of both domination and resistance” (398). The titular “God of Small Things” is personal, “cozy and contained, private and intimate,” while the “Big God” “howled like a hot wind and demanded obeisance” (*GoST* 20). This approach means that Roy outright rejects a connection between the coming-of-age of the twins and any kind of grand national telos: if Estha and Rahel “stand for India” in any meaningful way, they do so only because the story of their fractured family and their generational trauma is resonant. Compared to, say, Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, which very explicitly charts the birth of the new Indian nation through Saleem,<sup>5</sup> Roy’s novel does another kind of work entirely. This by no means suggests that the novel isn’t engaging with issues of coloniality and postcoloniality, only that the novel takes pains to showcase the importance and significance of the “small things” that are too often swept

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<sup>5</sup> In a subsequent chapter, I will take up Rushdie’s appropriation and reimagining of the national allegory. The prevailing understanding in the current critical literature however is that he participates in this generic tradition.

away in and by grand historical narratives. Ania Loomba makes the cogent point that postcolonial works “cannot be adequately discussed out of the difficult interplay between their local and global contexts, an awareness that is all too often erased as we celebrate the hybridity or polyphony or magic realism of these texts” (257). By hewing so close to the “small things” Roy forces readers to confront the local specificity of her family drama even as the formal features of the novel, and its handling of the “big things” compete for readerly attention. The binary between big and small, like so many other binaries in Roy’s novel, is, however, a false one. Youngsuk Chase suggests that Roy “criticizes the ways in which dualistic constructions naturalize hierarchies” in this and in other false binaries including gender, caste, and (non-)development (522). One such false binary worth thinking through using the language of the novel is that of youth and age, displaying the ways Roy represents the passage of time in the storyworld.

From the opening chapters of the novel, Roy makes frequent and curious references to characters who don’t fit the standard model of aging. While this may seem like a quirk of some passages from the novel, it is a very significant break from the aesthetic promise of the Bildungsroman: without the progression from youth to maturity, the genre, as the earlier texts in this chapter show, loses something essential, and without the older generations passing the torch to the younger, there is no societal space for that progression to happen. Baby Kochamma, the twins’ tyrannical great aunt, is very old and yet still called Baby. She is, according to Rahel, “*living her life backwards*” (GoST 23, emphasis in original). At the end of the chronology of the novel, when she is as old as she will be, Baby Kochamma is “like a young bride who couldn’t believe her good fortune,”

and Rahel thinks again, “Baby Kochamma *had* lived her life backwards” (23, emphasis in original). Estha has in him “worst of all...the memory of a young man with an old man’s mouth” (32). After her drowning, Sophie Mol’s corpse takes on the appearance of advanced old age, “pale and as wrinkled as a dhobi’s thumb from being in water for too long” (6). Rahel thinks it “unnecessarily cruel” to make an old bellboy who “wasn’t a boy and hadn’t a bell” wear “a cap sideways like that and arbitrarily re-order the way in which age chose to hang from his chin” (108). Combined, these references convey to the reader that time oughtn’t to be read as linear in the novel, and, scattered throughout the text, become a persistent motif that plays out not only in its prose but in the *syuzhet*. This intrusion of youth on age—and vice versa—pairs with the persistent preservation of people and things that occurs throughout the text, which led Ato Quayson to argue that the novel “becomes not the story of growing up but rather the teleology of an arrested development” (241). This arrested teleology finds its narrative symbol in the Paradise Pickle Preserves factory that features in the novel, which Rukhaya Kuhn and Zeenath Mohamed Kunhi have pointed towards as the symbol for an untroubled natural world that “desperately attempts to be preserved for posterity,” but I would suggest that this “pickling” seeps into the text’s narrative mesh, more pervasive than an attempt to uphold an untroubled natural world which has long been a mirage (5).

Like the products of the factory, the twins themselves are preserved in various ways, and the structure of the novel encourages the reader to think of them as simultaneously child and adult, living in two times at once through the text’s *syuzhet* and the intrusions of memories from the distant past. In these instances, Rahel will switch

tenses mid-thought. A typical passage from early in the novel and late in its chronology demonstrates this linguistic play:

In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was Forever, Estha and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities.

Now, these years later, Rahel has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha's funny dream.

(5).

The borders between self and other, past and present, break down, and Rahel switches from the past to the present tense when she “has” a memory of something in the distant past. She thinks and lives in what Homi Bhabha described as “in the narrative uncertainty of culture’s in-between: between sign and signifier, neither one nor the other” (*Location of Culture* 126-127). Their state of living “in-between” timeframes places the twins in a tenuous relationship with the influx of Western commodities and culture that spill into India and into the narrative, as well as with personal and national histories.

Amidst an ever-increasing amount of imported commodities and Western cultural touchpoints which start with the Plymouth and range from Elvis to *The Sound of Music*, Estha and Rahel are surrounded by “networks that threaten to overtake or obfuscate the presence of the human” (St. John 11). John Lutz argues that the “dehumanizing process” that commodity fetishism causes in the characters of the novel

results in “the reduction of all human experience to the stultifying inactivity and uniformity made manifest” typified by Baby Kochamma’s late-life turn towards schlocky American television (*GoST* 60). This influx puts the twins’ importance in the narrative under siege and leads to the risk that they might be eclipsed entirely by waves of American and European commodities. This is something that Roy makes reference to in the text: the twins’ uncle Chacko comments that they “were a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history” (*GoST* 51). They are trapped, seemingly, outside of their personal and national histories, while still enclosed in networks of power and capital that seem inescapable.

In this light, Rose Casey argues that history itself is one of Roy’s “tropes of enclosure” which along with the networks of commodities “establish an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia, of character having little agency over their narrative trajectories” (391). Casey is certainly correct, but Roy takes care to build the potential for resistance in these enclosures in subtle ways. In a longer passage that seems at first to demonstrate the unimportance of the humans in Roy’s novel, Chacko gives the twins “a sense of Historical Perspective” one afternoon, further shrinking their sense of narrative significance in their own unfolding lives:

He made them imagine that the earth-four thousand six hundred million years old was a forty-six-year-old woman-as old, say, as Aleyamma Teacher, who gave them Malayalam lessons. It had taken the whole of the Earth Woman’s life for the earth to become what it was. For the oceans to part. For the mountains to rise. The Earth Woman was eleven years old, Chacko said, when the first

single-celled organisms appeared. The first animals, creatures like worms and jellyfish, appeared only when she was forty. She was over forty-five-just eight months ago-when dinosaurs roamed the earth.

“The whole of human civilization as we know it,” Chacko told the twins, “began only two hours ago in the Earth Woman’s life. As long as it takes us to drive from Ayemenem to Cochin.”

(52-53).

This passage works in several ways. First, the metaphor of the Earth Woman changes the scale of time entirely, from twenty-three years lived by two young twins to geologic time which transcends them entirely. This continues the decentering of the individual subject in the twentieth-century Gothic Bildungsroman, eroding the narrative import of any one character’s development narrative. It also personifies the earth itself, suggesting in the earth woman a character who might fight for primacy in the storyworld, rather than any human character: it takes on a life, another vivified location. The final sentences, however, reconnect the Earth Woman to the twins. They can understand geologic time and their place in it through something familiar. Though the entirety of human history “was no more than a blink of the Earth Woman’s eye,” this will ultimately become liberating, a trick solution to the increasingly claustrophobic, inescapable history that constricts the twins (53).

The History House sits across the river Sophie Mol drowns in, and becomes the physical manifestation of the generational trauma that runs through personal and national histories. “Though the Earth Woman made a lasting impression on the twins,” the reader

finds out, “it was the History House—so much closer at hand—that really fascinated them. They thought about it often. The house on the other side of the river. Looming in the Heart of Darkness” (53). This and a later reference to Colonel Kurtz establish the History House as a location that stands in for the legacy of global colonialism, but it is also useful to think about the import the twins put into the History House of their own free will. It is “a house they couldn’t enter, full of whispers they couldn’t understand,” inaccessible to them and incomprehensible, or at least inarticulable (53). The narrator pulls the reader forward and reveals that they “didn’t know then that soon they *would* go in... That they would watch with dinner-plate eyes as history revealed itself to them in the back verandah” (53). They will eventually watch as Velutha is beaten to death by police from the History House, but in this moment and at others when the History House is near, the narrator will step in and move forward or backward in time before retreating into the familiarity of Rahel’s free indirect discourse in a form of narrative suspension.

In the following lines about the History House, Roy blends the strange seriousness that characterizes children’s lexica with information directed at the reader. She writes, that while “other children of their age learned other things, Estha and Rahel learned how history negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws. They heard its sickening thud. They smelled its smell and never forgot it” (53-4). Combining the horror of history with the previous decentering influence of the Earth Woman, the twins will “try to tell themselves that in terms of geological time [Velutha’s murder] was an insignificant event. Just a blink of the Earth Woman’s eye. That Worse Things had happened. That Worse Things kept happening. But they would find no

comfort in the thought” (53). The History House becomes a character that imposes law on the twins, and which gains more agency than they have. When they huddle together inside it watching the police beat Velutha to death, the twins are reduced to witnesses as their potential to change their own futures is taken from them before their eyes.

While a site of great violence and trauma, Mirja Lobnik argues that the History House also has the capacity for “the possibility of silenced histories to surface whenever met with force or vibration” (130). When the twins defer to the History House as the arbiter of their history, Roy draws attention to the conspicuous artifice of her narrative, and of narratives generally. Often, characters in novels will think or say something that has a double meaning for the reader, pointing to the form of the story they are reading. In the early pages of Roy’s novel, for example, Baby Kochamma decides she “didn’t even trust the twins. She deemed them Capable of Anything. Anything at all. *They might even steal their present back*” (29, emphasis in original). Obviously, this means that the twins are capable of stealing a present Baby Kochamma has taken from them. But to the reader who considers the genre of the novel and the way it turns out, this offhand thought reasserts agency through the cracks of grand historical narratives. The twins, who are capable of nothing, having ceded agency to the History House and what it represents, are “capable of anything”; for them to “steal their present back” would be to take the reins of history, to have a future different from the future that happens in the text. The eventual revelation that they don’t achieve this, that they share the “hideous grief” at the end of the novel instead of peace or joy or satisfaction, has already been tempered earlier in the

narrative in this hidden affirmation, a “small thing” that offers a respite from the “big things” that have overtaken them (311).

It is at these places where the novel shows the yet-untapped capacity for the ruin to spring forth with something new. The insignificance of the individual and her inability to change her circumstances becomes freeing, rather than constraining. Taken comprehensively for all of its parts and narrative import, the History House will continue to stand in various forms and stand witness to traumas that will transcend any one (or two, or many) human lives, but the “small things” that bring joy will temper the bad. Roy’s novel ends not with violence or grief but with Ammu and Velutha’s physical manifestation of love in an overwhelming reaffirmation of life and the capacity for humans to find respite in each other, much earlier in the novel’s chronology but placed last in order to reassert the power of the small and seemingly insignificant over the grand and the powerful. The final word of the text, “Tomorrow,” plays with the intermingled chronologies of the novel by pointing towards a better future than that which happens earlier in the novel, counterfactual but hopeful (321).

### **Things Moving Forward**

Inverting Mikhail Bakhtin’s term *chronotope*, Susan Stanford Friedman helpfully calls for a “*topochronic* narrative poetics, one that foregrounds *topos* in an effort to restore an interactive analysis of time with space in narrative discourse” (“Spatial Poetics” 194). This inversion is particularly useful in understanding the work that Wilde, Bowen, and Roy have undertaken in reorienting the *Bildungsroman* to focus on the *whats* that inhabit the storyworlds in their historical specificity. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,

Wilde invokes the late-Victorian fear that history would be ending because the Victorians would cease to exist, or cease to be Victorian, degenerating into something cruder. Dorian becomes a sort of mockery of this desire to put an end to history, transformed into an ossified art object amidst myriad other objects inside his home, curator and exhibit in his own museum. His identity becomes an empty signifier; he is nothing more than a false face put on a hollow shell, and his failure to develop rots the narrative he inhabits into a living ruin in frozen time. *The Last September* has Lois caught between the two halves of her hyphenated identity at a crux in history that she watches but stands outside of; she watches the opportunity to change, to make choices that might situate her in a time and a place all her own, pass her by, and becomes an afterthought to Danielstown, removed from her own Bildungsroman. *The God of Small Things* is a very unique case. The twins are traumatized and have suffered immeasurably by the end of the text, more so than either earlier Bildungsheld. The “Big Things” have taken everything from them. But, the God of Small Things, “[i]nured by the confirmation of his own inconsequence...became resilient and truly indifferent” (*GoST* 20). Roy recognizes the absurdity of centering, even in fiction, grand historical narratives on an individual, and breaks the illusion that one (or two) individuals might come to stand in for an entire nation and change its history. The historical forces that make the human characters seem microscopic, overpowering them by dozens of orders of magnitude, actually recede as the “small things” become important because of their precious fragility.

Stripping characters of agency in the Bildungsroman is a radical formal choice, and the novels demonstrate the radical formal effects that result from this decision.

Through their use of Gothic tropes, particularly the creeping and insistent specters of history that the *Bildungshelden* are unable to escape, the three authors treated here test the resultant clash when the novel meant to contain and shape modernity through narrative pushes up against historical narratives that transcend or reject the importance of the biographical form. The resultant ruins are themselves ghostly entities that the reader encounters, years, decades, or centuries later, as putrefied monuments of a history that still continues. The subsequent chapter will complicate this further, reading novels with *Bildungshelden* who feel themselves slipping out of the center of their very own lives and personal histories without the language to articulate why. Rather than narratives that are hijacked by objects or spaces that decenter the human characters, these novels formally resemble spirals that make out of the ostensibly linear narrative mesh of the coming-of-age novel a pervasive narrative rot, disconnected to both grand historical narratives and personal biography.

### CHAPTER 3

#### CYCLICAL ENTROPY: 'UNBEING,' LITERARY DESTINY, AND THE NATURALIST BILDUNGSROMAN

This chapter is bookended by two poems which each relate closely to novels rather than standing alone as poetic works. Neither poem has received nearly as much attention as the novels themselves, but both help draw attention to key elements of what can be best described as the naturalist Bildungsroman. The first, "Tess's Lament" by Thomas Hardy, is written from the perspective of Tess shortly before her execution at the end of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The latter, James Joyce's "Villanelle of the Temptress," was written by Joyce as a young man and inserted, late in the drafting of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as something which the adolescent Stephen Dedalus writes within the narrative of his Künstlerroman. Hardy's poem is helpful as a companion to both of his naturalist Bildungsromane, the other being *Jude the Obscure*, and elucidates the shocking and permeating detachment from his own life that the Bildungsheld in each of Hardy's Bildungsromane feels. This dispossessed distance runs throughout the spiral structure of various Bildungsromane which fuse literary naturalism and the telos-driven biographical narrative of development. The placement of Joyce's poem within the narrative of *Portrait* and the ways it informs the overall shape of that narrative, I will suggest, offer a path out from the seemingly all-encompassing entropic spirals of naturalism, something between pure rot and the relatively orderly and sequential development seen in earlier novels. In between the two poems, I will pair Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* with Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, arguing that each text utilizes a distancing effect between the protagonist, their

world, and their actions, which generates decaying and inescapable narrative cycles as the character struggles against the form and content of the text. In shorter codas, I will then speak to the plotting and editing history of George Moore's *Esther Waters* as well as the structure of Joyce's *Portrait*, and examine the ways in which the two Irish novelists both apply and subvert the conventions of naturalism, creating alternative Bildung plots from what may have seemed narrative dead ends.

### **“I’d have my life unbe”: Naturalism and the Novel of Development**

“Tess’s Lament,” first published in Hardy’s 1901 collection *Poems of the Past and Present* occupies a strange place in Hardy’s poetic oeuvre. What Hardy does in the poem is essentially resurrect a character written and killed a decade earlier in a different genre and in her own voice, unmoderated by the typical Hardian psycho-narration. The poem is short and its final stanza is worth reproducing:

It wears me out to think of it,  
To think of it;  
I cannot bear my fate as writ,  
I’d have my life unbe;  
Would turn my memory to a blot,  
Make every relic of me rot,  
My doings be as they were not,  
And what they’ve brought to me!  
(*Poems of the Past* 234).

The familiar strain of determinism in Hardy's longer prose fiction emerges: Tess cannot bear her fate, which is represented as beyond her control. More unique to the poem are Tess's repeated entreaties to erase her, utterly, from existence. In this poem, Hardy has done the opposite. By bringing Tess back from beyond the grave (and after the end of Hardy's career as a novelist, which concluded with *Jude the Obscure*), he has denied her oblivion. "His characters," according to J. Hillis Miller's influential study on Hardy, "seek death in order to forget and to be forgotten" (238). Hardy's writing, conversely, "is remembrance of things past and a permanent record of that remembrance...his writing cooperates with the impersonal mind of the Void by keeping their fugitive moments of experience alive...His writing gives his people the immortality they flee" (Miller 238-239). In Hardy's fiction, characters fight helplessly for a time against forces far greater than them, succumb, and are cast adrift for hundreds more pages after their demise has been sealed. The use of the strange word "unbe" suggests not only the antithesis of "being," of a life lived, but also the negation of that life, its utter narrative disintegration.

Flowing from this, the Bildungsroman as a form is inexplicably both the perfect opposite of the naturalist novel and its close sibling. The typical Bildungsroman portrays a life well-lived and relies on that life as a focalizer in arranging the events within the novel into a symbolically meaningful plot where the actions of the Bildungsheld matter. The anglophone naturalist novel, conversely, has characters snuffed out by nature, fate, destiny, etc., reinforcing to excess the idea that nothing could have changed and that influencing the course of a life is largely impossible. However, the genres

morphologically resemble each other: they are twin stars, typically running parallel, but more similar than a bird's eye summary of the shape of each would indicate. Both are ultimately telos-driven: the naturalist novel depends on death and decay in its plotting for its ultimate narrative effect much like the Bildungsroman depends on progress and growth. Both have what might be termed a "predetermined" narrative form: readers can be sure that David Copperfield will succeed from the novel's opening lines (otherwise, how and why would he be writing the book?), and readers can be equally sure that Jude Fawley is marked for death within several pages. Both forms place the individual navigating his world at their center, chronicling attempts to find an education, vocation, and measurable success in private and professional life.

What naturalism brings to the novel of development is most succinctly described as an ironic distance between the character who fails to undergo Bildung and the form of the Bildungsroman he inhabits. Although the imagined reader might not be able to imagine *Jude the Obscure* without Jude Fawley, or *Voyage in the Dark* without Anna Morgan, very strangely, *those characters can*. Tess's wish to "unbe," to have herself blotted from existence, is not the outlier, but in fact the *modus operandi* of the naturalist Bildungsroman: the protagonist finds himself alone, without a home and without a purpose or path forward in life, and looks at himself from the position of an outsider, rather than as the liver of the life-gone-wrong. In Hardy's and Rhys's novels, this narrative disenfranchisement is a direct response to the perceived lack of space—inside the narrative world and in the actual historical world outside the novel—for the individual to develop. In anticipation of reading these two novels, I will first outline the

generic features of literary naturalism, work through the often knotty and contradictory relationships between naturalism, modernisms, and the global development novel, and explicate the significance of the merger between the Bildungsroman and naturalism in the history of literary realism.

While naturalism lacks the infamous reputation of the Bildungsroman as a potentially undefinable literary form, there have been shifts in the meaning and application of the term in the century and a half since Émile Zola's 1880 novel *Nana* that is often seen as the genre's equivalent to *Wilhelm Meister*. Brian Nelson defines the essential features of naturalism as "the rejection of myths of transcendence," "the displacement of tragedy into man's experience of social existence and everyday life" and the "tendency to erode traditional generic hierarchies," as well as "the prominence in its narrative poetics of the ironic modes satire and parody," and perhaps most of all "its thematics of disintegration and decomposition—an 'entropic vision'" (308). The last term he borrows from David Baugley's influential study of the genre, who writes that in naturalism "the vestigial nobility of the heroine whose spirit is broken by a combination of destiny, nature, man and circumstances" finds her fate belonging to "the 'best tragedy', to the 'highest tragedy', as the author defines it" (119). There is a privileging of "'scientific' objectivity" and an "enthusiasm for science" with an "acceptance of scientific determinism, the prevailing philosophy of the second half of the nineteenth century" (Nelson 296). Outside of fiction, Henry Maudsley, a pioneering psychiatrist in the nineteenth century, wrote to that effect that no man "can escape the tyranny of his organization; no one can elude the destiny that is innate in him, and which unconsciously

and irresistibly shapes his ends, even when he believes that he is determining them with consummate foresight and skill” (75-76). Permeating beyond French novels, the ethos of naturalism reached the sciences as well as the literature of the period.

In Europe, the relationship between naturalism and the realist novel is further complicated because, in Donald Pizer’s account, the two terms were interchangeably used in Europe throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century (4-5). The potential for slippage between terms is particularly potent here because, at times, novels switch between the two modes, or feature elements of each adjacent to each other. Not all critics however agree with his assessment, including Lukács, who would say that in naturalism, as compared to realism, the “profound social truth emerging from the interaction of social factors with psychological and physiological qualities is lost,” connecting “the false breadth assigned to the external world” to a “schematic narrowness in characterization” (*Writer & Critic* 139). Further, Lukács suggests that naturalists “describe only what lies immediately in front of them” while “great realists depict social evolution and the great social problems” in more elegant, nuanced ways (*Studies* 145). Naturalism precludes “the possibility of change” familiar in the realist novel, eschewing the “place for an interior transformation or an articulation of desire that could overcome the social determinism built into the novel’s representations” (Stasi 43). Critics of American naturalism have pointed to the overwhelmingly “unfulfilled desire” which sits at the center of naturalist texts, rendering the genre a series of negations, things that it does not do, or does not allow for, a definition that works by reference to its antithesis, which, it stands to reason, is the conventional (realist) novel of marriage or fulfillment (Maney 3). Simon Hay

helpfully brings the disparate positions together when he writes that realism and naturalism “are not neutral ways of telling stories but represent modes of understanding the world and our relationships with it” (338). It is more useful therefore to think of naturalism and realism as two tools that are deployed in varying quantities at different points in narratives which, particularly in the late-nineteenth-century British Bildungsroman and the early-twentieth century migration Bildungsroman, coexist in a struggle delineating narrative space.

Lukács posits a “continuity from naturalism to the Modernism of [his] day” in his essays on the two genres, but limits the continuity to only the “underlying ideological principles” of the genres (*Meaning* 29). Using a model of evolution, naturalism can be seen as, according to Richard Lehan, “a vortex through which the novel passed before it became” recognizably modernist (xi). In the spirit of considering many generic genealogies and narratives that eschew linear progression, Simon Joyce’s formulation that naturalism is not “modernism’s antithesis” but one of “the key forces contributing to its emergence” is quite helpful (5). Joyce rejects the consigning of naturalism to “a place in the Victorian prehistory against which the modern struggled to emerge,” which helps address the clear continuation of naturalism well into the twentieth century in the decades after work by Darwin and others caused the watershed shift in scientific discourse (4-5). Indeed, according to Rafael Walker, because “so many literary movements converge at this historical moment (realism, naturalism, and modernism) it has remained difficult” to reach a consensus on where one begins and another ends (495).

At the center of this web of genres, all of which owe some debt to each other and older forms, multiple narratives that are taken up by novelists who write Bildungsromane emerge. Emily Steinlight argues that the use of naturalism “removes the developmental *telos* from the novel of development,” which threatens to sap it “of its vital energy and suspend its future-oriented project” while at the same time introducing, according to Jill Ehnann, “more than one possibility, more than one narrative and more than one kind of progress” (Steinlight 168, Ehnann 165). What authors are doing by working in these genres is thwarting the dominant historical progress narrative through sustained interrogations of the validity of futurity when they combine the conventions of the naturalist novel with the Bildungsroman. By having characters perform the motions of Bildung in a naturalist novel, authors are in effect creating a negative dialectic of development, substituting a perpetual decay spiral for the universalized progress narrative.<sup>1</sup> The affirmations of life and potentiality become repeated reminders of futility, and the push to “unbe,” to cease existence, becomes a miasmatic narrative rot that sees plots repeat themselves in cycles that mire the protagonist of the novel despite frequent attempts at spatial movement and escape.

This is the Bildungsroman without a homeland, *any* homeland, far removed from “the world-as-homeland” model which Franco Moretti suggests for the earlier continental novels (19). Without this spatial locus for development, Moretti suggests, “the result is a wasted life: aimless, meaningless” (19). This existential homelessness goes

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<sup>1</sup> “Spiral of decay” meaning both a circular form that cycles downwards away from the fulfillment of Bildung as well as a rejection of the telos-driven plot in favor of negative development and eventual entropy.

beyond the lack of, say, Wilhelm Meister's Tower: Jude Fawley could traverse England and never find belonging or a community to enmesh himself in, but will always willingly seek them out and subsequently fail, time and again, to recognize his incompatibility with places like Christminster and its ivory towers. In later texts than Hardy's, this homelessness goes further, into what Homi Bhabha called the unhomely, "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place" ("The World and the Home" 141). The lack of a homeland in these novels draws attention to the invisible centrality of the homeland in the classical Bildungsroman. The homeland, a stable place for Bildung, is revealed in its absence as a prerequisite piece of the generic machine that whirled silently but indispensably under narrative twists and turns, a secure ground for failures that would eventually inform better decisions by the protagonist and lead to success. The introduction of naturalism removes this safety net and kills the Bildungsheld in his cradle; the attempts and ultimate failures he undergoes throughout the novel he inhabits are as much the components of an anti-formational narrative as they are an exercise in inverting the generic logic of the form. This exercise makes, using Adorno's negative dialectical framework, "what appears as the positive" essentially "the negative, i.e. the thing that is to be criticized" (Adorno *Lectures* 18-19). Thus, Bildung becomes scrutinized and questioned in the very narrative form that depends on Bildung for its structure.

This critique of the development narrative informs the shape of the novels, the decay spirals that drain vitality and hope from the hero until he wastes away, and also the position of the characters within them. In his *Negative Dialectics* Adorno describes the

condition of the artist or philosopher in late modernity, who feels “a sense of being not quite there, of not playing along, a feeling as if they were not themselves at all, but a kind of spectator” (*Negative Dialectics* 363). They must choose “between involuntary ataraxy...and the bestiality of the involved” (*Negative Dialectics* 364). The protagonists of these Bildungsromane, fictional characters who can be made to suffer without recourse, sit on the fence between the two poles to their detriment without ever actually embracing embodiment and involvement, futile though it may be, or embracing the serene absurdity of their inability to alter the course of their lives. In the history of the realist novel, the protagonist of the naturalist Bildungsroman is the exemplar of Benjamin’s “image.” In him, we find “dialectics at a standstill,” representative of but unable to comprehend “the relation of what-has-been to the now” even as the reader intuits that his circumstances are the result of social and political forces far beyond his horizon (*Arcades Project* 462, N2a, 3). Fredric Jameson points towards the inherent tension in realism, “*récit* versus *roman*...destiny versus the eternal present,” which these novels call attention to in a way that earlier texts try to hide with slick narratological artifice: a cacophony of progressing failures fill the pages of the naturalist Bildungsroman from page to page without ever distracting from the all-too-obvious destiny which awaits the Bildungsheld, held in tenuous balance only because there is yet worse to come (*Antinomies* 26). What may have appeared at first as the “fated progression of historical time” is shown instead to be “the phantasmagoric appearance of eternal repetition, mythic time, under conditions of capitalism” (Pensky 179).

The tension between embodied involvement and utterly detached passivity, never resolved but always fruitlessly worked through and worked over, is the force that drives the decaying narrative spiral in the naturalist Bildungsroman. Time passes without meaning. There is no spatial locus for maturation or progress. The homeland of the earlier Bildungsroman has been, Manya Lempert argues, replaced by a “tragic conception of natural history” sourced from Darwin, representing “a literary backlash against comforting, anthropocentric accounts” of the human and the developmental futurity of humanity (*Tragedy* 3). It would be an understatement to claim that Jude Fawley merely retraces his steps or repeats his mistakes, although he does: he marches through his own footsteps but does so in increasingly threadbare shoes in gradually worsening weather. Both he and the world he struggles for purchase in have less to offer: there is *less of him* in each iteration, less capacity to resist the forces that whittle away at his spirit until he eventually succumbs to illness. All the while, he looks at himself as if he is not Jude Fawley, but as a slightly concerned, largely disinterested bystander who wishes he was elsewhere. This position of disinterest centers the Bildungsheld in the spiral form of the naturalist Bildungsroman, witness to and victim of its destructive energies while still maintaining an ironic distance from it. The resultant narrative forms decenter human agency in the novel genre of human emergence, a literary response to the perceived lack of capacity for charting a societal path forward as empires crumbled and epochs turned over.

**“Ready to start all over again in no time”: *Jude the Obscure*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and Reproductive Futility**

Hardy's final novel and Rhys's third share more than just their desolate milieus and depictions of alcoholism. The homelessness that Jude Fawley and Anna Morgan both feel is exacerbated by their common inability to find success in romance and vocation, leaving them both rejected by the societies they find themselves inhabiting unwillingly. Jude's march toward his grave is largely cyclical, as is Anna's narrative, and both are punctured by the unreliability of memory and its inability to inform or guide the Bildungsheld into the future. Both protagonists embody the concept of "unbeing," a sort of unwillingness to inhabit the designated narrative space held by the protagonist in the Bildungsroman, namely that he or she serves as the focalizer and crux of a didactic plot. In the tradition of the naturalist Bildungsroman, *Jude the Obscure* stands as a powerful example of an author writing back to, but also within, the earlier Bildungsroman tradition, as Hardy exposes the logic of the Victorian coming-of-age novel by puncturing its life-affirming plot with the late-century move towards biological evolution and unfeeling organic change over the generations uninformed by bourgeois mores. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Rhys takes up the inability of the white heir to the colonial legacy, born in the Caribbean, to find a suitable place to come of age, fetishizing the colonized other as an unattainable but tantalizing possibility laid against Anna's deteriorating physical health and mental state. Both texts share a profoundly moribund commitment to the futility of reproduction and futurity, each inflected by the position of the Bildungsheld as he or she fails to rebel against or transcend the limited possibilities available.

*Jude the Obscure* is bleak, even by the standards of the naturalist novel. Jude tries and fails to achieve a college education, becomes an alcoholic, marries a woman,

Arabella, after a disastrous dalliance in a barn, and raises their child after she leaves for Australia. He engages in a bigamous relationship with his cousin, Sue Bridehead, and falls deeper and deeper into poverty as opportunities close around him due to his children with Sue—born out of wedlock—who are eventually brutally hung by Jude's first child, who then goes on to hang himself. This series of events causes Sue to miscarry, and Jude to descend inescapably into alcoholic poverty. Arabella returns, and Jude wastes away pining after Sue after she leaves him to marry Philotson, an older man she does not love but whom she hopes might save her soul after the terrible fate that befell her children. The novel has been described holistically and accurately as a “gradual, relentless atrophy of hope” (Millgate *Career as Novelist* 328). In a contemporary review in the *Guardian*, the Church of England newspaper, the novel was called “a shameful nightmare, which one only wishes to forget as quickly and as completely as possible” (Millgate *Biography* 340). It was Hardy's final novel, although he continued to write poetry for several decades after *Jude* was published in 1895, owing in no small part to the terrible response from his readership Hardy received.

Hardy however embraced the terrible trajectories he threw his characters on, writing in a letter after the novel's publication, that the “‘grimy’ features of the story go to show the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, & the squalid real life he was fated to lead...The idea was meant to run all through the novel. It is, in fact to be discovered in *everybody's* life—though it lies less on the surface perhaps than it does in my poor puppet's” (*Collected Letters* 93). During the penning of the novel, Hardy wrote that he “was more interested in this Sue story than in any” he had written to that point

(Millgate 339, 2006). A few choice terms Hardy uses when writing about his novel jump off the page. He thought that the story was “interesting,” and this might help bridge the gap between the early readers’ responses and Hardy’s purported intention: Jude’s tragedy doesn’t necessarily inspire pathos or suggest a better alternative. It holds interest. From the precocious young boy about to have his dreams stomped, over and over, to the beleaguered man who walks in the sleet until he dies, the novel commands attention. Rarely, if at all, does the novel inspire any of the positive releases of emotion (*catharsis*) associated with the end of classical tragedy, written by Hardy instead as a sort of grotesque spectacle.

The second term, and the more important by my reckoning, is Hardy’s almost giddy use of “puppets” to describe his characters. This is nothing unfamiliar to the reader of the Victorian novel: Thackeray uses the metaphor of the puppet master frequently in, say, *Vanity Fair*, and his accompanying illustrations feature puppet shows. Compare however Hardy’s conception of character, particularly tragic character and particularly the protagonist of a Bildungsroman, to Dickens’ description of David Copperfield in his 1869 preface to the novel: “It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD” (870). Penny Boumelha writes that there “is a Thomas Hardy...for almost any critical history of the English novel that you care to mention,” and I would suggest that here emerges the Hardy who traffics in the conventions of the Victorian genres so that he might showcase their futility as the next century approached

(242). Far from holding any special love for his fictional creations, Hardy beckons them into the world so that they might die miserably, and “puppet” does double work: in addition to its typical use as a metaphor, it also suggests that Hardy’s performative destruction takes place before an audience who, unlike the puppets, have the distance required from the narrative to perceive the puppets’ strings that jerk them to-and-fro.

As the central puppet in the show, Jude is at war with the form of the novel he is in, at war with its narrator, and at war with the laws that govern the world he struggles to inhabit. The goals he sets are impossible for him to achieve, and his attempts to achieve them are made humiliating by the narrator and the narrative. He believes, mistakenly, that he might be able to escape circumstance and skate by through the eye of a needle, navigating modern life and avoiding pitfalls while learning from them and being enriched by the experience, rather than degraded further. He turns towards the “established employments” of the Bildungsroman in the collective “cultural archive” which “give the subject an idea of what he/she will be going through in a given situation. The narrative that is to accompany a certain event is thus determined or suggested at the very start” (Haliloğlu 16). Before reading several passages from the novel that illuminate this tendency towards old and futile models of development, it is worth considering that, quoting Peter Arnds, “Jude’s pursuit of *Bildung* lies at the very root of his own and his family’s dissolution” (224). What, really, does Jude do? He attempts to seek an education, and is thwarted, “elbowed off the pavement by the millionaires’ sons” (*JO* 144). The novel starts with the preclusion of the very possibility of education: “The schoolmaster was leaving the village, and everybody seemed sorry” (*JO* 9). Jude sets out in the world

to make his fortune, only to return and re-return to the same places and spaces that have frustrated him for his entire life. What of seeking a wife, and raising children? Jude marries Arabella, and, in a familiar trope in the Bildungsroman, this first marriage (or proposal of marriage) is unsuitable:<sup>2</sup> she is no good fit for him and will enable his worst impulses while wringing him dry. Unlike in the early-century or mid-century Victorian Bildungsroman, she is not booted from the narrative so that Jude might find a suitable wife and start a family: Dora Spenlow's or Edward Casaubon's deaths pave the way for a better second marriage, with the hero or heroine informed and enriched by their initial folly, but Arabella leaves and returns at the precise moments that hobble Jude.<sup>3</sup> The aforementioned child murder and suicide erase any lingering spark of hope that remains for Jude. There will be no next generation, no futurity that he might find recourse in. His attempts to go through the motions of Bildung are checkpoints not in a progress narrative, but in his devolution and dissolution.

Hardy creates a world that serves as, in Penny Boumelha's terms, "the vehicle of a savage onslaught on the meritocratic myth...of the English *Bildungsroman*" (246). According to Gregory Castle, Jude "fails because he can transform neither himself nor the world around him" (*Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* 100). Fate and chance, two driving forces of the Victorian Bildungsroman which invariably help the protagonist along, are turned against him. So too are the natural laws, already under tense

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<sup>2</sup> A few other examples: Mr. Darcy's initial proposal in *Pride and Prejudice*; Rochester's first proposal and St. John's later proposal in *Jane Eyre*; Mr. Elton to Emma in *Emma*. In all cases, the protagonist is able to dodge disaster via either a convenient death or the good sense to decline the proposal.

<sup>3</sup> It is of course very ironic that these early novels, so obviously hopeful and life-affirming, use death as a way of removing narrative inconveniences from the path of the Bildungsheld.

renegotiation in the wake of Darwin's watershed writings: "*Jude the Obscure* attacks this ideal of self-cultivation that saw biological laws as accomplices of the bourgeois social order" (Zwierlein 353). The plot, pushing towards death, offers only what Lempert writes are "fleeting or imagined moments in which characters flourish" which might "contest plot's hegemony" ("Theory of Tragic Character" 471). Playing his part dutifully, Jude passes through these moments in an "ironic pattern" in which he "is illuminated only to find his life darkened further" (Giordano 584). The characters in the novel experience all of this with what seems to be a "lack of awareness of their own motivations" (Keen 55). Like an automaton, Jude attempts and fails to achieve *Bildung*, following a roadmap that he seems to believe in and that perhaps would achieve positive results, had he been born one or two generations earlier.

Jude is unable to stop and reflect, potentially changing course, for two reasons. First, in the novel, memory "is thematized as never being useful or propitious...as if personal memory and the social forces that constrain Jude and Sue were in some diabolical alliance" (Moffett 90). Because of the novel's omniscient narrator who is often recalcitrant at points when Jude's mind might be picked open and laid bare, the reader gets the sense that Jude himself does not—or cannot—think down to the root causes of his misfortunes and perceives the entire tree as poisonous. This is a phenomenon felt by the novel's reader, delivered by Hardy's narrator. Second, within the storyworld, Hardy's plots, "with their unparalleled reliance on chance and coincidence" lead to, argues Adam Grener, a grounded "historicism that is attuned to the force of environment and circumstance despite the unavailability of a stable vantage point from which order might

appear...Hardy's narrative form foregrounds the contingent circumstantial causes that mediate the abstract deterministic laws which emerge from the flux of a temporal world" (150). Hardy creates Jude so that he might stand on the frontline of war between two genres of literature. The "stable vantage point" Greener alludes to as lacking is in the generic (or genetic) mesh between the naturalist novel and the Bildungsroman, two familiar spaces which both draw from the telos of determinism in antithetical ways.

In his early childhood, Jude is sensitive to the world around him in ways that will eventually foreshadow his death. He "could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or lopped, from a fancy that it hurt them...This weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that he was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again. He carefully picked his way on tiptoe among the earthworms, without killing a single one" (*JO* 11). This is one instance of Hardy's narrator drawing attention to Jude's unnecessaryness in his own story. Between sentences indicating a sort of charming and childish quirk—Jude is sympathetic to trees and worms and this might endear him to us—Hardy is quick to point out that his life is "unnecessary" and stages it in dramatic terms, speaking to a curtain which will eventually fall on Jude at the end of his plot.

Jude acutely feels the pangs of his futile role in the narrative. He feels "his existence to be an undemanded one," and the narrator tells the reader again that "his dreams were as gigantic as his surroundings were small" (12, 16). Jude struggles against forces he cannot articulate or perceive except in their limiting of his agency. In an early crossroad, Jude misunderstands how one learns a language, assuming that Greek and

Latin can be mastered using some yet unknown to him cipher. The narrator tells the reader that,

Somebody might have come along that way who would have asked him his trouble, and might have cheered him by saying that his notions were further advanced than those of his grammarian. But nobody did come, because nobody does; and under the crushing recognition of his gigantic error Jude continued to wish himself out of the world.

(25).

Unaware of why he is misguided and without any of the surrounding characters or institutions that might have corrected his mistake, Jude's childhood misunderstanding becomes a "gigantic error." It is possible to read this passage in the child Jude's voice, a humorous or ironic use of the word "gigantic" which might seem to blow his linguistics misunderstanding out of proportion, but in Hardy's novel, the precocious seriousness of childhood is co-opted into the grim determinism of the world. Left to fester in his thoughts and perceived failings, even at a very young age, Jude wishes he was not in the world he inhabits. Pivotal here is that he does not, like Jim in Conrad's novel, for example, wish himself *elsewhere*: Jude wishes to be out of the world entirely, not spirited away into a new or kinder world. Within the first section of the novel, Jude is already displaying the germs of the learned helplessness that will characterize his adolescence and adulthood.

There are many subsequent examples of Jude's desire to "unbe," ranging from an incomplete prayer that cuts off just before the promise of resurrection, ending instead on

“teach me to die” (76), to a reflection on “scenes” which “returned upon him the feeling...that he was not worth the trouble of being taken care of” (171). A moment that stands out amongst the recurring depressive episodes in Jude’s life is the brief section of the text where he finds himself speaking to ghosts and statues of literary and historical figures at Christminster, “holding conversations with them as it were, like an actor in a melodrama who apostrophizes the audience on the other side of the footlights” (74-5). Whether this is the voice of the narrator or Jude’s perception of his own impromptu performance, there is a recognition of the contrived performativity of the entire ordeal that makes up Jude’s life. The earlier reference to the eventual falling curtain as the only respite Jude will have pairs with this passage in building up the cascading waves that repeat throughout the text, the “compulsion to repeat” that characterizes not only Jude but also the form of the novel (Daleski 181). Each new scenario will echo and be inflected by the past, and any latent potentiality in a possible future has already been clipped off by the promise that more curtains will drop on each scene, leaving Jude without a place in his plot except his eventual grave plot.

Jude’s son, also named Jude but more frequently referred to as Little Father Time, enacts the failure of the past to flow into the present coherently in a way that would provide a safe landing for the future, represented here, as it so often is in the novel, through reproductive futurity. He is described as “Age masquerading as Juvenility, and doing it so badly that his real self showed through crevices” (*JO* 266). He also shows a sort of awareness of the genre of the book he inhabits: “To him the houses, the willows, the obscure fields beyond, were apparently regarded not as brick residence, pollards,

meadows; but as human dwellings in the abstract, vegetation, and the wide dark world” (267). The world is not wonderful and specific, but a series of unmarked things that may be drawn and put away from a box of props, repurposed by characters as they return and retread, but only as unique and embodied as Jude might find them for a moment before descending back underneath the murky surface separating him from the world of potential which seemingly lies just outside of the world he can access, tantalizingly close but always out of reach. Little Father Time echoes Jude almost verbatim, asking Sue, “It would be better to be out o’ the world than in it, wouldn’t it?” (322). He becomes thus an image of Jude that also functions as yet another point of distance between Jude and his own perception of living, a “Jude” that Jude can look at from the outside, reflected physically but not conducive to internal reflection.

Although his short life only ranges some seventy-five pages within Jude’s longer Bildungsroman, Little Father Time captures it perfectly in miniature while also gesturing beyond the container that is *Jude the Obscure*. The struggle Jude and Sue have—finding lodging and paying for children they cannot afford in a society that does not want to acknowledge their precarious position as parents living together out of wedlock—exacerbates the tensions within the family and leads to the calamitous exchange between Sue and Little Father Time:

‘Then if children make so much trouble, why do people have ‘em?’

‘O—because it is a law of nature.’

‘But we don’t ask to be born?’

‘No indeed.’

...

‘I wish I hadn’t been born!... I think that whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly, before their souls come to ‘em, and not allowed to grow big and walk about!’

(322-323).

That Sue cites the laws of nature is of course particularly ironic because, to this point, the laws of nature have been nothing but cruel to her and to Jude, particularly as society interprets and weaponizes those laws against them. Little Father Time’s final sentence in the exchange summarizes that which Jude has been bumping into the entirety of the novel: there is no space for him to undergo a development plot, no homeland, and perhaps he would have been better served—he certainly would have suffered less—if he was never born into the world at all, or was removed from it without a trace hundreds of pages prior. Two pages later, all the children are dead, killed by Little Father Time, and Sue is “paralyzed by the strange and consummate horror of the scene” (325). Little Father Time’s suicide note reads, misspelled, “*Done because we are too menny*” (325). The sentence has several apparent meanings. Of course, the child means that the deed was done because there were too many children for his parents to support, but there is also the sense that Jude’s lineage is “done” because there are too many Fawleys and that the entire possibility for subsequent generations to thrive is “done” because there are simply too many people.

A quack doctor remarks, albeit belatedly, that Little Father Time’s suicide and fratricide are “the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live” (*JO* 326). The

lived experience of the Bildungsheld, which is typically used as a metaphor for the universal bourgeois experience, is in decay. What once was a path forward into prosperity is now a showcase for the inevitable and nascent wish to “unbe” which Jude has already experienced and which overwhelmed his son. In *Little Father Time* “had converged all the inauspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last. He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term” (*JO* 326). Already a dark climax to the action of the plot, *Little Father Time*’s death distills down in his singular existence the impossibility of growth not only for Jude but for subsequent generations that have been born and those still yet to come. The kernel of light that one might expect in such a desolate narrative turn never comes. Jude trudges on for a while longer before dying, and Hardy pays “homage to human scale by ceasing as the hero or heroine dies. The single life span is no longer absolute but polemical” (Beer 222-223). In his usage of the Bildungsroman form, Hardy makes plain its contrivances by taking their logic to its opposite extreme, a tragic stage show at once predetermined and yet rife with the potential for unimagined suffering. Some decades later, Jean Rhys will leave the fate of her heroine Anna Morgan in limbo, pushing the naturalist Bildungsroman by refusing even the ghastly closure that Hardy’s novel provides.

About her fiction and fiction generally, Jean Rhys wrote, “all of a writer that matters is in the book or books,” and that “it is idiotic to be curious about the person” (*Smile Please* 136). It is difficult however to separate Rhys from her work, and more difficult to situate her and her writings in a single critical tradition. Rhys’s work “troubles

and haunts critical fields” just as her “portraits of marginalised women” have a “ghostliness, as though they haunt rather than inhabit” the settings in her novels (Johnson and Moran 4). In their introduction to Rhys and her fiction, Erica Johnson and Patricia Moran further point out that on “an existential level, her protagonists experience the inner deathly stillness to which Rhys alludes in her earliest journal writing,” a “threshold existence” which is intrinsic to the “power and lucidity” of Rhys’s novels (8). Although less well-known than her seminal *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her 1934 novel *Voyage in the Dark* is compelling because it sits between so many different nodes across literature and history. Written between the World Wars, not quite postcolonial, working through naturalism but not fully acquiescing to its superlative realism, and harboring a powerful strain of modernist experimentation, Rhys’s Bildungsroman calls readerly attention to the strange, nebulous position of the female subject raised in post-plantation Dominica who travels back to England but finds it empty. This in itself is a feature of the female Bildungsroman throughout history, which was already a “fraught genre for representing female experiences of adolescence and maturity,” particularly when those experiences do not align closely with the expectations of patriarchal European society (Jones 359). In Rhys’s novel, however, the inability for Anna to develop is blighted and clouded by her complicity in and inability to acknowledge her place in the structures of power between the waning empire and its former colonies.

In the early-twentieth century Bildungsroman, the trend of representing “individual life as meaningful only as a part of a wider network of relationships... redistributing the *Bildungsroman*’s structural emphasis towards institutions in order to

interrogate the politics of aesthetic exemplarity” emerges (Jones 359-360). Rhys follows this trend to a certain extent, leaving Anna to dangle between forces and institutions that predate and overpower her, but tellingly, and so very unlike Hardy, leaves Anna as the narrator of the text. Anna remains the focalizing agent in her narrative, and, although it disintegrates and loses coherence, *Voyage* lacks the hand of the narrator who might color the events of the novel with counterfactuals, hypotheticals, and other musings beyond the mind of a Jude Fawley, particularly as Anna attempts and fails to negotiate her identity. Because of her narration, Anna’s downward spiral is incredibly and uncomfortably intimate in a way that Hardy’s novel never allows for. Strangely, Anna herself is removed further and further from the experience of living her own life. Despite narrating the novel and limiting the representation of events to her own recollection and experiences, she becomes a sort of ghost within her own Bildungsroman, doomed to watch herself make and repeat mistakes in fragments which comprise the past and present in the slow work of eroding the future.

In the novel, Anna Morgan, a young woman not yet twenty years old is forced to move to England from the Caribbean by her stepmother after her father dies. She attempts to make a living as a chorus girl after her stepmother cuts her off financially, but becomes sexually and romantically involved with a man twice her age, Walter Jeffries, who initially bankrolls and subsequently frustrates her. When he inevitably leaves her behind with only a note, Anna slides further and further into poverty, coming to live in a massage parlor another woman has opened, which also functions as a brothel. As she attempts to eke out a bearable existence under these circumstances, Anna slides further

and further into an alcoholic stupor and becomes pregnant. The published ending of the novel sees her attempt an abortion which, although it is botched, she survives; the original intended ending has Anna die from the results of the procedure, paid for in both endings by Walter after Anna relinquishes all the letters and love notes he had sent her during their prior relationship. Jane Nardin writes that “Anna’s narrative gradually becomes less coherent” later in the text, and she frequently repeats herself “using almost identical words” but “does not notice that she has repeated herself” (63). On the one hand, the novel hews close to the typical anti-developmental naturalist narrative of the fallen woman, but more compellingly, Anna’s failure to develop is one manifestation of the impossible and alienated position of the female subject caught between a fetishized racial other and a white identity that she does not identify with. The space between these two positions, and Anna’s inability to recognize the futility of reconciling them in herself, leaves her staring at her own life from the position of an observer, unable to identify with her *Bildung* plot and therefore unable to escape the cyclical shape of her socioeconomic descent.

Only accessible through Anna’s memory, the Caribbean island of her birth and raising comes to stand for something like a paradise compared to England. In a drunken reverie, Anna retraces her steps: the “feeling of the hills comes to you—cool and hot at the same time. Everything is green, everywhere things are growing. There is never one moment of stillness—always something buzzing” (*Voyage* 151). This motion and vibrancy is in stark contrast to London, which is repeatedly described as “all hideously stuck together,” and “all exactly the same” (103-104). Anna thinks to herself that she “got

used to everything except the cold and that the towns we went to always looked so exactly alike. You were perpetually moving to another place which was perpetually the same” (8). Like Jude, Anna goes through actual physical motion—from place to place, town to town—but does not differentiate between the set pieces around her. “Metropolitan perception,” writes Urmila Seshagiri, “fails to transform lived experience into gratifying artistic form” (498). Anna’s memory takes on an eclectic fecundity that her lived experiences in the present do not. The inversion of the typical formula in the colonial travel novel, namely a journey from the metropole to the colony, or to some constructed hidden jungle, and Rhys’s reference to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in the title of the novel offers insight into Anna’s mental state when she thinks about her place in the settings she inhabits: the past, her memory, becomes the “real,” and the Anna that wanders around in the present is a container for memory and past experiences rather than an agent who accumulates new experiences and builds upon the past. Urban England becomes the “heart of darkness,” existentially unknowable.

Carol Dell’Amico calls Rhys’s London “a city gestating, beset by the first intimations of the complexities and implications of imperio-colonial history,” a city “where an historical, geopolitical forgetting is just beginning to lift” (40-41). Her point is well-taken and pairs well with Jed Esty’s argument that “Anna cannot recognize herself as an integral subject developing continuously in time” (168). She was “already lost and alienated in post-plantation Dominica” to the extent that “even the merest colonial nostalgia is removed as a source or ground of a functional expatriate identity. Anna’s disorientation and her failure to mature or progress are symbolically rooted in the

massive anachronisms produced by later colonial life in the West Indies” (Esty 168). At this crossroads, Anna has no identity that she can inhabit fully because those possible identities are either outmoded and irrelevant, in the case of the rich white heir to the plantation, or yet unarticulated, a more global citizen who must move beyond nostalgia for systems of colonial violence. Rather than navigating this quagmire, Anna engages in what Anne Cunningham called “a purposeful self-destruction...the Rhysian protagonist demonstrates that a feminine subjectivity based on negation and failure is preferable to the prescribed choices...to those women who have a privileged relationship to a largely white patriarchal system (376). This is perhaps the largest difference between *Jude the Obscure* and *Voyage in the Dark*. Jude, the oversexed peasant boy, fails at every turn and wishes he wasn’t alive, wasn’t the central character in his own story, and wants to fail and be finished; Anna self-destructs spectacularly, over and over, rejecting and dissolving the formational logic of the textual tradition she is heir to.

Despite being the novel’s narrator, Anna has only a tenuous self-reflexiveness. She “largely describes what happens but not how or why it happens,” according to Elaine Savory in a study of Rhys’s fiction, “just as she describes how she feels and what she sees, smells, hears, or touches in detail but does not try to explain why this comes about” (90). A frequent move in the novel comes at moments when Anna’s introspection would be expected, and a glimpse into her mind would illuminate her position on external events. In one instance, when she is about to lose her virginity having sex with Walter, Anna thinks “I heard my voice going on and on, answering his questions” (*Voyage* 21). She then thinks, that it “was as if I were looking at somebody else” in a mirror (23).

Again, shortly thereafter, Anna thinks, “Is that me? I am bad, not good any longer, bad. That has no meaning, absolutely none. Just words” (57). Later, approaching her most destitute, Anna finds herself “not being able to get over the feeling that it [her life] was a dream” (157). Frequently gazing at herself in reflective surfaces or dissociating from her day-to-day existence, Anna is positioned as an outsider in her own coming-of-age. She readily takes up roles that are given or offered to her in attempts to fill this void, “trapped in the inevitably doomed narrative through her own unwitting investment” not in herself or her experiences, but in the part she is cast in by other people (Harris 28).

It isn’t only mirrors that allow Anna to hide from herself. Early in the novel, reading Zola’s *Nana*, perhaps the most canonical of the early French naturalist texts in the anglophone literary world, Anna fails to see her relationship with the titular coquette. She “was lying on the sofa, reading *Nana*...The print was very small, and the endless procession of words gave me a curious feeling—sad, excited and frightened. It wasn’t what I was reading, it was the look of the dark, blurred words going on endlessly that gave me that feeling” (9). According to Dillon Brown, Anna “fails to pay proper attention to the potential lessons to be extracted from her reading,” taking “no notice of the implied fate of her anagrammatic namesake” (570). Furthermore, she fails to recognize that she is living *Nana*. She does not parse the words at all, but recognizes their endless procession and can relate the feelings that the procession induces in her, along with the sense of its endlessness. Later in the text when her own life induces these feelings in her, Anna is equally inarticulate due to a combination of alcohol and her previously established unwillingness to consider the root causes of the “blurred words” that make out the

sentences and paragraphs of her life and internal monologues. Typically when a fictional character reads another text, particularly a real text, there is some level of metafictional awareness of that character's place within a certain fictional form.<sup>4</sup> Anna reads a novel that mirrors her life, and rather than inform or guide her, it only marks one instance among many that see her failing to make the connection that she is on center stage in her own life, its main character, so to speak, rather than a reader or an omniscient observer of it.

The gap between Anna's experiences as they might be laid out by that omniscient observer, as they were in *Jude the Obscure*, and the way that Rhys lays them out, riddles the novel with disorientation on the levels of plot (we often aren't sure who someone is because Anna has forgotten to tell us, or why she has come to a new place) and prose (it often isn't clear why Anna jumps from one thought or topic to the next in her interior discourse). In Rhys's novels "disorientation" is "a defining experience for her characters" (Su 180). For readers, "the time shifts in Rhys's narratives" are further disorientating or mystifying formal features that obfuscate meaning (Su 179). It is this disorientation—brought about by Anna herself—that complicates the tale of the young woman who cannot become any concrete and established identity and so finds herself dissolving. This is also why I take some issue with Steven Earnshaw's argument that "In Rhys...drinking grants access to the truth about the self and the world, with the world significant as it appears phenomenologically to the individual consciousness rather than

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Jane Eyre's childhood pastime of reading from *Bewick's History of British Birds* portends her own flights and her ability to escape precarious situations, as well as the frequent avian metaphors throughout the novel. Or, as mentioned earlier, Jim's reading of adventure fiction before his failure to act heroically aboard the *Patna*.

that of social groups” (85). As Anna drinks more, and her narrative fragments more, we do not see “the possibility of forging the authentic self, not beholden to the habituations of the modern world,” but a narrator who has grown so unreliable that she has utterly lost touch with her narrative (Earnshaw 92). Anna explains that she “stopped going out; I stopped wanting to go out. That happens very easily. It’s as if you had always done that—lived in a few rooms and gone from one to the other” (*Voyage* 140-141). Alcoholism hasn’t let Anna tap into a romantic world of the mind where she might form an identity, but shrunk her world, as it did Jude’s world, to something far smaller than any initial ambitions. Her liquor-soaked retreat inwards is a flight from the external world that has left her without an identity and with an inability to find a concrete purchase to create one but is not itself a pivot point that suggests a path out of her entropic spiral. Arguably, her turn to drink is what seals Anna most concretely into the girl who looks into mirrors without really recognizing the person staring back.

Again drunk, Anna stares up at the ceiling:

There was a spot on the ceiling. I looked at it and it became two spots. The two spots moved very rapidly, one away from the other. When they were about six inches apart they remained stationary and grew larger. Two black eyes were staring at me. I stared back at them. Then I had to blink and the whole business began all over again.

(127).

Staring up into spots she imagines, once again, staring back at her, the cyclical nature of the plot seeps into Anna’s narration and she can, at least, articulate the endless futility of

her life. The whole business “began all over again.” “From behind a glass” after drinking, Anna imagines herself watching “the ghosts of all the lovely days that have ever been,” reliving events rather than living new ones (142). The gently cascading depictions of memory fit well with the novel’s modernist sensibilities but also render Anna inert, paralyzed by the things that have happened which constrict her desire to act in the present. She thinks that, lying in bed, again after drinking, “you can hear time sliding past you, like water running” (113). There is a very wide gulf between the world Anna perceives—the world of memory, of the Caribbean, an atemporal idyll—and the world she lives in, which is characterized by her degrading fortunes and destitution, a world that is continuing to pass her by despite her perception of time washing over her like a blanket.

This comes to a head with the novel’s ending, which should be considered in both its original form and the published version. Anna, unlike Jude, is a woman who must bear the actual consequences of sex in more than the abstract. On display in Hardy’s novel were the disastrous consequences of Jude’s siring of a litter of children he cannot afford and who seem to have even less place in the world than Jude does. In Rhys’s original ending, Anna dies during her abortion, which is, according to Elaine Savory, a stroke of the pen meant “to save her from endless pain and disappointment” rather than a narrative punishment for a fallen woman (92-93). The published ending, much more ambiguous, leaves Anna writhing in pain and delirious but very much alive. This ending, supposedly written after editors asked Rhys to lighten the tone of the novel, “excises the moment of internal psychological and emotional epiphany...It demands choice. Choice begets

consequence” (Hanna 139). Instead, Anna hears a doctor say, “She’ll be all right...Ready to start all over again in no time, I’ve no doubt” (*Voyage* 188). Her stunted—arguably, her unattempted—Bildung will continue into perpetuity. Anna “lay and watched it and thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about being new and fresh...And about starting all over again, all over again...” (188). She repeats herself, by this point a familiar move as she retreats into the dreaming pool of her mind where meaning dissolves, but the chiasmatic structure of her final thoughts suggests enclosure: there is no hope that she might eventually escape, because her thoughts, like her experiences, are bound up on the page. She has become her experience of reading *Nana*, an endless and undifferentiated procession of characters, raw feeling without mediation. The doctor’s “in no time” doubles as a promise that she’ll be soon out and about, as well as a haunting finger pointing towards the timelessness of Anna’s incoherent narration and descent into physical and mental fragments.

Both Hardy and Rhys test the capacity of the Bildungsroman to sustain and interrogate its developmental telos without substantially changing its form: *Jude the Obscure* and *Voyage in the Dark* both take the biographical form and stick closely to it, even as they subvert the conventional developmental milestones that the Bildungsheld undergoes. Both novels also symbolically destroy futurity with the child murders and abortion that come late in each text. What Rhys does, and what helps to color the reading of Anna’s narrative as a whole, is reject finality in the text. By the editorial writ which was meant to make the text slightly less morbid, Rhys has created an endless nightmare for Anna, who is doomed to begin and fail repeatedly, always just outside herself, always

looking in. Both protagonists lurch towards a state of “unbeing,” but Rhys denies this state to Anna by dooming her to start again. I will approach the following texts, approached in broader strokes emerging from their shapes, and attempt to resolve the double bind that naturalism introduces to the Bildungsroman without breaking the tense but delicate strands that unite the two genres. Without reverting to the giddy and idealistic Bildungsroman of the mid-century, Joyce and Moore both navigate what the urge to live and to push forward might look like when it would be all too easy to succumb to “unbeing” and decay.

**“Tell no more of enchanted days”: *Esther Waters*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and the Restructuring of Hope**

Neither George Moore’s 1895 *Esther Waters* nor James Joyce’s 1916 *Portrait of the Artist* should be read as “responses” to Hardy and Rhys, not least because both texts were written earlier than Rhys’s novel. Both texts do however occupy the same naturalist/Bildungsroman hybrid position, and both texts work through many of the same knots that Hardy and Rhys have Jude and Anna fail to work through. The very conceit of *Jude the Obscure* is that he will suffer mightily and struggle and fail and never quite know why. In *Esther Waters*, particularly in Moore’s revisions which did come years after Hardy’s final novel and well into the history of literary naturalism, Moore does seem to be undoing some of those knots through Esther, suggesting a tightrope walk that might allow her to escape the cyclical demise that Jude falls prey to. In *Portrait*, Joyce has Stephen, who by all accounts falls into the narcissistic and self-aggrandizing path which should lead to—at best—his failure as an artist, repurpose narrative ambivalence: Joyce has, covertly, woven

a progress narrative into his cyclical Bildungsroman that undermines the seemingly inescapable cycles Stephen Dedalus stumbles through. The quartet of novels, together, represent a fuller spectrum of the literary capacity to fuse narratives of devolution and progress within a single text, colliding linear Bildung with cyclical naturalism and leaving intact, in the cases of Moore and Joyce, a potential open-endedness.

George Moore's account of a fallen woman was described by Norman Jeffares in a biography of Moore as "written with an innate if unobtrusive compassion. It is a humane book" (19). In a letter, reproduced in the biography, Moore wrote that the "human drama is the story of the servant girl with an illegitimate child, how she saves the child from the baby farmers [people who would take custody of unwanted infants in exchange for money], her endless temptations to get rid of it and to steal for it. She succeeds in bringing up her boy, and the last scene is when she is living with her first mistress in the old place, ruined and deserted. The race horses have ruined masters as well as servants" (Moore, reproduced in Jeffares 18). Omitted from Moore's summary of his novel is the reappearance of "her boy," now a grown man and a soldier at that, able to make a living and perhaps prosper despite his rough upbringing and impoverished mother. Again from the Jeffares, Moore "realized later that his ability to write prose was questionable...but the story, he said, enthralled him" (6). Unlike Hardy, who was willing and able to spin any narrative event into another nail in the coffin of Jude's development, Moore seems determined to buoy Esther despite his very real capacity to do the opposite: in the fiction of the 1890s, it was strange to have Esther engage in an affair, have a child out of wedlock, hide that child from her mistress, eventually marry the father, William

Latch, before he succumbs to alcohol and horse-betting, and come out the other side with herself and her son intact. In Gissing's *The Nether World*, for example, one finds no such comfort, despite a similar focus on poverty and the lives of the impoverished urban poor. It is this flickering and fragile hope that Esther carries with her, that Moore imbues his novel with, that makes the novel a Bildungsroman: although she only briefly and intermittently escapes poverty, Esther develops so that she might provide space and materials for her son to develop. As much as the story is about Esther, we might also say that it is about her son, Jack. Because she holds him so dear, and so unlike the children in *Jude the Obscure* who seem albatrosses around Jude's neck, *Esther Waters* becomes a forward-looking naturalist Bildungsroman that suggests new growth out from old and trampled narrative mulch.

In an essay defending his novels, Moore wrote that the "worst scar that red-hot iron ever left may be cured by science to-morrow, but in dealing with the soul we must reckon that what is impossible to-day will be impossible to-morrow—there time's ravages are irreparable, there the crow's feet cannot be concealed" ("Defensio" 283). His perspective on his fiction helps mediate the gap between the plot of *Esther Waters* throughout the first, say, ninety-five percent of the novel and its hopeful ending. Michele Russo writes that Esther "moves within the boundaries of London and seems to get caught in the net of her social position, without a chance of changing her situation...The heroine's entrapment seems to obey social determinism," which seems to me to match the conventional reading of the novel and of the fallen woman novel genre (229). This doesn't however clash with Moore's musing essay. Although Esther's "sin" is behind her,

knowing that she won't ever be able to undo it, and that it will follow her, Esther never loses sight that the "it" is actually a "he," and Esther's movement forward through the text is in fact a heroic rebellion against her inability to undo the past or truly chart her own future.

According to Michele Russo, Esther "outgrows her condition as a 'fallen woman'" and "steers away from the deterministic lot that awaits every sinner" (233). Facing the inevitability of time's prolonged march—and the very real social death that comes with mothering a baby out of wedlock—Esther wears the ravages of time and comes to embody, Mary Mullen suggests, "two temporalities—slow decay and progressive growth" which renders her "at odds with the historical moment" and "opposed to the present arrangement of power" (163). She undergoes the typical degradation of fortunes in naturalism while also undergoing *Bildung* which will only be fully felt and appreciated by her son after her own time and narrative primacy have passed. Esther has deferred the fruits of her own *Bildung*, inaccessible to her during her own life given its trajectory, by creating space for Jack.

Esther's hand in driving her own life and in perceiving the forces beyond her control that helped to shape it emerges in Moore's gradual revisions of the text. I take some issue with Royal A. Gettmann's declaration that Moore's changes to *Esther Waters* "are negligible"; they seem to me quite important indeed (533). The 1894 first edition places, in key passages, an emphasis on Esther's helplessness, of her inability to change things or act when it counts; the 1920 edition, however, gives Esther at times a glimpse behind the curtain of fortune, and at other times places her more clearly in the position to

make a decision, even when she ultimately makes the wrong one. Each edition of the text is certainly still full of Moore's version of naturalism, but in later editions, he tempers it with room for Esther to reflect and understand her place in the larger society that has shunned her. In an early passage, Esther "was absorbed in the consideration of her own perilous position" in the 1894 edition, but "thinking of what would happen to her" in the 1920 edition, for example (12, 1894; 14, 1920). Though the difference here is small, Esther in the later edition is looking forward toward the future, while in the first edition she is absorbed in the immediacy of the moment. A very vivid example of Moore's edits comes during William's seduction of Esther:

One evening, putting his pipe aside, William threw his arm round her and whispered that she was his wife. The words sounded delicious in her ears, but she could hardly hear what he said after; a sort of weakness seemed to come over her. It must be the beer she had drunk. She wished she had not taken that last glass. She could not struggle with him...

(69, 1894).

...one evening, putting his pipe aside, William threw his arm round her, whispering that she was his wife. The words were delicious in her fainting ears. She could not put him away, nor could she struggle with him, though she knew that her fate depended upon her resistance, and swooning away she awakened in pain, powerless to free herself...

(70, 1920).

In the earlier edition, weakness “seemed” to come over Esther; she blames the alcohol she consumed, and she can hardly hear William. The second passage likewise shows Esther’s knowledge that her “fate depended on her resistance,” something made oblique in the first edition. Obviously, Esther is aware, in the earlier text, that having an affair as a servant risks her fate in life, but only in the later edition does Moore articulate her vivid understanding of what is at stake. She seems to lapse out of consciousness in the later passage, beyond the point of no return, a purely bodily response.

After she has her son, a curious quirk in Moore’s narration emerges. In the below passages, we see Moore remove the voice of the narrator typical in Hardy’s fiction, who rules from on high and distributes blanket statements about the preordained or inescapable fate of the protagonist:

She did not desire her baby’s death, but she could not forget what the baby-farmer had told her—the burden would not become lighter, it would become heavier and heavier. What would become of her? Was there no hope? She buried her face in her pillow, seeking to escape from the passion of her despair. She was an unfortunate girl, and had missed all her chances.

In the six months she had spent in the house in Chelsea her nature had been strained to the uttermost, and what we call chance now came to decide the course of her destiny. The fight between circumstances and character had gone till now in favour of character, but circumstances must call up no further forces against character. A hair would turn the scale either way. One morning she was startled out of her sleep by a loud knocking at the door.

(157, 1894).

She didn't desire her boy's death, but she couldn't forget what the baby-farmer had told her, that the burden wouldn't become lighter, but heavier and heavier.

Was there no hope? She buried her face in her pillow.

One morning she was startled out of her sleep by a loud knocking at the door.

(153-154, 1920).

Moore has entirely excised the section of the text where Esther despairs and seeks to escape her lot. So too does he remove the mention of her missing her chances, and the belabored metaphor of the scale weighing circumstances and character. The 1920 edition grounds Esther in reality, and keeps her perspective centered. The narrator does not intrude, and, if the narrator in the earlier edition might be something between a religious moralist and the author of a book on the natural sciences, the narrator in the later edition lets Esther think and speak for herself in her own words, relating her own experiences of struggle and failure.

Late in the text, Moore again changes a small but important word that characterizes his editing enterprise. Esther, grown old and reflecting on the trajectory of her life and the lives of those she had encountered along the way, contemplates "the mystery of destiny" in the 1894 text, and the "sadness of destiny" in the 1920 text (373, 359). While "mystery" leaves Esther in a liminal space, not sure what precisely might have been done or what might have been beyond her control, the use of "sadness" to describe destiny places the novel soundly in the tragic tradition, but it is a tragedy within which Esther had the capacity to choose. She has been given the vantage point to reflect,

and her rebellion against her lot in life, though futile, takes on a noble tenor. She was unable to escape poverty or find lasting success after giving birth to Jack, but, unlike Jude, her repeated attempts *to try* and have things turn out differently are presented as, at the end, heroic. Her narrative inverts the negative dialectic of the development plot, mining it for a generative kernel within its overwhelming negativity rather than continuing the erosion of positive development seen in Hardy and Rhys's novels.

The final paragraphs of the novel show Jack, grown, handsome, and strong, returning to visit his mother and her original mistress before embarking on life as a soldier. At the end of the text, "All was forgotten in the happiness of the moment—the long fight for his life, and the possibility that any moment might declare him to be mere food for powder and shot. [Esther] was only conscious that she had accomplished her woman's work—she had brought him up to man's estate; and that was her sufficient reward. What a fine fellow he was! She did not know he was so handsome" (362, 1920). It is possible to read a sort of doomed cyclicity into this scene, understanding that Jack is about to go off to war and may very well die. It is also possible to read the ending as a machination by a male author to undermine the potential for his female character to have a life of her own with its own meaning outside of the social role assigned to her as an impoverished mother. What I believe is so innovative about Moore's ending is that he passes agency and the baton of the future off to the next generation: is that not, ultimately, more Darwinian than Hardy's extinction plot? In *Esther Waters*, Moore has followed the taxonomy of the naturalist Bildungsroman to such an extent that Esther

herself becomes one iteration of a cycle that will, at least as far as the novel indicates, continue into the future.

There is an extensive critical tradition surrounding even the most minor of Joyce's writings, and his Bildungsroman has sustained dozens of readings that position Stephen Dedalus at many different points across myriad axes. He is the genius creator, "determined to author himself" and become "the first entirely self-conscious agent of... formation for an entire community" (Nolan 26). He is the heir to a national destiny, "built upon historicity and tradition," "born to transcend, but his transcendence involves a sacrilege towards the past which horrifies him" (Bennett 281). He is the representation of Joyce's "deeper ambivalence toward the whole question of escape, of liberation," risking "subservience to a particular narrative structure" because of the shape of his life (Comens 297). The way readers handle the ending, Stephen's flight from Ireland to the continent, has been perhaps the most important crux of the text: is his journey heroic, a first adult step out from adolescence in his Künstlerroman, or another childish maneuver in an established pattern of avoiding responsibility? The novel, like the critical literature, tends to double back and repeat, to cycle through possibilities without leaving anything behind. Michael Levenson for example suggests that "the novel...relies heavily on a formal principle that challenges finality with repetition and that encourages a view of Stephen as bound within a perpetually unfolding series—as the sort of character, that is, who having done a thing once, would as soon do it a million times" ("Stephen's Diary" 1020-1021).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For further accounts of the cyclicity of the text, see Farrell, Kevin. "The Reverend Stephen Dedalus, S.J.: Sacramental Structure in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*." *James Joyce Quarterly* 49.1 (2011): 27-40; Ellmann, Richard. "The Limits of Joyce's Naturalism." *The Sewanee Review* 63.4 (1955): 567-575.

I tend to agree with Tobias Boes' position that *Portrait* "is neither a eulogy to lost possibility, nor does it quietly resign itself to the triumphal march of history," representing as it does "life in a colonial society caught between tradition and modernity in all its confusing, contradictory, and sometimes also disheartening complexity" ("*A Portrait*" 773). His reading of the thrust of the novel and its ending is excellent; I intend, in the final section of this chapter, to expand his reading to include the structure of the novel, often unremarked upon in favor of its prose, highlighting a hidden progress narrative that Joyce included in *Portrait* which bucks the critical trend of reading the novel as largely a series of cycles. Joyce turns to naturalism in his Bildungsroman and, without rejecting it outright, builds its antithesis into Stephen's life largely in the hidden realm of the novel's shape, below even the narrative moves of its plotting.

Joyce held a complicated relationship with earlier English writers as well as with literary naturalism. He "had little regard for the fiction of his elder English contemporaries," particularly Hardy, for example (Block 337). To the naturalist movement, "James Joyce maintained a reserved attachment. At times he found the movement dull and at times rich and varied" (Raisor 457). Perhaps most strongly felt in *Dubliners*, Joyce's naturalist strand runs at least through the family drama in *Portrait*, if it doesn't trickle down through his final novels. In his Bildungsroman, we see the Dedalus family fall in their fortunes, suffering in Jane Lilienfeld's account "the complete overturn of their class privilege" as Simon Dedalus, Stephen's drunk, braggart father, falls on hard times (105). Stephen's mother, composed and well-dressed early in the novel, ends it "living in abject fear of the once-monied husband" (Lilienfeld 105).

I will largely refrain from retreading through readings of the oft-cited passages of *Portrait*, but one helpful passage in understanding Joyce's overtures towards naturalism comes when Stephen, too young to drink himself, is dragged off to a bar to witness Simon and his old crew booze to excess. Simon recalls the good old days, and says: "There's that son of mine there not half my age and I'm a better man than he is any day of the week...I'll sing a tenor song against him or I'll vault a five-barred gate against him or I'll run with him after the hounds across the country as I did thirty years ago" (Joyce 83). Simon's drunken, bragging rant leads Stephen to think that that an "abyss of fortune or of temperament sundered him from them. His mind seemed older than theirs... No life or youth stirred in him as it stirred in them...Nothing stirred within his soul but a cold and cruel and loveless lust. His childhood was dead or lost and with it his soul capable of simple joys and he was drifting amid life like the barren shell of the moon" (83-84). Here the threat more familiar in *Voyage in the Dark* rears its head: Stephen cannot conceive of himself at the center of his own life and feels detached from his circumstances and therefore his past and future. In the past, he can find only "his father's coarse bonhomie, leaky libido, profligate drinking, and masculine bravado"—all ill fits for Stephen—and yet he feels out of time in his own time, the older mind detached without either the joy of childhood or the fulfilled passions of adulthood (Esty 149).<sup>6</sup> This scene induces the most acute feeling that Stephen is doomed to follow in his father's footsteps and end up drunk, middle-aged, and hemorrhaging much-needed money.

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<sup>6</sup> Esty's reading of this scene as well as Stephen's position as a (post-)colonial Irish subject can be found in *Unseasonable Youth* pp. 142-159.

Joyce however offers a different sort of trajectory for Stephen. The (in)famous repetitiveness of *Portrait* which has frustrated readers as Stephen's adolescent perspective and decisions cause the narrative to double back on itself also happens to offer a forked path that, in Joycean fashion, emerges from one of Stephen's most bumbling efforts, the villanelle he writes in the fifth chapter of the novel (196-197). It is strange to think of the villanelle, clumsy as it is, and antiquated a form as it was, might enable something novel in Stephen's artistic development, but indeed it does. Joyce "himself wrote the villanelle, around 1900. We may assume that the late adolescent Joyce wrote it mainly with the idea of writing as good a poem as he could, not with the intention of embedding it in a novel," although that, eventually, is what he did (Adams Day 71). Further complicating matters, the poem "has no intrinsic existence because it has no direct creator: it is an actual villanelle written by a fictional poet" (Benstock 37). The villanelle should be the poetic form that best typifies the cyclical nature of Stephen's non-developmental narrative: it repeats, winds around on itself, and is circumscribed, having a set number of lines and a set form, without necessarily offering closure. Positioned as it is so close to the end of the novel, it is Stephen's most complete artistic effort, and, really, a rather pitiful effort that stands for his undevelopment.

The entire novel itself however is a sort of villanelle. The five chapters are joined by sets of asterisks which all divide scenes, and the sum total of these scenes is nineteen, the exact number of lines in a villanelle.<sup>7</sup> This makes the entire novel function loosely

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<sup>7</sup> In its original serial publication in *The Egoist*, some of the section divisions remain the same and include the asterisk dividers (for example, the break after "fall from him in that magic moment" in the May 1st, 1914 *Egoist*), while other breaks align with the sections published in the magazine. In any event, it appears Joyce had this structure in mind from the initial serial publication.

like a cyclical, repetitive poem. Initially, this might support the reading of the villanelle as a futile and puerile attempt at artistic creation in a novel about frustrated artistry. It also lends itself to a reading of *Portrait* as a prequel to *Ulysses*, given that Joyce will recycle Stephen later in his career and show him drunk and decidedly unsuccessful as an artist. But, “to too quickly swallow the supplement of *Ulysses* is to deny the hopeful... utopian work that *A Portrait* does” (Rando 51).<sup>8</sup> It is helpful to turn to *Ulysses* here, but perhaps in an unexpected way to the frustrating and labyrinthine episode, “Oxen of the Sun.” Scarlett Baron reads Joyce’s tour de force through literary history as in conversation with Darwin: while “Darwin’s scheme presents extinction as an inevitable outcome of the emergence of new species, Joyce’s episode shows that nothing, in literature, need be discarded—that no genre...need be relegated to extinction, to the status of ‘dead and broken branches’ on the great tree of letters” (197). From the first page of the book to its final section, Stephen undergoes “Oxen” himself, and it is his journey through literary forms, buried under his adolescent foibles and dalliances, that gives his flight from Ireland purpose.

Stephen “is allowed to see too much of himself in his surroundings...which can lead to an innocent narcissism” (Jok 322). He is cast as “Baby Tuckoo” in the oral folktale he hears as a toddler, for example, the hero of the oldest genre of story; he imagines himself, later, as the penitent sinner suffering in Dante’s literary Hell, and prays to avoid damnation. He debates Byron and Tennyson, and lands on the side of the Romantics while writing bad Romantic poetry. Throughout the novel, Stephen casts

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<sup>8</sup> For a more thorough reading of the relationship between the two novels and the status of *Ulysses* as a quasi-sequel, see Kenner, Hugh. “The *Portrait* in Perspective.” *Kenyon Review* 10.3 (1948): 361-381.

himself as, tries out, and rejects the forms that litter literary history and predate him. If he has no filial love for his father, grandfather, or lineage, then he makes up for that and finds a substitute family tree in the genealogies of genres which lead through his villanelle and into the final section of the text, his diary, unmediated by Joyce's narrator and in his own words. Finally, Stephen comes to narrate himself in a stream of consciousness that reflects his new capacity to undermine his adolescent gravity. The twin structures of *Portrait* form a double helix of its DNA: it is cyclical and is a novelistic manifestation of the villanelle, but in equal measure, it is a progression through literary history and into the future, as Stephen takes up the form most associated with modernity in a self-narrated stream of consciousness. *Portrait* offers both possibilities without fully shutting one down: we aren't sure what will become of Stephen, but we have seen both his ability to spin himself silly in circles and to undergo Bildung through literary experimentation. If this seems too neat, Stephen is not, according to Castle, at the very least, "the defunct *Bildungsheld* who...wanders through a modernist wasteland devoid of any positive outlet for that great symbol of modernity" ("Terrible queer creatures" 21). Though he strips the Bildungsroman "of its idealist pretenses," Joyce does provide space carved out in the continuum of literary form for Stephen to develop ("Terrible queer creatures" 2). Bradley Clissold points out that the Bildungsroman tends "to highlight the socialization of individual protagonists for the simple reason that significant life events are narratable via observation, whereas hidden genetic processes are not" (195). *Portrait*, on the twin levels of its plot and shape, attempts both.

### **Cycles of Life and Death**

The brief codas gesturing towards offshoots of the naturalist Bildungsroman are by no means an exhaustive treatment of Moore's or Joyce's novels, but each does help to shade in the empty spaces in a generic Punnett Square that would be left incomplete if only Hardy and Rhys's more pessimistic novels were up for consideration. As in previous chapters, the collision between genres opens up new territory while exposing some of the inherent limitations in each form as it is typically understood. The telos-driven plot of personal development finds a natural enemy in the wholly disinterested nature of evolutionary development, outside the scope of one human life and outside the careful curation of an author. Hardy's position, at the end of Victoria's reign, seems particularly conducive to the desolate narrative he writes for Jude, who clings to life only so that he might suffer more. Moore, through his editing history and across a longer span of time that bridged generational gaps, takes a softer stance and whittles away some of the pure determinism, advocating for a human spirit that can be a faint beacon through the generations. Rhys and Joyce, both writing at a time and a position that left them unsure of the direction that the status of their respective colonial birthplaces would take, offer different perspectives on the same fundamental question: what is the individual meant to do when he or she has no footing, no homeland, no heritage, to grow from? While Rhys dissolves Anna's subjecthood and shuts down her path into a future, Joyce leaves behind material reality, which may well have driven Stephen down a similar unfulfilled path, and takes recourse not in biology, but in literary forms.

In the following chapter, I will examine a novel that, in its stalwart refusal to capitulate to a literary form, threatens to break the DNA of the Bildungsroman entirely

and billow over into unfiltered subjectivity mediated and held from volcanic rupture only by the powerful ego of its central heroine. Rather than any sort of existential homelessness, this novel suggests that its heroine *is* at home, unremovable and inevitable, from the fabric of a society that ought to recognize in her the legacy of their generational violence and failures. This will require a reimagining of the genre known as the national allegory and a pairing with Salman Rushdie who himself reimagined the national allegory in the late-twentieth century. Following from Joyce and Moore, the treated texts play with the expectations of their narrative forms, and, by the respective end of each, have unmade the generic logic of the national allegorical Bildungsroman in opposite but interlinked ways.

## CHAPTER 4

### ALLIGATORS AND CHIMERAS: THE NATIONS AND ALLEGORIES OF

#### HUGHES AND RUSHDIE

The genre Fredric Jameson termed “national allegory” has been something of a hornet’s nest in the study of world literature and in the development of the field now known as postcolonial literary studies. His 1986 essay “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” provoked immediate responses from many scholars, most of whom quickly pointed to the flaws in Jameson’s argument. In the introduction to this chapter, I will provide an overview of this familiar debate, including Jameson’s recent coda, appended to the reproduction of the original essay in his 2019 book *Allegory and Ideology*. What I hope to make apparent with this discussion is a sort of lacuna in the study of the national allegory which remains largely understated in both Jameson’s initial hypothesis and in the many responses to his essay which primarily reply to Jameson’s strand of totalizing Marxism which collapses people and their literatures into the “third world.”<sup>1</sup> I do not believe literary critics have exhausted, or even come close to exhausting, considerations of what constitutes a national allegory, and the political and historical conditions that might cause novelists to turn to the genre, even and particularly anachronistically.

The consequences of this argument emerge in the readings of the two coming-of-age novels considered in this chapter. The national allegory has a nuanced and symbiotic relationship with the Bildungsroman that scholars have already remarked on in

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<sup>1</sup> The divide between a supposed “first,” “second,” and “third” world was and is obviously quite reductive. When referencing Jameson’s essay and the responses to it, I will still use these terms because they are pivotal to understanding Jameson’s argument and the fiery pushback he received.

the secondary literature. Michael Ormsbee writes that the Bildungsroman, as soon as it comes into focus, “threatens to slide into national allegory” (1966), while Jed Esty’s “soul-nation allegory” offers a reading of the relationship between Bildungsheld and his nation which becomes tenuous and fragmented in the early-twentieth century (39-40). While Jameson’s model is undeniably problematic, the national allegory itself is a potentially rich field: in the twentieth century, for example, even supposed “first-world” authors turn to a version of the national allegory that challenges the assumption that it is a vestigial genre, something that remains in the colonies but which was left behind by the empires. Given that scholars have argued much the same for the Bildungsroman into the middle decades of the twentieth century, it is fitting that authors have combined the two genres in texts that use the telos of both to great formal effect.

Novelists who are familiar with the many national literary histories across the world can and have worked within the framework of the national allegory, writing texts that play with and invert the generic logic of this supposedly outdated and outmoded literary form. Indeed, the national allegory provides the political framework and form required for the Bildungsroman to leap beyond biography: in Richard Hughes’ *A High Wind in Jamaica* and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, the future potentiality of the nation is bound to the individual, who in turn becomes the kaleidoscopic center of national identity, refracted infinitely. In Hughes’ 1929 novel, the Bildungsheld becomes the terrible and unknowable subject of the future, the heroine and monster of a horror story told in childish language, the torch bearer of a nascent national identity which shocked and appalled readers who could not look away. In Rushdie’s hypercanonical

1981 text, the unlikely hero Saleem fragments himself and history writ large, exploding outwards into futures and histories that transcend any singular national identity, reimagining the allegory of the nation and the Bildungsroman both. In the former text, it is Hughes' cagey refusal to situate his story in a clear historical context that lends the narrative its horrific promise of the nation's future; in Rushdie's novel, conversely, Saleem's absolute embeddedness in his national history unmakes the conceit of the national allegory as Saleem is unmade, subverting it by creating the space for other, multifaceted narratives of national identity that are given space by Saleem's disintegration.

### **Nations and Allegories**

Before going any further with Hughes' and Rushdie's novels, it will be useful to consider the potential affordances of the national allegory as a literary form separate from the referendum on Fredric Jameson and his essay that the term "national allegory" has been so bound to in the scholarly literature. Jameson actually coined the term in his 1979 book on Wyndham Lewis, *Fables of Aggression*, determining its boundaries: "national allegory should be understood as a formal attempt to bridge the increasing gap between the existential data of everyday life within a given nation-state and the structural tendency of monopoly capital to develop on a worldwide, essentially transnational scale" (*Fables* 94). In the early examples of this genre, "'classical' realism presupposed the relative intelligibility and self-sufficiency of the national experience from within, a coherence in its social life such that the narrative of the destinies of its individual citizens can be expected to achieve formal completeness" (94). This system, "once in place...has

a kind of objectivity about it, and wins a semiautonomy as a cultural structure which can then know an unforeseeable history in its own right, as an object cut adrift from its originating situation and ‘freed’ for the alienation of a host of quite different signifying functions and uses, whose content rushes in to invest it” (95). The genre as Jameson defines it seems uniquely positioned, at the turn from national to global capitalism, to reorient or reinvent a national history and identity in a way that provides a neat and seamless *narrative* to patch over the cracks between individual, nation-state, and the globe.

Several years later, Jameson’s infamously uniform proclamation about third-world literature roused numerous fiery responses. Although it is a familiar conversation, Jameson’s initial remarks and Aijaz Ahmad’s response are both worth reproducing. Jameson argues:

although we may retain for convenience and for analysis such categories as the subjective and the public or political, the relations between them are wholly different in third-world culture. Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*. Need I add that it is precisely this very different ratio of the political to the personal which makes such texts alien to us at first approach, and consequently, resistant to our conventional western habits of reading?

(“Third-World” 69, emphasis Jameson).

Ahmad would reply, after effusive praise of Jameson’s work and approach to literature and culture (which has perhaps too often gone unmentioned in favor of his powerful rebuke), that “there is no such thing as a ‘third-world literature’ which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge. There are fundamental issues—of periodisation, social and linguistic formations, political and ideological struggles within the field of literary studies, and so on—which cannot be resolved at this level of generality without an altogether positivist reductionism” (Ahmad 4). With one paragraph, the national allegory becomes a four-letter word, emblematic not of a nuanced, ongoing revision of history via narrative, but of the late-twentieth-century scholarly Marxism which reaches too far in laying out superstructures that elide individuals and their lived experiences. “What Jameson does,” according to Lisa Moody, is “reverse the cause-and-effect sequence theorized by Lukács. Rather than support the notion that the political must be written as a personal narrative in historical fiction, he inverts the formula to suggest that the personal can be read only as political in third-world fiction” (26).

It is more than fair to say that Ahmad is right and that Jameson was misguided. Too often, however, according to Neil Lazarus in his defense of Jameson, “the authority of Ahmad’s reading tends quite simply to be taken for granted” (99). He points not to a problem with Ahmad’s essay, but with its *reception*, namely that scholars have “mobilised very centrally” the debate between scholars as “a way of routing Marxism, of pointing to its alleged complicities with Orientalism, cultural supremacism, colonialism, and the like” (99). The point at issue in Jameson’s essay is his insistence that *all* texts

produced by these authors, by virtue of their status as citizens of former or of current colonies, must necessarily be national allegories. We needn't necessarily throw out the literary baby with the political bathwater: the national allegory, like the Bildungsroman, provides a sort of framework that makes sense of modern life in the nation and in global capitalism, and gives a form to possible national narratives that can be extremely illuminating, and that might offer insights into the milieus that produced them. Imre Szeman attempts to tease out the latent potential of the national allegory as a form, writing that, far from "reducing the complexity of third world literary production, the concept of national allegory enables us to consider these texts as the extremely complex objects that they are and not just as allegories of one kind of another of the Manichean binaries produced out of the encounter of colonizer and colonized...It also foregrounds (metacritically) the cultural/social situation of the readers of the texts" (812).

The national allegory, for the remainder of this chapter, will be treated as a form that serves a powerful political function and enables a sort of counterfactual historicizing of national history and destiny, something that authors can choose to write or subvert without necessarily being "locked in" to the form due to the place and circumstances of their birth. While I will contend that Rushdie has written a national allegory in *Midnight's Children*, he was no more forced to its shape than he was the Bildungsroman; as will become clear, it is ironically in the savvy (di)fusion of the two forms that the hegemony of both *as* forms is undermined.

To write a national allegory is to will into being a utopian phantom: the possibility of encompassing all the subjects of the nation and all the strains of national identity into

one coherent text is impossible. Perhaps this is why the Bildungsroman has historically been identified with the national allegory, and even threatened to spill over into it in its handling of the individual subject and his potential as metaphors for the growth and maturity of the nation. The Bildungsroman has the potential to emblemize both a hyper-specific, individual experience through the Bildungsheld who becomes spectacular precisely because he is typical, while also crystalizing in its plotting the image of the ideal citizen, fully socialized and ready for mass production. Even in postcolonial texts which might employ “*Bildung* and ‘development’ in opposition,” the Bildungsroman incorporates the “populist struggle” which “[participates] in the postcolonial formation itself by cultivating a national audience for domestic literary production...and [thematizing] the active constitution of a unified body from discrepant social elements” (Ribic 139, 136). Benedict Anderson’s argument concerning national identity, that an “American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd fellow Americans” is something that the Bildungsroman helps to smooth over: the individual “has no idea of what [his millions of fellow citizens] are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity” (26). By creating a template for a national narrative through individual identity formation, authors of both the Bildungsroman and the national allegory have operated within similar space, using the power of narrative to simulate the platonic image of national identity in storyworlds where the inherent messiness of actual nations can be smoothed over.

“Nations,” according to Homi Bhabha, “like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye. Such an image of the nation—or narration—might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west” (*Nation* 3). This idea of the nation has a “cultural compulsion” which “lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force” (*Nation* 3). The nation/narrative fusion in the Bildungsroman takes up the national allegory into its larger, teleological shape relying on the symbolic force of this vision of the nation: always moving forward, always forming new and better subjects, and perpetually reimagining its own origins in a creation myth which is retold generationally. The form threatens to fail when, again from Bhabha, we “are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population” (*Location of Culture* 148). The national allegory and the Bildungsroman rely on the readerly acceptance of a homogeneity that may not appear to him problematically homogeneous: the Bildungsroman, particularly in England, for example, depicts “a solid world, sure of itself and at ease in a continuity that fuses together ‘tradition’ and ‘progress,’” which “has absorbed and propagated one of the most basic expectations of liberal-democratic civilization: the desire that the realm of law be certain, universalistic, and provided with mechanisms for correction and control” (Moretti 185, 213). The world outside of the novel by no means follows these conventions: “tradition” and “progress” were points of great anxiety to the Victorians, and the law was anything but universal and fairly applied. But, within the novel, the nation can be theorized as the perfect version of itself, with a

perfect version of its own history and trajectory. The national allegory that hews to the biographical form is supersizing the Bildungsroman: just as the Bildungsheld comes to embody the ideal traits for neoliberal exceptionalism, the nation that nurtures him becomes the model for idealized statehood.<sup>2</sup>

That this model is caustic and has led to various concerning nationalisms goes without saying: it is designed to do precisely that, to create a division between the ideal “here” and the unknown, flawed, or inferior “there.” It is, according to Étienne Balibar, this “fictive ethnicity which makes it possible for the expression of a preexisting unity to be seen in the state and continually to measure the state against its ‘historic mission’ in the service of the nation and, as a fictively ethnic unity against the background of a universalistic representation which attributes to each individual one—and only one—ethnic identity and which thus divides up the whole of humanity between different ethnic groups corresponding potentially to so many nations” (349). This “inscribes their demands in advance to a sense of belonging in the double sense of the term: that is, both what it is that makes one belong to oneself and also what makes one belong to other fellow human beings” (Balibar 349).

The novel is uniquely poised as the vehicle for this move. Lukács points directly to the purpose of the historical novel in shaping national narratives, claiming that the process of appropriation within “enables readers to clarify their own experiences and

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<sup>2</sup> Responding to the national allegory debate, Madhava Prasad writes that “the very idea of a text being free of ‘allegory’ and therefore ‘individualistic’ is an idea that only arises with the division of the aesthetic from the theoretical/critical functions” (80). The feedback loop between the ideal citizen and the ideal nation in the national allegorical Bildungsroman seems to me to be very much caught up in this distinction that doesn’t have a clear dividing line between allegorical and individualistic texts.

understanding of life and to broaden their own horizons” (“Realism in the Balance” 1056). Unlike other genres that carry a sense of national formation or national history (for example, as Bakhtin suggests, the epic<sup>3</sup>), the novel is a genre that can look at the present and the future, rather than only the past in the formation of national identity and nationalism. About nationalism, in the the 2019 coda to his 1986 essay, Fredric Jameson remarks that while “vacuous” and leading “nowhere except into unhealthy collective narcissism and soccer hooliganism,” nationalism maintains a powerful force in no small part because of its “vital narcissism” (*Allegory* 195). Because of that narcissism, because nationalism is so powerfully narcissistic that it can be demonstrably counterfactual while still drawing scores of adherents, the national allegorical Bildungsroman as a genre must be understood as a generic finger-trap: pulling against it and trying to unravel its strands only solidifies its illusion of totality. Only by pushing inwards, accepting and operating within its flawed terms and examining the limits of their logic, can the destabilizing potential of the national allegory emerge.

Because the national allegory, like the Bildungsroman, has the potential to be slippery, it is necessary to describe precisely what constitutes a national allegory and what it might look like when fused with the Bildungsroman, which, I propose, both Hughes and Rushdie have done in the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> A rather simplistic definition of the national allegory is that the genre takes as its subject the ordinary lives of ordinary

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<sup>3</sup> Of the epic, Bakhtin writes that its world is the “national heroic past...The formally constitutive feature of the epic as a genre is rather the transferral of a represented world into the past” (*Dialogic* 13). Novels, conversely, represent the present and the future as well as the past, often within the same text.

<sup>4</sup> I make this temporal distinction because earlier Bildungsromane might certainly qualify as national allegories, but lack the unsteady relationship to the future that later texts have. It is exactly this unsteadiness that gives the genre its bite, lacking in earlier Bildungsromane.

citizens and that their choices in the storyworld come to reflect on the state of the nation outside of it. When a young man chooses between a wild and unreliable woman and a safe, dependable homemaker, he is the nation in miniature and his two love interests are two parallel paths the nation might take. His choice of wife correlates, one-to-one, with the future political program for the nation. Ditto for his and the other characters' choices in these texts, which offer forked paths towards either reliability and continuity or pitfalls and disarray. This simple definition is complicated when considering modernist texts that are often hyper-aware of the status of the text, self-reflexive about their genre, and are written by authors aware of their generic niche in broader literary history. In these novels, the use of allegory is multifaceted and typically rejects the one-to-one system of identification and signification that typify, in Benjamin's view, earlier allegory, which functions "to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal...to take the repetition of stereotypes for a process of intensification" (*Origin* 178). These allegories, Jameson says, combine other literary forms as "reminiscence and pastiche of their former selves rather than as living models or paradigms" (*Allegory* 309).<sup>5</sup> Thus, the myths and folklore that feature in *Midnight's Children*, remade in new contexts.

The Bildungsroman makes these novels, already so concerned with the fate of the author's nation above all others, even more egoistic. The national allegorical Bildungsroman asks the reader to take seriously the premise that one fictional individual is so emblematic of the nation and its destiny that she will metaphorically chart its future course in her biographical narrative. The resultant novels adhere to the conventions of

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<sup>5</sup> Jameson marks this as a feature of all postmodern allegory, but I suggest that it is perhaps equally or more true of modernist texts.

biography to the point of absurdity: Saleem's physical and spiritual connection to the fate of geopolitics for example is a feature of Rushdie's novel that causes it to stand apart from other Bildungsromane or historical novels which include events such as the Battle of Waterloo or the French Revolution happening above the level of the biographical plot. Most importantly, the national allegorical Bildungsroman must reimagine the history and shape of the nation and its destiny, reorienting the relationship between the individual and the nation as both enter the future.

Accompanying this last facet of the genre is the often ambivalent or simply pessimistic view of that future which emerges as the Bildungsheld grows into a savvy subject able to navigate the world of her specific moment without growing into the perfect bourgeois subject. Rather than a model individual, the character who emerges from these national allegorical Bildungsromane is often by her nature either unemulatable or so foreign or unknowable that emulation is impossible. More ruinously, she carries in her unknowability the portent of the disintegration of a coherent and ideal identity that might transcend generational lines, typically offered up by the Bildungsroman. In both texts treated in this chapter, the Bildungsheld avoids the conventional pathways of development entirely, finding alternative paths that are, seemingly, outside of society, and outside proper bourgeois mores and law. In Hughes' novel, Emily, the quintessentially precocious young girl, becomes what Derrida theorized as the simultaneous ruler-beast, powerful because she is not subject to the law, beneath its purview yet also above it; in Rushdie's text, Saleem pioneers a version of identity formation which leaves his body, narrative, and agency fragmented, but thereby immune to the crushing forces of history

which threaten to overwhelm him, and also outside the structures of power which gird the national allegory. They both become, in their own way, the sovereign citizens of the future, the allegorical manifestation of the frustration felt when a coherent national identity is inarticulable or undesirable in any of its apparent potentialities.

These novels approach subject formation as a potential outlet for national allegory from diametrically opposite social and political conditions, both centered on the legacies of Britain's colonial enterprise. Hughes, writing in the 1920s about post-slavery Jamaica and a journey back to the flagging heart of the empire, places his child characters in a dreamy world almost without a real place in historical time; their formation portends an insidious strain of the next generation of British subjects, seemingly identical to their parents and forebearers but corrosive to England from within. Rushdie, beginning Saleem's life at the precise moment of India's independence, swaddles the very real history of India with layers of myth and systems of meaning which reject both the one-to-one signification of classical allegory and the structures of power which both remained after the British Raj, and which threaten Saleem and his kin in the newly independent state. The novels are structured, essentially, as mirrors of each other: Hughes' feral children lurch toward England as the inevitable heirs to the worst facets of its history and civilizing mission, while Saleem, in the end, rejects the form of the national allegory he has been writing and dictating, privileging myriad identities and possibilities outside the scope of the Bildungsroman.

**'Alligators are utterly untameable': Emily's Apotheosis and England's**

**Future**

*A High Wind In Jamaica* has had a bizarre life and reception history befitting a novel as strange as it is. Immediately popular upon its release, it launched Hughes to international acclaim as an author. Although never out of print, it has since been relegated to the status of minor classic, a curiosity of literature for children. It was written twenty-five years before Golding's more famous *Lord of the Flies*, with which it shares its portrayal of children behaving in decidedly unchildlike ways and various narrative elements which caused Truman Capote to remark that it was "one of the great rip-offs of our time. Complete steal from *A High Wind in Jamaica*" (Grobel 138). Hughes approaches his child subjects from strange and unconventional angles: the novel is titled *A High Wind in Jamaica*, or *The Innocent Voyage* in its first American printing, but only a small part of the novel takes place in Jamaica, and the voyage to England which comprises its bulk is anything but innocent. From the title page, the text misleads and disorients the reader.

The novel eludes classification, and attempts to pin it down solidly in one genre or tradition fail in no small part because the narrator of the novel is complicit in the disorientating effect that its bevy of strange or horrible happenings inflict on the reader, and because Hughes' entire literary career can be characterized by his ironic or subversive uses of established genres.<sup>6</sup> *High Wind* can be read as either an extremely macabre piece of children's literature, or a modernist meditation on the minds of children written in simple prose, or a late imperial adventure/romance. It is either gleefully

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<sup>6</sup> Another example comes in Hughes' book of fairy tales, *The Spider's Palace*, the title story of which is a take on "Beauty and the Beast" with a dash of "Bluebeard": a young woman who is forced to marry a giant spider grows bitter and resentful when, after she sneaks into a forbidden room, he turns into a handsome prince. She preferred the spider.

complicit in the fetishization of the world as a British playground, or deeply cynical of the moral goodness of the British subjects who emerge from the colonial project.

There are novels with two competing structural strains, with one strain affirming the dominant social and political power structures, while the other, subtler, strain undermines them. The twentieth-century national allegory has this capacity, eluding one-to-one signification and questioning the surface narrative that its practitioners present. In *A High Wind in Jamaica*, Hughes presents children who are barely more than animals, raised by aloof parents in Jamaica: we might expect them, in a conventional colonial adventure novel, to shed the “taint” of the colony and become model British subjects as they mature, climbing from their primordial, feral animality into the world of civilized, white, English grown-ups. They do not. If anything, the Bas-Thornton children become more bestial. Further, the narrator, a belated vestige of the archetypal Victorian gentleman, loses the ability to describe the children’s inner workings, resorting to simplistic animal similes before finally conceding that he cannot peer into their minds, particularly the mind of Emily, the most dynamic and troubling of the children. Through her association with animality, Emily gains power in the narrative by operating both below the social conventions of the time expected of her (she is “only” animal) while also breaking free of the laws and mores of her society by using the bestial to work above them (she transcends middle-class expectations of conduct because she is animal). Through this double move, Hughes calls into question the validity of the primary narrative of *High Wind*, offering instead a potential shadow-narrative that transforms the text from children’s fiction to very adult horror: the “taint” that Emily carries isn’t

something that can be removed by socialization as it's understood in the classical Bildungsroman, but is instead something that the children have inherited as the heirs to the generational violence inflicted by their parents and grandparents. Indeed, the very process of socialization enables Emily to nurture that black spot in her psyche while learning the mechanisms necessary to hide it under the mask of the innocent, ordinary girl. Emily's rapid evolution and growing narrative power come to allegorize the state of England itself. She is terrifying because while outwardly resembling the picture-perfect daughter of the nation, she holds within her the capacity for tremendous violence and a mind that becomes inaccessible and unknowable to both the narrator and reader. She is England in miniature, and her path through her development narrative instills her with more and more monstrous agency before, finally, letting her loose on the nation that has created her.

The novel's plot dips in and out of familiar story forms with aplomb. It begins rather simply: the Bas-Thornton children are a gaggle of white children, heirs to an adequate fortune at home and abroad, whose parents own property and reside with them in Jamaica. They play in watering holes and go on silly adventures on foot or horseback with their neighbors, the Creole Fernandez children. Most of the children have never actually seen England, but after a hurricane and an earthquake destroy their property, their parents decide to send both sets of children back to London by ship under the eye of the gruff and nonplussed Captain Marpole. Set some time after slavery was abolished across the empire in 1834 but still some time before the novel's 1929 publication, the children inhabit a world where steamers and sailboats coexist on the ocean, and pirates

anachronistically roam the open water. This ahistorical caginess is something that will later afford the novel allegorical power: the narrator never pins down a date or even consistent sets of historical or societal circumstances to indicate to the reader when the novel might take place. He speaks of “how it used to be done” and indicates that he knows “nothing of modern methods—nor if there are any, never having visited the island since 1860, which is a long time ago now” (*HW* 6). The very presence of pirates on the open ocean is waved away by a glib remark, that piracy “had long ago ceased to pay, and should have been scrapped years ago,” with pirates continuing “to exist because they always had; but for no other reason” (134).

After the children leave the titular Jamaica in only the second chapter of the novel, their supposedly safe voyage is interrupted by pirates who abduct them. At this very early juncture, strange eccentricities emerge which tip Hughes’ hand. Captain Marpole is more irritated that he’s been inconvenienced and will have to file an insurance claim than he is worried about the children, and he lies in a letter to their parents, claiming that the lot of them were thrown overboard and drowned. He exits the narrative unceremoniously. The pirates, it turns out, are buffoons: caricatures of what children might think of pirates even today, they have more of Jack Sparrow than Blackbeard in them. The captain, Jonsen, is particularly farcical, wandering around in a robe and slippers, stammering, rotund, and drunk. The pirates keep pets aboard, including a monkey and a pig, and the children and animals make fast friends. At the hundred-page mark, *High Wind* seems set on the course charted so many times before: the children will

adventure and come of age amidst these strange maritime characters, all the better for their potentially fatal abduction by sea reavers: a comedy set on the high seas.

Shortly thereafter, the other shoe drops. John, the oldest Bas-Thornton, falls to his death some forty feet headfirst while rough-housing in a port town. The children don't make much of watching their brother die. In fact, Emily in particular reacts more negatively to her pet cat dying in the opening chapter. To her, the death of Tabby "at times, seemed a horror beyond all bearing. It was her first intimate contact with death—and a death of violence" (*HW* 61). The narrator tells us, conversely, about her brother the morning after his untimely demise: "In the morning they might have easily thought the whole thing a dream, if John's bed had not been so puzzlingly empty. Yet, as if by some mute flash of understanding, no one commented on his absence...Neither then nor thereafter was his name ever mentioned by anybody: and if you had known the children intimately you would never have guessed from them that he had ever existed" (158). The pretense that this is a simple children's book vanishes. The captain attempts to rape Emily, who is eleven at the time, and Margaret (the oldest of the Fernandez children), in her early teens, starts a relationship with the first mate which will eventually lead to a disastrous pregnancy. Later, the crew attempts to murder her. A Dutch boat sees the pirate ship, the Dutch captain is abducted, and is, in a misunderstanding, Emily kills him while he is bound with a knife. The ship grows unbearable for the pirates as they realize that, at some point, the children have utterly emasculated them and overturned the chain of command. The children are eventually transferred by the pirates to a British steamer under false pretenses and, when they finally do arrive in England, Emily gives testimony

in the trial where the pirates are found guilty and hung for the various deaths that took place on the schooner and at the port towns along the way.

The early reviews of the novel were overwhelmingly positive despite the narrative whiplash outlined above, but always two-toned: readers agreed that they enjoyed the book very much and that it upset or unsettled them. In her preface to the 1932 edition, Isabel Paterson wrote that the novel “is shocking. It plucks at the roots of one’s nerves. It makes one’s heart turn over, and shakes the bases of logic, leaving a sense of imminent unbalance” (vi-vii). It has been described as a novel “closer to Conrad than to Lewis Carroll” (Henighan 6). A newspaper reviewer wrote that the child characters, particularly Emily, operated according to an “angelical, fourth-dimensional logic,” and called her, in an almost Homeric turn of phrase, “death-dealing, innocent Emily” (Galantière 312). Ford Maddox Ford compared the novel to a mixture of *What Masie Knew* and *Turn of the Screw*, with “that touch of elfin cruelty” which leads to “some of the horror that there is in the story, which—it isn’t anything but the highest of literary compliments to say—is the most horrible I have ever read...I feel inclined to say, as a final tribute, that if ever a book deserved the attention of the censor it is the *Innocent Voyage*—and that compliment will do Mr. Hughes no harm, for the censor is too stupid to attend to the book. He will probably give it to his daughters for a Christmas present” (12). Ford was right: it is perhaps best known as a bizarre outlier in the history of children’s literature (Manlove 63) that “immediately shot to the top of the bestseller list,” making Hughes famous before the month was out (Graves 187). Ruth Sapin, confused, wrote that the children were “hopelessly unmoral,” forgetting dead family and friends, but “never ceas[ing] to mourn

their tabby cat” (Sapin 26). In the one hundred-odd contemporary reviews of the text, what shocked reviewers most “was this version of evolutionary psychology; that, rather than being represented as innately innocent, the Bas-Thornton children are eccentric and libidinal and Emily, the eldest surviving child following John’s accidental death, is portrayed as lured into donning a mark of civility” (Titlestad 36).

Hughes, for his part, played the role of coy author. He wrote that he “was entirely astonished at the controversy my innocent tale aroused. I had not set out to change anybody’s ideas about anything. I had a story to tell. My story chanced to be about children...but surely children had the same right their elders had to be portrayed as realistically as I knew how. After all, in such a context, ‘realistically’ is only another word for ‘lovingly’; my whole concern was to show them at their truthfulest best—with love” (*Fiction as Truth* 40-41). Richard Poole, who would later go on to write a literary biography of Hughes, wrote that his “central concern...from his earliest play...is with the vexed question of moral values in a world where ‘good’ and ‘evil’ can no longer be seen as absolutes, or even as polar opposites” (“Morality and Selfhood” 10). Refusing to commit to anything—Hughes’ characters always seem to inhabit gray zones in their thoughts and actions, and even at apparent binary decision points, often his narrator pulls away and refuses to illuminate their thoughts—Hughes’ storyworlds lend themselves to eclectic and often conflicting readings.

I believe this narrative ambivalence has led to a persistent misreading of the text within the relatively sparse secondary literature, that it is a violent but realistic portrayal of children in a late-colonial fantasy world, meant to be read alongside Kipling. This

reading is typified by the line of argumentation which situates “the colony as a site of primitivism and the metropolis as the locus of civilization” in the novel, endorsing “a view of the colony as a site of a primitive lack of inhibition” that has seeped into the children (van Schalwyk and Titlestad 187). This reading of the novel essentially stops precisely where Hughes begins to open up the contradictions within the plotting and narration of the text which makes it unique. I follow, for example, Adrienne Kertzer’s belief that the text “is not a children’s book because the text by its definition of the child discourages a child reader”: we only “think that we are reading a children’s book because the plot at first” seems like the plot of one (Kertzer 16). Taking any element of the text as a full endorsement of any position, literary or political, is to ignore its very instability because it is of course tidier to do so. This is why the generic traditions the reader perceives *High Wind* participating in change its apparent meaning entirely, reversing the conventional reading of the novel as colonial children’s fiction into a troubling allegory for England’s future.

*High Wind* looks like a very different novel indeed if, rather than a children’s storybook meant for the next generation of British children, it is instead a horror novel for the parents who might read it to them. The children of the novel, abandoned by their parents, struggle to return to the place of their ancestry in London. They are not, however, wonderfully behaved children who fall into trouble: they are bestial in their actions, and the narrator draws attention to this fact conspicuously. The “descriptive passages...often extended by similes drawn between humans and animals, exhibit Hughes’s relentless awareness of the bestiality of the human body” (Dumbleton 51). The prose, often simple,

belies its purpose: the frequent similes and metaphors comparing Jack's scampering to a monkey's, or another child's lounging in the sun to a dog's, work on two levels. They continue on the one hand Hughes' illusion, his deceptive veneer of childish fancy, but simultaneously they advance the growing sense that these children are not truly human, or knowable as human. If everything they do is animal, then they are really coming-of-age into animals, rather than the typical subject familiar at the end of the Bildungsroman. It is extremely generative to think of these children as figures in what Stephen Arata termed the "narrative of reverse colonization" ("Occidental Tourist" 623). In these novels, "a terrifying reversal has occurred: the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes exploited, the victimizer victimized" (623). Arata reads *Dracula* as the typical novel in this genre, but these children, unlike Dracula, are utterly indistinguishable from their peers. These narratives force the British readership to see "its own imperial practices mirrored back in monstrous forms" (Arata 623). Reading the novel as a form of national allegory opens up the possibility that, rather than carrying some taint of the colony which is excised in their journey and development, these children are themselves the taint, the logical and inevitable successors to their parents' colonial violence. Returning to England, they are poised to threaten and undermine the very social order that they are heirs to, already familiar with the moves required to subvert the society they are meant to incorporate themselves into at the end of their homecoming plot.

Emily is particularly suited to this allegorical function. Throughout the text the reader is confronted with her often terrible actions and made to wonder how accountable

she really is, or can be. As Emily grows up, according to Daniel Woodward, “she develop[s] from a lower to a higher order animal with such complex transitions that it is impossible to say whether at these times she had sufficient understanding of her actions...since at a given time a child may resemble an alligator or a cat more than an adult human, most moral questions about her remain unanswerable” (74). Looking into Emily for any sort of guidance or suggestion of what might become of the future subject of the nation not only holds a mirror to the reader, it also “offers...the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man...the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself” as Derrida described (*Animal* 11). When Hughes portrays Emily as a sort of “human in the making,” he does so with an eye not only towards her incipient adolescence but also the parts of her, of, perhaps, all children, which aligns them with the beast.

Emily rejects human relationships, favoring nature and animals. After experiencing an earthquake, Emily “ate earthquake and slept earthquake: her fingers and legs were earthquake” (40). After her cat is killed during the hurricane, the same night that Old Sam, her black part-time babysitter, dies, the narrator relates that the “death of old Sam had no such effect: there is after all a vast difference between a negro and a favourite cat” (61). Watching her father bring Sam’s corpse inside, Emily is “thrilled beyond measure at the way he dangled,” rather than frightened or alarmed (51). While the aforementioned examples paint a damning but likely true to life picture of the privileged white child that Emily is, the narrator also points out that Emily “had loved Tabby first and foremost in all the world, some of [her siblings] second, and hardly noticed [her]

mother's existence more than once a week" (65). This sequence is a common move in Hughes' novel: experiencing an earthquake would impact any child's thoughts and feelings, and the death of a family pet is of course traumatic. He escalates that death with an objectively more serious human death, then undermines it with Emily's jarring nonchalance when confronted with human suffering. At this point in the sequence, the logical conclusion seems to be (and is) that Emily values her black babysitter less than her cat. She is horrible, but in the typical, well-tread mold of the plantation heir. Hughes goes a step further: she *also* loved her cat more than her siblings, and she holds little if any regard for her mother at all. This boundary-pushing addendum is the true insight into Emily's psychic landscape: Tabby held her affection, but Emily sees the people around her as, at best, means to an end, or playmates to be used and discarded at her convenience. At age ten, she is already perfectly well-versed in the conventions of market economics without the vocabulary required to articulate it.

Throughout the novel, there are asides which remind the reader that the Bas-Thorntons are "just children," so to speak, not on the same level as adults and incapable of thinking as their parents think. The narrator writes that it "is a fact that it takes experience before one can realise what is a catastrophe and what is not. Children have little faculty of distinguishing between disaster and the ordinary course of their lives" (60). He remarks that it "was as if they [the children] were a different order of beings!" (92). He insists that they *are* human, rather than simple beasts, but draws a hazy, misty line separating animal, child, and adult: "Possibly a case might be made out that children are not human either: but I should not accept it. Agreed that their minds are not just more

ignorant and stupider than ours, but differ in kind of thinking (are *mad* in fact): but one can, by an effort of will and imagination, think like a child at least in a partial degree” (223). Emily’s supposed madness manifests itself in her processing of events, certainly: her reactions to the aforementioned deaths demonstrate this well enough. What I want to suggest however is that Hughes positions Emily not as less than the adults, but as operating both on a level beneath their understanding and above their capacity to make sense of her. Derrida’s influential formulation linking the animal to the sovereign is once again helpful:

The beast *and* [*et*] the sovereign, the beast *is* [*est*] the sovereign, that’s how our couple seems first to show up, a couple, a duo or even a duel, but also an alliance...the beast being the sovereign, the sovereign being the beast, the one and the other being each engaged, in truth changed or even exchanged, in a becoming-beast of the sovereign or in a becoming-sovereign of the beast, the passage from the one to the other, the analogy, the resemblance, the alliance, the hymen depending on the fact that they both share that very singular position of being outlaws, above or at least at a distance from the law, the beast ignorant of right and the sovereign having the right to suspend right...The sovereign is not an angel, but, one might say, he who plays the sovereign plays the beast (*Beast and the Sovereign* 32-33).

Emily holds these twin potentialities within her. We might predict, as she comes of age, the animal teeth and claws trimmed as she learns the rules of society and how to operate within them; we should see, as she encounters authority and matures, a tempering of her

egoism, replaced by a safer, middle-class temperament befitting a privileged young woman. Instead, she learns to use and abuse the power afforded to her by her liminal status rather than resolving it: playing the beast-sovereign, the narrative is taken over by her grotesque egoism, pushing out other voices and perspectives until even the narrator falls mute.

I will turn shortly to the four key moments in the novel when Emily's development narrative intersects with the horrible and unique events that shape her. Before doing so, it is prudent to think briefly about the one character who joins her, linked by the novel until its very end, the narrator. Poole writes that to "begin with *A High Wind in Jamaica* is to encounter both a story and a storyteller. No doubt, like the dancer and the dance, they are difficult to separate, but the narrator's presence and style (his presence *is* his style) so direct and shape the reader's response to his narrative as to make time reflecting upon him time well spent" (*Richard Hughes* 133). He goes on to write that "the narrator's *interest* in the story...is not easy to say. It is not the interest of someone who has a stake in events...On the other hand, *High Wind's* narrator is not Richard Hughes...for Hughes is not present in his own novel as Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* or George Eliot in *Middlemarch*" (*Richard Hughes* 133). He begins the narrative not with a list of the children, or even the history of their estate, but with the account of two Miss Parkers who, in their infirm old age, are stripped naked and tortured by their former slaves. At the end of that story, before moving to the children, he says only, "[n]ot long after this, I believe they were both starved altogether to death. Or, if that were hardly possible in so prolific a country, perhaps given ground glass—rumour varied. At any rate,

they died” (3). Poole describes the narrator as a “Victorian narrator” who is “an unsentimental man of the world who remains unsurprised by the fantastic, unperturbed by the grotesque, and unmoved by the pathetic” (*Richard Hughes* 135). This is certainly an understatement. When explaining Emily’s habit of capturing and physically torturing animals, including shoving lizards into matchboxes, he says only, “Her room was full of these and other pets, some alive, others probably dead. She also had tame fairies; and a familiar, or oracle, the White Mouse with an Elastic Tail” (11-12). We might expect a certain qualifying statement, perhaps pointing to Emily’s youth and inexperience, or a condemnation of her proclivities. That the narrator provides neither is his style, and it is this style which not only forces the reader to make his or her own moral judgments, but also opens the text to readings that run contrary to the childish sea-faring adventure Hughes lays out.

The first moment in Emily’s evolution is rather a non-moment, something passed over entirely. After John dies, Emily becomes the eldest of her siblings. She goes from one amongst the Bas-Thorntons, perhaps more interesting and developed than her younger siblings, to the central focalizer of the novel. After the children fail to react to John’s death, the next line of the novel is: “The children’s only enemy on board the schooner (which presently put to sea again, with them still on board) was the big white pig. (There was a little black fellow, too.)” (158). Emily becomes central seemingly on the pure chance happening that John, normally able to scamper around the riggings of the ship easily, slips and falls. Either the children repress the event and refuse to acknowledge it, they move on, and they watch pigs battle aboard the ship, leaving the

event a bizarre repressed memory. Or: this moment is pivotal in Hughes' project, showing that Emily is willing and able to invent and reinvent the narrative of her own life as a character within it. John is dead, and she gains narrative space because of it, a sort of burgeoning narratological awareness of her subjecthood as she centers her position in the wake of this chapter which contains nothing more than pigs squabbling. Erich Fromm describes the subsequent scene as a "remarkably keen description of a ten-year-old child's sudden awareness of its own individuality" (59). Emily thinks to herself, "And then an event did occur, to Emily, of considerable importance. She suddenly realized who she was. There is little reason that one can see why it should not have happened to her five years earlier, or even five later; and none, why it should have come that particular afternoon...it suddenly flashed into her mind that she was she" (*HW* 188-189).

Fromm is certainly right, and his description is apt. It is also incredibly understated. Only a few pages later, the precocious young *Bildungsheld*, only freshly aware of her own existence as Emily and no one else, wonders,

Had she chosen herself, or had God done it? At this, another consideration: who was God? She had heard a terrible lot about Him, always: but the question of His identity had been left vague, as much taken for granted as her own. Wasn't she perhaps God, herself? Was it that she was trying to remember? However, the more she tried, the more it eluded her. (How absurd, to disremember such an important point as whether one was God or not!)

(192).

Emily's leap from self-identification to apotheosis takes only about two pages. Almost immediately thereafter, paranoia sets in. Emily feels, for the first time, afraid: "A sudden terror struck her: did anyone know? (Know, I mean, that she was someone in particular... She could not tell why, but the idea terrified her. It would be bad enough if they should discover that she was a particular person...But suppose they knew already, had simply been hiding it from her" (195). Emily's fear is met by the narrator in an aside that seems out of place: "Grown-ups embark on a life of deception with considerable misgiving, and generally fail. But not so children. A child can hide the most appalling secret without the least effort, and is practically secure against detection" (196). This moment in Emily's development is the crux of my reading of the novel as a national allegory: Emily realizes her status as Emily, her potential power, immediately falls into delusions of grandeur, and, anticipating threats to her primacy, resolves to hide all of the above. The narrator, the reader's only insight into the children, insists that "if there is some point the child really gives his mind to hiding" the chances of discovering it "are nil" (196). She recognizes the mask of the innocent girl as a tool in her arsenal and dons it. There is now an unknowable citizen aboard the boat, headed towards London: the subject of the future, the product of socialization in the late empire, is Emily and her kind.

At this point in the text, Emily is in an extended and insidious mirror stage, affirming her importance and identity with repeated acts of self-aggrandizement that reify her bloated subjectivity. She fails to progress from this stage, which, according to Lacan, would come when she successfully resolves "the dialectical syntheses by which [the child] must resolve, as *I*, his discordance with his own reality" (75). Emily stares into

herself and decides that Emily is not Emily, eleven year old girl, but Emily the god, or Emily the monster. To borrow from Bhabha's formulation, identity and identity formation "is always the production of an 'image' of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" ("Remembering Fanon" 117). Michael Levenson, writing about the formation of the individual subject in twentieth-century modernist texts, explains that it "may be the age of narcissism, but it is also the century in which ego suffered unprecedented attacks upon its great pretensions, to be self-transparent and self-authorized. It discovered enemies within and enemies without; walls within, mirrors without; it no longer perched securely on the throne of the self" (*Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* xi). Through Emily as relayed by the indifferent, nonplussed narrator, Hughes shows a potentially turbulent "solution" to this assault on the ego: the child, looked down upon, can embrace her absolute childishness and both grab power and safeguard her power against threats. Because she can lie and transform (chameleon that she is) so freely with her mercurial whims, Emily becomes immune to the logic that dictates what adults can and cannot do, and, more troublingly, what they *should* and should not do.

The following pages bring the novel's most alarming whirlwind of activity. Captain Jonsen attempts to sexually assault Emily in a drunken stupor, and she bites his finger. The pirates attack a Dutch schooner, take the captain hostage, and Emily, locked in the cabin with him, stabs him repeatedly until he dies. He pleads with her in Dutch, and therefore unintelligibly to Emily, to spare his life: he has a wife and young children. The pirates assume that Margaret, the oldest Fernandez child, is to blame, and Emily does not

correct them. They attempt to throw Margaret overboard, but eventually rescue her: she is traumatized to such an extent that she miscarries (she had begun a sexual relationship with the first mate) and falls mute. Of Margaret's fate, the narrator explains, "since her return, she had become very dull company...Moreover, she made no attempt to regain the sovereignty to which Emily had succeeded" (283). Everything, even and especially Margaret's trauma, is framed through Emily's bids for power aboard the ship. The captain, looking at his bedroom where the murder had happened, thinks, "It seemed changed somehow—emasculated" but cannot articulate why (273). Only her siblings see something different in Emily, on the cusp of understanding. The youngest looks up and sees, "now, her terrible eyes, with no hint in them of pretence," and imagines "the ancient experience of a serpent" (286).

Eventually, the pirates manage to dump the children on a British ship, pretending to be innocent merchants. What should be the end of the novel's twists—the children are as safe as they have been with competent adults to watch over them for the very first time—leads instead to by far the novel's most striking image. Emily, aboard the ship that will bring her to England, goes nose to nose with a young alligator. The narrator, previously rock-solid in his understanding of the children, loses his nerve and his foothold:

The eye of an alligator is large, protruding, and of a brilliant yellow, with a slit pupil like a cat's. A cat's eye, to the casual observer, is expressionless: though with attention one can distinguish in it many changes of emotion. But the eye of an alligator is infinitely more stony, and brilliant—reptilian. What possible

meaning could Emily find in such an eye? Yet she lay there, and stared and stared: and the alligator stared too. If there had been an observer it might have given him a shiver to see them so—well, eye to eye like that (333-4).

The alligator “opened his eyes again, and snapped on her finger: then turned and wormed his way into the neck of her nightgown, and crawled down inside, cool and rough against her skin, till he found a place to rest. It is surprising that she could stand it, as she did, without flinching. Alligators are utterly untamable” (334-5). In one of his last moments of insight, the narrator proclaims, “Emily grew quite a lot during the passage to England... her grave face lost none of its attractiveness by being a fraction nearer your own” (342). Emily has undergone no shortage of traumatic events and has been the perpetrator of a murder. The concordance between Emily and the reptile is the culmination of several hundred pages of the simple, insipid animal similes that falsely mark *High Wind* as a piece of children’s literature. One can say “Emily is like the alligator,” but the layers of meaning—her deceptiveness, her ability to transform herself, her ability to appear as one thing but *be* another, her unknowable mind—have built over the entire text, and only come together here when her development plot is literalized in the reptile. And, it is telling that the narrator makes mention here of the reader, to whom Emily grows closer in appearance but more distant in temperament.

When the children arrive in London, Emily is called upon to give testimony which will see the pirates hung. As they go to the courthouse, Emily’s own father looks at her and “his sensitive eyes communicated to him an emotion which was not pity and was not

delight: he realised, with a sudden painful shock, that he was afraid of her! But surely it was some trick of the candlelight, or of her indisposition, that gave her face momentarily that inhuman, stony, basilisk look” (386). The narrator has left the mind of Emily for good, and inhabits the adult characters, looking over their shoulders with the reader as Emily becomes an object of study. He wonders, “What was in her mind now? I can no longer read Emily’s deeper thoughts, or handle their cords. Henceforth we must be content to surmise” (387). The narrator is the Victorian gentleman, thwarted at last, unable to break open his subjects and excavate the information he desires. Too late, Emily’s parents and the narrator seem to realize that they’ve permitted her entry into polite society. What they do not realize is that their own society is what caused Emily to become Emily. It is her uncanniness that makes her so frightening, and her uncanniness that induces the stony, serpentine look, “what was once well known and had long been familiar” (Freud 124). She, the narrator has already said, still looks like Emily: her face draws nearer to “your own” as she ages, closer to the reader who, for most of the text, has likely been hoping with bated breath that the children will make it home safely. Her very external similarity to the innocent child who must be protected and guided makes her menacing.

The final sentences of the text are shocking, and complete the dread-inducing thrust of the novel. As she heads off to school as a bit of a hero for her maritime misadventures, the narrator looks from afar: “In another room, Emily with all the other new girls was making friends with the older pupils. Looking at that gentle, happy throng of clean innocent faces and soft graceful limbs, listening to the ceaseless, artless babble

of chatter rising, perhaps God could have picked out from among them which was Emily: but I am sure that I could not” (399). Many years ago, Daniel Brown read the final words of the novel and argued that the reader “is left wondering what garish things have happened to the other girls in the scene” (8). The final note of the text, Hughes seems to suggest, is that one can never know: the narrator has lost his capacity to narrate in the typical realist mode, and his skimming of exterior appearances is precisely what he avoided, early in the text, when his narratological powers were at their height. That Emily will slink through life, not as a girl who barely survived, but as an existential threat to her peers and to the adults who populate England, is the last taste Hughes leaves in the reader’s mouth. In Emily’s Bildung plot, the surface, the young girl, ages and succeeds in her mission of surviving pirates, trauma, and making it to England. Measuring her successes against the tribulations levied against her, she is as successful as any Jane Eyre or Dorothea Brooke. Beneath the surface, she has shown her capacity to deceive, and has become unrecognizable: her vivid, powerful mind is closed to us. The pervasive sense that this ending is actually a cliffhanger, entirely open, is Hughes’ resolution of the allegory of the next generation of English citizens: there are no soothing words, only the knowledge that no one can know who or what is yet to come.

**‘National Longing for Form’: *Midnight’s Children*, India, and the Chimera**

I turn from a very silly novel that ought to be read very seriously to a very powerfully written, significant novel that perhaps shouldn’t be read seriously at all, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. I don’t make this suggestion lightly, nor is it intended as a pure act of intellectual gadflyism: *Midnight’s Children* bears more than a

superficial resemblance to a novel like *David Copperfield*, which blurs the line between proper literature and schmalz, social commentary and riotous, absurd laughter. How can anyone take seriously the autobiography of Saleem Sinai, who claims mythic significance in his national and global history, who is bullied in a pickle factory by his wife, and whose great watershed changes in life center around the congestion in his bulbous nose?<sup>7</sup> Of course, that is precisely what the entire literary world did. An early review in the *New York Times* proclaimed that the “literary map of India is about to be redrawn,” and that the novel “sounds like a continent finding its voice” (Clark 1). Another review praised its “exuberance and fantasy...The language is as full and copious as a flood or fire” (Desai). Praise was quick and effusive, and Rushdie’s star has only grown since the publication of *Midnight’s Children*. The novel is spectacularly heteroglossic, weaving together many of the great texts of literary history and dabbling in genres ranging from allegory to epic and family drama. It is precisely because of this tremendous engagement with both the canon and the very real history of the burgeoning India that Rushdie’s novel tends to be read as a national allegory in the mode indicated by Jameson when it is better read as a deconstruction of the national allegory, informed by its conventions but subversive in its deployment of them. Saleem’s absolute centrality in history, both his personal history and national history, becomes the text’s absurd conceit: its form, like Saleem’s body, is fragmenting even as it is being made, and Saleem’s overdetermined position in global history comes to stand for the very absurdity of narrativizing history coherently through

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Sjoerd-Jeroen Moenander argues that the novel is best read as oscillating between the picaresque and the Bildungsroman, settling on “tragic picaresque” (2). This reading is compelling but never reconciles the novel’s use of real history with its appropriation of genres of fiction.

the biographical novel. *Midnight's Children*, full of myths and grand national allegory, unmakes those genres as it raises them, opening at the end the possibility for new stories free of the shackles of national identity.

The story Saleem is writing down is a strange one. He claims to have been born the moment India became an independent nation, and that he and one thousand other babies born between midnight and one in the morning on the 15th of August, 1947 were born with special powers. Some of the so-called Children of Midnight were born with the power to cast spells or given extremely powerful knees, or were given the ability to travel (somehow) through time. Saleem's gift befits the narrator of such a story, as he is able to become a sort of conduit to each of the rest of the children despite their geographic distance and language barriers, holding telepathic meetings in the middle of the night. He points to events in Indian and world history—including mass migrations, wars, and Indira Gandhi's Emergency—and claims that each is tied to him or his family meaningfully; the reader gets the sense that, if Saleem is to be believed, he is the most important figure in Indian history. Thus family drama, including paternity tests, marriages and failed romances, babies switched under cover of night, and bombings take on both a personal/familial and mythical/historical tenor, focalized through Saleem and his sprawling story. The narrative is therefore always working on at least three levels: the story as Saleem tells it (including his frequent digressions and his soon-to-be wife Padma's interruptions), the actual events in the past (or in some cases, events that are currently happening in the pickle factory Saleem writes in), and the allegorical significance of the steps of Saleem's

development plot as they relate to the (mostly correct) timeline of India from the decades prior to Saleem's birth to his thirty-first birthday.

Because Rushdie's novel, and Saleem as its narrator, are reluctant to make simple interpretation available by design, the figure of the chimera becomes a gateway into the novel's winding energies. In a study of international modernisms, Aarthi Vadde turns to the chimera as a representative form for cosmopolitan modernism. Quoting Rushdie's later novel *The Satanic Verses*, Vadde uses

the phrase 'chimeras of form' as conceptual shorthand for pushing the epistemological limits of imagining community and for testing the categories by which social life is rendered coherent and speakable. The chimera is primarily understood in its mythic dimensions, as a monstrous figure of the unclassifiable body ('lionheaded goatbodied serpentailed impossibilities'), but it can also be seen in its botanical and genetic dimensions, as a figure of taxonomic interference and rearrangement that brings newness out of the old, more familiar categories (lion, goat, serpent) that it grafts together  
(2).

She explains that the chimera of form is an "autoreferential definition" of Rushdie's own style, put in the mouth of one of his characters (4). The chimera's "knotting together of threatening change and harmless fantasy makes it a powerful symbolic figure for internationalism, a discourse punctuated, on the one hand, by dramatic calls for transformation in the loyalties of ordinary people and the realpolitik of states, and, on the

other hand, by recurring doubts about its efficacy in affecting either ordinary people or state policy” (Vadde 9).

Chimeras stand for multifacetedness, illusions and elusiveness, and hybridity. The chimera is a fitting analogy for the second text treated in this chapter because it, more than any prior novel in this study, embodies all of the heteroglossic formal possibilities that the novel enables. It is also, like the chimera, ridiculous: the figure of a lion with a bleating goat’s head halfway down its back and a snake jutting aimlessly out its rear is absurd. Rushdie’s novel is perhaps the most fully-realized Bildungsroman because it takes all of its very serious possibilities—national and personal formation, history, subjecthood, hybridity, generational trauma, and large-scale violence inflicted on the individual—and interweaves them with absurdity of the highest order. It is this absurdity that is sometimes lost in the aura Rushdie and his novel have cultivated. Saleem’s Bildung, beginning as he is “mysteriously handcuffed to history” by the circumstances of his birth, is equal parts national-historical and comic in the broadest sense of the words (*MC* 3). Saleem is not only handcuffed to history, but to the teeming multitudes of references, sources, genres, and plots that Rushdie weaves into the novel, it’s “encyclopaedic impulse,” as Søren Frank termed it (Frank 189). Much of the secondary literature takes up one or more of these impulses as an entrypoint to Rushdie’s novel and Saleem’s place in Indian history, often running into the conundrum that is the endless proliferation of material and potential: the limits of the biographical novel push against the infinities of national and global histories and threaten to collapse into the “Boum” familiar in Forster’s *Passage to India*. Through the process of defanging (or

yanking the tail of) the overburdened novelistic chimera, Rushdie is actually encouraging his readers to undergo this exact type of dialectical thinking. The novel's structure can therefore be read as the making and unmaking of the national allegorical Bildungsroman, so bloated and heteroglossic that it loses the previously steady, overdetermined shape that makes it recognizable as such.<sup>8</sup> Rushdie is not writing a national allegorical Bildungsroman because it is necessary that he do so, but because that fused genre inherently contains the tools of its own unmaking, and it is thus the ideal form to both reify and tear asunder a singular national narrative.

Rushdie has spoken at length about the construction of the novel. In an interview, he explained that when he “began the book it was more autobiographical, and it only began to work when [he] started making it fictional” (printed in Reder 36). Originally drafted in the third-person, Rushdie added the discursive passages which run through the text, and “thought that by putting the book in the first person Saleem’s voice would organize and hold together the material” (printed in Reder 37). Like Conrad as he wrote *Lord Jim*, Rushdie “remember[ed] feeling alarmed at the size it was turning out to be—frequent feelings of panic that [he] was losing control of the material and that what was happening was no good” (printed in Reder 36). He has spoken about wanting “to restore the past to [himself], not in the faded greys of old family-album snapshots, but whole, in Cinemascope and glorious Technicolor” (“Imaginary Homelands” 429). The

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<sup>8</sup> In this vein, Neil ten Kortenaar suggests that Saleem “offers the reader a choice between faith in the nation and doubt. It is because it is a real choice that critics have read the novel in such utterly different ways, as both a celebration of India and a withering satire on the very possibility of the nation-state” (“Allegory of History” 57). That neither choice ever actually “wins out” is by my estimation another feature of Rushdie’s chimerical form.

effusive praise of the novel by reviewers the world over makes it safe to say that Rushdie succeeded on all accounts. The unsteady form of the novel and its vibrant references, characters, and settings fuse into a polyphonous sensory overload held together tenuously by Saleem, the mediator of so many traditions and peoples.

In this light, reflecting on his place in the Indian literary tradition, Rushdie remarked that his “view is that the Indian tradition has always been, and still is, a mixed tradition. The idea that there is such a thing as a pure Indian tradition is a kind of fallacy, the nature of Indian culture has always been multiplicity and plurality and mingling” (“*Midnight’s Children* and *Shame*” 10). Many readings of the novel wisely approach it from the perspective of its dualities and pluralities and address its appropriations of many literary genres and forms.<sup>9</sup> These readings navigate the text well, but are by my estimation somewhat too deterministic: the move to create a binary, even a series of compelling pairs, threatens to preclude some of the wonderful messiness of the text. A less nuanced move is to take the allegorical elements of *Midnight’s Children* on their face,<sup>10</sup> something Chun-yun Chen cautions against: “What is noteworthy in most of these allegorical interpretations is the configuration of allegory as a neutral medium with a

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<sup>9</sup> John Clement Ball for example argues that the text is a late manifestation of Menippean satire, and that readers should evaluate all “pairings hierarchically” in the text, that “the first element” of the pair is “valorized, the second the endangering threat to it” (69). Tadd Graham Fernée writes that the novel deals “with doublings, the entropic disintegration of sublimated ideals into decaying corporatality and finitude,” approaching from a reading of the text which hinges on the importance of Saleem’s gradual physical disintegration (56). Sara Upstone points to the novel’s “reversals and inversions,” complicating the many dualities of the texts as they replace “depoliticized order with politicized chaos,” which ultimately, in Rushdie’s story, “allows domestic space to transcend the colonial model” for the nation in history (280).

<sup>10</sup> Roger Clark’s study typifies this approach. He writes, “*Midnight’s Children* is structured on history and on a mythic cycle, starting with the fall from a symbolic Garden of Eden and ending with a possible return to this Garden” (62). While Rushdie traffics in the conventions of epic, myth, etc., reducing the novel to its conformity to an(y) archetypal form diminishes its power to startle us.

built-in message ready to be decoded” (145). Chen’s point is important; Jed Esty argues, compellingly, that “Rushdie’s conceits reveal the inherent contradictions of national allegory, underscoring the limits of the organicist and idealist logic attached to soul-nation stories of harmonized growth” (206). A form at war with itself should be read as negotiating a tenuous and shifting flux with its component parts, never settling on a final interpretation.<sup>11</sup> This runs through Rushdie’s appropriation of the national allegory, as well as his approach to the Bildungsroman as a form for weaving together personal and national histories.

In *Midnight’s Children*, according to Josna Rege, Rushdie “declared that there were as many equally valid versions of Indian identity as there were Indians” which opens up “the paralyzing polarities of endlessly contending dualities” (343, 359). Saleem finds that “as soon as he begins his history of the new nation, other histories interfere,” according to Teresa Heffernan, and the “rivalry to control the center is fierce” (474). Even and especially in matters directly concerning his own life, Saleem offers counterfactual or hypothetical possibilities for the causes and forces behind events, rather than a coherent biographical narrative within which cause and effect flow neatly.<sup>12</sup> These histories are winding, cyclical, and eschew linearity: Aruna Srivastava contends that, as “he writes the novel, Saleem wrestles with a chronological view of history, passed on by the ruling British and now part of the Indian national consciousness, and (to him) a more ephemeral

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<sup>11</sup> This is not necessarily the only reading possible of the text’s narrative thrust. Rama Lohani-Chase reads the novel convincingly, but concludes that it is still “an allegory...that uses personal experience to tell a political history” (45).

<sup>12</sup> Loretta Mijares called this an “obsessive *proliferation* of alternative origins” which she suggests are “intended to structure and make sense of the events of his life” (133).

...mythical view of history—properly and traditionally Indian, but suppressed by more ‘progressive’ ideas about history and its relation to time” (63).<sup>13</sup> Saleem’s model of history is far from definitive, very unlike western models of linear history, and very open to possible elements which would undermine any teleology. Yet, despite this, he remains absolutely central to it, unerasable even as he blunders through misremembered dates and events which call into questions his assertions that he is the centerpiece of Indian history. Assailed on all sides by competing models of history and identity in the burgeoning nation, Saleem endures as the only constant, mediating all of the above.

David Lipscomb puts it succinctly when he points out that the “audience is not accustomed to getting its history lessons from a voice like Saleem’s” (165). Taking Rushdie’s fantasy seriously, he argues, requires “resisting historical discourse’s claim to singular authority” (Lipscomb 182). Peter Arnds points out that Saleem’s very bodily fragmentation plays into Bakhtinian heteroglossia, “a multiplicity of voices” which emerge in the text and reject purity and holistic meaning (58). The heteroglossia of *Midnight’s Children* runs deeper than its genres and approaches to history. It approaches from “below,” as well as above, that is to say, with the voices of characters such as Padma and crude, occasionally scatological humor and scenarios.<sup>14</sup> Rejecting external authority and diminishing Saleem’s authority over his own autobiography, Rushdie establishes what is arguably the most compelling conceit of the novel: Saleem, who by

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<sup>13</sup> Maria-Sabrina Draga Alexandru similarly suggests that “the perception of history as linear does not actually appear before national consciousness begins to form in reaction to British rule,” a western import “perceived as part of a new idea of modernity” (123).

<sup>14</sup> David Amigoni has described Padma’s role in the text: “the common-sensical naratee who just wants Saleem to tell his story in a straightforward manner...using a comic and pretension-crushing language of excrement” (147).

his own assertion is the pathway into Indian history and the formation of the nation, has only one of hundreds of millions of possible stories to tell. Each component of the literature and myth which builds throughout the text, its nature as “both mythical and actual, an amalgamation of myth and history” provides the material which will undermine the primacy of Saleem’s history (Biswas 117). Paradoxically, the more Saleem is central in his own biography, the less authority he really has: his method is such that the moment we start to believe his claims is the very same moment when his story proves incomplete and incompletionable.

There are painfully real stakes to Rushdie’s project. Rushdie has had several career controversies, particularly following his publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, when bombings and killings followed from the religious blowback in the wake of its publication, ordered by Ruhollah Khomeini in the form of a fatwa commanding Rushdie’s murder. Alok Yadav, in an essay considering the methods of reading fiction and the potentially dangerous ability of fiction to impact reality, wrote that, particularly when considering postcolonial texts with real geopolitical stakes, any “adequate account of fiction will need to recognize not only that fictional discourse is always a mixed discourse, a combination of fictional and nonfictional elements, but also that our reading of fiction engages many of the same protocols and considerations as our reading of nonfiction, including, centrally, the criterion of historical falsifiability” (194). There is a tremendous power in Rushdie’s “diasporic myth-making,” namely that in his mythical histories “communal myth-making contributes to the diaspora becoming self-conscious of itself as a group” (Biswas 116). Unlike Richard Hughes who might hide behind the

coyly ahistorical milieu of his fictional project, Rushdie's narrative in *Midnight's Children* gives legitimate form and voice to a people entrenched in historical time: Saleem's Bildungsroman, argues Michael Gorra, "seems to be the autobiography of Saleem Sinai," but "even its title suggests the way it differs from the individual biography characteristic of nineteenth-century novels. If earlier writers sought protagonists who were, in Georg Lukacs's terms, 'typical' of their society, a novelist like Rushdie...chooses emblematic ones" (119-120). Saleem, in other words, is not afforded the opportunity to hide behind generalities or vague historical echoes, but is forcibly entrenched in and comes to embody his nation's incipient identity.

This move is what must be worked through to understand Rushdie's use of national allegory: Rushdie elects to use Saleem as his Bildungsheld, rather than an ordinary child who might live through the same series of historical events that are already by their nature tremendously formative. The familiar move in the Bildungsroman takes the events of a narrative and makes them meaningful through the protagonist whose fate we are invested in. It doesn't matter, that is to say, in the grand scheme of the British Empire that Emma marries Mr. Knightley. Because Austen has positioned her in the narrative such that her personal success becomes the marker for subsequent generations' success, the reader waits with baited breath to see if Emma will come to her senses and make the prudent choice; across the ocean and on the continent, wars are waged and thousands die. Rushdie, in reality, required no narrative tricks or lenses through which the history of a newly independent India might become significant. But, because he imbues Saleem with magical powers and places him at the heart of India's history, the absurdity

of this act of grafting national destinies to the protagonist becomes apparent and runs throughout the entire novel.

Saleem's voice opens the novel and he works through potential beginnings before settling on his historical moment:

I was born in the city of Bombay... once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more ... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. There were gasps. And, outside the window, fireworks and crowds [...] thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country

(MC 3).

This first passage resonates with the familiar opening to *David Copperfield*: The novels share the birth at the stroke of midnight, the uncertainty about how to start the story, and the adult voice of the infant narrator. What distinguishes the two is of course the absolute connection Saleem has with his history, the indissoluble handcuffs: David is only tied to the general Victorian setting, while Saleem cannot escape the precise history the circumstances of his birth will define. His remark, “there's no getting away from the date” is the rallying cry for the entire novel: equipped with a timeline of Indian history,

one can expect, with a few deviations, large events in Saleem's life at large historical crossroads. The potential meanings for everything contained within the novel are multiplied through the triangulation of Rushdie, Saleem, and actual history: to borrow the Greimas-esque schema Saleem constructs, he is "actively-literally, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically and passively-literally" tied to the form of the text (*MC* 272-273).

For this purpose, Saleem is tied to actual history, and ties history to himself (he mentions at points things like "My aunt Alia's contribution to the fate of nations") (378). He also seeks to address "a sort of national longing for form—or perhaps simply an expression of our deep belief that forms lie hidden within reality" (344). Because he is aware that he is writing his own biographical novel *and* that he is writing an allegory for his nation, Saleem is also trying to fulfill the "Indian disease" which imparts the "urge to encapsulate the whole of reality" (*MC* 82). Thus his life takes on mythic proportion in addition to its already sizable import to the founding and evolution of national histories. The space, in the narrative and on the page, for Saleem Sinai competes with everything else captured in the pages of *Midnight's Children*; by the mechanisms of his own authorial hand, Saleem makes himself peripheral despite sitting at the center. The shifting narrative sands around him render him relatively unable to chart the course of his biography: familiar and frequent are the concessions that Saleem's life boiled down to chance, or forces far outside his control, yet just as frequent are his reminders that, yes, he will "amplify, in the manner and with the proper solemnity of a man of science" his "claim to a place at the center of things" (*MC* 272). But, his claim to centrality is only as

scientific as it is literary: the genres he writes in lend themselves to reifying his claims in the form of the text, and, as explored in earlier chapters, Saleem's claims to centrality and protagonism draw on conventions of literary history which signal to the reader that, rather than immediately thinking him insane, we ought to take Saleem very seriously indeed. He insists that he's "been the sort of person to whom things have been done; but Saleem Sinai, perennial victim, persists in seeing himself as protagonist" (*MC* 272).

I specify Saleem in the previous paragraph because Rushdie's hand, the hand that *actually* writes the text, adds the third level of allegorical significance which finally, at the end of the novel, collapses it. One of the starkest moments in the text is Saleem's discovery that he has misremembered Mahatma Gandhi's death date: "Rereading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date. But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time" (*MC* 189-190). He follows this lapse in memory by wondering, "Does one error invalidate the entire fabric? Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything—to re-write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role? ...For me, there can be no going back; I must finish what I've started, even if inevitably, what I finish turns out not to be what I began" (190). Rushdie works from real history; Saleem claims interconnections with that history and casts himself as a character (arguably *the* character) within it. But it is Rushdie's authorial hand that causes such a pause in this moment. Laura Bucholz writes that Rushdie "creates a storyworld in which his character/narrator Saleem writes an embedded storyworld that

consequently changes the construction of the original storyworld...it unnaturally violates what we consider to be the natural heterodiegetic and homodiegetic levels of storytelling” (348). Are we to believe that Saleem, who makes so many digressions, is incapable of scratching out the error and fixing the date? If he is capable of lecturing Padma and writing the lectures down, it should be (but is not) a trifling thing to correct the date. The future continuous tense, “Gandhi will continue to die,” is spectacularly unusual when referring to any death, let alone an actual historical death. It suggests that the text is perpetually being written in the present and that each sentence will take on a life of its own after Saleem finishes it. In “Saleem’s India,” the past takes on an unlife in the future and into perpetuity, while Saleem, narrating his own history, represents events incorrectly and declines to fix them. What Rushdie is doing, which Saleem eventually addresses directly when he writes, “It’s a dangerous business to try to impose one’s view of things on others,” is highlighting the unthinkability of attempting to create from the microscopic tininess of the individual an allegory for a history which predates him and a world which will outlive him by orders of magnitude (*MC* 243).

What Saleem does is not really Sisyphean, in that there is no looping promise that he will soon begin again. He seems poised, from the first page of the text, to let the boulder crush him and break him down into pieces, rather than attempt to scale the mountain again. His mantra—that he “must simply continue (having once begun) until the end; sense-and-nonsense is no longer (perhaps never was) for me to evaluate”—makes him seem at times an unwilling but necessary participant in his own autobiography (*MC* 485). The momentum of history pushes him forward, and Saleem, putting himself at

its center, is both the boulder and the human figure about to be cracked into infinite pieces under its weight. He asserted that he could not escape the shackles of history, and he did not attempt to do so.<sup>15</sup> What he does instead is a tremendous feat in its own right: he allows himself to be broken into “specks of voiceless dust,” as promised (533). Saleem gives up the pen at the end of the text, as he is one of the children who were “both masters and victims of their times...sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes” (533). To be turned into narrative charnel is something utterly unthinkable in any Bildungsroman described previously in this study. Jim and Dorian’s suicides, or Jude’s descent into obscurity, only reaffirm the individual ego as the unbreakable kernel at the center of the genre: the novels simply stop when *they* stop. To quote Saleem again, “human beings, like nations and fictional characters, can simply run out of steam, and then there’s nothing for it but to finish with them” (374). Saleem points to his “son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, and his who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts” (533). Saleem has done the unthinkable: he has opened history back to “each ‘I,’ every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us” who “contains a similar multitude” (440-441). The event horizon at the end of the national allegorical Bildungsroman, the total collapse of meaning, history, and progress into one individual, collapses and explodes into infinity.

This final maneuver is exactly why *Midnight’s Children* is a fundamentally comic text, and why Hughes’ novel is best read as a horror story. The national allegory as a

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<sup>15</sup> He does “fib” once, by his own admission, in an attempt to “create past events simply by saying they occurred” when falsifying a death for Shiva, his rival (MC 510-511).

genre, as much as the Bildungsroman, requires a monstrous egoistic heart: the author and the reader have to consider seriously the fate of one little girl or crib-swapped baby as not only emblematic of but also important to the fate of nations. Hughes' narrator, losing the ability to narrate, has the pen taken from him forcibly, so to speak: he cannot tread where Emily goes any longer, and she, having reached the aforementioned event horizon, carries all of that potent symbolic import into the world, taking future meaning and the trajectory of history with her. Rushdie, creating Saleem who undermines himself between reminders of his own supreme importance, navigates the twin genres by using each of them to their utmost capacity and allowing the energies of each to undermine their totalizing teleological mission by their combination. The very timelessness of *A High Wind in Jamaica*, its aspirations to represent a land faraway and a time shrouded in mist, make it existentially petrifying because its "present" can be any time, and its threat ever-present. The shackles of history in *Midnight's Children* provide the key to freedom: many voices, many people, many stories, emerge from history and share in the immense capacity to change its trajectory once the biographical allegory of the superlative individual splinters into millions of fragments.

The final chapter of this study concerns the process by which Bildungshelden delineate narrative space through the uses and abuses of conventional realism, and pairs Charlotte Brontë with Ben Okri. Although the two authors wrote their novels farther apart spatially and chronologically than any previous pair in this study, both authors use a kind of fantastical realism to create utopian possibilities for representation in the Bildungsroman through their narrators. Brontë has Jane reject a series of unsuitable or

undesirable identities before eventually settling on something unique that insulates her from the barrage of other voices that demanded she fit conventional molds for female behavior and identity through the novel, ending it with one of the true “happily ever afters” in this study. Okri does the opposite, opening up the typically egoistic Bildungsroman to the millions of voices that the Bildungsroman is typically preoccupied with excluding through the voice of his narrator and the unique heteroglossia of his novel. Both authors, using the voices and styles of their narrators, push the limits of the Bildungsroman, testing its ability to represent different kinds of subjects. At the end of each novel, the protagonist does not finish development into a final and crystallized form, but into a narrator who might yet continue with new possibilities.

## CHAPTER 5

### “READER, I”: IDENTITY, NARRATION, AND NARRATIVE SPACE AT THE EDGES OF THE BILDUNGSROMAN

In this final chapter, I turn toward the beginning and the end of the textual timeline that bridges two hundred and fifty years of anglophone novels. The earlier text, Charlotte Brontë’s 1847 *Jane Eyre*, needs no introduction. The latter text, the novelist Ben Okri’s 1991 Booker Prize-winning *The Famished Road* has become a modern classic in its own right. These two novelists, even compared to the clusters in earlier chapters, come to the Bildungsroman from as diametrically opposed vantages as possible: Brontë, the Victorian woman novelist, and Okri, the contemporary male Nigerian writer share little in common, and their Bildungshelden even less. The narratives of the novels are likewise vastly different. The *narrators*, however, have much more in common than they appear to at first blush. Both Jane and Okri’s narrator Azaro are engaged in a sustained battle to narrate themselves into being, to shape the form of the text they inhabit. For Jane, this manifests in the storyworld as a series of identities she tests and subsequently rejects, and in her narration as a series of forceful delineations of her and other characters’ relative import within her ongoing life story. For Azaro, the disorienting picaresque mode Okri uses hides the gradual accumulation of voices and perspectives that, finally, reveals a unique form of dialogic novelistic discourse in what I term “monophonic heteroglossia” that simulates the voices of his countrymen despite the novel never leaving the autobiographical Bildungsroman mode. Azaro, too, tries on

different identities, but rather than rejecting them, adds them to the building chorus of voices in the novel centered through him.

To this point, each chapter has detailed the combination of a literary form or genre with the Bildungsroman and examined the inflections in the narratives that result from such fusions. Here I will confess a bit of slipperiness because the “genre” that Brontë and Okri share is not necessarily a genre at all, but a novelistic mode: both authors take very fantastical approaches to the Bildungsroman, a form tightly associated with nineteenth-century realism. Okri uses magical realism in his novel, a working definition of which will be explored in the section dedicated to *The Famished Road*. This is readily apparent from the first page of the text. *Jane Eyre*, however, appears, if not realistic in its plotting, at least “realist,” save the inexplicable telekinesis that Jane develops very late in the novel. Everything potentially supernatural, that is to say, has some sort of explanation that is at least within the bounds of the physically possible. Despite these eventual explanations, however, Brontë uses the logic and form of the fairy tale to create a sort of “magic in the air” that is never dispelled: Jane, as the narrator, conspicuously crafts her own life story to crackle with the supernatural, affording herself the narrative space outside of conventional realism to carve an identity based on the principle of continuous reinvention. This allows that which is out-of-bounds in the realist Bildungsroman, something that Okri also actualizes through Azaro: rather than one final, crystalized individual at the end of these novels, myriad possibilities coexist. While their fantastical realisms use the narrative capital of the Bildungsroman to accomplish this, it is in the *narration* that the actual effects on the reader’s perception of each storyworld emerge. So,

while this is a chapter that takes up the non-realist, fantastical, or magical Bildungsroman, it also offers a consideration of the role of the first-person narrator in the Bildungsroman and the ways that other stories (fairy tales, myths, the stories of other people, and things) might enter or be removed from the autobiographical development novel.

Both narrators, then, chart new paths deep into the narrative woods of the Bildungsroman in the fictional construction of their autobiographies. Jane to find a self-identity that allows for the fullness and scope of her personhood in a society (and narrative form) that seems built to force her to acquiesce to an undesirable final mold, and Azaro to bring the voices of the people who surround him into his autobiographical first-person voice. These related moves use the narrating “I” of the Bildungsroman to work through other identities outside of or that might bleed into the narrator’s own identity: these novels push the genre’s edges through their narration and narrators in a way that undermines the presuppositions of the realist autobiographical novel. Both treated novels could conceivably have been placed in earlier chapters: Brontë’s certainly features the Gothic and Okri’s quite arguably works through the national allegory. I pair them together and present this pairing last because these novels use fantastical narration and the Bildungsroman to engage in a very optimistic, utopian formal play that demonstrates the work the genre can do and has done across the world and across the centuries. I will read *Jane Eyre* first after offering a brief history of the fairy tale and its function, and also a consideration of what “realism” looks like in Brontë’s novel. After exploring the process of Jane’s identity formation and the formation of *Jane Eyre* through

its famous frame narrative, I will argue that Okri, too, deploys a frame narrative, albeit one that has gone unremarked upon because it has been made deliberately difficult to find in the text. Through this frame and its interplay with the picaresque, magical realist *fabula*, Azaro's true Bildung emerges, as he demonstrates a burgeoning ability to inhabit and negotiate the space for other "I's" in an autobiographical Bildungsroman.

### **"I thought unaccountably of fairy tales": The Fairy Tale Bildungsroman and Fairy Tale Realism**

Seth Lehrer, writing on the origin of the term "fairy tale," explains that it is "a translation of the French *conte de fées*, the genre that arose in the salon to narrate social criticism or offer moral instruction under the guise of fantasy" (210). As they were imported from the continent to England in collections, the stories "were framed not as mollifying trifles but as both entertaining and instructive," not *either* amusing or instructive, but both simultaneously (Schacker 11). Writing about literary genres generally but particularly applicable to the fairy tale as a genre, Jameson argues that genres "are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between writer and a specific public whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (*Political Unconscious* 92). These were imported stories, changed in their medium from an oral to a written form, warped and tweaked to fit a new, voracious English audience. This symbiotic relationship situates the changes the Brothers Grimm made to the stories in a politically charged process.

This is apparent when reading older, less familiar versions of the stories. Some of these changes are so well-known to readers of the fairy tales that they have become parts

of the canonical version of each story: evil mothers in the original stories become wicked stepmothers instead; the stories were lengthened, with adjectival descriptors (“ugly,” “evil,” “pure”) and details added; certain salacious elements (Rapunzel, in the original, is impregnated by the prince, and wonders why her dress is growing tight) were omitted. Some stories were removed entirely, including the unsalvageable “How Some Children Played At Slaughtering” which tells how a boy slit his younger brother’s throat pretending to be a butcher before his mother kills him too in a rage before hanging herself. From the 1812 edition to the 1815 edition to the 1857 edition of *Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, the text underwent a long process of tinkering, becoming more and more the classic of children’s and popular literature that springs to mind today when thinking about fairy tales. The English-speaking readership, by the mid-nineteenth century, could feel secure in their position as middle-class consumers of the fairy tale as it had been bundled for them: there was in them no threat of total social upheaval, only rewards for good behavior and just desserts for the villains. Even if an evil king is killed, a better, more just king replaces him; the youngest son marries the princess and takes the crown, rather than creating a democratic state after slaying the ogre.

But, Jack Zipes argues, that “the people as carriers of the tales do not *explicitly* seek a total revolution of social relations does not minimize the utopian aspect in the *imaginative* portrayal of class conflict” (*Art of Subversion* 8, emphasis in original). It is this revolutionary potential that sizzles just beneath the rising and falling action of each tale that Charlotte Brontë identifies and allows to blossom in her novel. Brontë lived and wrote during the period that saw the greatest changes to the written fairy tale, and she

was therefore well-positioned to use the conventions of the fairy tale in her work for her contemporary audience, who were likely familiar with the tales in *several* of their versions. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane deftly positions herself as straddling tales and variants of tales so that her identity never coalesces into something immutable. This is a narrative safeguard against the possibility of becoming an inert object without agency in her own Bildung rather than the subject who drives it and narrates it. By raising the possibility of various fairy tale identities through the inclusion of fairy tale plots and language in the novel, Brontë is generating a kind of fairy tale realism, a process of identity formation in the storyworld that progresses without acquiescing to a purely teleological end state for Jane.

But who is Jane Eyre, and what is *Jane Eyre*? Jane is the precocious child, student, teacher, governess, heiress to a fortune, wife, mother, narrator, and author. *Jane Eyre* is a novel that participates in the traditions of the Gothic, the marriage plot, and the coming-of-age novel, but also traffics in various folk and fairy tales, the bigamy plot, and more. At the center of the novel, of course, is Jane Eyre. Styled as an autobiography edited by Currer Bell, it is Jane, in the storyworld, who weaves these genres and tropes together to create the form that is recognizably *Jane Eyre*. She is the focalizer and the focalized, the lens through which all plots and characters are filtered. Specifically at the junction of Jane's maturation and the fairy tale lexica which slip into the ostensibly realist narrative, Charlotte Brontë manages a deft formal balancing act characterized by the repeated raising and squashing of generic possibilities that never truly reach a permanent equilibrium. *Jane Eyre* can therefore be read as a text that weaves and unweaves many

generic threads into different permutations, a series of different tapestries without absolute resolution. Paradoxically, it is through the combination of the Bildungsroman and the fairy tale, two famously teleological genres, that the process of making and unmaking plays out. In their collision, the fusion of the genres opens a web of possibilities that navigates and rethinks the deterministic thrust of both the Bildungsroman and the fairy tale.

U.C. Knoepfelmacher remarked that finding “fairy-tale allusions in *Jane Eyre* has become a veritable industry” (22). In one account, Jane is “first a childhood Cinderella, then a Sleeping Beauty, a wife in Bluebeard’s castle, and finally Beauty wed to Beast, Rapunzel healing the prince” (Martin 94). In another, Jane uses “Fairy-tale terms” to articulate her “dilemma. ‘Is [Rochester] a Beast figure or a Bluebeard figure?’” (Campbell 235). Readers of *Jane Eyre* are intimately familiar with the references to fairy tale creatures, changelings, and broader plots derived or borrowed from fairy tale antecedents. Rather than work through further iterations of which heroine(s) Jane either is aligned or aligns herself with at points in the text, it is perhaps more useful to ask: what does the incorporation of these fairy tale elements do for *Jane Eyre*, at the level of the novel’s form? It is my contention that *Jane Eyre* is a fairy tale Bildungsroman, relying on the formal elements that characterize both genres in a synthesis that affords the latent possibilities in each while also playing with the generic logic of the Bildungsroman and the fairy tale to thwart the expectations of both.<sup>1</sup> After briefly commenting on the early-

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<sup>1</sup> In her compelling reading of the female Bildungsroman, Carol Lazzaro-Weis points out that many authors, but particularly women writers, have traditionally approached the genre with this thwarting in mind: “Women writers, like their male counterparts, have traditionally turned to the *Bildungsroman* not to subvert its structures but rather to flaunt the contradictions in the form” (21).

Victorian Bildungsroman and several influential interpretations of the purpose of fairy tales, I will proceed to a discussion of the form of *Jane Eyre* and the affordances that come with its form, before finally arguing that the fusion of Bildungsroman and fairy tale opens the plot of the novel into a compelling and transgressive narratological landscape. In this conscious juxtaposition, anxieties latent in both genres emerge which are resolved—both in the construction of the novel by Charlotte Brontë and by *Jane Eyre*’s fictional pen—by repeated acts of magical reinvention and protean hybridity.

As I have argued in previous chapters, it is more apt to think of the Bildungsroman as an aggregate of forms and plots organized and presented as a linear narrative, focalized through the singular protagonist. So, when Franco Moretti, somewhat facetiously, asks of the Victorian Bildungsroman, could “it in fact be that, deep down, these novels are fairy tales?” it is extremely generative to agree with a resounding ‘yes!’ and parse what results from a reading of the novel straddling the two traditions (185). The fairy tale (and Bildungsroman) heroine, singular, unheroic but superlative despite her ordinariness, is the keystone for the entire text: without her, the story would truly be formless, and its threads would collapse into futility and meaninglessness. Just like the fairy tale, in addition to all the other affordances it enables, the Bildungsroman, according to Michael Ormsbee, “*portrays the development of an individual whose ‘protagonicity’ never seems to be in question. Protagonicity...refers to the right to occupy a dominant position within a hierarchical network of character*” (1959, emphasis in original).

The novels that result have considerable narrative power, but are also inherently fragile: much of the plotting in the Victorian Bildungsroman reaffirms the

primacy of the heroine, and many of the genres and modes that the author relies on in the plotting of the Bildungsroman are contrivances to keep her centrality safeguarded against the possibility of a usurper. The “‘battle for the Bildungsroman’...is a figurative struggle-unto-death, the purpose of which is to cinch a character’s right to be perceived as the protagonist” (Ormsbee 1956). Outside the storyworld, Charlotte Brontë engaged with this tradition: the novel is called *Jane Eyre*, Jane Eyre narrates the text, and the reader follows Jane’s thoughts, words, and actions. Inside the story, Jane Eyre does the same: in her authorship, her entreaties to the reader, and her dazzling interiority, Jane casts and recasts herself in various roles that draw upon the reader’s familiarity with the conventions of the fairy tale. From this position of precarity, the hybrid fairy tale/Bildungsroman showcases the narrative potentialities that emerge when the narrative logics of the genres collide. Not one Jane, singular, dominant, final, emerges but many.

Fairy tales, unlike the Bildungsroman, have been categorized in neat and orderly ways by scholars. The Aarne-Thompson-Uther index remains a useful classification system for fairy tales and folktales, linking tales that share narrative elements together. The ‘animal bridegroom’, for example, is a helpful category that connects “Beauty and the Beast” to “The Frog Prince,” as well as many other similar stories. While being cautious not to descend into dated divisions of genre by pure function, it is worth considering Bruno Bettelheim’s assertion that the fairy tale as a genre—and each type of tale—serves a purpose: the child “needs ideas on how to bring his inner house into order, and on that basis be able to create order in his life...not through abstract ethical concepts but through that which seems tangibly right and therefore

meaningful to him” (5). The child faces a problem, that “a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence,” and the fairy tale promises “that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious” (8). The fairy tale does not, in its plotting, hide anything from the listener or reader. Unlike the stories Bettelheim calls “safe,” which “mention neither death nor ageing, the limits to our existence, nor the wish for eternal life,” the fairy tale “by contrast, confronts the child squarely with the basic human predicaments” (8).

This definition, this function, seems to me remarkably similar to the ostensible purpose of the Victorian Bildungsroman, a genre that is didactic in that it reproduces the myth of genteel middle-class ascension from humble beginnings. A final quote from Bettelheim, who may well be describing the Bildungsroman: “[t]he fairy tale begins with the hero at the mercy of those who think little of him and his abilities, who mistreat him and even threaten his life” (127). Describing the “rise fairy tale,” Ruth Bottigheimer outlines a story that begins “with a dirt-poor girl or boy who suffers the effects of grinding poverty and whose story continues with tests, tasks, and trials until magic brings about a marriage to royalty and a happy accession to great wealth,” again describing, unintentionally, the Bildungsroman plot (11-12). Moretti points out that this state “is the basic predicament (if not always the starting point) of every protagonist of the English *Bildungsroman*: In *Jane Eyre*, the *incipit* is actually duplicated when the adult Jane flees Thornfield and finds herself hungry, feverish, alone and penniless in an unending rain” (186, emphasis in original). Not once, not even twice, as Moretti argues, but many times,

*Jane Eyre* sees Jane returned to this state, recasting her again at the beginning of what can be read as a string of fairy tales, each with her at the center: she is Cinderella, orphaned and unwanted; the wife of Bluebeard, or of the Beast, at Thornfield; a kept woman emotionally and spiritually trapped in the vein of a Rapunzel at Moor House when faced with St. John's frigid marriage proposal. The aforementioned list of heroines Robert Martin offered which Jane temporarily embodies is really a list of tales-within-the-tale, smaller units of meaning which are tested and ultimately discarded for further and more nuanced, evolved versions of the protagonism which Jane lays claim to. It is ultimately the affordances of the Bildungsroman form that allow *Jane Eyre* to accommodate these sundry tales—and the characters and mores within them—into its plotting.

The Bildungsroman privileges the protagonist, has a plot that follows the biographical life of that protagonist, and provides everything that comes with her centrality, while also closing off other potentialities: the Bildungsroman affords the interiority of the heroine, a compelling narrative, a didactic roadmap for middle-class success, but potential perspectives beyond hers, stories she is not a part of, are precluded definitionally. As mentioned in previous chapters, the most powerful affordance of the Bildungsroman is its unparalleled potential to absorb and repurpose other forms, beyond even the capacities of the typically and famously heteroglossic novel.<sup>2</sup> Anything and everything can be subsumed into its narrative as long as it can be repurposed as a

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<sup>2</sup> In his influential reading of the novel as a form, Mikhail Bakhtin outlined one of its primary strategies: "The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [*raznorečie*] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [*raznorečie*] can enter the novel" (*Dialogic* 263).

component of the development plot. *Jane Eyre* in particular has been termed a “textual Frankenstein” that “actively resists confinement to a given generic category...In effect, both the novel and its protagonist give in to temptations to explore the dark desires beyond hierarchical class or classification systems” (Khosravi 314). Brontë darts between forms, invoking them without ever needing to settle and crystallize the narrative because Jane herself is still in motion; on another level, Jane “herself” is doing the narratological darting, because she is writing herself into being.

Karen Rowe has argued that Brontë “tests the paradigm of the fairy tale for her *Bildungsroman* and finds it lacking, precisely because it can give shape only to the child bride of Rochester, not to the substantial human being who is Jane Eyre” (71). What this interpretation of Brontë’s engagement with the fairy tale tradition misses is that the child Jane, the adolescent Jane, the adult Jane, and Jane the narrator, never abandon the fairy tale paradigm: comparisons to “Beauty and the Beast” abound even in the novel’s final pages. Jane may abandon “Cinderella” after escaping her cousins and aunt, but eventually “becomes” the heroine of another tale, then another. It is more apt to think of the fairy tale as something that helps to shape and reshape Jane throughout the narrative as Jane pushes back against the overly simplistic roles that, importantly, she has purposefully aligned with herself. It is Jane, after all, who tells the reader, “I lingered in the long passage to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third storey: narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle” (Brontë 126). It is Jane who tells the reader about the Gytrash, as Rochester approaches on his horse, and

Jane who reflects on her own visage and sees a fairy in the mirror. Jane's "imaginative awakening" to these fairy tales, according to Jacqueline Simpson, "remain[s] long after Jane has ceased literally to believe in such creatures" (47).

The narrative logic of the fairy tale offers a compelling but often distorted reflection of the logic of the coming-of-age novel. Take for example Jane's initial description of the objectionable Brocklehurst:

The handle turned, the door unclosed, and passing through and curtsying low, I looked up at—a black pillar!—such, at least, appeared to me, at first sight, the straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug: the grim face at the top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital  
(38).

Phallic, monstrous, and towering, Brocklehurst might appear picking his teeth with a child's bone in some faraway cave in a storybook. Jane steps "across the rug; he placed me square and straight before him. What a face he had, now that it was almost on a level with mine! what a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large prominent teeth!" (39). The uncomfortable proximity of Brocklehurst to Jane induces a feeling somewhere between the very real claustrophobia when a child is faced with a frightening stranger and the gaping maw of the wolf that has just eaten grandmother. Brocklehurst embodies the fusion between the realist Bildungsroman and the magical fairy tale: he is a social obstacle who must be dealt with and overcome, and his overbearing, harsh physicality marks him as a creature of pure harm. He is no different in narrative function at this point

than an ogre or troll who will be slain, a roadblock between “once upon a time” and “the end.”

Brocklehurst, and later many other characters more complex than him, is made more nuanced than his simple function. The fairy tale cannot include these shades of gray: either the ogre is vanquished, or the hero has failed. The fairy tale operates purely in black or white, good or evil, one of its stark limitations that emerge amidst its many affordances. Jane’s narration raises the possibility of Brocklehurst as a pure, brutish monstrosity to be slain, but this never really happens: loathsome as he is, he has social capital that Jane does not have. He tortures her and the other girls at Lowood School, and no heroine with a sword ever comes to chop off his head. This will become a pattern in *Jane Eyre*. The possibility, the suggestion, of something or someone that exists entirely in the fairy tale paradigm is raised, resolved within the conventions of the realist Bildungsroman in a way that provides Jane with experience and maturity, and left behind so that another character might leap out of another storybook. With Brocklehurst, his mistreatment of the girls is eventually smoothed over by the appointment of more gentle hands at Lowood, but Jane is careful to point out, “Mr. Brocklehurst, who, from his wealth and family connections, could not be overlooked, still retained the post of treasurer” (99). In a novel that gleefully flouts what most would consider strict adherence to probability and realism, Jane’s subsequent (and perhaps disappointing) request for a letter of recommendation from Brocklehurst and the board at Lowood is a very stark reminder that Jane the character is capable of moving adeptly in an unfair and uncaring social world, while Jane the narrator is capable of retroactively mapping meaning onto

and making useful the unpleasant experiences in her progress narrative.<sup>3</sup> In neither case can Jane escape cruel reality. Here, the Bildungsroman takes over where the fairy tale cannot tread: Jane leaves Lowood behind. Brocklehurst is mentioned in passing several times more, but he never reappears. This is, in narrative terms, “the end,” but the reader understands that it is only one of many beginnings for Jane.

In Winifred Gérin’s biography of Charlotte Brontë, she writes that “[a]bove all, what distinguished Charlotte’s conception of the hero, both in her juvenilia and adult writing, was her acceptance of his moral imperfections” (89). Her acceptance of the imperfect permeates characters like Rochester, of course, but also the entire narrative world: readers might want to see Brocklehurst thwarted or removed from Lowood to languish in obscurity, but all too many Brocklehursts are still in positions of power and always will be. Brontë rejects tidiness in her plotting and uses the fairy tale as the formal battleground for this rejection. There is in *Jane Eyre* “understanding of the value of impurity” that transcends the limit of the fairy tale (Knoepfmacher 24).

Moretti’s point that the English Bildungsroman is a genre of disguised fairy tales masquerading as novels should really be taken very seriously. At times Jane (via Brontë) creates a Brocklehurst, builds him to fantastical proportions, and leaves him behind in a narratological display of maturity; she has literally left the fairy tale monster behind and continues her journey. At other times, Jane depends on the fairy tale as a

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<sup>3</sup> Lorna Ellis writes that, in the female Bildungsroman, the heroine frequently must “understand themselves and their relationship to their environment, and to negotiate that environment in order to maintain some form of agency,” and is subsequently forced to “give up those aspects of her independence that separate her from patriarchal society” (16). While this perhaps does not fully encompass Jane’s maturation, at several points in the novel Jane does indeed bow to the conventions of the patriarchal society she inhabits.

touchpoint for meaning. An example comes during her early walk through Thornfield's halls:

Who blames me? Many, no doubt; and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third storey, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement, which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence (129).

Jane takes ownership of her active imagination and thinks of her life already as a story, a tale, which she will live and create simultaneously. It is irrelevant that she “had not” the fire or material to fuel it because she has shown herself willing and capable of narrativizing anything and turning it *into* meaning. She goes on to think that it “is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot” (129).

Turning a string of events into a tale is the work of the author and the narrator, but the logic by which Jane does so is lifted from the fairy tale. In that genre, narrative

proximity is what makes meaning. There need be no explanation beyond “magic bean” or “talking cat” or “evil queen”: by writing them onto the page in proximity, the narrator has made a story out of otherwise random elements. This is the affordance that fairy tales have which the Bildungsroman ultimately lacks, but which can be inserted into it by the hand of the narrator, as long as the narrative continues to churn towards a far-off and often misty maturity, broadly defined. The punishment of evil and rewarding of good, the coincidences, and the unlikely happenings of *Jane Eyre*, all stem from Jane’s plainly stated commitment to her “silent revolt” against inactivity and stillness. The narrative, the world of the story, in other words, turns on Jane, and because Jane turns it.

What separates *Jane Eyre* from a novel like *David Copperfield*, which was serialized only two to three years later, and which features many of the same narrative elements including an orphan protagonist who retrospectively narrates his life to the reader, is Jane’s consistent dedication to transformation as a governing principle. A principle, I will suggest, which is necessary because of the very gendered nature of the Bildung each character undergoes. This is demonstrated as early as the very first sentence of each novel. *David Copperfield* opens, “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show” (Dickens 1). There is an “I,” and the question David raises concerns his own import within his life story. Steerforth, Heep, Mr. Murdstone: these characters will at times threaten David’s primacy, but the story will ultimately be about how the “I” becomes the author David Copperfield who is the protagonist of *David Copperfield*. There is no risk that, if David lets himself settle into a final identity, he will be unseated; arguably, he is a

very static character amongst a field of largely static characters.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, *Jane Eyre* begins, “There was no possibility of taking a walk that day” (9). The reader is not sure yet who has decided there is no possibility of going for a walk. It might be an omniscient narrator, a parent speaking to a child, or an unnamed man sticking his hand out the window. In any case, there is not yet an “I,” but possibility, potentiality, has already been precluded.<sup>5</sup> *David Copperfield* demands what the pages *must* show; *Jane Eyre* states what cannot be done from an unknown source.

Micah Hussey points out that the novel largely lacks passages “marking the process by which [Jane] writes her own story—no preface wherein she explains her intention for her autobiography and no narrated scenes of Jane working on a manuscript” (31). However, this lacuna “actually emphasizes the intimacy between Jane Eyre’s introspection and her representation as an author...her absorbed subjectivity emphasizes the function of psychic fantasy as a kind of valence integral to the understanding of selfhood” (Hussey 31). *Jane Eyre* lacks the digressive passages familiar in *David Copperfield* when David takes long breaks from the narrative to reflect on his position as its author and curator, repeatedly asserting his role in its writing. Jane the narrator

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<sup>4</sup> Hilary Schor and others have questioned David’s heroism in his own novel. She writes that “Dickens may be sure David is his favorite child...but the novel is less certain that it belongs to David” (11). She goes on to argue that, in David’s own eyes, “the hero of his life is his wife Agnes...It is Agnes who has made possible the author’s heroism” (12). For my purposes, it is sufficient to treat him as “protagonist” if “hero” seems too strong: Borrowing from Alex Woloch’s influential formulation of character in the novel, David occupies the largest “character-space” within the “character-system,” and determines the relative space and importance of other characters with his authorial pen (14).

<sup>5</sup> Victor Watson argues that “the opening of *Jane Eyre* is unlike anything which had preceded it; more passionate and more arresting. This little girl is not described objectively or ironically; the ‘I’ of the narrative is simultaneously the child Jane once was and the intelligent adult she has grown into, so that the reader is both inside and alongside her” (8). I wholeheartedly agree with his reading of the opening chapters of the novel, but would suggest that Brontë delays the introduction of that “I” quite intentionally in the text’s first sentence, and chooses the plural ‘we’ in the second sentence for a continued narrative deferral.

frequently reaches out to the reader as a confidant or friend but presents different and multifaceted versions of herself as it fits the story. Unlike David's narrative, which has as its explicit purpose the representation of the finished version of David's subjectivity and therefore his self, Jane, to borrow Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's compelling formulation, resists the expectation for "'genteel' women to 'kill themselves'...into art objects: slim, pale, passive beings" (25). To capitulate to the "aesthetic cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty" would be tantamount to falling into the "snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead" (25). In the female Bildungsroman, the heroine finds her journey not as a line, but as, according to Susan Friaman, "an endless negotiation of a crossroads...in contradictory directions, some more sanctioned than others" (x). Jane must *become something*, someone, to fulfill the aesthetic promise of the Bildungsroman, but doing so would render her potentially inert; the trajectory of David's ascension narrative would be for Jane a descent into dormant passivity.

So, rather than making herself once, Jane makes and remakes herself. In her gradual identity formation, she dissolves her sense of self, only to rebuild it again. "The source of Jane's resilience," writes Anna Neill, "her willed resistance against the many figures in her life who seek to define her nature...is neither her parentage nor her circumstances; rather, it is the yearning of growth itself—to form and be formed...by experience and bodily passions" (1082). By darting into and out of different fairy tale personas, casting herself as multiple heroines before leaving those identities behind or complicating them, Jane is struggling, Ruth Bernard Yeazell argues, "to preserve the integrity and independence of the self. And such a struggle entails immense risk—even,

paradoxically, that of the life on which that self depends” (137). Through her centrality, refracted through the twin lenses of the Bildungsroman and a litany of fairy tales, Jane transforms herself to drive her Bildung and escape the potential snare of narrative stasis that might befall a female Bildungsheld in the traditional English Bildungsroman *and* the passivity of so many fairy tale women.

This is perhaps why Jane has so many doubles in the text. Helen Burns and Bertha Mason are two particularly stark examples. Famously, Jane rejects Helen’s martyrdom as a potential way to make her life meaningful; in more troubling passages, she dehumanizes Bertha before ultimately casting aside a potential life as Rochester’s kept woman living in a bigamous marriage. Karen Chase suggests that these other, earlier characters should be read “not as parts of, or doubles for, Jane, but as *phases*, temporary and extreme manifestations” (73). Within the *fabula* of Jane’s life, she encounters many other women who might serve as models for her own integration into society as an adult, all of whom she rejects for various reasons relating to her own internal sense of right and wrong, or simply incompatibility with her unique sensibilities. In the *syuzhet* of Jane’s life, her recollections organized into *Jane Eyre*, Jane casts herself in the often-ill-fitted role of fairy tale heroines. Thus, on two levels, Jane raises comparisons for herself that do not quite work, pushing away established models of acceptable femininity and female public life more broadly. According to Sarah Maier,

Jane learns to articulate, over time, her complex position in society not via traditional education but through her interactions with other women who embody the various possibilities her life might offer...however, she rejects each

of these positions as either silence or self-silencing, or as another form of womanhood which is “in” but not fully “of” or desired in/by society (332).

In a version of identity articulation by negation, Brontë pulls a sort of disappearing act: Jane can only be Jane and can only emerge as Jane Eyre after every other possibility has been exhausted. Jane’s addresses to the reader signal clearly her self-awareness in the construction and rejection of these identities within her broader narrative, unmistakably using her position as narrator to carve space for herself outside of these undesirable identity categories. Raising and negating potential analogs both within the events as they happen and through their retelling and collating, the novel thus works on two levels to establish Jane’s fantastically powerful capacity to will Jane Eyre/*Jane Eyre* into being.

It is worth thinking about the form that Jane’s *Bildung* actually takes, rather than only the forms it does not take, and the people she does not end up resembling. Because the structure of *Jane Eyre* contains multilayered fairy tales woven into the narrative of a *Bildungsroman*, we might think of *Jane Eyre*, in Yeazell’s terms, as “more true than real” (128). What matures Jane Eyre? It is a combination of the almost frighteningly ordinary juxtaposed with the borderline supernatural. Jane demonstrates restraint, maturity, and charity when dealing with her tormentor aunt in her dying moments, even after finding out that an easy life of leisure could have been hers, had her aunt not feigned Jane’s death out of hatred; she steps out of the fairy tale she had started to tell when she arrived at Thornfield, but never recasts herself as the maligned step-daughter/niece again. Indeed, though her aunt is dying and as cruel as ever, Jane makes a

form of peace with the two remaining Reed siblings before returning to Thornfield. She stays longer than she has any reason to stay, even though, by her own admission, Mrs. Reed hates Jane as much as ever, and, frankly, deserves no such consideration. Jane's banishment of both Reed sisters from the narrative is also very telling. Jane formally closes this chapter of her life by cordoning off a paragraph that tells the reader what becomes of Eliza and Georgiana. She could, of course, have saved this paragraph for the final chapter of her autobiography, where she looks to the future after catching the reader up with the events that occurred between her marriage and the moment of her writing her story. Instead, she banishes the sisters from the text after deciding, "I may as well mention here that Georgiana made an advantageous match with a wealthy worn-out man of fashion; and that Eliza actually took the veil, and is at this day superior of the convent where she passed the period of her novitiate" (279). She shows here a careful consideration of the space she and her cousins occupy within the story and pushes them out of the "distributional matrix" that is the novel *Jane Eyre* (Woloch 13).

At Thornfield shortly afterward, Jane experiences visions, prophetic dreams, fires, and perhaps the most famous marriage ceremony in the history of the novel. In this other extreme, borrowing again from Yeazell, "although the miraculous events which conclude this novel are scarcely realistic, they *are* 'true'—true to the internally consistent laws by which [Brontë's] world is governed... Magic is certainly at work, but it is a magic thoroughly grounded in the world of the novel (128). A pattern emerges here that plays out throughout *Jane Eyre* in careful doubles. If Jane is an almost-Cinderella her first time at Gateshead, mistreated and abused, before leaving that possibility of "Cinderella"

behind her, then her return to Gateshead could be seen as her return to that story again, perhaps inflected given her newfound independence and mature perspective. Jane rejects this possibility. Her cousins are conspicuously banished from the text in a narrative show of force. The fairy tale has ended, and Jane has moved on: her cousins (and Mrs. Reed) go on to their final, crystalized state, where they will remain, but Jane continues to transform herself. It is these return trips to earlier chapters in her life where Jane pares away the magic that had colored them earlier. The entire “Bluebeard”/ “Beauty and the Beast” dichotomy that Jane works through before the failed marriage at Thornfield, and which continues as Jane hears Rochester telepathically call out to her in the night, is dispelled when Jane returns to the ruins of Thornfield. The mansion is destroyed, the magic, so to speak, is gone, and Jane will move on, or so the reader may initially assume. Bertha’s death, her burning *with* Thornfield, and exiting the story is, strangely, the same narrative move that Brontë had made earlier through Jane at Gateshead, and at Lowood when Helen Burns died. A death closes an earlier chapter in Jane’s life and a new one begins, leaving the fable that characterized the prior phase behind so that she can begin anew.

Jane is, of course, afforded this potential by Brontë in the literal sense that Brontë has written the novel, but Jane’s arrangements of events within her autobiography point to a rejection of the basic premise of the Bildungsroman, that she must eventually settle into a role and typify one type of (female) success. Indeed, even the subtitle “edited by Currer Bell” gives Jane an additional distancing mechanism from her author, emphasizing further the conspicuous noncompliance with generic convention in her

autobiography which, within the narrative, comes solely from Jane. Eventually “we arrive at a modified account of the genre based on a destabilising irony: *The Bildungsroman tells the story of a single protagonist becoming not-single.*” (Ormsbee 1957, emphasis in original). Ormsbee of course means simply that the protagonist is being integrated into society when he writes “not-single” but in *Jane Eyre* the question of how this integration might be navigated is vital. Perhaps to an even greater extent than Rochester’s attempted bigamy, St. John threatens Jane’s development plot because he threatens to derail it into an emotional and narrative stasis. The possibility of becoming a missionary wife to St. John is, in effect, the possibility of total integration not only into patriarchal society but also into St. John himself, for his presence in the narrative is an existential threat to Jane’s centrality. He tells her

I spoke of my impatience to hear the sequel of a tale: on reflection, I find the matter will be better managed by my assuming the narrator’s part, and converting you into a listener. Before commencing, it is but fair to warn you that the story will sound somewhat hackneyed in your ears; but stale details often regain a degree of freshness when they pass through new lips

(438).

When he retells Jane the story of her own life, he is re-narrating that which Jane has carefully narrated, and attempting to unmake the woven threads of *Jane Eyre* that lend it its protean form. St. John’s version of *Jane Eyre*/Jane Eyre is simple and perfectly

determined, circumscribed and tidy.<sup>6</sup> Faced with this possibility—unspoken even in earlier confrontations with characters who may have browbeaten Jane out of her seat of importance—Jane undergoes her final transformation, not into one integrated by the character of Jane Eyre, but into the author who integrates or decenters to the periphery other characters, determining with authority who and what occupies narrative space in *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*.

The final section of the novel in Ferndean exemplifies Jane's last move away from the types that have existed before—she is no princess held hostage by St. John waiting for rescue—and allows her the physical and narrative space to see what, precisely, a new direction might entail. There are a few characters physically in Ferndean, but the space that Jane metes out for her family extends beyond its walls to a broader picture of Jane's world. She has rejected overly delineated models of traditional femininity and has returned to Rochester, who she now finds worthy. They will, presumably, fulfill the belated “happily ever after” familiar in the fairy tale. Ferndean might seem to be society in miniature, replete with servants and all, but in light of Jane's fairy tale analogs throughout the text, the final arrangement should instead be read as a path uncharted, an ending that only becomes possible when many different masks have been tried and rejected, disenchanted and left behind. After St. John's pronounced threat to her mobility, in the narrative and in her self-determination, Jane asserts her perception of people and events as paramount. Even Rochester's actions in the time the two have

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<sup>6</sup> This moment is itself an echo of an earlier section in the text, Rochester's costumed “reading” of Jane at Thornfield. What distances the two is by my reckoning the lack of humor and playfulness that characterizes Jane and Rochester's relationship which is sorely lacking from St. John.

spent apart are best read, argues Phyllis Ralph, as “secondary to Jane’s transformed understanding of him” (57). Jane’s perception, then, of Ferndean as a world apart that she lives within, where nothing must settle and coalesce, by the narrative logic of the novel, makes it so.

This informs the final pages of the novel, resonating with but markedly different from the panoptic conclusions of some Victorian Bildungsromane. As has been stated, Jane has already banished her cousins from the text many chapters prior. The people who remain are those whom Jane chooses to keep near her: Rochester, of course, and their child, their shared ward Adèle, the Rivers sisters, and their husbands. The final words of the novel are in effect a reversal, the one sour note in the otherwise blissful picture of married life. Jane addresses the final fate of her cousin and proclaims, “St. John is unmarried: he never will marry now” (521). In light of his earlier attempt to define Jane and *her* life using *his* own terms, the final passage should be read, on the one hand, as a sympathetic gesture made by Jane towards the eventual grim fate of her cousin, but also as a final assertion of her power to cast others as characters in the tableau of her own life, even as she eventually comes to leave so many of them behind.

All of this is possible because of the repeated enchantment and disenchantment of the world of the novel which begins in its opening pages. Because the Bildungsroman and the fairy tale both perpetuate the bourgeois values of the Victorian middle class, namely social climbing, mastery, exceptionalism, and liberal egoism, Brontë is well-equipped to twist the conventions of each genre through their combinations in Jane’s narration. The novel does, at points, look like a Bildungsroman, a fairy tale, and

something in between. But it is the careful and twisting scales that balance the genres and tip at times from one to the other that allow *Jane Eyre* to operate within the familiar forms of each while subtly rejecting the inherent immobility that comes at the end of each genre as its telos is accomplished. Casting off static figures, locations, and stories that no longer serve Jane's reinventions, Brontë, in *Jane Eyre*, writes a character fit to navigate some of the most well-worn literary paths without ever reaching the end of the road.

**‘strange new air of myth’: Homophony and Heteroglossia in *The Famished Road***

Unlike *Jane Eyre*, which largely hints towards the supernatural without actually including magic spells or fictional monsters, Ben Okri's novel *The Famished Road* features a much more overt magical realism. Also unlike Jane in *Jane Eyre*, Azaro, despite his substantial presence as the text's narrator, recedes into its landscape compared to the fantastical characters and otherworldly occurrences that surround him. This is particularly jarring because the text is styled as Azaro's autobiography, and his expected place in its narrative center seems to be in question. It is also jarring because, even amongst the great pantheon of anglophone novelistic narrators, Azaro has every claim to the extraordinary: he is an *abiku*, a spirit-child, who possesses strange magical abilities and is pulled between the world of the living and the spirit world beyond it and sees visions of these worlds and their inhabitants intermingled in amalgamations of bodies and parts. Despite this, Azaro makes no grand declarations of his own cosmic import. The events that he undergoes as an *abiku* are to him facts of life, disorienting and strange but

not necessarily part of any coherent grand narrative, and perhaps no stranger than the material realities of growing up as the sole child of impoverished parents in a time of great political upheaval in his African nation.

The narrative move of juxtaposing the fantastical with the banal realities of life is familiar to any reader of the magical realist genre, but Azaro's relative insignificance within his own fictional autobiography hasn't yet been considered in the secondary literature situating Okri's novel in either or both of the magical realist and the postcolonial literary traditions. The novel reads at times as almost a conglomeration of other fictional lives that overtake the narrative space typically afforded to the autobiographer. Far from a quirk in its emplotment or style, this is one of the key formal elements of the novel: *The Famished Road* is an exercise in representing as many voices as possible in one textual object, mass heteroglossia that is achieved through the form of the autobiographical novel inflected by magical realism and, paradoxically, a stylistic commitment to homophony. Okri thus represents many voices on an equal plane using the same generic container that his predecessors have used to make deliberately unequal the voices on the page and in the narrative. The novel thus presents two narratives: the actual plot as Azaro and his family struggle to find footing in their changing community, and an almost subterranean plot, the struggle to represent the voices of that community through the autobiographical novel. Before suggesting a working definition for magical

realism as Okri uses it and working through a distinction in terms Bakhtin coined that will become vital to this argument, the apparent genres of the novel should be considered.

Like the novels treated in earlier chapters, the generic traditions and historical movements that *The Famished Road* participates in and responds to color my reading of the text. In existing scholarship on the novel, critics have disagreed on the extent to which the apparent postmodernism in the text intersects with Okri's status as a postcolonial writer if it indeed does at all. This point of critical juncture provides the basis for this interrogation of the novel's form that, if it does not outright eschew these labels, at least sidesteps them: previous scholarship has coalesced along the postmodern/postcolonial axis, but the novel's form represents a new data point. With the exception of Douglas McCabe, who posits a "New Age spirituality" as "the most important cultural vector shaping *The Famished Road*," critics have largely argued for the novel's place in the canons of postmodernism, postcolonial literature, or both (2).<sup>7</sup> Olatubosun Ogunsanwo argues that what "makes *The Famished Road* postcolonial and multicultural both in form and content is precisely what makes it postmodernist, that is, its response to 'the need to clear oneself a space'" (42). Mark Mathuray suggests that "Okri's text places these two discursive frameworks [postmodern/postcolonial] at loggerheads with each other," indicating their incompatibility in Okri's storyworld (1102). Anjali Roy outright

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<sup>7</sup> Esther de Bruijn, of McCabe's argument, writes scathingly that "McCabe refuses to acknowledge that cultural forms can be innovative *and* respectfully operated to negotiate the ontologically complex present-day challenges that indigenous peoples face," emphatically rejecting the New Age spirituality model he suggests in favor of more conventional readings of the text (172).

rejects readings of the text as postmodern, stating that allowing a text “as culturally embedded as Okri’s to be labeled and naturalized within western postmodernism is to let post-colonial texts once again serve European categories” (23). Mathuray offers another possibility, writing that “Okri presents us with a distinctive African modernism” (1114).

With Mathuray, and perhaps against the conventional grain, I read Okri’s text as wearing the mantle of modernism’s creative ethos, without being tethered to the late-modernist European zeitgeist that feeds into postmodern literature. Okri engages in formal play and iterates on old novelistic genres without wholly disassembling them: *The Famished Road* is, for example, recognizably a participant in the tradition of the autobiographical Bildungsroman. Reading Okri as a modernist is liberating on several accounts. Rather than total incoherence of grand narratives as in texts considered postmodern, Okri, like Brontë, gradually accumulates narrative strands in his novel, but uses them to offer a tenuous new paradigm for the representation of many voices and perspectives in global history. If, following Achille Mbembe, the “postcolony is a period of embedding, a space of proliferation that is not solely disorder, chance, and madness,” then reading Okri as a belated modernist *is* to read his project in a truly postcolonial light (242).

Okri’s teasing out of the space between traditional genres and narrative modes in the novel has been noted by several critics. Clare Barker writes that, although the novel “privileges indigenous epistemologies over the mores of the colonial centre,” Azaro’s

“non-normative African” perspective “cannot simply be assimilated within the parameters of an ‘African worldview’” (162). Philip Whyte points to Okri’s “dual causality,” familiar in magical realist novels, where “certain extraordinary events...are explained in terms of poor lighting or smoke blurring the observer’s vision,” but is also careful to note that there are “numerous occasions when events appear to occur independently of any rational cause,” eliminating the possibility of viewing the entire text as operating within one mode or the other (111). Kim Sasser argues convincingly that the novel might be read as a “postcolonial über-*Bildungsroman*,” and writes that the novel “encompasses not one but (at least) five *Bildungshelds*,” a radical departure from the typical, European coming-of-age novel which privilege the singular voice (74). In all of these cases, the novel tries to “make it new” more than it tries to “tear it down” or fragment: Okri engages in a balancing act and works in preexisting literary traditions to redefine what they might afford in his contemporary African context.

Treating the text as modernist also opens a somewhat unconventional reading of Okri’s use of magical realism, which he uses to unsettle the genres at play in the text just as much as he uses it in the more typical modes associated with Rushdie, Gabriel García Márquez, and Toni Morrison. Homi Bhabha’s declaration that magical realism “becomes the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world” is well-known by scholars who have written on the genre (7). In her comprehensive definition, Wendy Faris offers a series of formal elements, including “an ‘irreducible element’ of magic,

something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them,” and “the closeness or near-merging of two realms, two worlds” (167, 172). Christopher Warnes claims that magical realism “draws upon the conventions of both realism and fantasy or folktale, yet does so in such a way that neither of these two realms is able to assert a greater claim to truth than the other” (2). Ato Quayson stresses Okri’s use of the ambivalent and the in-between in his magical realism when he writes of the novel that Okri fractures the “knowability of the real” by “suggesting that not only is the real decentered because of its permanent interplay with the esoteric, but that neither is reducible to the other” (149).<sup>8</sup> It is this liminality that ultimately signals Okri has opened space in the narrative for other emergent voices: both the esoteric and the “real” as such coexist on the page without hierarchy. Taking these definitions as a loose composite, Okri’s magical realism and Brontë’s fantastical or fairy tale realism actually work similarly, carving a narrative in-between where the ordinary can bleed into the supernatural and vice-versa, which then bleeds into the *Bildungsheld* and the form his or her autobiographical narration takes.

This type of narration lends Okri’s novel a form of dialogism that harkens back to features of the novel Bakhtin outlined a century ago. However, in *The Famished Road* an important distinction emerges between two of these features, heteroglossia and

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Andrade stresses the point that “literary criticism of Francophone and Anglophone African novels has moved towards a hypervaluation of the anti-mimeticist, the avant-garde, or the hybrid indeterminate” (184). While Okri certainly deals in the hybrid indeterminate, the balance within the text between the two modes is of considerable importance despite the mimetic elements being passed over by some critics in favor of its anti-mimetic elements.

polyphony, that are often used interchangeably. Bakhtin's familiar description of heteroglossia is worth reprinting:

The orientation of the word amid the utterances and languages of others, and all the specific phenomena connected with this orientation, takes on *artistic* significance in novel style. Diversity of voices and heteroglossia enter the novel and organize themselves within it into a structured artistic system. This constitutes the distinguishing feature of the novel as a genre...When heteroglossia enters the novel it becomes subject to an artistic reworking. The social and historical voices populating language, all its words and all its forms, which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized in the novel into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch

(*Dialogic* 300).

This definition emerged from Bakhtin's earlier writings on Dostoevsky, wherein Bakhtin primarily used the term "polyphony" to describe the novelist's technique, "the impression that one is dealing not with a *single* author-artist who wrote novels and stories, but with a number of philosophical statements by *several* author-thinkers—Raskolnikov, Myshkin, Stavrogin, Ivan Karamazov, the Grand Inquisitor, and others" (*Problems* 5, emphasis in original). Bakhtin would then go on to suggest, in the same book, that the "essence of

polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony. If one is to talk about individual will, then it is precisely in polyphony that a combination of several individual wills takes place, that the boundaries of the individual will can be in principle exceeded. One could put it this way: the artistic will of polyphony is a will to combine many wills, a will to the event” (Bakhtin *Problems* 21). The terms are similar, and, by the time he writes “Discourse in the Novel,” perhaps Bakhtin himself used them interchangeably, although he almost exclusively refers to heteroglossia in that essay. It is useful however to draw a subtle distinction between the two terms. Heteroglossia is the coexistence of many points of view, genres, and discourses within a cohesive textual object; polyphony is the coexistence of many linguistic registers and distinct voices that, in Bakhtin’s own words, “remain independent.” Thus while in many texts, the two function in tandem to create a cohesive effect (characters speak in different dialects or lexical registers, and these speech patterns and quirks often inform their perspectives and actual words), they *do not necessarily have to*. Okri’s novel actually attempts this, juxtaposing monophony with heteroglossia: one register, one dialect, but many points of view spread across the voices that share in that register.

This monophonic heteroglossia has stark effects on the prose in *The Famished Road*. Rich and poor alike speak in the same linguistic register, and the text is presented as standard unaccented English with one exception that draws attention to the previous

several hundred pages of homophony when a character asks, “What kind of question is dat?” (*The Famished Road* 230). Folktales and myths are told to Azaro by characters using the same speech patterns as descriptions of political riots and walks to the bar. Voices overlap and become muddled, particularly in extended passages of dialogue without speech tags: there are passages where it is difficult to determine who precisely is speaking because the languages of all characters are flattened into the same register. Children and adults, even Azaro as a very young child, likewise share this register. Azaro does not have a “voice” of his own in the sense that nothing distinguishes his language from that of Mum, Dad, Madame Koto, or any of the other characters in the text. Kerry-Jane Wallart argues that the lack of idiolects in the text “severely amputate[s]” the “polyglossia allowed” by the novel, which is in one account correct: the reader is confronted with dialogue that, absent speech tags or relevant plot information, would be indistinguishable from other represented speech (96). Here, the distinction between polyphony and heteroglossia becomes very helpful, because, in the void left by the lack of idiolects, a form of heteroglossia that presents all voices as equivalent in prevalence and import emerges. Lacking language markers that might indicate class, status, or power, it is only words themselves that convey meaning: the wealthy, poor, enfranchised, disenfranchised, and even gods and spirits share the same register. When those words are presented as equal, or at least in a way that precludes preemptive judgment or that would allow linguistic hierarchies to emerge, the prose of the text challenges the reader to

approach the storyworld as containing characters who, despite massive gulfs in social and political capital, are *linguistic* equals.

Scholars have remarked on some of the phenomena that emerge in the text following this choice, but most germane here is the apparent lack of an organizing frame from an adult (or at least older) Azaro. Quayson notes that Azaro's narrative lacks the conspicuous frame of adult reflection, writing that there "is no reference whatsoever within the text to these narrated events being related from the vantage point of adulthood" (126). José Santiago Fernandez-Vasquez similarly notes that in "*The Famished Road* there is an incongruity between the maturity displayed by the 'narrating self' and the lack of experience that should correspond to a child" (97). There is not, in other words, the hyper-visible narrating Jane Eyre who organizes thoughts and events into a coherent narrative, only the narrative itself, which borders on a loose collection of stories. Fernandez-Vasquez reads this as warping the typical teleological mold of the autobiographical novel into "a mere aggregate of loose and unconnected episodes, something which has bewildered critics and readers" (98). Jens Frederic Elze-Vollanze suggests that, because the characters in the text must be concerned "with mere survival," the "picaresque mode of narration is *one* appropriate way of expressing and critiquing this existential precarity and the change of dominant towards a more liminal and ateleological postcoloniality" (51). Precisely because the novel does not seem to have the organizing narrative frame novels participating in the genre generally use, the *syuzhet* of

the text is much harder to separate from its *fabula* than in other Bildungsromane: returning again to Jane, the reader is never allowed to forget that it is her hand that composes the narrative with an eye towards her role as its writer. *The Famished Road* seems to lack this frame and the curatorial gestures that might distance the Azaro living through events from the Azaro who chronicles them.

However, despite the lack of an explicit adult narrator with a unique voice, there *is* distance between the Azaro living events and the Azaro composing them. A small textual curiosity demonstrates this succinctly. In one passage, Azaro sees a group of people “like bizarre actors” come into Madame Koto’s bar (*TFR* 107). He remarks that one man has “a head like that of a camel,” among many others including albinos and “a woman with a terrible hip deformation” (*TFR* 108). Later in the text and later in its timeline, Azaro speaks to a photographer who asks him:

‘Did you know that in Egypt rats ate up a whole camel?’

‘What is a camel?’

‘The only animal that can survive in the desert’

I marvelled at the idea of such an animal

(*TFR* 190).

Youthful perspective aside, it is obviously impossible for Azaro to use a camel as a description before he knows that a camel exists. It is also clear that this is not Azaro playing along with or poking fun at the photographer, as the final line in the passage is

his own internal narration. This gap in knowledge suggests a distance between Azaro the narrator and Azaro, but a distance that the reader must deliberately squint to find in the cracks where it becomes apparent. Therefore, it can be read as something objectively present in the text that Azaro retroactively paves over so that his acts of narration and understanding appear as simultaneous with the events themselves: the picaresque affect of the text hides a level of deliberate craftsmanship, as Azaro is more self-consciously the arranger of the text than the child who simultaneously lives events and reports them that he initially appears.

In light of the almost invisible frame Azaro (through Okri) employs, the *Bildung* in the text emerges not in Azaro's personal growth, but in his growing ability to *represent* manifold voices and perspectives. His *Bildung* plot becomes the narrative not only of his integration into his community but of *their integration into his Bildungsroman*. The heteroglossic monophony of the text has its root in something diegetic, as it is the solution Azaro devises to the problem of his own limited perspective and a way to gesture towards the vast quantities and types of voices that the *Bildungsroman* as a form cannot include without tipping into textual incoherence. Finally, in the last pages of the novel, Azaro's status as *abiku* becomes mapped onto his young nation and the millions of people within it, revealing his biographical narrative as emblematic not only of the other voices he *has* incorporated into it but also of the countless scores he could not.

Despite his position as a spirit-child who has access to, and therefore offers the reader access to, worlds beyond the observable modern world and into the minds and hearts of other people, Azaro does not offer interpretations or any single master narrative. This makes him doubly alien to the typical narrator of the autobiographical Bildungsroman: he lacks a unique voice and also does not filter narrative strands into what should be his coherent development plot, leaving the loose threads and characters for readers to sift through. Rather than reading him as a specific, unique character in light of the above, Stephen Larsen has argued that readers might see Azaro “as a symbol or metaphor...about conditions in his country, and in several African countries” (286). This universal reading extends into the novel’s world, as others, including David Lim, have been careful to note that the setting of the novel “may well be Nigeria, but the word Nigeria never once appears” in the text; the specific country that approaches independence and is undergoing technological modernization is left open, and concrete details that might root Azaro’s life in one specific nation are sparse (59). These positions are interesting, but, for all his universalizing gestures, it is significant that Azaro remains the narrative focal point of the text: he is specific, and it is his *construction* of the story that aspires to the universal.

Okri, of his novel, said, the “novel moves towards infinity, basically. You’re dealing with a consciousness...which is already aware of other lives behind it and in front and also of people actually living their futures in the present” (reprinted in Wilkinson 83).

Ironically, through the flattening of differences between voices, many scores of voices are symbolically made present and equal in the text. This move seems almost to address Benedict Anderson's argument that in a modern nation a given person "will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful" of his fellow citizens, but still "has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity" (26). Anderson's textual examples here include both the novel and the newspaper; fittingly, Okri takes this up in the text when, faced with a photograph of his family and neighbors in the newspaper, Azaro thinks that, "[w]e were heroes in our own drama, heroes of our own protest...Mum was clearly recognizable among the faces. Ten million people would see her face and never meet her in their lives" (*TFR* 156). Mum is in this passage at once specific, as there is only one of her, and symbolic because she might emblemize something universal for the ten million who see her face in the photograph of the political riot. Very significant in this passage is that it is his mother, not Azaro himself, who will be seen and perhaps lionized by the ten million viewers. Okri uses the preexisting form of the autobiographical novel and the space allotted to its typical protagonist to make gestures, in a genre devoted to the individual and his journey through life, to the great teeming masses of people whom these novels typically and necessarily decenter under the singular and often myopic focus on the fictional author's ultimate destiny. By decentering Azaro, by allowing other characters to become symbolic and mythical in their significance in the narrative world, Okri does throughout the text what the photograph

has done to Azaro's mother: present vignettes of the specific, singular people and their stories, that come to stand in the story's construction for the millions who must logistically go unmentioned.

In his study of minor characters in the novel, Alex Woloch coined two useful terms, "character-space," the "determined space and position within the narrative as a whole" that characters occupy, and "character-system," the "arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces...into unified narrative structure" (14). Much of the space in Okri's character-system runs through Azaro but leaves him relatively insignificant compared to the character-spaces occupied by the "minor" characters in the novel. Of course, one of the great affordances of the realist novel is that even (perhaps particularly) minor characters might become spectacularly memorable: an author like Dickens, with his Micawbers, Grimwigs, and Creakles leaves a lasting impression with relatively few strokes of the pen. What Okri has done with Azaro is create a character and a narrator who is both major and minor in two interwoven ways. He is minor because he is major: as an *abiku*, he is definitionally significant in Okri's cosmology and has access to ways of being that other characters do not, but is made minor because, caught as he is between worlds, he is unable to markedly develop in or change either. He is likewise major because he is minor: as the son of an impoverished family without political power in the community, the incipient nation, or the world, and precisely because he is only a child, he has unparalleled access to spaces, places, and events that other characters in the text do

not, and can represent that which adults around him cannot under the guise of innocent boyhood. Through the interwoven majorness/minorness of his narrator, Okri presents a text that superficially resembles the autobiographical novel while also containing a utopian impulse toward true, non-hierarchical heteroglossia.

The strategic minoring of Azaro's place in the text begins in its opening pages. The mystical world of spirits, sunlight, and plenty that Azaro begins in before he is born gives way quickly to squalor and disorientation. In the act of being born, he has the limits of what is apparently possible contract on him substantially. Like Jane, Azaro's possibilities are winnowed away before the plot has begun. This however is something of a ruse: as an *abiku* Azaro still sees, hears, and feels spirits from that world, many of whom take on human-like forms and threaten to overwhelm him. In an early and typical passage, Azaro wanders alone in a market, looking for a way home:

I watched crowds of people pour into the marketplace. I watched the chaotic movements and the wild exchanges and the load-carriers staggering under sacks. It seemed as if the whole world was there. I saw people of all shapes and sizes, mountainous women with faces of iroko, midgets with faces of stone, reedy women with twins strapped to their backs, thick-set men with bulging shoulder muscles. After a while I felt a sort of vertigo just looking at anything that moved...I shut my eyes and when I opened them again I saw people who walked backwards, a dwarf who got about on two fingers, men upside-down

with baskets of fish on their feet, women who had breasts on their backs...I  
was so afraid that I got down from the barrel  
(*TFR* 15).

Conventionally this passage might be read as the textual representation of disorientation caused by a crowd on a young child who lacks the language and experience to parse it. In *The Famished Road*, this passage is the first of many passages that will begin with Azaro seeing something or someone mundane that will transition, following either his strong emotional response or an altered state of mind brought on by alcohol, smoke, or drugs, to the uncanny and magical, an array of hybrid, mismatched figures and masses of bodies. Amidst the disorientation in the passage, Azaro is overwhelmed on the page by “the whole world”: he resorts to a descriptive catalog of bodies in his narration, including as many physical descriptions as possible<sup>9</sup> that replace his thoughts or mediation. His gestures towards his own state of being only clarify his own inability to find clarity or determine meaning.

In his reading of Azaro, John Hawley argues that “it is clear that Azaro is not realistic in any sense that a nineteenth-century author would recognize. He is more accurately described as a late-twentieth-century doorkeeper between two imagined worlds: that of the spirits and that of the mortal” (35). Passages such as the above lead me to disagree with this reading: Azaro is here as “realistic” as many narrators of nineteenth-

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<sup>9</sup> The passage is considerably longer and contains more similar descriptions. Out of consideration for its length, I have abridged it here.

century novels, reacting to an overabundance of stimuli in a way that manifests in the prose as a pure description of the external at the expense of his own inner life. Of Dickens' characters for example, Woloch writes that "the protagonist's interiority is overwhelmed by the very exterior content that it attempts to process, and this condition also underlies the structure of the character-system, motivating the strong minor characters who are, in one sense, the distorted consequence of the protagonist's incomplete processes of consciousness and perception" (133). Reading Okri as iterating on this tradition is important because, as the text progresses, Azaro will himself iterate on the disorientation he feels in this initial section. Here, there are only bodies presented in a sequence, but, as the novel progresses, Azaro becomes a sort of chronicler of others' stories and myths. His minorness in the story of his own life becomes the greatest asset in that story's form, using the space he *does not* occupy to both represent and inhabit the stories of others across the realms of the ordinary, the mythical, and the political.

This is perhaps why Sasser so readily identifies other possible characters who might fit more closely with the traditional role of the *Bildungsheld*. Frequently, Azaro makes reference to his father as a kind of giant, mythical figure, even though these designations might ring hollow to the reader who is more skeptical of his greatness. Early in the novel, Azaro recognizes "the crowd that was busily generating [Madame Koto's] myth," and throughout the text, he can certainly be read as a scribe who writes of her exploits even as others fear or avoid her (*TFR* 38). In yet another, similar passage,

Jeremiah, a photographer who later becomes known only as “the photographer” is released from jail: “He said he had been tortured in prison. He was louder and more fearless than before. Prison seemed to have changed him, and he went around with a strange new air of myth about him, as if he had conceived heroic roles for himself during the short time he had been away” (*TFR* 155). Azaro is persistent in his use of myth as a category to describe the changes to the characters who share his textual world, which on the one hand fits his position as *abiku*, as the reader might expect him to be a mythical figure himself, but on the other, feels dubious: his use of elevated, mythical language is often contrasted with the harsh realities of impoverished life, and many characters remain powerless to change their standing in larger society even after bursts of mythical glory. Thus, rather than the chief agent in the driving and shaping of his own life or his community, Azaro’s true vocational calling in the text is a call to storytelling, oriented toward a deliberately meandering picaresque mode that rejects purely rational narrative teleology and the conventional organization of biographical fiction in favor of a heteroglossic *fabula*.

The potentially disorienting simultaneity that emerges because of the lack of a highly visible mediator between *fabula* and the reader allows Azaro to insert himself into the stories he hears and shapes without needing to switch linguistic registers and without relinquishing his role as narrator and focalizer. By the end of the novel, Azaro has more of a handle on the integration of voices into his narrative, blending their perspectives with

the external description seen above. A small but significant moment that shows the first flash of the heteroglossic effect of the text comes as Azaro is told a fable about a man without a stomach by Mum late at night. Mid-story, Azaro relates, “Somewhere around that point in the story I fell through the back of the chair and I flew on the back of a cricket and I was the man without a stomach heading for a feast on the moon. And then I found my eyes open and there was a candle lit on the table” (*TFR* 80-81). What is literally happening is that Azaro has dozed off in the middle of his mother’s story and is dreaming that he is the hero of that story. Also demonstrated here is the abrupt transition between different voices and spaces (Mum’s story gives way to Azaro’s self-insertion in it, which gives way to his “re-entrance” into the room) without any linguistic change to mark it. Beyond this, what Azaro really shows in his youthful approach to the folktale is his ability to incorporate into himself other people and their stories. In *The Famished Road*, which is styled as the autobiography of Azaro’s childhood, Azaro becomes a character other than himself and inhabits his story before ultimately incorporating it into his ongoing life. This is similar to Tutuola’s move that situates the Drinkard in different stories but with a sharper eye toward community and integration. Because of the simultaneity of events and their presentation to the reader, further, this appears to happen instantaneously rather than through a post-facto construction as in *Jane Eyre*.

The many instances that people and stories overlap with Azaro’s individual identity draw from the conventional tools of literary realism as well as more unusual

narrative techniques. Unlike Jane, who wards off these intrusions into her identity as potential existential threats to her Bildung, for Azaro they become the very essence of his development. One syntactic strategy comes as Azaro's neighbors fight in a political riot against the Party of the Rich, and Azaro switches to the first-person plural:

The energies that went into fighting back exhausted the street. We did not celebrate our resistance. We knew that the troubles were incomplete, that the reprisals had been deferred to another night, when we would have forgotten... We waited for new forms of iron to fall on us. We waited for a long time. Nothing happened the way we expected"  
(*TFR* 182).

This is a traditional tool in the novel and shows a burgeoning sympathy for the people Azaro shares the storyworld with. Although he will return to the first-person singular, this moment, on the tail of a long, difficult night of violence and confusion, indicates Azaro's nascent preoccupation with the representation of other voices and perspectives. By binding his autobiographical "I" to his unnamed neighbors in the "we," Azaro is demonstrating the capacity for the form of his story to incorporate other voices, undifferentiated from his own in style and indistinct in thought and motivation: all of the individuals wrapped into the pronouns in the above passage are of one mind, and share their anxieties and state of being.

A more unconventional, non-realist move to incorporate other voices into his autobiography emerges later in the text as Azaro finds his bodily autonomy threatened, seemingly, by the thoughts and voices of others. After hearing a story told by his bombastic father, Azaro thinks, “I nodded. After that he withdrew into his cavernous silence. I too became silent. His story had infected me” (*TFR* 389). Later, in a similar happening, Azaro explains that he, “lay down and listened to Dad thinking. His thoughts were wide; they spun around his head, bouncing off everything in the room. His thoughts filled the place, weighed me down, and after a while I was inside his head, travelling to the beginnings...His thoughts were hard, they bruised my head, my eyes ached, and my heart pounded fast in the stifling heat of the room” (*TFR* 441). These musings follow from a passage when Azaro succinctly describes the gap between a limited and an omniscient narrator, reflecting on his own place in the construction of the text he inhabits:

I couldn't get over the fact that we can look out of our eyes, out of our inner worlds at people, but that people, looking at us couldn't see into our eyes, our thoughts, our inner worlds. How transparent one feels, but how opaque: it mystified me...I looked at the world, I tried to see all that was in it, I embraced all things in my life. I hugged the alarming mystery of reality, and grew stronger.

(*TFR* 342).

The transformation of Dad's thoughts into physical sensations or objects in actual space follows from the magical realism in the novel, but coupled with Azaro's ruminations on his role as focalizer in the text should also be taken as a solution to the problem he assesses in the inequitable portioning of textual space to various consciousnesses other than his own. Here, it causes him physical pain, as if the task of replacing his own mind with the minds of others is anathema to his sense of self, and, indeed, the autobiographical form of the novel. This is the same quandary that Azaro faces earlier in the marketplace with slightly different variables: Azaro's sense of self either must retreat and the prose must become pure description, or Azaro relays the sensation of claustrophobia, being pushed into the metaphorical corner of his own life story.

The hidden frame reveals Azaro's method of handling this claustrophobia. Through it, Azaro outfits each character with the same voice and simulates heteroglossia through homophony without replacing himself as the text's focalizer. The form of the novel is a series of loose events and tales because Azaro is reducing his own apparent narrative footprint to make room for the other voices. Azaro the character may not undergo a cohesive developmental plot, but Azaro the narrator develops the text itself: as Madame Koto, Dad, the photographer, and others undergo dramatic changes, gaining significance in the character-system as their stories intersect and grow, Azaro situates himself as the collector and teller of these stories. The text's heteroglossic homophony is the voice of the storyteller, an almost invisible organizing hand that uses a single

linguistic register to contain many stories in an autobiographical novel *and* gesture beyond the confines of those lives to many more lives besides.

Assuming the intentionality of the frame in the novel, several passages at its end emerge as a roadmap for the construction of *The Famished Road* as an autobiographical Bildungsroman that is more invested in the communal than the individual. If the passages occur in the textual timeline before the construction of the text itself (the hidden frame), these sections inform the formal arrangements used earlier in the novel. Reflecting on what it means to be an *abiku* in light of his experiences to date, Azaro thinks, there “are many who are of this condition and do not know it. There are many nations, civilisations, ideas, half-discoveries, revolutions, loves, art forms, experiments, and historical events that are of this condition and do not know it. There are many people too. They do not all have the marks of their recurrence. Often they seem normal” (*TFR* 487). Sara Upstone suggested that the *abiku* as a figure possesses “eyes that are able to interrogate and move beyond monolayered and superficial appraisals” that reject “the colonial/colonized” binary (151). This is an interesting reading, and, expanding it, Azaro also rejects the narrator/narrated binary, perhaps a binary that shares much in common with matrices of relationships between the colonial and the colonized, providing narrative space for the many voices often left silent in this genre of novel. Fittingly, Dad, after one of his several boxing matches against supernatural beings tells Azaro, “All roads lead to death, but some roads lead to things which can never be finished. Wonderful things. There are

human beings who are small but if you can SEE you will notice that their spirits are ten thousand feet wide” (*TFR* 498). Only a page or two before the end of the novel, this possibility of seeing and understanding the hidden lives of the myriad people around him and the power in representing them is the rudder for the form of the text. Although it comes at the end of the story, this possibility should be read as both informing the thrust of the text and explaining Azaro’s evolving place in it: he is not waning or losing anything of himself, but using his unique position to gradually incorporate the voices and stories of others into his heteroglossic narrative.

Azaro’s power as narrator is his power to arrange those voices into a dialogue that maintains a coherent textual register even as his place in the story of his life comes into question. If the subtle frame narrative is taken as Azaro’s intervention into the *fabula* of his life that brings it purpose and order, then the mark of his successful development is really the incorporation of the lessons he learns throughout the story in the formation of the text, allowing disorder and disorientation to remain at various points for the overall greater effect of the incorporation of many voices. This is universal on the one hand because the voices, often unnamed and totally undifferentiated from Azaro’s narrative voice, point towards a utopian construction that might offer a way to represent many more people than any conventional autobiographical novel. It is also totally unique to Azaro, informed by his identity, a second narrative in the novel buried under the picaresque events of Azaro’s day-to-day life. This reading sees Okri transforming one of

the most well-known, well-tread, and egoistic novelistic genres of the nineteenth-century empires into a genuinely communal form, inverting its focus by peering out into the wider world through the lens of the individual narrator.

This is in some ways the opposite of what Brontë accomplishes with Jane, in that Jane safeguards herself against voices and identities that might erode her sense of self, while Azaro structures his fictional autobiography to incorporate these voices and welcome them into the textual body. Both writers however turn towards the fantastic to generate within the typically realist autobiographical novel form the space for this work to take place. In *Jane Eyre*, the great threat is to Jane's autonomy, her ability to form herself in a way that is coherent with her inner sense of self and values despite seeing around her in the *fabula* of her life only dissatisfying possibilities for young women: her mastery over her autobiography is the mastery of her own Bildung, and this demands a powerful organizing narrative hand and voice. In *The Famished Road*, conversely, Okri represents not one dominant voice, but many voices that have gone unheard. *The Famished Road* is an autobiography that also works as a catalog of voices and stories, a picaresque Bildungsroman that shows the growth of a storyteller whose marginalized social position in his community actually bolsters his ability to represent that community in text.

This is really the same approach that each author treated in this study has taken when coming to the Bildungsroman: one teleological genre with the capacity for much

more subversive, dynamic, narratives and narrators than its emphasis on telos might indicate. The comparative nature of each chapter saw authors from across the world using similar formal tools in penning their novels for drastically different formal effects in the storyworlds. Despite their differences, these authors responded to modernity, modern history, and their place within it, evolving and mutating the Bildungsroman so that its energies might continue to serve new purposes in new places as it has always done. Like the very process of growing up, these novels spring forth with new potentials previously unthought, and each stopping point is really only another point in the history of the genre that might go on to inform its own descendants, and then their descendants after that. By its focus on endings, the Bildungsroman always allows for new beginnings.

## CONCLUSION

### GROWING UP GLOBALLY

At the end, as I write this, I am taken back to a warm July evening in 2000, in a Barnes & Noble parking lot with my mom. It was her birthday, July 7th, and the fourth book in the *Harry Potter* series would go on sale to the applause of dozens of children that night at the stroke of twelve, which marked my own fifth birthday. I am taken back to nights I was read to, slowly learning how the ink on the page formed words and sentences and stories with my dad, and later nights spent under the blanket reading *Harry Potter* when both parents were hoping I was asleep. These were my first novels, and certainly, the first Bildungsromane I encountered; it is fair to say that I am one of the hundreds of millions of children over the last twenty-five years who “grew up with Harry” and dreamed of Hogwarts. Later, *Jane Eyre* was the novel that converted me from a stubborn, aspiring lawyer to a stubborn, aspiring academic during my undergraduate years. I was mesmerized by Jane’s thoughts and felt her feelings as if they were real; I tried to figure out who Rochester really was as Jane did and was shocked by the “madwoman in the attic” as nearly two hundred years of readers have been. From there the Bildungsroman enchanted me like it has so many other people: their idiosyncrasies and meandering lengths have become charming, and the stories of growing up resonant even when I share little in common with the characters within them. All of this to say, despite any cynicism that emerged in this project, these are all texts I come to with love and admiration, and they are texts I will return to again and again. Even when the premise of “happily ever ever” seems to come into question far more often than it is delivered at

the end of the Bildungsroman, each novel contains within a utopian impulse, a hope for tomorrow that might be out of reach today.

My sincere hope is that this study has illuminated a methodology that might be extrapolated to other literary genres or forms that have in recent years benefitted from substantial New Historical readings in the secondary literature but which might lack sustained formal analyses in light of the new developments in the last decades of literary formalism. Over a decade ago, Esty wrote that the problem for “postcolonial and alternative-modernities theory now” was “how to oppose Hegelian historical destiny without collapsing into an ahistorical vacuum” (199). Essentially, this is the struggle to resist the problematic stagist version of history that emerges when arguing for a single modernity, without tipping into a model of myriad modernities that possibly fetishize (or arguably worse, collapse all differences between) all non-Western cultures. I have no answer to this question that approaches it on its own terms, and by my reckoning, it is *still* an unanswered question that Jameson, Chakrabarty, Peter Osborne (in *The Politics of Time*), and many others across the fields of history, literary studies, and the social sciences have continued to take up. What I have modeled here is an approach to this and other related questions that circle around modernization and global development using texts that respond to their unique moment in modernity, or their authors’ unique perception of modernity using genre and form as comparative lenses. This is something of a cheat: it addresses the question on a vector that bisects the axis Esty succinctly describes, and has allowed for more considerable maneuvering in the middle without necessarily taking one side.

Despite the lack of a final verdict on Esty's question, this approach does genuinely take seriously the historical circumstances of the individually treated authors and texts while also arguing that they should be read in continuity: a through-line that isn't stagist, and cross-cultural, cross-temporal connections that don't sum to a historical vacuum. At their core, these texts are engaged in the same literary project and their authors work in this venerable literary genre despite the years, miles, and nations that divided them. The term "comparative neoformalism" might be helpful in situating this type of cross-cultural, cross-period survey in the roadmap of literary formalisms, or it might be distracting: in either case, I view it as in continuity with both decades of literary formalists and contemporary historicist critics, whose work has been invaluable in the building of this study on the anglophone Bildungsroman. On offer here is a way to move forward as well as return to the roots of literary studies without giving up the lessons learned in the last century and more of reading and writing.

I have always viewed literary studies as a sort of scavenger discipline in the most generous way possible: only in this field could Marx, Lévi-Strauss, Freud, Kant, Conrad, and Derrida share space in bibliographies and feel in total continuity. For all of the hand-wringing about the identity and future of literary studies in the AI-age, and at the risk of sounding extremely hackneyed, what we do is read books. A good literary critic can write something novel about books, and a great one can do that while also illuminating something beyond the confines of the page. Understanding that various branches of the discipline wax and wane in scholarly vogue (reader-response theory, post-structuralism,

etc.), we oughtn't lose sight of the text and its form even as different formal approaches to text-based criticism prove lacking or insufficient. Formalist criticism is by its nature unwieldy and definitionally inconclusive, and I have no doubt that the new strains of formalism that will emerge into the middle decades of this century will sustain better and smarter historical contextualization without losing sight of the text. This project, with every digressive paragraph about punctuation and syntax or section spent reading, perhaps too closely, unusual quirks in prose stylistics is a love letter to texts. In what I understand as a universal experience, each critic had a moment encountering a piece of literature that was either so resonant or so nettling that they were compelled to *say something* about it. While we are critics now, we were close readers *first*, and it would be a shame to lose sight of that as the discipline continues to evolve.

I will continue to use the phrase comparative neoformalism for a moment because it is the most condensed description of my approach. By my estimation, it cordons off the critical space required to make three interlinked moves that each preceding chapter demonstrated to varying degrees. First, comparative neoformalism encourages the use of several cultural vantage points spread across wider swaths of time than is typical in literary surveys, creating two points in an analytical triangulation, the third being form itself. This avoids the pitfalls of studying "pure form" while still centering form, using space and time as tempering measures. Second, it encourages a view of literature and history as a long vector pointing backward to the beginning of modernity and forward towards infinity rather than a timeline punctured with ruptures and divergences. In the preceding chapters, this continuity emerged in my suggestion that the treated novelists

*iterate on* rather than break from tradition in their work. This process of ongoing iteration and mutation does not mean that authors are doing the same thing, but, to state the obvious, that their acts of reading and writing are in response to other acts of reading and writing that preceded them, and anticipate future iteration. Third, comparative neoformalism might be a way to rescue genre and form in the discipline from the claws of character, recentering stories, and their shapes. Even (particularly) in the remarkably egoistic, human-centered Bildungsroman, the shapes of the stories are far more complex and engaging than a focus on their characters alone would indicate. The nuance at play in this approach to forms and their functions makes it a far cry from the earliest literary theorists who reduced form only *to* function: forms are sometimes at war with their supposed function, and the opposite is often true as well.

Authors of other studies of literary forms and genres might find the sweeping approach on display here useful, particularly in taking up the points in historical time when wide-scale change outside of stories caused generic mutations inside of them. As literary periods and approaches to literature that adhere to national models come into question, it is both a throwback and a potential breath of fresh air to return to a comparative approach to form. Even as the value of “form” broadly comes into question in an age that might seem formless, the echoes of form or form’s shadows where they are conspicuously absent are themselves forms that merit interrogation and comment. Sometimes, as I hope to have demonstrated in the body of this study, the strange and unwieldy forms often come to make perfect sense when paired with similar narratives that approach the same difficulties of representation from different vantage points. This is

what a “cosmopolitan” approach to a literary genre really is: a collage of parts and pieces that, taken together, means something different and something richer than its composite parts.

Arriving finally at the end, I will offer some brief thoughts on other texts that were not included in this study of the Bildungsroman, and a final look into what seems to me the essential kernel of the genre, shared by each author in this study and, to varying degrees, each author who has written a coming-of-age novel from Goethe to the present. This study has been constrained to anglophone novels. I have suggested that this both limits the scope of the study and provides continuity. All the treated novelists take up, in one way or another, the legacies of England, the British Empire, and global imperialism. This proved a helpful through-line linking authors who, by all rights, might have gone to live very successful literary (after)lives without ever meeting. This manifests in Conrad’s ambivalent Marlow, Rushdie’s cavalcade of historical narratives, and many other nooks and crannies in each treated novel. Another version of this study might have worked across languages, incorporating French, German, Spanish, Italian, or Russian novels, many of which are either alluded to or taken up in previous studies of the Bildungsroman as powerful examples of one or another strain of Bildung: Goethe and Mann alone, likely, could have sustained a study of this length or more.

Another version of this study could have adhered to a timeline that more closely morphologically resembles the plot of the Bildungsroman, beginning with novelists who romanticize the past and concluding with those who offer either utopian or bleak visions of the future focalized through their narrators. This version might have included a chapter

on speculative futures in novels by Kazuo Ishiguro, H.G. Wells, and Cherie Dimoline. Another version might have followed the Bildungsroman's migration from the continent out to England and beyond spatially, organizing texts through the nexus of genre and geography. Chapters might have read, for example, aquatic travel and the echoes of generational memory in George Eliot and George Lamming. The sweeping survey model that I elected to use emphasizes the comparative nature of genres and narratives. However, as a direct consequence of its scope, it loses the satisfying wax-and-wane or progress model that the two approaches above might have offered. Each approach has benefits and limits, but, given the already extensive corpus of monographs on the Bildungsroman that adhere to those models, it seemed time to proffer a new schema for mapping the genre.

In some ways, despite the unconventional organization of authors and novels, this has been a traditional critical text. The coming-of-age film, for example, is a natural continuation of the novelistic Bildungsroman and enjoys tremendous popularity the world over. Films such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, adapted from a young adult novel, Take Waititi's family drama *Boy*, and Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* might have anchored a consideration of the affordances provided by film, and the necessary narrative moves that do and don't translate from the lengthy, digressive novel to the comparatively circumscribed major motion picture. Richard Linklater's melancholic 2014 *Boyhood* even goes as far as to wait for its actors to age in real-time, chronicling twelve actual years of a young boy growing up in just under three hours. That film has as radical a form as any

novel I have read in this study has and proves that innovation in the Bildungsroman continues into the present across media forms.

Another popular media form for coming-of-age fiction is manga, which has the added quirk of serial publishing: in a way, these series are closer to Dickens and the Victorians than to authors like Rushdie or Okri. Something like an American comic book in that each chapter is fully illustrated and builds an ongoing narrative, these series often run for many years and some, through meandering plots, show young men and women growing up. The most popular of these, in terms of sales, are in the “shonen” genre, targeted at young boys, and feature action, romance, and personal discovery. The corresponding genre written and marketed for young women is called “shoujo,” and both genres have specialized serial magazines that release their chapters weekly or monthly. Although many of the most popular manga hew to the conventions of the genre that have been gradually codified over the decades, some coming-of-age series such as Inio Asano’s *Oyasumi Punpun* (*Goodnight Punpun*) show a distinctly anti-formational logic that would be right at home in any modernist Bildungsroman. The issues taken up by several of these series are no less serious than those in conventional novels: Hitoshi Ashinano’s *Yokohama Kaidashi Kikou* for example is set amidst a planet-wide ecological collapse and tracks the last generation of humanity growing up on a dying planet through the eyes of an unaging android who befriends a young boy.

Including these other genres would have widened the corpus of texts beyond the novel and even further from its original German moment, and even further still from a working definition of “Bildungsroman” that, at least in this study, takes as its limit the

printed novel. Other scholars will certainly take issue with this, and might argue that one or more of the novels I have read oughtn't be counted as Bildungsromane at all. This is one of the great pleasures of writing on coming-of-age literature in any context: because no two people have the same corpus of texts to draw on, Wilhelm Meister will be joined with a polyphony of new voices in each subsequent study. Inevitably, another introduction will classify the Bildungsroman as a problem, and then four or six chapters will try to solve it before passing the baton. All of this to say that, despite this meandering journey through the anglophone literary tradition, there are still many avenues of further research and exploration that the Bildungsroman affords and will continue to afford as long as it retains its status as both the belle of the literary ball and the red-headed stepchild of the secondary literature.

Something I have suggested repeatedly which I would argue has borne out across the treated novels is that the Bildungsroman isn't itself a stable or reliable container, but merely a form that can look like one, and a form that provides within its structure the narrative material to smooth over its own cracks or draw readerly attention to them: this is how novels like *A High Wind in Jamaica* can be recognizably participating in the same tradition as the most orderly of the Victorian Bildungsromane, possessing the same energies but allocating them in wildly different ways. These authors don't arrive upon the Bildungsroman, with all of its emphasis on telos and adherence to personal biography, by accident: it is its conflicted, Janus-faced form that affords such experiments in the first place, and in, say, the allocation of heroism or classist discourse in *David Copperfield*, we might find the basis of what would later emerge in the many more ambivalent, messy

texts that follow. This is the necessary consequence of the biographical form: lives, fictional or real, are messy, but narratives that make sense of a life can either eschew disorder and create coherence from dissonance or embrace the tangled webs of interpersonal relationships, random chance events, and the ebbs and flows of personal and vocational successes.

In a return to the premise of this study as an extended exercise in reading the Bildungsroman's narrative form, I will offer a final pair of passages about a ticking watch, both taken from the opening pages of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*. Otto, preparing to sleep, looks up and sees at "the head of his father's bed...a great silver hunting watch. It ticked loudly...It never waited; it went on inexorably; and every time it ticked *a man died!* He raised himself a little on his elbow and listened. He wished it would leave off" (Schreiner 7-8). The boy sits awake, mesmerized by the timepiece, and is as transfixed by its mechanical ticking:

He tried to count again, and sat up to listen better.

"Dying, dying, dying!" said the watch; "dying, dying, dying!"

He heard it distinctly. Where were they going to, all those people?

...

The boy lay with his eyes wide open. He saw before him a long stream of people, a great, dark multitude, that moved in one direction; then they came to the dark edge of a world, and went over. He saw them passing on before him, and there was nothing that could stop them. He thought of how that stream had rolled on through all the long ages of the past—how the old Greeks and Romans

had gone over; the countless millions of China and India, they were going over now. Since he had come to bed, how many had gone?

And the watch said, "Eternity, eternity, eternity!"

"Stop them! stop them!" cried the child.

And all the while the watch kept ticking on

(Schreiner 8-10).

This I think is the kernel at the center of each Bildungsroman, from their penning to their plotting to their purpose: they are an attempt to make sense of the individual's place in time and in history. Schreiner, through her character Otto, is imagining history as a great cliff one will eventually tumble over, and tries to create continuity from the ancient empires to the present millions across the globe who will never meet but will share the experience of living and eventually tumbling over the edge into eternity. All the narrative artifice is stripped bare when the Bildungsheld comes face to face with the physical representation of modern time in the watch, uniform, unyielding, and startling: the same conditions that made his development and indeed his life as he knows it possible portend his inevitable end, the passing of the torch to the subsequent generations who will reckon with the ticking and the cliff in their own time. The didactic, speculative nature of the Bildungsroman allows for the continuity that Otto seeks, bringing the past, present, and future into accord with each other, and making sense of the utterly incomprehensible magnitude of the history of all the people who have ever walked the earth. There is a hope buried in Otto's morbid waking nightmare: the very form of the text he inhabits

offers him the chance to commune with the multitudes who will come later, leaving his voice echoing after he is long dead.

I present these passages to reiterate that I fundamentally disagree with the position that some previous scholars have taken, that the Bildungsroman has been exhausted, or has lost something essential to its identity approaching the present day. The very nature of the genre demands transformation, losses, and gains. Authors continue to flock to it and write for every audience from children to adults, infusing the now very familiar form of the coming-of-age novel with manifold new genres and narrative shapes. The engagement that contemporary audiences have with countless media forms that earlier novelists never could have imagined has meant, in practice, that the Bildungsroman has become at times only a “roman” in name, exported to visual forms, incorporated into films, television shows, and many more literary forms that play out the trials and tribulations the plucky young heroine must undertake for new audiences. Perhaps, decades in the future, the appetite for such stories will diminish as tastes change, but for the time being the Bildungsroman is as enfranchised a genre in popular culture and literary fiction as any other.

The end of this study is I think only a new beginning: rather than presenting a model of the Bildungsroman that waxes and wanes, mirroring the life it is centered on, I feel in some way that I’ve cheated the premise of the coming-of-age novel by proposing an approach that staves off the end of its life by repeated acts of reinvention and rejuvenation: something between steady generational turnover and a magical portrait. This approach afforded much terrain for an examination of formal play over time and

across continents, but it lacks the final maneuver that other studies possess in suggesting the end of the genre's life or a momentous epoch that begins and ends with the scale of the treated novels. Perhaps it is best to conclude by stating that, like Saleem's body, this text might fragment out into new lives, new voices, that carry the torch of an open-ended, future-pointed approach to the Bildungsroman. At the very least, this text itself is a sort of meandering Bildungsroman, stopping and starting before eventually coming to rest in the act of putting down the pen, closing another chapter, and draining another pot of ink in the history of readers trying to make sense of these strange and wonderful novels.

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