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The Time Helix: Nonlinear Narrative Structures and the Paradox of Delayed Simultaneity

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Abstract

My study of contemporary (post-2000) Anglophone novels combines themes of time and temporality with narratological analysis. I argue that nonlinear narrative structures (which originate in science fiction novels) challenge the supposed impossibility of simultaneity in the novel, undermine the literary construct of realism, and model new, more optimistic ways of imagining the future(s) beyond our present. I build upon Mathias Nilges' argument that in the wake of the crisis of the "long now"—a societal belief that the future has been exhausted and we are trapped in an unchanging present—the contemporary time novel critiques historical forms of time and models new ones. In my analysis, I bring together theories of simultaneity and delay from phenomenology, theories of dialectical montage from film studies, and theories of implicit and explicit causality from narratology to demonstrate how nonlinear narrative structures create a paradox of delayed simultaneity despite the linearity of the written form. I also use an intersectional, feminist lens in my critique to show how nonlinear narrative structures can grant greater agency to narrators and force readers into the role of detective. My study primarily focuses on the following novels: Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* (2015), Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011), Ariel Lawhon's *I Was Anastasia* (2018), Kate Morton's *The Clockmaker's Daughter* (2018), Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* (2015), and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019). I argue that contemporary novels, especially time novels, are not an opposition to the postmodern project but an expansion of it with a questioning of forms of time and temporality that parallels the questioning of myths, universal truths, and historiography by British

postmodern writers as well as the postmodern belief that a multiplicity of ways exist by which to structure a narrative or tell a story.

Summary for Lay Audience

I study novels published after 2000 that emphasize the theme of time, which I call time novels. I consider how these novels tell their stories, specifically looking at stories that are told out of order, because these out-of-order story structures interrupt the typical way that we think about time as chronological or a progression of earlier to later events. These out-of-order, or achronological, stories also create a contradictory reading experience that works in two ways, both of which convey a delayed simultaneity. The first way is to present readers with events that are happening at the same time in the story but are read in a delayed fashion. The second way is to present readers with events that are not happening at the same time but are told to the reader as if they were simultaneous. Imagine a box of loose puzzle pieces, which must be reassembled without reference to an original picture. The contradiction of delayed simultaneity in time novels uses a story structure that is familiar from speculative and science fiction novels, in which characters may travel through time and experience events out of order. But in achronological time novels the reader time travels through the story instead of the characters. In some cases, these achronological story structures also empower characters as storytellers by enabling them to control the order in which the reader discovers key information. These storytellers can then manipulate readers, who must act as detectives to piece together the story's plot. In film, editors create montages by splicing contradictory images or scenes together to change the interpretation of individual shots. Like a montage, the chapter and scene breaks in novels mash together events from different times and perspectives, conveying a causality distinct from chronological cause and effect. Overall, the out-of-order story structures in these time

novels encourage readers to think critically about their experiences of time and to imagine more optimistic and hopeful futures that lay beyond the present.

Dedication

To my parents and my grandparents, especially Donna Reed and Marj Jolley,

for indulging my demands as a child to read me whatever book I thrust in their faces

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Much like the temporalities discussed in this study, my journey to this point has not been a linear one driven by a singular teleology. I owe thanks to a multitude of people who have supported, encouraged, or inspired me, and this list will inevitably prove to be incomplete in one fashion or another.

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"The function of the novel today, therefore, is not a matter of its struggle against time's passing and its desire to remain novel. Instead, the novel's function and value lie in its ability to serve as a medium for thought that allows us to know our time differently and to create ways of telling time beyond the confines of the long now."

—Mathias Nilges, *How to Read a Moment: The American Novel and the Crisis of the Present*

The Race to Periodize 21st-Century Fiction

Post-Postmodernism. Return to realism. Literature of authenticity. Literature of reconstruction. Metamodernism. The litany of proposed labels for literature in and after the postmodernist period could fill pages. In *The Moral Worlds of Contemporary Realism*, Mary Holland lists twenty different "literary realisms" that have been proposed as potential classifications for contemporary fiction over the past few decades, including the following: dirty realism (1983), neorealism (1992), postmodern realism (1992, 2010, 2012), British postmodern realism (1994), crackpot realism (1988, 1996), traumatic realism (1996), tragic realism (1996), figural realism (1996), hysterical realism (2000), meta-realism (2003), speculative realism (2007), agential realism (2007), disquieting realism (2008), capitalist realism (2009), post-postmodern realism (2011), poststructural realism (2013), metonymic realism (2013), ecocritical realism (2013), relational realism (2013), and metafictive realism (2014) (32). These terms—along with countless others— have been suggested and used to classify contemporary fiction in a way that participates in what Mathias Nilges has identified as a critical movement in art, literature, and

politics that promotes immediacy by lengthening the present moment, romanticizing the past, and negating the future (3). Nilges observes that contemporary art critics largely believe that "the absolute presentism of [our] world" produces art that "is unable to critique and that it instead merely reproduces" such that "[t]he contemporaneity of contemporary art is symptomatic of a historically specific phenomenon in art, and it designates a moment when art can only register the given and has lost its ability to imagine that which may lie beyond the present" (7). Although Nilges does not directly reference the contemporary realism debate by name, the arguments by contemporary scholars who label contemporary fiction realist and reconstructionist feed into the problem of an "eternal now"[1] that Nilges diagnoses in *How to Read a Moment: The American Novel and the Crisis of the Present* rather than considering how the contemporary novel as a form might resist such labels. In particular, contemporary novels that fit into the time novel genre defined by Nilges[2] are countering the widespread cultural narrative of the "long now" by modeling new forms of time and temporality and "making sense of such a relation to the world, [so] that the novel allows us to understand what it means to live in time" (75). According to Nilges, the temporal turn in contemporary criticism "is dominated by phenomenological approaches to time. ... But the temporal turn lacks approaches that examine time as form" (18-19). Nilges aims to correct this by focusing on the time of the clock, capitalist time, to demonstrate "that literature in general and the novel in particular are uniquely able to forge a link between time and history" (19). My

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[1] Nilges describes this as a societal belief that the future has been exhausted and we are trapped in an unchanging present (31).

[2] Nilges defines the genre of the contemporary time novel broadly as "a novel that aims to examine time as form in itself" by critiquing historical temporal knowledge, experience, and immediacy (93, 85).

own approach supports Nilges, but I also aim to combine themes of time and temporality with narratological analysis to demonstrate that nonlinear narrative structures (which originate in science fiction novels) in Anglophone contemporary time novels challenge the supposed impossibility of simultaneity in the novel, undermine the literary construct of realism, and model new, more optimistic ways of imagining the future(s) beyond our eternal present.

The reasons that I take issue with the current realism-related periodization of contemporary novels are not because I do not acknowledge the presence of realist aspects in the novels of the 21st century. Instead, my dislike of such periodization terms stems from the two-fold implications that realism was not present in postmodernist literature and that realism (by any name) is the main concern of contemporary novels. Holland distinguishes herself from others in the contemporary realism camp by not only documenting the problematic history of Realism[3] and the lack of precise definitions for it as a literary mode, but also issuing a call to action for scholars of contemporary literature:

> [T]o step out of this limited realism/modernism or realism/anti-realism context and examine not only these new modes of writing in and of themselves, but also to ask what their labeling of "realism" can tell us about the history of realism and our history of periodizing, and how we might rethink periodizing in more productive ways as we move forward. (3)

Thus, Holland asks that we as critics question how we have and will periodize literature in the past, present, and future, in a way that echoes the questioning of historiography and narrative that was a large part of British postmodernism. Although I appreciate the

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[3] Holland argues that "terminology … drags its own historical moment with it" (3).

context and definition that Holland provides for contemporary realism, I disagree with her assertion that the "new realisms" that have attempted to shed their 19th-century trappings "are more productive and useful" because "they aim to characterize a particular type of fiction in or after the postmodern period" (35). Nilges also argues against broad periodization labels, which he observes now often function more as brands than as classifications, while also moving the discussion away from realism specifically, writing:

> [W]e can avoid this problem by replacing attempts at large-scale periodization with the more modest aim of recognizing and interpreting the formal patterns that emerge when we examine how a particular facet of literature, such as the novel, confronts a set of historically specific structural, sociopolitical, or philosophical crises or transitions as aesthetic problems. (204)

The problem with this race to periodize contemporary fiction in the 21st century is that many of the popular categorical terms[4] imply that what is happening in fiction after postmodernism directly opposes that movement, whereas Holland notes that some types of realism[5] were actually raised and suggested during postmodernism, demonstrating that realism is neither a new nor a returning phenomenon in novels written after postmodernism. Realism ought to be viewed as an illusion and an ever-changing aspect of fiction rather than as a defining characteristic of it. Therefore, while I acknowledge elements of realism are present in the novels that I analyze in my study, I choose to focus on an aspect of these contemporary time novels that is more compelling than any attempts to reflect or represent our world in fiction: the attempt by myriad authors to

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[4] These include realism, authenticity, reconstruction, post-postmodernism, and metamodernism.

[5] According to Holland, realisms such as dirty realism (1983), neorealism (1992), postmodern realism (1992, 2010, 2012), British postmodern realism (1994), and crackpot realism (1988, 1996) were theorized before postmodernity became dominant and postmodernism was declared over (32).

disrupt the temporality and causality of contemporary fictional narrative structures to create a paradoxical simulacrum of delayed simultaneity within the inescapable linearity of the English reading experience.

The Realism Debate and the Many Misconceptions of Postmodernism

Before discussing contemporary time novels in particular, I want to address the periodization issues at play in contemporary scholarship and to explain why I choose to eschew such categorizations in my own analysis, regardless of any overlap that may exist. As Peter Boxall observes, an "illegibility of the present" is impossible to escape when one is writing about or analyzing current events or literature, and this illegibility "is not a problem that is confined to the twenty-first century" (2). Thus, perhaps the best practice is to save the periodization labels until we have enough distance to see beyond the books right in front of us to the shelves and library stacks that will hold them eventually.

The insertion of an additional "post" before postmodernism is problematic as well as emblematic of the desire to view so much of our world in terms of what is supposedly gone and to place the present in direct opposition with the past. Critics such as Alison Lee raised the problems of using "post" with the rise of postmodernism itself, observing, "The term 'postmodern' has had a troubled and hotly disputed beginning," and the problems with using it include "its relation to modernism, the meaning of 'post,' the periodization implied by the reference to modernism, and its co-opting of the modernism it apparently seeks to transgress" (x). The periodization issues that were raised by Lee are compounded by the new round of immediacy-related classifications to further the misconception that postmodernism was anti-modernist and thus references to

modernist works and uses of modernist techniques in the 21ˢᵗ century should be used to distinguish contemporary fiction *now* from postmodernist fiction *then*. In addition, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and post-colonialism have birthed a plethora of other "post-" prefixations (seemingly in the same way that all political scandals now end with a "-gate" suffix): post-feminist, post-history, post-racial, post-truth, post-covid, etc. And, just as with these supposed posts, the hurry to claim to have moved beyond an issue often seems to be a case of "The lady doth protest too much" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.2.254). Nilges also eschews any attempt at adding an additional post-, arguing: "The contemporary novel allows us to see why in the context of a present defined by the inability to imagine an 'after,' the answer to our struggle to periodize postmodernism's exhaustion cannot lie in the addition of another *post-*" (176). Thus, post-postmodernism as a periodization term fails on multiple fronts: amplifying the implications of opposition between postmodern and contemporary novels and discouraging imaginative future alternatives to the neoliberal eternal present.

Classifications such as "return to realism" and "literature of authenticity" are problematic because they insinuate that postmodern fiction was not realist—a flagrant misconception as indicated by Lee's argument (1990) that British postmodernists both used and challenged realism in their texts[6]—and also because the classification of realism is rarely well-defined and often ignores the historical baggage this term carries

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[6] Lee argues: "Realism is, even now, a dominant frame of reference for literary criticism and evaluation. My focus in this study is on the challenge to literary Realism by postmodern techniques and conventions which seek to subvert the assumptions that Realism and its related ideology … [are] 'natural,' 'normal,' and 'neutral'" (x).

with it from its past usage.[7] Such baggage serves to minimize the multiplicity and

diversity of contemporary literature. Authenticity is an equally problematic term that is

either used synonymously with or as code for realism. In *The Aesthetics of Authenticity*,

Wolfgang Funk, Florian Groß, and Irmtraud Huber argue, "While definitions of

authenticity routinely refer to its immanence and naturalness, its being found not

created, recent engagements with authenticity highlight that it is necessarily the result

of careful aesthetic construction that depends on the use of identifiable techniques with

the aim of achieving certain affects for certain reasons" (10). They also describe

authenticity as "promising the genuine and immediate" and as the "prime venue" in

which "postmodern insights may be both acknowledged and transcended" (Funk et al.

10, 11). While Funk et al.'s definition of authenticity ties its meaning to "verisimilitude"

and an "accurate reflection of real life," the definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary* tie

its meaning to the idea of something that is "authoritative or duly authorized", expresses

"genuineness" or "sincerity," is "in accordance with fact; veracity; correctness," and has

"the factor or quality of being real; actuality, reality" ("Authenticity, *N.*"). These

additional meanings and connotations of authenticity make its usage problematic

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[7] As the key identifiers of Realism for critics over the past century, the three innovations that 19th-century Realist writers brought to their fiction—common subject matter, objectivity, and artistic philosophy— continue to haunt Realism as a literary construct. According to George Becker, Realist authors believed that Romanticism had been "prettifying" the world rather than presenting an objective view of it based on direct observation (24). These writers wanted to prove that "the ordinary and near at hand are as suitable for literary treatment as the exotic and remote" by telling the story of "the real average, the common, essentially animal man" (Becker 23, 25-26). Thus, Realism promotes "a kind of implicit Benthamite assumption that the life lived by the greatest number is somehow the most real" (Becker 25). Realist objectivity is defined as "a dipping into the stream of life" so that the novel or play "is ideally all middle, without beginning or end" and "come[s] as close as possible to *observed* experience" (Becker 29, 31-32). Matthew Beaumont defines Realism as an artistic philosophy "in relation to the medieval conviction 'that there was a sort of transparent pane of glass between what we said about the world and what was in the world, between word and world, between representation and reality" whereas Becker defines it as "a formula of art which, conceiving of reality in a certain way, undertakes to present a simulacrum of it on the basis of more or less fixed rules" (Beaumont 8; Becker 36).

because, like the term realism, they harken back to the 19th-century idea of a common reader whose experience is universal, and they directly oppose the postmodernist effort to dismantle such oppressive ideas. Literary criticism that advocates for the classifications of realism and authenticity participates in what Nilges describes as "the turn to immediacy," which "rests on a distinct sense of disciplinary nostalgia and conservatism" (88). Moreover, Nilges observes:

> Arguments in favor of a literary conservatism whose reading practices are nostalgically aimed at good old immediacy in order to save literary criticism from materialist and deconstructive approaches fail to address the contemporary novel's own struggle against immediacy and are, at the same time, strikingly unaware of their own historical, methodological, and political functions in the age of immediacy. (89)

The imposition of the ideologies of immediacy—such as realism and authenticity—on contemporary fiction is also an attempt to reconstruct nostalgically, to return literature to a past that came before the diffusiveness of postmodernism and the multiplicity and intersectionality that define the contemporary novel (i.e., to make literature "great again").

Referring to contemporary literature as "reconstructed" problematically turns deconstruction[8] into a synecdoche for all postmodern literature, which is yet another misconception of postmodernism. While deconstruction was one of a multiplicity of theories that emerged during postmodernism, it is by no means the only driving principle

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[8] *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* defines deconstruction as Jacques Derrida's reading strategy that "every philosophical position, irrespective of how coherent it seems on the surface, contains within it the means of its own under-mining" (Buchanan).

of the period. As a reading strategy, deconstruction is one lens through which to look at fiction, but it is not a one-size-fits-all label for the fiction written during the postmodern period. In addition, the use of the term "reconstructive literature" by Funk and Huber[9] is problematic because if postmodernism tore down the boundaries of hierarchies of racism, sexism, and colonialism, then it only stands to reason that a literature of reconstruction may attempt to rebuild such boundaries and hierarchies.

Finally, although the label metamodernism appears less problematic on the surface, its main problem lies in the multitude of ways in which it is being defined and interpreted. Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen argue:

> [S]ince the turn of the millennium, we have seen the emergence of various "new",
> often overlapping aesthetic phenomena ..., each of them characterized by an
> attempt to incorporate postmodern stylistic and formal conventions while
> moving beyond them. Meanwhile, we witness the return of realist and modernist
> forms, techniques, and aspirations (to which the metamodern has a decidedly
> different relation than the postmodern). (3)

Van den Akker and Vermeulen also argue that "postmodern discourses have lost their critical value when it comes to understanding contemporary arts, culture, aesthetics, and politics" and side with Adrian Searle who claimed that "Postmodernism is dead, but something altogether weirder has taken its place" (3; qtd. in van den Akker and Vermeulen 3). They admit that metamodernism as a "term has ... a long and scattered history, the full lineage of which has yet to be traced" though they do not appear to view this history as problematic despite acknowledging its usage during the 1970s that they

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[9] Funk and Huber use the term reconstruction in their respective books, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium* and *Literature After Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies*.

now choose to classify retroactively as postmodernist (van den Akker and Vermeulen 4).

Additionally, van den Akker and Vermeulen describe metamodernism as "shot through

with productive contradictions [and] simmering tensions," both phrases which could

define postmodernism equally well—demonstrating once again the multiplicity of

misunderstandings and misconceptions surrounding postmodernism (5).

Nilges links literary criticism's concerns with immediacy with the capitalism that

undergirds our contemporary society, arguing:

> [T]he time of contemporary capitalism stands opposed to the temporality
>
> required by interpretation, reading, and critical thought. … Capitalism's new
>
> temporal regime, its commitment to immediacy, creates a crisis for thought and
>
> culture that expresses itself in the perception of the end of futurity and
>
> temporality. It is not surprising, therefore, that we can trace the emergence and
>
> rise of the notion of the end of the future in relation to the gradual transition into
>
> digital, real-time capitalism beginning in the 1990s. (51)

I add to Nilges's argument the observation that the systems that support capitalism also

reinforce patriarchal institutions in 21st-century society and both capitalism and

patriarchy are perceived to be under threat from today's progressive political movement.

Similarly, realism as a critical construct (with origins heavily steeped in the patriarchal

Victorian era) supports patriarchy as an institution, presupposing an ideal, common

reader who will identify with contemporary literature in an expected way, which is why

many postmodern writers chose to play with and subvert realism in their works (Lee xii-

xiii). Therefore, the periodization efforts of 21st-century critics work to suppress the

multiplicity and intersectionality of contemporary fiction through what Joanna Russ

long ago identified as a strategic use of false categorization.[10] The categorizations of post-postmodernism, realism, authenticity, reconstruction, and metamodernism argue that contemporary literature is not unique or diverse, but merely a nostalgic attempt to reproduce the real human experience in art, as if there is one individual, *real*, homogenous human experience rather than a multiplicity of diverse, intersectional, heterogeneous human experiences. This false categorization of immediacy parallels in a sense the efforts of conservatives around the world to walk back the gains in gender and racial equality made by myriad diverse groups and movements since the 1960s and refuses to allow contemporary literature to imagine potential futures, trapping it instead in the eternal patriarchal present. According to Nilges, the solution to the crisis of immediacy in literary criticism is to broaden our critical categorizations and to recognize that "the time of contemporary capitalism stands opposed to the temporality required by interpretation, reading, and critical thought" (50). The recognition of the time novel as a broadly defined genre of contemporary fiction helps to combat the issues that arise from the periodization debates of the early 21st century and to find a way to imagine ourselves and our literature beyond the limitations of the unending now.

Identifying the Limits of Postmodernism

Writing in 1988, Linda Hutcheon observes that "There seems to be a new desire to think historically, and to think historically today is to think critically and contextually" (88). She argues that British postmodernism participated in a

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[10] Russ defines false categorization as "a complicated now-you-see-it-now-you-don't sleight of hand in which works or authors are belittled by assigning them to the 'wrong' category, denying them entry into the 'right' category, or arranging the categories so the majority of the 'wrong' [works or authors] fall into the 'wrong' category without anyone's having to do anything further about the matter" (Russ 49).

problematizing of history that was both similar to what some modernists did but also different, claiming that "paradoxical postmodernism is both oedipally oppositional and filially faithful to modernism" (Hutcheon 88). In this way, Hutcheon argues that postmodernism is not simply an opposition to or the antithesis of modernism, but that it borrows from and expands upon modernist concerns to problematize them in new ways.

In addition, Hutcheon argues, "Postmodern historicism is willfully unencumbered by nostalgia in its critical, dialogical reviewing of the forms, contexts and values of the past" (89). Hutcheon aligns the concerns of postmodern historiography to narrative structure when she notes:

> Postmodern works … contest art's right to claim to inscribe timeless universal values, and they do so by thematizing and even formally enacting the context-dependent nature of all values. They also challenge narrative singularity and unity in the name of multiplicity and disparity. Through narrative, they offer fictive corporeality instead of abstractions, but at the same time, they do tend to fragment or at least render unstable the traditional unified identity or subjectivity of character. (90)

What I note about contemporary fiction, especially time novels, is not an opposition to the postmodern project but an expansion of it with a questioning of time and temporality in ways that parallel the questioning of myths, universal truths, and historiography by British postmodern writers as well as the postmodern belief that a multiplicity of ways to structure a narrative or tell a story exist. History continues to play an important role in 21st-century novels as demonstrated by how Nilges emphasizes that contemporary novels provide historical context for forms of time and temporality, writing, "[T]he novel today provides us with new, alternative ways of understanding the

temporality of a changed historical moment, thus transcending what is elsewhere simply understood as a limiting crisis" (10). The contemporary time novel uses form and historicism to critique existing forms of time and to help us recognize that neither time nor history has ended in the aftermath of postmodernism and that there are still futures awaiting us.

I recognize that postmodernism is a compact term for a large, sprawling, and varied literature (i.e., it is bigger on the inside) as well as being used as a periodization term. Nilges recommends limiting the definition of postmodernist literature to "a temporally more modest account of postmodernism" (26). He argues that postmodernism can be distinguished from postmodernity if postmodernism is viewed as being concerned with "incipient postmodernity" rather than the "dominant postmodernity" of "our neoliberal present" (Nilges 26). "[O]nce the postmodern new becomes the new structural now," writes Nilges, "we witness the exhaustion of postmodernism and the emergence of a new range of literary forms that attempt to make sense of the absorption of the new into the now, of the future into the present" (26). Defining postmodernism in this more limited way makes it possible for elements and techniques from postmodern literature to carry forward into the literature of the 21st century without implying that the new literary forms are functioning in opposition to postmodernism. Therefore, contemporary time novels should be read as bringing postmodernism's hope to fruition by continuing to challenge how the present and future interact with and are influenced by the past.

Defining the Contemporary Time Novel

"The time novel examines the current crisis of time," Nilges argues, "as a crisis of our temporal imagination, situates the crisis in the history of both time and capitalism, and furnishes us with a new form of temporal knowledge and new ways of reading our present" (48). History and time are closely interwoven in literary theory, especially when it comes to discussions of narrative theory in postmodern and contemporary fiction. Ernst Breisach observes, "For historians, the content of life and the dimension of time could not be separated in life or theory" (19). Time repeatedly surfaces in discussions of historiography and postmodernism, so it makes sense that contemporary authors who want to expand and build upon postmodernist historiographic concerns are playing with temporality in fiction to probe the paradox of delayed simultaneity in written narratives. Time, like history, is a construct, and temporality, like historiography, is our experience of that construct. Some might say that time and history are so inextricably linked that one cannot be explored without the other, but I see a distinct shift from a preoccupation with history and historiography in postmodern narratives to a preoccupation with and questioning of time and temporality in contemporary fiction. However, I stress that this is a shift, not a break. In the same way that Hutcheon argues that postmodernism is not merely the antithesis of or opposition to modernism as it is sometimes treated, contemporary fiction is not the antithesis of and cannot be reduced to a mere reaction to the postmodern movement. Rather, I argue that the contemporary time novel is an expansion of the postmodern movement that builds upon its questioning foundations and moves us forward toward something new.

Before defining the time novel specifically, Nilges diagnoses the problems that plague our society and especially contemporary literary criticism, observing:

> [O]ur moment is marked by a frustrated, disillusioned longing for the future.
> Unable to produce our own cultural futures, we nostalgically reanimate those of a
> different time and long for idealized moments when easy futures were said to be
> readily available. The futures of our present are thus temporally intriguing. They
> are untimely and strikingly anachronistic—not in the sense of a present in which
> we imagine a time yet to come, however, but in a sense of a true anachronism, as
> futures that belong to a different moment in time. (5)

Nilges connects the contemporary time novel to a larger tradition of *Zeitroman*, which stretches back to the beginning of the 19th century, and argues that "the *Zeitroman* … becomes the novel form of the age of the *nunc stans*, the standing now," taking over from the bildungsroman in the 21st century because both the *Zietroman* and the bildungsroman "centrally revolve around nonsynchronicity and discontinuity" but only the *Zeitroman* can return "those discontinuities and multiple temporalities in the present that are overwritten by an overly homogeneous, overly synchronous, singularized understanding of our present" through its ability to critique the time in which it is written (19-20). However, Nilges does not only argue for the recognition of the time novel as a genre but also for the renewed relevance of the novel as an art form: "Understood as form, time can be made historically legible and examined as narrative via a novel" (21). The importance of how novels engage with time and temporality is that they model the benefits of a new form of temporal experience rather than just seeking to emulate our temporal experience as we currently understand it in the present time.

Nilges also argues that what there is of current temporal criticism in contemporary fiction focuses too much on experience but not enough on the form that

time takes, which is why although I do look at temporal experience in my study, I also examine the form my authors and narrators use for time through their descriptions of time and the narrative structures they employ (18). As I understand him, Nilges is not arguing against time novels attempting to depict particular temporal experiences, but more so that they should be seen as engaging with temporality in a critical mode rather than the reflective one implied by the periodizing terms such as realism and authenticity (21).

Just as Lee argues the postmodernists problematized and subverted realism to question its "cultural authority" and the perception of it as "'natural,' 'normal,' and 'neutral,'" contemporary writers are questioning the traditional acceptance of linear chronology and causality as the one way in which we can experience time in fiction (xi, x). Instead, they bring ideas of simultaneous, nonlinear, and achronological temporality from science fiction into their otherwise seemingly realist fiction, which serves to upset the traditional understanding of time in the same way that postmodern writers upset the traditional understanding of historiography and historical fiction. Therefore, contemporary fiction is not a nostalgic return or a step backwards, but the next step forward, expanding on inquiries of the past, the better to create and understand the literature of the future.

The Contemporary Time Novel and the Paradox of Delayed Simultaneity

I want to widen the scope of 21st-century literary criticism and look at novels with nonlinear narrative structures and a marked interest in time as form that should be included in the genre of the time novel as defined by Nilges. According to Nilges, the time novel is a fictional work that "interrogates the historical development of temporal

knowledge and the formation and historical specificity of ideas of time, and it develops its critique through a confrontation with art itself"; it "aims to examine time as form in itself" and "treat[s] time not as the experience of the protagonist but in and through itself" (83, 93, 93). Nilges categorizes the majority of contemporary criticism as focused on immediacy and the eternal now, and he argues that the importance of the time novel is that it offers ways to critique that immediacy (85).

The novels that I have chosen to study herein are interested in contrasting the temporality of our lives with the temporality of fiction, telling achronological and nonlinear stories, and challenging the impossibility of simultaneity in fiction, all of which undermine the so-called realism or authenticity of the novels and have more in common with postmodernism's metafictional techniques, denial of universal truths, breaking of binaries, and questioning of historiography. This countercurrent is not exclusive to women, queer or minority writers, but their underrepresentation in the canon belies their plentiful representation in the contemporary moment and makes it easy to miss this temporal countercurrent flowing through the choppy waters of contemporary fiction because individual time novels can appear to be mere anomalies rather than a growing trend that simultaneously connects literature of the present to the past and the future and models new forms of time that reinvigorate our collective ability to imagine new futures beyond the eternal present in which we have become mired.

Over the course of this study, I will explore the myriad ways in which contemporary writers play with and disrupt temporality, causality, and chronological narrative structures in their novels and create paradoxes of delayed simultaneity. In chapter 1, I set the stage with a brief history on temporal theory since the late 19th century, and then demonstrate how bringing together queer theory, narratology, film

studies, and phenomenology enables us to read nonlinear narrative structures as both simultaneous and delayed, creating a temporal paradox, and how disrupting chronological causality forces readers to interact with the text and piece together the narrative and/or plot for themselves. In chapter 2, I apply Julia Kristeva's distinctions between linear and cyclical temporality to demonstrate how Jeanette Winterson and Jennifer Egan contrast these two temporal perspectives with nonlinear narrative structures that shift focalizations with each chapter. While the linear-thinking characters are obsessed with the past and unable to think of the future, resulting in a perpetuation of the eternal now, the characters whose thinking is influenced by cyclical perceptions of temporality create a multiplicity of future possibilities that allow them to imagine moving beyond the present's limitations. In chapter 3, I examine how Ariel Lawhon and Kate Morton use omniscient, named narrators, serial montaging, and achronological nonlinear narrative structures in historical fiction novels to disrupt chronological causality and force readers into the role of detective. Finally, in chapter 4, the paradox of delayed simultaneous fiction is foregrounded in novels by Ali Smith and Bernardine Evaristo that comprise multiple present-tense timelines set in different times twisted into a nonlinear narrative structure to create novels that, like the famous Schrödinger's cat, both are and are not simultaneous. Each of the six novels in this study demonstrates a way in which novels can use their form to evoke delayed simultaneity and to model new forms of time and temporality that encourage future thinking.

The insistence that the current trends in writing oppose what came immediately before them is a common trope in criticism; however, this insistence is too often reductive and rarely productive. If we look at everything that is going on in literature yesterday, today, and tomorrow, if we broaden the canon and make it more inclusive, if

we resist our periodization urges, then we will see that contemporary 21st-century fiction does not oppose postmodernism but is simultaneously building upon it, expanding it, and transforming it into what comes next.

Chapter 1:

A Postmodern-Inspired Temporal Paradox:

Delayed Simultaneity and Nonlinear Narrative Structures in

Contemporary Anglophone Time Novels

"People don't understand time. It's not what you think it is. … People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect. But actually from a nonlinear, non-subjective viewpoint it's more like a big ball of wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey stuff."

The Doctor, "Blink," *Doctor Who*

"Can time be perceived? What is the time like that we encounter in our experience of our world and ourselves? Is the time of our lives the same as the time of nature or of history? In particular, if time runs through our lives, in which direction does it run? … [I]s the time of our lives subjective or objective, or is there a third possibility?"

David Couzens Hoy, *Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality*

"It is not that we do not know what to think about time; it is that the solution to what time is may contain contradictory properties."

Jay Lampert, *Simultaneity and Delay: A Dialectical Theory of Staggered Time*

"[T]ime is itself a matter of a delicate relation between fiction and fact, between the real world and the realm of ideas … ."

Mathias Nilges, *How to Read a Moment*

Introduction

When postmodernism and poststructuralism became popular as critical approaches to literature in the 1980s, feminist critics, especially Black feminist critics

such as Barbara Christian and bell hooks, raised concerns that these theories did not acknowledge the multiplicity and intersectionality of experiences of women, of Blacks, and most especially of Black women, and that the drive to divorce literature from its author, as promoted by Roland Barthes in "Death of the Author," would undercut their efforts to bring identity politics to bear on literary criticism and to broaden the academic literary canon. Around the same time, Joanna Russ warned that literary classifications, including genres and labels such as realism, can be used to suppress women's writing: "The assignment of *genre* can also function as false categorizing, especially when work appears to fall between established genres and can thereby be assigned to either (and then called an imperfect example of it) or chided for belonging to neither" (53). Such concerns that criticism and categorization can become tools of oppression are equally important in the 21st century because of contemporary literary criticism's focus on nostalgic immediacy. Mathias Nilges argues, "[T]he strategic deployment of apophenia and faulty periodization is one of the most effective tools of populism" (211-212). Categorizations such as realism and authenticity serve to diminish the diversity, intersectionality, and multiplicity of the contemporary novel and ignore the resurgence of the contemporary time novel[11] that is playing with and questioning time and temporality. The overall aim of such time novels, especially the nonlinear ones I examine in this study, is not to hold up a mirror to our everyday lives, but instead to use nonlinear narrative structures to create a temporally paradoxical type of fiction that not only questions how we experience time in our lives but also the forms that time can take.

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[11] Nilges defines the genre of the contemporary time novel as "a novel that aims to examine time as form in itself" and that "rejects subjective experience in favor of an examination of time as a form of knowledge in history" (93, 80). He also argues, "the time novel's examination of time as form is always bound up with and made possible by an examination of the novel's own historically specific possibility" (Nilges 93).

Nonlinear time novels model new, more optimistic ways of imagining the future(s) beyond our present and agitate against the normalizing institutions of our modern world, such as realism, patriarchy, capitalism, and populism.

On the Subject of Time in Fiction

Time is something that as humans we both notice and take for granted. Todd McGowan refers to this in *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* as time's "obscure obviousness," explaining that "everyone knows what time is, and no one can give a satisfying explanation of it" (2). Trying to figure out how we experience time has preoccupied philosophers spanning the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. A multiplicity of theories exists to explain how we experience time in our lives—which I will refer to as temporality hereafter—versus the time of the universe (which area I will leave to be explored by theoretical physicists and the like). In the past, temporality in fictional narrative structures was largely chronological or supported by an assumption of some overall linear temporality whereby readers could distinguish, for example, analepsis and prolepsis (i.e., flashbacks and flashforwards) in narrative time. My interest lies in looking at how temporality is conveyed through the narrative structures of contemporary time novels written after 2000. The Anglophone novels that I analyze in this study all contain nonlinear narrative structures that disrupt temporality in significant ways, though some employ a more extreme achronological scheme than others. Nonlinear narrative structures may be familiar to readers of speculative or science fiction novels, which have previously utilized such structures to play with temporality in more literal ways (i.e., time travel). What distinguishes the nonlinear time novels I study from their science fiction predecessors is a lack of scientific explanation behind the nonlinear temporality

of their narrative structures and a focus on the temporal experience of the readers rather than of the protagonists. This is just one way in which the novels I study fit into the genre of the contemporary time novel as established by Nilges in *How to Read a Moment*, because Nilges argues the time novel distinguishes itself by "treat[ing] time not as the experience of the protagonist but in and through itself" (93). For example, the time novel *I Was Anastasia* uses a retrograde narrative structure to tell the fictionalized story of Anna Anderson's life, but Anna does not actually experience her life in reversed order in the novel, so the temporality of the narrative structure does not reflect the protagonist's temporal experience. In contrast to this, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut takes his reader backwards and forwards through Billy Pilgrim's life in what seems to be an achronological journey, and yet it is not truly achronological because Vonnegut tells us that Billy Pilgrim is a time traveler and "*has come unstuck in time*" (22). Therefore, although the story jumps backwards and forwards in time, it remains a chronological story of temporality as experienced by Billy Pilgrim.

Contemporary time novels model a spectrum of forms of temporality, and I will look at novels that fall at varying points upon that spectrum. For the purposes of my study, a linear storyline is one that has a forward-moving, causation-driven structure, whereas a nonlinear storyline may seem random because it does not have a logical, teleology-driven trajectory. I will also employ the terms chronological and achronological to distinguish between stories that are "arranged in order of time" and those which are arranged in a more jumbled fashion, "not … in order of time," or "unchronological," respectively ("Chronological, *Adj.*"; "Achronological, *Adj.*"). I use both sets of terms because it is possible to have a nonlinear narrative that is still largely chronological (such

as Lauren Willig's *The Secret History of the Pink Carnation*, which alternates between two parallel narratives set in two different time periods but still relates events within each narrative in a chronological fashion) just as it is possible to have moments of linear narrative within an achronological narrative structure (such as Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, which uses linear narrative structure within each scene but orders the scenes in an achronological way).

The Linear-Chronological Spectrum

ACHRONOLOGICAL

Legend
- Chapter 2
- Chapter 3
- Chapter 4

Ali Smith
How to Be Both

Bernardine Evaristo
Girl, Woman, Other

Ariel Lawhon
I Was Anastasia

NONLINEAR

Kate Morton,
The Clockmaker's Daughter

Jeanette Winterson
The Gap of Time

LINEAR

Jennifer Egan
A Visit from the Goon Squad
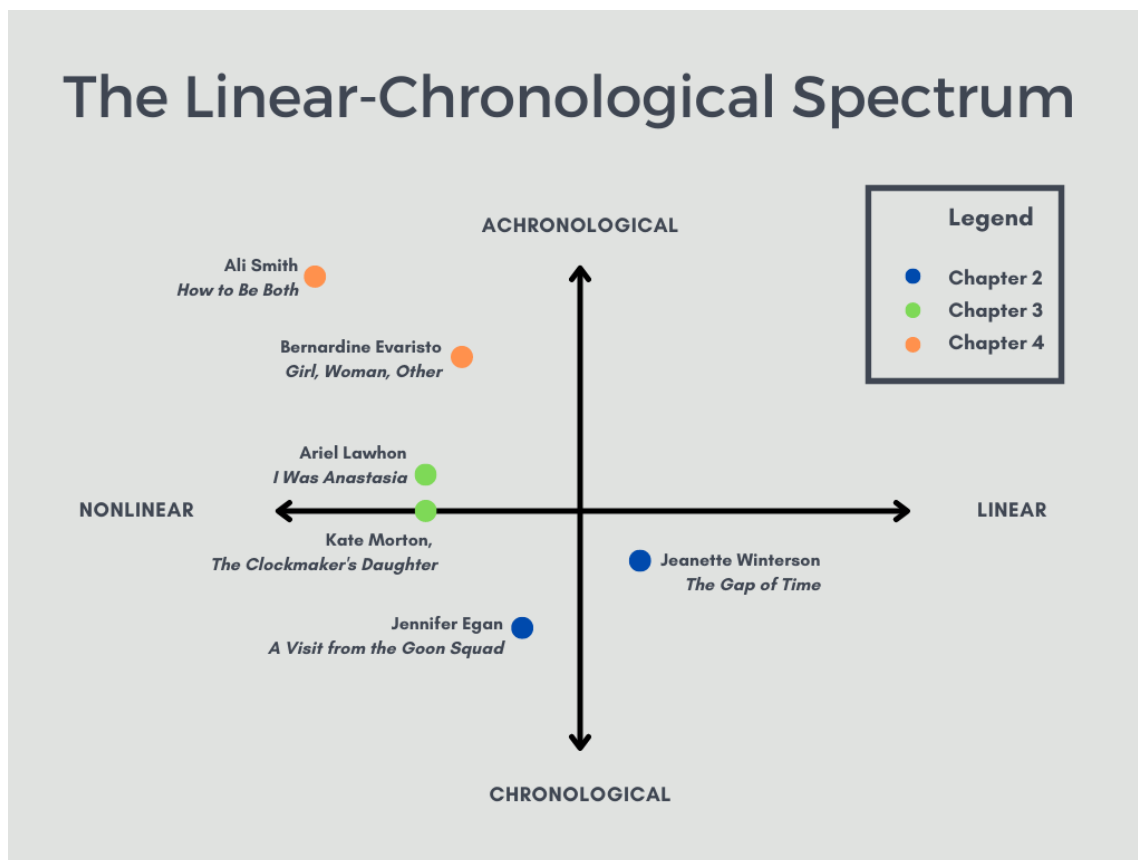
CHRONOLOGICAL

Figure 1. The Linear-Chronological Spectrum
A matrix spectrum illustrating where the time novels I analyze in chapters 2-4 fall in terms of both chronological/achronological ordering and linear/nonlinear narrative structure.

Beginning with those texts that are closest to the chronological and linear ends of the spectrum (see Figure 1), in chapter 2, I analyze Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* (2015) and Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011), which both disrupt

temporality in more limited ways within the text to achieve a particular awareness of temporality's forms and jar readers out of a complacency into which chronological narratives lull them. Then in chapter 3, I turn to Ariel Lawhon's *I Was Anastasia* (2018) and Kate Morton's *The Clockmaker's Daughter* (2018), both of which, although distinctly nonlinear, are nearer to the middle of the chronological spectrum, and examine how their serial montaging of multiple timelines subverts chronological causality. Finally, in chapter 4, I reach the extremes of both the achronological and nonlinear spectrums with Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* (2015) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019), which employ the most complete disruptions of temporality and strive for reading experiences with the most paradoxically delayed simultaneity by montaging multiple present-tense timelines. The questions that I want to begin this study by asking are as follows: How does our reading experience change when we time travel through a story, but the characters do not? And how can a novel convey forms of simultaneous temporality when it is impossible for the reading experience to be such?

The Science-Fiction Origins of Simultaneous Temporality and Nonlinear Narrative Structures Seen through "Story of Your Life" and *Arrival*

"Time remains paradoxical," McGowan observes, "as long as we view it as an external field to be known rather than as the terrain through which we know" (2). Ted Chiang shows us just how temporality can affect what we know and how we know it in his science fiction short story, "Story of Your Life" (2002), which inspired the film *Arrival* (2016). *Arrival* begins with the protagonist, Dr. Louise Banks, observing, "Memory is a strange thing. It doesn't work like I thought it did. We are so bound by time, by its order" (1:45-1:56). Then, she explains that beginnings and endings have lost their

meaning for her as she has realized that memories cannot always be so easily ordered by chronology (*Arrival* 3:08-4:10). Her reflections introduce the idea that temporality and memory are inextricably intertwined. In both the film and the short story, a global extraterrestrial encounter introduces a new experience of temporality to the human linguists who are tasked with learning the aliens' language. Chiang takes this temporal experience a step further by bringing it to his readers as well in the way that he disrupts the temporality of the story's narrative structure itself so that the reader experiences the events of the story in a nonlinear, achronological order.[12]

For Chiang, our temporal experience is grounded firmly in how our language works. Louise distinguishes between the spoken and written versions of the alien language (referred to as Heptapod A and Heptapod B, respectively):

> For them, speech was a bottleneck because it required that one word follow another sequentially. With writing, on the other hand, every mark on a page was visible simultaneously. … Semasiographic[13] writing naturally took advantage of the page's two-dimensionality; instead of doling out morphemes one at a time, it offered an entire page full of them all at once. (Chiang, "Story" 135)

Louise notes that this is different from how terrestrial languages work (though some ancient hieroglyphic languages are considered to be semasiographic writing), saying:

> For me, thinking typically meant speaking in an internal voice; as we say in the trade, my thoughts were phonologically coded. My internal voice normally spoke

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[12] Unlike the film, Chiang begins his story at the moment in which Louise and her partner decide to have a baby, to whom the story as a whole is addressed, and then moves back to the day that the aliens arrive. The story of her encounters with the aliens is intercut with Louise's achronological memories of future interactions with her daughter, creating a nonlinear narrative structure.

[13] Barry Powell defines semasiographic writing as that "in which the signs are not attached to necessary forms of speech" and "may be arranged in any conventional way" (51).

in English, but that wasn't a requirement. The summer after my senior year in

high school, I attended a total immersion program for learning Russian; by the

end of the summer, I was thinking and even dreaming in Russian. But it was

always *spoken* Russian. Different language, same mode: a voice speaking silently

aloud. (Chiang, "Story" 127)

However, what I find interesting about Louise's distinctions between speaking,

thinking, and writing language is that the Heptapods view writing as a way to

communicate multiple ideas simultaneously rather than in a linear progression: in the

film their writing is portrayed as circular logograms (though Chiang does not provide a

visual description of the writing in his story), which Louise's physicist colleague

describes as "free of time" and categorizes as "nonlinear orthography" (*Arrival* 54:55,

55:06). In other words, the Heptapods' writing has "no forward or backward direction"

when it is read, distinguishing it from terrestrial written languages, which almost always

have a directionality, being written in either horizontal or vertical lines (*Arrival* 54:20-

55:14). The physicist proposes this analogy: "Imagine you wanted to write a sentence

using two hands starting from either side. You would have to know each word that you

wanted to use as well as how much space that it would occupy" (*Arrival* 55:15-55:25).

The idea of writing being more simultaneous than speaking presents an interesting

paradox in that while we can visually see all the words on a page at the same time, we

cannot process their meaning simultaneously as the Heptapods can with their

logograms. Smith confronts this paradox in *How to Be Both* when one of her protagonists,

George, postulates that in a simultaneous novel "all the lines of the text [would] have

been overprinted, like each page is actually two pages but with one superimposed on the

other to make it unreadable" (11). For George (and Smith), a text that contains all the

words on one page, presented simultaneously, is impossible for a reader to process, a

paradox. Louise, however, speculates that perhaps the limitations of thinking or writing

the same way that we speak also apply to how we interpret and experience time. As she

learns to write in Heptapod B, she finds that she experiences a new temporality, one that

is simultaneous[14] rather than chronological. There is no beginning, middle, or end for her

because she now perceives all the events of her life to be happening at the same time.

Temporal perception is key here because the other characters in the story are still

experiencing temporality in a chronological and linear way. She observes, "And now that

Heptapod B had introduced me to a simultaneous mode of consciousness, I understood

the rationale behind Heptapod A's grammar: what my sequential mind had perceived as

unnecessarily convoluted, I now recognized as an attempt to provide flexibility within

the confines of sequential speech" (Chiang, "Story" 135). Science fiction enables Chiang

to grant Louise a new way in which to experience the temporality of her life. This

speculative experience of temporality differs from the nonlinear time novels that I

analyze because while the authors (and sometimes narrators) are aware of the

nonlinearity and simultaneity of the narrative structures, the characters themselves are

not aware of it and cannot alter future, past, and present as Louise does. This

demonstrates one component of Nilges' definition of the contemporary time novel: that it

"treat time not as the experience of the protagonist but in and through itself" (93).

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[14] This is also referred to as synchronous by some; however, I prefer to use the term simultaneous to
distinguish it from Ferdinand de Saussure's synchronous and diachronous linguistic theories, which focus
on describing a language either "at a particular point in time (especially the present)" (synchrony) or as it
developed and evolved from "an old(er) version of a language and its present-day incarnation" (diachrony)
(Aarts, "Synchronic" and "Diachronic").

In addition to linguistics, Chiang uses a scientific theory, Fermat's Principle of Least Time, to explain the alien's temporal experience. The physicist glosses the principle after drawing a diagram for the narrator, saying, "Any hypothetical path would require more time to traverse than the one actually taken. In other words, the route that the light takes is always the fastest possible one" (Chiang, "Story" 118). He then explains that this scientific principle is one of the first ones to which the extraterrestrial Heptapods have responded even though it is more complicated (from a human perspective) than the ones that the humans had presented at first. Louise mulls over this and eventually observes to herself, "[T]he ray of light has to know where it will ultimately end up before it can choose the direction to begin moving in" (Chiang, "Story" 125). This need to know the outcome before one can begin is what ultimately leads her to the conclusion that Heptapods must experience time differently than humans do because their written language is structured in such a way that they could not begin writing without knowing exactly where they would end up. She describes this as follows:

> I found myself in a meditative state, contemplating the way in which premises and conclusions were interchangeable. There was no direction inherent in the way propositions were connected, no "train of thought" moving along a particular route; all the components in an act of reasoning were equally powerful, all having identical precedence. (Chiang, "Story" 127)

She contrasts this way of thinking with how human thought typically functions, arguing that humans prefer to view physics with "a chronological, causal interpretation of events: one moment growing out of another, causes and effects creating a chain reaction that grew from past to future" (Chiang, "Story" 129-130). Then she returns to speculating how

the heptapods' thinking differs from this human obsession with chronology and cause-and-effect because they prioritized "physical attributes that … were meaningful only over a period of time" (Chiang, "Story" 130). Since the heptapods can see the bigger picture—all of time's events on display simultaneously—they could "[recognize] that there was a requirement that had to be satisfied, a goal of minimizing or maximizing. And one had to know the effects before the causes could be initiated" (Chiang, "Story" 130). Rather than pitting these two ways of experiencing temporality against each other or concluding that they are mutually exclusive, Louise suggests that they are simply two different ways to interpret the same events: "The physical universe was a language with a perfectly ambiguous grammar. Every physical event was an utterance that could be parsed in two entirely different ways, one causal and the other teleological, both valid, neither one disqualifiable no matter how much context was available" (Chiang, "Story" 133). The problem that arises here is that both Chiang's causal and teleological[15] views of temporality reinforce chronological causality. Even though Chiang sets these temporalities up as opposites, their true opposition would be a temporality in which causality was not chronological. This consideration of the teleology of nonlinear temporality is mostly important when considering the writing process and the narration of the contemporary time novels studied herein. As with Heptapod B, it is essential that these writers (and their narrators at times) have the telos of their novel in mind (or the effects that will result from the causes) as they write so that they can craft a cohesive

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[15] Chiang's use of teleological contradicts Kristeva's argument that linear temporality is the one that has a telos and that it is in opposition to a more circular temporality that she identifies as female in nature (17). However, this seeming contradiction can be reconciled through consideration of how Chiang connects his teleological simultaneous temporality to "the concepts of purpose or design," which is not the same as Kristeva's perception of teleological temporality as "relating to a goal, end, or final cause" ("Teleological, *Adj.*").

story in the same way that a Heptapod must know the telos of its sentence before it writes the circle of "text" (for lack of a better word) and, hence, these stories are, strictly speaking, teleological and this teleology grants agency to both the writer and narrator. However, at the same time, the achronology and nonlinear temporality of their narratives disrupt the normative linear temporal experience that sets out to create a chronological, cause-and-effect narrative with an ultimate telos and, therefore, they can also be read as anti-teleological.

In addition to the more scientific aspects of the story, Chiang also brings in literary allusions to Jorge Luis Borges' short stories, "The Library of Babel" and "The Book of Sand," with his own infinite, omniscient creation: the *Book of Ages*. This is a "chronicle that records every event, past and future" and "[e]ven though the text has been photoreduced from the full-sized edition, the volume is enormous" (Chiang, "Story" 131). He describes a person who reads her history in this book but "being a contrary sort, she now resolves to refrain from" the predicted action (Chiang, "Story" 131). Yet, Chiang issues the following stipulations and rhetorical questions to his reader:

> The *Book of Ages* cannot be wrong; this scenario is based on the premise that a person is given knowledge of the actual future, not of some possible future. … The result is a contradiction: the *Book of Ages* must be right, by definition; yet no matter what the *Book* says she'll do, she can choose to do otherwise. How can these two facts be reconciled? They can't be, was the common answer. A volume like the *Book of Ages* is a logical impossibility, for the precise reason that its existence would result in the above contradiction. ("Story" 131)

Chiang philosophizes about how free will can (or cannot) be possible with a simultaneous temporal experience, ultimately asking his reader to speculate "What if knowing the future changed a person? What if it evoked a sense of urgency, a sense of obligation to act precisely as she knew she would?" ("Story" 132).[16] This is what the narrator of his short story does; even knowing how her life (as well as her daughter's life) will turn out, she still makes the choices that she knows she must to ensure that the "predicted" future will come to be.

Chiang's "Story of Your Life" is helpful in crafting an approach to the time novels that I study for two reasons: first, he demonstrates that chronology implies causality; and second, he introduces the idea of simultaneity represented as achronology. One of the effects of the nonlinear narrative structures I study is a disruption of chronological cause and effect. By relaying narratives to readers in an achronological order, writers can influence readers to create new and different connections between events and characters that might have been overlooked or obscured in a chronological text where cause easily leads to effect. Some of the writers I am studying have expressed a desire to create a simultaneous reading experience for their reader, which is obviously frustrated by the fact that the act of reading itself can never be a truly simultaneous experience as we must always read word by word, paragraph by paragraph, page by page.

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[16] Chiang tackles this complex concept again in his flash fiction story "What's Expected of Us," which features a device called "a Predictor" that has a light that "flashes one second *before* you press the button" ("What's Expected"). In this story, the narrator sends a warning that playing with the Predictors will cause some users to succumb to "akinetic mutism" when they realize they have no free will (Chiang, "What's Expected"). At the same time, the narrator fatalistically admits, "There's nothing anyone can do about it—you can't choose the affect the Predictor has on you. ... [M]y sending this warning won't alter those proportions. So why did I do it?" (Chiang, "What's Expected"). Yet, the concluding line of the story echoes the ideas expressed in "Story of Your Life" as the narrator answers his own question: "Because I had no choice" (Chiang, "What's Expected").

In an interview with Alex Clark, Smith admits that, when writing *How to Be Both*, "she was more specifically interested in exploring fiction's problem of representing synchronicity; the fact that whereas in life all sorts of things can happen at the same moment,[17] on the page one event must precede another" (Clark). Chiang tells his readers that he is conveying the story to them in the same way as the world is experienced by his protagonist, thus directly connecting an achronological narrative structure with a simultaneous temporal experience. Therefore, it stands to reason that authors outside of the science fiction genre who also want to convey a simultaneous temporal experience to their readers might adopt an achronological narrative structure.

In contemporary time novels, especially those written in English, there is a recent trend to write stories in which all the components of the story are "equally powerful" and there is "no direction inherent" in the events of the novel (Chiang, "Story" 127). For example, Smith's novel *How to Be Both* has two narrative parts that can be (and are intended to be) read in no particular order as both are labeled "Part One," and the book was published in two versions, one with the two stories in one order and the other with them reversed. In both parts, the narratives are constructed in a largely achronological order. In this way, the ideas that Chiang incorporates in his science fiction can be seen to cross over into the realm of literary fiction, even fiction that is being labeled as realist or metamodernist. Smith's novel is filled with myriad details that remind us that it is firmly grounded in our world (not a fantastical or speculative future), and, although she discusses time in the novel, the nonlinear structure of her narrative is not reflective of her protagonists' temporal experiences, which distinguishes her narrative structure from

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[17] This assumption is highly contested among phenomenologists.

those used in Chiang's "Story of Your Life" and Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). However, rather than being about free will, or a lack thereof, what the contemporary time novel is trying to confront and question is how we experience causation and correlation in life versus fiction and what we can gain from experiencing new forms of temporality.

As Chiang points out in his story, it can be difficult with English and other non-semasiographic languages to convey the simultaneity of experiences. In real life, we are seemingly bombarded by sensations and experiences simultaneously, but it can be difficult to convey this multiplicity in fiction where readers are encouraged to read in a specified order and can only encounter one event at a time. The recent use of achronological narrative structures breaks down the direct links from cause to effect that chronological narrative conventions create in fiction to create a more simultaneous temporal experience for readers. A nonlinear construction of temporality resists the explicit causality and narrativization that Nassim Nicholas Taleb argues are problematic elements of historiography in *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, writing:

> Our tendency to perceive—to impose—*narrativity* and *causality* are symptoms of the same disease—dimension reduction. Moreover, like causality, narrativity has a chronological dimension and leads to the perception of the flow of time. Causality makes time flow in a single direction, and so does narrativity. But memory and the arrow of time can get mixed up. Narrativity can viciously affect the remembrance of past events as follows: we will tend to more easily remember those facts from our past that fit a narrative, while we tend to neglect others that do not appear to play a causal role in that narrative. (70)

Taleb argues that our memories are fallible because the past is reconstructed in our minds, not reviewable "like a serial recording device like a computer diskette" (71). This theory aligns with Jay Lampert's analysis of Henri Bergson's theory of "memory-images" versus "pure memory" (138). Bergson theorizes that humans have both mental representations of the past (memory-images) and more subconscious memories of past experiences (pure memory) that Lampert describes as "the virtual existence of the past" (138). According to Lampert, Bergson's "'memory-image' is not memory itself" but "something that takes place in the present, rather than the survival of the past as such"; the creation of the memory-image requires "present interpretation" of what happened in the past, and it is during this act of interpretation that Taleb argues that we have a tendency to impose causality and narrative structure onto our memories of the past (Lampert 138; Taleb 71). In *Time Warped*, psychologist Claudia Hammond argues that our ability to imagine ourselves in the future relies on this ability to remember and re-interpret our past: "[I]t is clear that my vision of the future is an amalgamation of any relevant memories I can find. By recombining old memories, we are able to project ourselves forward into the future, giving us endless combinations from which to select the most plausible possibilities" (219). Hammond agrees with Taleb and Bergson that our memories do not function like recordings but are "essentially a reconstructive process" and alterations can be introduced during the reconstruction, either from hindsight or other knowledge we have obtained in the aftermath of the original event (Hammond 219). Although Taleb, Lampert, and Hammond all agree on this point, they use this understanding to highlight different issues. Taleb applies the issues with our reconstructive tendencies to how we narrativize both our personal lives and our public history, pointing out that historiography suffers from a "fallacy of silent evidence"

because successes and extreme events are more likely to be recorded and remembered

and because "it is easier to predict how an ice cube would melt into a puddle than,

looking at a puddle, to guess the shape of the ice cube that may have caused it" (308, 310).

Lampert uses Bergson's theory to argue that when we do engage in memory

reconstruction "the virtual memory is made simultaneous with the present" (138).

Hammond first observes that people who suffer from memory issues can also lose their

ability to imagine the future for themselves (or mentally time-travel forward), and then

she proposes that this ability to mine our memories to imagine possible futures for

ourselves is actually the default setting for our minds (217, 229).

　　　If we piece all of this together, we can see first why phenomenologists have had

such a difficult time teasing apart our temporal experiences of past, present, and future.

The threads of temporality are a Gordian knot of "wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey stuff"

(Moffat 16:36). However, what also emerges is that chronological causality is a

normalizing, reductive force in our lives. In this way, chronological causality has a similar

effect to realism: it appears to be the natural, normal, and neutral setting, and yet both

the science and the philosophy agree that we do not experience memory or temporality

in a chronological time stream of past to present to future. In *How to Read a Moment*, Nilges

argues "real-time capitalism" is an underlying cause of the "temporal flattening"

necessary "to maintain the fiction of a singular, totalizing form of contemporaneity"

(126). He also observes our collective ability to imagine the future has stagnated, writing:

"our moment is marked by a frustrated, disillusioned longing for the future. Unable to

produce our own cultural futures, we nostalgically reanimate those of a different time

and long for idealized moments when easy futures were said to be readily available" (5).

In the aftermath of postmodernism—with its goals of encouraging narrative multiplicity

and problematizing and pushing back against the tyrannical imposition of universal truths, common readers, moral interpretations, and either/or binaries—writers have observed that it is not just how we narrativize our history that needs to be turned on its head, but how we narrativize our temporality and memories. Nilges proposes that the solution to this inability to imagine new futures can be found in the contemporary time novel with its exploration of time as form and its critique of immediacy. Taleb and Hammond also connect the chronological causality bias to paranoid and destructive thought patterns, which appear to be increasing since the rise of social media circa 2005.[18] By removing the causality between events in narratives, contemporary writers produce a jumbled pile of individual moments akin to a box of loose puzzle pieces with no original to reconstruct. This challenges the "cultural authority" of chronological causality and encourages readers to narrativize temporality in new and different ways as they interact with the novel to piece the narrative back together again. To understand these concepts better and how a delayed simultaneous temporality fits into them, I will first provide a brief background of phenomenological theory, focusing on temporal theories of the present and how to distinguish it from the past and future (if that is even possible).

A Brief History of Present Temporality

　　For the purposes of my study, I want to distinguish between *time*—a vast, objective force that operates in the universe—and *temporality*—our lived experience of

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[18] While social media sites such as LinkedIn, MySpace, LiveJournal, and Facebook pre-date 2005, this is the year that saw the increased popularization of existing sites and the proliferation of additional social media sites such as YouTube, Flickr, WordPress, and Reddit, with Twitter (2006) and Tumblr (2007) to follow closely on their heels.

time in our daily lives. In *The Time of Our Lives*, David Couzens Hoy defines time as

"universal time, clock time, or objective time" and temporality as "time insofar as it

manifests itself in human existence" or "the time of our lives" (xiii). These are

distinctions that I will employ in my analysis as well. My interests lie not in how time

operates in the universe, but rather in how temporality is perceived and portrayed at a

more human level in contemporary time novels. The authors included in this study call

attention to how we experience temporality in our daily lives and ask us to question that

experience and think critically about the ways in which technology has changed our

quotidian experiences of temporality and encouraged a temporality of immediacy. While

time and temporality have long been associated with the science fiction and speculative

fiction genres, the contemporary time novels that I examine herein are largely written

without the trappings of science to explain their temporal contortions: they are set in

worlds that appear on the whole to be representations of our own contemporary world.

Couzens Hoy begins his discussion of phenomenology's theories of the present, or

the now, by putting Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) into

conversation with each other because they disagree on the sources of time and

temporality. According to Couzens Hoy, Kant's stance was that time is created by the

universe and "the human, qualitative experience of temporal moments" is derived from

the objective time of the universe, whereas Heidegger reverses the relationship, arguing

"not that objective, clock time does not exist, but that objective time is not intelligible

without Dasein's[19] prior qualitative temporality" (22). Thus, Heidegger believed that it

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[19] While Hegelian philosophy defines Dasein as "existence" or "determinate being," Heidegger and other existentialists define it more precisely as "human existence" and "the being of man-in-the-world" ("Dasein, N.").

was possible to apply how we experience temporality in our daily lives to explain how time functions at the universal level, but not vice versa. Couzens Hoy also points out that Kant "did not have a specific theory of lived temporality," whereas Heidegger claims that "we ourselves are time," and that "in each case Dasein itself is time" (36; qtd. in Couzens Hoy 22, 23). Couzens Hoy observes that Heidegger's claim "suggests that time is relative to each particular Dasein"—an idea that will continue to plague future theorists as they strive to reconcile a temporal experience that is both individual (e.g., my perception that my day went by either fast or slow) and collective or shared (e.g., the meeting occurred at 10 a.m.) (23). Heidegger expands on this connection between temporality and identity, saying, "Human life does not happen in time but rather is time itself" and "[t]he *being-there* of Dasein *is* nothing other than *being-time*. Time is not something that I encounter out there in the world, but is what I myself am" (qtd. in Couzens Hoy 23). Couzens Hoy argues that ultimately, "Heidegger's own account of temporality requires the source of temporality to be neither subjective nor objective. Instead, temporality is itself the source of the subjective-objective distinction. … [I]n contrast to Kant's view of time as mind dependent, Heidegger's view is that … [the] mind is time dependent" (36-37). Couzens Hoy shows how both Kant's and Heidegger's interpretations of the relationship between the mind and time will be challenged by other phenomenologists.

G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) challenges the idea that we can experience any specific moment as Now, saying, "The Now that *is*, is another Now than the one pointed to" and that one Now "contains within it many Nows" (qtd. in Couzens Hoy 43). Couzens Hoy explains that the result of Hegel's analysis of the Now is "that what the term 'Now' refers to is not as clear as sense-certainty thinks" and, therefore, Hegel's theory "problematizes the naïve intuition that time is objective and mind independent by deconstructing the

notion of time as consisting of instants" (44). This question of when "now" is (and also when "now" ends) continues to plague studies of simultaneity within phenomenology. Lampert points out that one of the unresolved problems with Hegel's theories when considered from a simultaneity angle is that "if simultaneity provides the freedom in which all things are possible at once, it is a rigid freedom in which possibilities are all already laid out beside one another" (10). Thus arise the questions of predestination and free will that science fiction often poses.

According to Couzens Hoy, Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) main contribution to temporal theory is the idea of retention in perception of temporality. Husserl argues that if we could only experience time in individual present moments, then we would never experience an entire song because, as Couzens Hoy explains, "if one's theory of perception holds that temporality is such that one can hear only what is in the present, and the present can include only one note at a time, then one would never hear the melody. The melody is the entire sequence of notes, including their length and the space between the notes" (Couzens Hoy 51). Husserl theorizes that temporality comprises three layers: "the primal impression, the protention, and the retention" (Couzens Hoy 51). Although Husserl associates protention with the immediate future and retention with the immediate past, Couzens Hoy explains that these layers are distinct from past, present, and future: "We experience ourselves as in time and as having a past, present, and future *because* our temporality involves the structure of protention, retention, and primal impression. ... It takes all three for one unified experience to be possible" (51-52). In other words, the present itself has to contain knowledge of both the immediate past and immediate future. Couzens Hoy compares Husserl's central claim to a string of

memories,[20] but says that Husserl's memory string is not exactly like a string of pearls because each memory is not "self-contained and identifiably discrete" from every other memory, nor do the memories match each other as pearls in a necklace do, but rather "each moment reflects the previous one and anticipates the next one" (Couzens Hoy 52). To me, what Husserl is describing is a chronologically reinforced cause-and-effect structure. As with Heidegger's and Kant's phenomenological theories, Husserl's theory of retention can be viewed as promoting a normative temporal experience.

Couzens Hoy argues that Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) disagreed with both Heidegger and Husserl, "taking issue with the standard ways of thinking of time as a string of pearls, that is, as a series of instants, and as something that 'flows' like a river" (66). Instead, Merleau-Ponty argues that "time is not a 'real process,' and it is neither an 'actual succession' nor a flowing substance" but rather is like a fountain "with a single jet of water shooting up and falling back on itself" so that "we are ... the upsurge of time" (Couzens Hoy 66; qtd. in Couzens Hoy 66). Unlike his predecessors, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the primacy of the present, arguing, "Time exists for me ... because I have a present" and "the present nevertheless enjoys a privilege because it is the zone in which being and consciousness coincide" (qtd. in Couzens Hoy 66, 67). In this way, Merleau-Ponty weighs in on the subjective or individual side of the temporal experience debate, arguing that temporality—unlike time in the universe—must have an "observer" (i.e., a subject to experience events in time) in order to exist at all. Rather than creating "a series of objective positions through which we pass," Merleau-Ponty theorizes a "'mobile

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[20] The stacks filled with memory marbles in Pixar's *Inside Out* are another analogy for this, except that instead of each memory marble being a single color (representing the predominant emotion associated with the memory) as they are in the movie, the marbles would carry tinges of color from the marbles that proceed and follow them.

setting' that moves in relation to us" as if we are passengers on a bus constantly moving forward through temporality (Couzens Hoy 73). According to Couzens Hoy, the main objection raised against Merleau-Ponty is that "If each of us has a different time, where does our sense of being *in* time come from?" (67). But Couzens Hoy explains that Merleau-Ponty blamed the "metaphysical tradition ... for making time incomprehensible" and, in anticipation of the postmodernists and poststructuralists who would come after him, Merleau-Ponty claimed, "the future is not yet, the past is no longer, while the present, strictly speaking, is infinitesimal, so that time collapses" (68; qtd. in Couzens Hoy 68). Couzens Hoy explains this as the "string of pearls metaphor thus deconstructs itself" because "if the past and the future do not exist, then the Now disappears because a present without a future or a past is not a present at all" (68). Even though Merleau-Ponty tries to move temporal theory away from the river and the string metaphors, he is unable to escape the normative linearity of the temporal experience.

Echoes of Merleau-Ponty's collapsed temporality can be found in Nilges' observation that our society has become obsessed with the idea that "[t]he future has ended, and we are witnessing the rise and absolute expansion of the present" (6). According to Nilges, "as a result [of this short-termism] the future has collapsed into an ever-expanding, self-renewing present" and this collapsing future and expanding present are why we are currently suffering from a "temporal crisis" of the present (6, 9). However, Merleau-Ponty's argument that time collapses without the ability to distinguish between past, present, and future is contradicted by Lampert in *Simultaneity and Delay: A Dialectical Theory of Staggered Time* (2012), in which he argues "we can only perceive simultaneity virtually, by perceiving one event actually occurring and another event that belongs at the same time in principle, namely by seeing one event acted out

and the other delayed" (132). Lampert's combination of simultaneity and delay allows for past, present, and future to overlap with each other without collapsing in on themselves because they do not have to be distinct from one another. The paradox of delayed simultaneity then provides a new temporal model and "new ways of reading our present," which Nilges argues is part of the contemporary time novel's project (48).

Temporal theory finally shifted away from strictly linear theories with Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time" (1981). Kristeva argues, "As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations" and connects this female subjectivity to "two types of temporality (cyclical and monumental[21])," but notes that female subjectivity is disconnected from "a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear, and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression and arrival—in other words, the time of history" (16, 17). She characterizes linear temporality as "masculine" and "both civilizational and obsessional" (Kristeva 18). Kristeva's theory of men's time as linear and women's time as cyclical have been repeatedly used to analyze women's life-writing and autobiographies, but her theory has hardly been applied to women's fiction at all. Kristeva points out that while it was necessary for first-wave feminists to adopt a linear temporality to achieve an effective "insertion" of women into what has largely been an androcentric history, it is more important for her contemporary, as well as future, feminists to engage in a "radical *refusal* of the subjective limitations imposed by this history's time" (20). Kristeva also

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[21] Kristeva borrows the term "*monumental time*" from Nietzsche and defines it in direct contrast to "the time of linear history, or *cursive time*" as "the time of another history ... which englobes these supranational, sociocultural ensembles within even larger entities" (14).

cautions that linear temporality can work alongside terms like "woman" to suppress the "multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupations" that intersectional feminism seeks to emphasize (19). Although Kristeva's identification of linear and cyclical temporalities as masculine and feminine is now viewed as essentialist, the distinction that she makes between the two views of temporality can be useful apart from their gendered components because cyclical temporality allows for a form of narrative time that models a multiplicity of possible futures. Although individual, subjective experiences of time should not be gendered, Nilges acknowledges, "time is not neutral, but it is gendered, and ... it is also racialized. Indeed, time serves as a crucial tool for maintaining essentializing gender narratives" (115). Nilges also observes that the temporal crisis he describes is felt largely by those who are privileged enough to have had control over their futures, namely, "white (wealthy) men" (115). Nilges argues, "the perception of the end of change and promise is associated with a materially specific crisis of masculinity and a historical shift in the gendering of time in the context of which men struggle with the repetitive, standardized, and often timeless everyday that, as Rita Felski shows, was traditionally a site of confinement for women" (33). While I largely agree with Nilges' analysis of this masculinity crisis, Kristeva's theory of linear versus cyclical time helps me to expand on Nilges' argument by looking at how nonlinear forms of time modeled in time novels can demonstrate ways to move beyond the eternal present in which our patriarchal, capitalist society has become trapped.

Building upon feminist problematizations of linear temporality, Elizabeth Freeman explains in *Time Binds* (2010) how her queer approach to temporal theory works differently than the more linear approaches of her predecessors. She tackles the same ideas with which they struggled, such as duration, writing, "I track the ways that

nonsequential forms of time … can also fold subjects into structures of belonging and duration that may be invisible to the historicist eye" (Freeman xi). She argues:

> Now I think the point may be to trail behind actually existing social possibilities: to be interested in the tail end of things, willing to be bathed in the fading light of whatever has been declared useless. … I find myself emotionally compelled by the not-quite-queer-enough longing for form that turns us backward to prior moments, forward to embarrassing utopias, sideways to forms of being and belonging that seem, on the face of it, completely banal. (Freeman xiii)

Freeman approaches the kind of nonlinear temporality that I analyze in my study, observing that the goal of the authors she studies "is less to negate than to prevaricate, inventing possibilities for moving through and with time, encountering pasts, speculating futures, and interpenetrating the two in ways that counter the common sense of the present tense" (xv). Where my argument diverges from hers is with her idea that pasts are more set in stone (to be "encountered") than are futures (which are only "speculated") because one of the things that the nonlinear narrative structure of certain time novels achieves is an equalization of the past, present and future in that if all of these temporalities are occurring simultaneously, then none of them is more—or less— mutable or changeable than the others. This is the paradox of delayed simultaneity; the past, present, and future are and are not equally immutable.

The temporal concept of "now" has long been problematic for phenomenologists. This is because the moment that the word "now" is written down on a piece of paper (or typed on a computer screen), it is already no longer that particular "now" anymore. Simultaneity—events happening at the same time—also creates what Lampert categorizes as a "struggle between convergent and staggered time" (1). Lampert argues

that "the moment where many things happen 'at the same time' is constructed out of converging rhythms and then unfolds in delayed reactions. Time becomes a shifting continuity of events at a distance. The dialectic of simultaneity and delay organizes time into elastic rhythms" (1). This description is apt for the novels that I discuss in each of the subsequent chapters. In chapter 2, Winterson and Egan contrast linear and cyclical temporalities by incorporating temporal disruptions in smaller, asymmetrical ways. In chapter 3, the implementation of serial temporal disruptions by Lawhon and Morton creates a single-helix narrative structure that I represent with two-dimensional graphs because it spirals through the time periods included within the novels. Finally, in chapter 4, both simultaneity and delay are inherent in the oscillating double-helix narrative structure created by the dual narratives of Smith's novel[22] and in the overlapping narrative cycles of Evaristo's novel that spiral a bit more tightly through the events of a single day in London, England.[23] Lampert defines simultaneity and delay as codependent theories because while simultaneity denotes a convergence of multiple timelines, which can occur in past, present, or future, delay is tied to the divergence of those timelines—when "events seem as though they should be happening at the same time, but one of them lags behind"—but despite this opposition delay relies on the "ideal of simultaneity" (1). In the same way that convergences and divergences bring together temporality as a phenomenon, the nonlinear oscillations of nonlinear narrative structures create both convergences and divergences of past, present, and future in a way that

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[22] This similarity to the double helix structure of DNA seems all the less coincidental due to the repeated references to DNA throughout the text.

[23] Evaristo's decision to set the majority of the accounts in *Girl, Woman, Other* on the same day could be viewed as an allusion to James Joyce's *Ulysses* and also a subversion of that text's focus on privileged white men.

creates a feeling of simultaneity despite the fact that the texts must be read in a linear fashion (i.e., word by word, paragraph by paragraph, page by page). However, even though simultaneity is potentially a "real" or "authentic" experience, the ways in which simultaneity is created or evoked by contemporary writers are like the self-reflexive, metanarrative texts of postmodernism. Such texts questioned how history and stories were narrativized; the writers discussed herein are similarly questioning how the temporality of our daily lives is narrativized and modeling new forms of time. This type of temporal narrativization should be viewed as distinct from attempts to capture and portray real time and temporality accurately, or authentically, in fiction because the writers specifically ignore the protagonists' subjective temporal experiences.

Throughout his monograph, Lampert brings together ideas about simultaneity and delay from myriad phenomenologists to show how the theorists build upon each other's work, answering each other's questions or problems, but also creating aporias,[24] which Lampert argues are actually "time's own real aporias" (150). The co-dependency of simultaneity and delay as theories of temporality are prime examples of this as repeatedly demonstrated by Lampert in his attempt to tease out a coherent theory of simultaneity and delay from Derrida's theories of meaning and the now, writing, "Meaning is synthesis: two terms that mean something for each other must coexist in time" (151). He argues that this is an impossibility because nows cannot exist simultaneously and yet, "we know this because we put all the nows together," so "the impossibility of

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[24] Lampert's use of aporia (and subsequently my own) is not to be confused with the deconstructionists' usage of the term; Lampert draws on aporia as a term from logic and philosophy, meaning "a perplexing difficulty" or conundrum ("Aporia, *N.*"). For deconstructionists, especially Jacques Derrida, an aporia is "an insuperable deadlock," a point at which "each text deconstructs itself, by undermining its own supposed grounds and dispersing itself into incoherent meanings in a way … that the deconstructive reader neither initiates nor produces" (Abrams and Harpham 80).

coexistence depends on 'a certain *simultaneity* of the nonsimultaneous'" (Lampert 152). Using Lampert's combined theories of simultaneity and delay as a lens through which to view contemporary fiction demonstrates how novels with nonlinear narrative structures can be read as simultaneous even though an actual simultaneous reading experience is impossible.

Although Couzens Hoy observes that "there is an almost universal dismissal of the view of temporality as a series of Nows," most of the early phenomenological theorists assumed that time is linear, that it must flow in one direction or the other, either from the future to the past, or from the past to the future, with a brief pause at the present in the middle (89-90). Towards the end of the 20th century, postmodernists, feminists, and queer theorists problematize this notion of linear time, and we begin to see a shift in the theories of temporality away from a strictly linear understanding of the human experience of temporality. Couzens Hoy cautions that there is "the possibility of phenomenology not simply describing experience, but also prescribing normativity" (39). When considered as such, it makes sense that feminists and queer theorists ultimately reject a linear temporality in favor of less normative (or normalizing) temporal experiences. Overall, temporality is still a nascent topic for feminist and queer literary studies, with most contemporary critics applying feminist and queer temporal theories to life-writing and autobiography rather than to novels. However, film and television studies have shown an increasing interest in temporal studies, especially as concerns shifts, disruptions, and contortions in temporality in the film and television of the past two decades.

Nonlinear Temporality in Film and Television Studies

In *Out of Time* (2011), McGowan introduces the idea of an atemporal cinema[25] by grounding his argument in literary theory[26] and the evolution of 20th-century literature. He argues that "the attempt to integrate time into thought" has been the main purpose of 20th-century theorists and that, ultimately, "This effort did not simply take time as an object of thought but instead worked to reveal the intrinsic temporality of both thought and being. Time had to become a matter of form and not just content" (McGowan 1). He points out that historical novels of the 19th-century realist movement "depict the unfolding of time," and "Characters act in time, but the narrators that recount their lives do so from a perspective outside time or only implicitly temporal" (McGowan 1). McGowan observes that this changes with the Modernist movement as "Time ceases to be what we know and becomes more explicitly part of how we know" (2). What McGowan does not do is consider that atemporality might be a phenomenon outside of film studies. McGowan argues that temporality is inherently part of film studies because "[f]rom its inception, cinema has privileged time" by being experienced by every viewer in the same time while other works of art such as painting, sculpture or photography are experienced "on [their] own time" (4-5). Even literature, plays, and dance performances do not "emphasize temporality to the same extent that cinema does," according to McGowan, because "the role of time in each is contingent rather than necessary" and "the performance time of a dance or a play inevitably varies, at least by a few seconds" (5). While this argument may explain why temporality has been more closely examined

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[25] Although McGowan labels nonlinear films such as *Pulp Fiction* as "atemporal," I have limited my usage of the term to only those narrative instances in which temporality cannot be determined by the reader (35).

[26] McGowan leans heavily on Freudian-influenced psychoanalytic theories of the drive, which I do not find to be as relevant in the analysis of nonlinear temporality in the contemporary time novel (10).

in contemporary film and television studies than in literary criticism, I do not think it should be used as an excuse to keep literary critics from examining how films, television shows, and novels may all be playing with nonlinear temporality (or atemporality as McGowan refers to it) in their narrative structures. This is especially relevant to reconsider as the prevalence of at-home viewing and streaming have altered the way in which so many of us consume film and television in the 21st century both by allowing us to binge-watch hours of shows in a single sitting and by enabling us to control our viewing experience. We can pause, rewind, or fast-forward specific moments or scenes of shows and films, all of which affect the inherent temporality of films that McGowan's analysis presumes.

Contemporary Novels in the Social Media Age

One of the indicators that temporality has become of increased interest in television studies is the publication in the past ten years of not one but two books titled *Time on TV*.[27] While atemporal, nonlinear, and achronological narrative structures have been analyzed and examined in film and television studies, this analysis has not yet been

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[27] The first was published in 2012 by Paul Booth and looks at "the ideas of 'Temporal Displacement,' 'Mashup Television,' and 'Transgenic Media,'" which he defines as "shifts in the representation of time," "the way that contemporary television integrates new media characteristics with traditional content," and "the integration of new media aesthetics with more traditional media forms," respectively (1). Booth's main argument is that "[a]n emergent temporal complexity in online media has engendered this shift in television textuality. Contemporary temporal displacement both amplifies and mirrors the audience's reconstruction of the cultural temporal discontinuity that also emerges on our computer screens" (4). He also argues that the temporal disruptions in television shows work on their audience to teach them "to control their own discontinuous lives" (Booth 4). The second *Time on TV* was published in 2016 and edited by Lorna Jowett, Kevin Lee Robinson, and David Simmons and, as a collection of essays rather than a monograph, takes a more varied approach than Booth's earlier book. Jowett et al. make many pertinent observations about the differences between temporality in film versus television, arguing that more complex backstories and epic timescales are often more prevalent in television series than films (3-4). They organized their essay collection into two parts—"Structuring Time" and "Experiencing Time"—which they explain as examining "conventions for representing time, especially in terms of time travel or other manipulations of time" and "emotional or affective aspects of television time," respectively (Jowett et al. 13).

applied to literature criticism. My research and analysis of nonlinear narrative structures and simultaneous temporal experiences in contemporary time novels bridges this gap by bringing temporality studies back into conversation with literature studies in order to show how the trend of nonlinear narrative structures is not happening in isolation but rather is occurring across multiple media formats.

McGowan also makes the argument that the accessibility of information and films on the internet has "provided an instant resolution and thereby diminished the importance of the object" because "the experience of desiring to recover some piece of lost information increasingly becomes impossible to sustain" and "[w]hen one can have any film at any time, each individual film loses much of its sublimity" (27, 28). This could potentially be applied to books as well. If we cannot remember a character's name, the setting of a particular novel, or any other specific detail, we can Google it in moments rather than wracking our brains trying to remember or even going back to the book itself to look it up.

Technology has narrowed the gap between how viewers and readers experience film, television, and books, especially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, because viewers have become far more likely to watch movies and films—even premieres and new releases—at home on their own schedule via streaming services than in a theatre with other audience members. This allows viewers to start and stop watching on a whim and also to rewatch entire works or segments as many times as they like, which minimizes some of the temporal distinctions that have previously existed between film, television, and novels. How we read books has also changed with the introduction of e-books and the increased availability of audiobooks and other recordings of literature through sites such as Audible.com, Librivox.org, and

YouTube.com. We can now download e-books and audiobooks instantaneously rather than having to go out to find and purchase hard copies. However, one problem that arises with this increase in at-home access is that these online sources of media are not exhaustive; the content is selected by unseen hands and, while access to some content is increased, content that is absent from these sites can be left behind or forgotten, whereas what is accessible becomes more popular, in part because it is easily available. In a similar way, we are becoming increasingly aware of the echo-chamber effect created by social media and internet search engines as the algorithms learn what we like or are interested in and work to give us more similar content. When contemporary writers disrupt causality and temporality in their narratives and deploy nonlinear narrative structures, they engage readers and put them to work, work that encourages critical thinking skills and that highlights the extreme lengths to which we as a society will go—the crazy conspiracy theories we will let ourselves believe; the fake news stories we will like, share, and retweet in our self-validating echo-chambers—when we would rather believe in a happy fiction than in the unvarnished truth.

Nonlinear Narrative Structures and a Theory of Montage Causality

The disruption of temporality and causality in contemporary time novels does not result in a complete dissociation between the events being related. There is a moment in "Story of Your Life" when Louise's daughter asks, "Mom, what do you call it when both sides can win?" (Chiang, "Story 128). Louise initially tells her daughter that she does not remember the technical term her daughter wants to know; however, she then visits a moment from the alien invasion when Gary used the term "non-zero-sum game" and returns to the moment with her daughter with the answer in hand (Chiang, "Story" 128).

One could say that she is merely "flashing back" to that memory, but Chiang's

explanation of how the Heptapods think contradicts that and suggests rather that the

narrator is experiencing her whole life at the same time and thus she is able to transmit

knowledge to her daughter, and to the reader, from one event to another because she

experiences them as happening simultaneously. There is a similar moment in Sue

Eckstein's *Interpreters* (2011) that links two alternating but seemingly unconnected

narratives. Early in the novel, in the narrative that is told in transcript form, an

unidentified woman remembers the abusive childhood she suffered with her father,

confessing, "And boy, could he hit hard! He kept a special comb in his study and it was

one of my jobs to make sure all the fringes on his Turkish carpet were combed absolutely

straight. And he'd call me in and say, 'Look at this—do you call this straight?'—and then

bang!" (Eckstein 38; section II). Later, in the more traditional first-person narrative, the

narrator remembers a time from her childhood:

> [My mother] grimaced when she found me painstakingly combing out the fringes
>
> of the sitting room rug with my fingers.
>
> "Aren't you pleased?" I asked her indignantly, my feelings hurt.
>
> "Of course I am," she replied unconvincingly.
>
> "You don't sound it."
>
> "No, you've done a lovely job. Thank you."
>
> "What's wrong with them? They look beautiful when they're not all messed up
>
> and tangled."
>
> "I don't know. It's just one of those things." (Eckstein 52; chapter 4)

Until the narrator relates this moment to the reader, the relationship between the

woman speaking in the transcript and the woman in the first-person narrative is

unknown, but this moment unites the two narratives while at the same time creating

dramatic irony because even though readers know why her mother is uncomfortable in

the scene, the narrator does not yet know because she has not yet listened to the tapes

whose transcripts we now realize we have been reading. McGowan explores this idea of

narrative unity by comparing the diegetic reality of the story with the film spectator's,

observing:

> [T]hough the same characters appear in the different scenes, neither the
>
> movement of time nor the flow of events unites the scenes that follow each other.
>
> Whereas within each scene a strict forward moving temporality governs the
>
> action[,] ... the relationship between the scenes ... shows no deference to a linear
>
> chronology. The experience within the diegetic reality is opposed to that of the
>
> spectator watching the film. Time for the spectator is cut up and loops back on
>
> itself, whereas time flows uninterrupted for the characters within each scene. (17)

He also notes, "The moments of black screen that connect the various scenes allow the

spectator to understand what's happening in a way that the characters within the film,

who don't have the advantage of any gaps within the forward movement of time, cannot"

(McGowan 19). The same can be said of the temporal narrative structures of the novels I

analyze herein. Having a nonlinear, achronological narrative structure does not mean

that none of the events relayed in the novels follow a linear temporality, but rather that

the larger scenes and chapters are not provided to the reader in a chronological order.

The chapter and scene breaks (with their requisite white spaces on the page) in the

novels serve a similar purpose as the moments of black screen in the films McGowan

analyzes because they alert the reader to the fact that a temporal shift is occurring even

though the characters in the story are unaware of the temporal shift. Within the scenes

and, in some cases, chapters, the narrative remains linear. But the montaging of scenes out of chronological order emphasizes different causal connections between scenes from the implicit causality typically encouraged by chronological narratives.

Although analepsis and prolepsis have long existed in fiction and novels, the nonlinear narrative structures created by contemporary time novel writers go beyond the bounds of flashing forward or backward from a set point in the storyline and combine Gerard Genette's idea of narrative anachrony with Sergei Eisenstein's theory of film montage and narratological theories from Seymour Chatman, Ken Ireland, and Judith Roof to create what I call montage causality. Genette precisely defines these "neutral" terms (e.g., analepsis, prolepsis, and anachrony) to avoid "evok[ing] subjective phenomena"; thus, he "designat[es] as *prolepsis* any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later, designat[es] as *analepsis* any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier in the story than the point in the story where we are at any given moment, and reserv[es] the general term *anachrony* to designate all forms of discordance between the two temporal orders of story and narrative" (40). Genette defines both prolepsis and analepsis as existing in relation to "the point in the story where we are at any given moment" (40). This is what distinguishes the moments in which two times collide within a narrative structure, which I refer to as temporal disruptions, from traditional flashbacks and flashforwards because there is no present moment of the story that is interrupted by instances of narrative maneuvering, but rather moments of temporal discordance as the narrative shifts from one time period and/or perspective to another distinct period or perspective. Thus, the story must be interactively pieced together by the reader rather than just being consumed as is. Although Genette's anachrony helps to distinguish this narrative

structure from analepsis and prolepsis, it needs help from Eisenstein's theory of dialectical montage to demonstrate how temporal disruptions impact chronological causality and create a new montage causality.

In the early 1920s, Lev Kuleshov and his students, referred to as the Kuleshov Workshop, began experimenting with film editing by reassembling segments of existing film "in hundreds of different combinations to test the ways in which an arrangement of shots produces meaning" (Cook 95). According to David Cook, the best known of these experiments is one in which Kuleshov montaged "unedited footage of a completely expressionless face" with "a bowl of hot soup, a dead woman lying in a coffin, and a little girl playing with a teddy bear" and found that audiences "invariably responded as though the actor's face had accurately portrayed the emotion appropriate to the intercut object" (98). The conclusions that Kuleshov drew from this experiment and others are known as the "Kuleshov effect," which Cook defines as theorizing that a shot's importance lies not just in what it directly portrays to an audience but also in its relationship with adjacent shots and that this second value is "infinitely more important in the generation of cinematic meaning than [is] the first" (95-96). Influenced by his time in the Kuleshov Workshop, Eisenstein built upon the Kuleshov effect with his theory of dialectical montage, which is "allegedly based on the psychology of perception and the Marxist historical dialectic"[28] (Cook 99). Eisenstein applied this Marxist principle to film editing, defining montage "as a series of ideas or impressions that arises from 'the collision of independent shots'" and comparing the effect to how "the individual words in

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[28] The Marxist dialectic "is a way of looking at human history and experience as a perpetual conflict in which a force (thesis) collides with a counterforce (antithesis) to produce from their collision a wholly new phenomenon (synthesis) that is not the sum of the two forces but something greater than and different from both of them" (Cook 105).

a sentence depend for their meaning on the words that surround them" so that "the individual shots in a montage sequence acquire meaning from their interaction with the other shots in the sequence" (Cook 105). In addition, Eisenstein theorized that audiences would process montages "*simultaneously*, as if one were continuously superimposed on another" rather than sequentially (Cook 105). Eisenstein developed five categories of dialectical montage[29]; it is the fifth category of "intellectual or ideological" montage that the contemporary time novels I study fit best because Cook defines that one as "capable of expressing abstract ideas by creating conceptual relationships among shots of opposing visual content" and "based on psychological association and stimulation that had little or nothing to do with narrative logic" (107, 108).[30] According to Cook, critics of the dialectical montage have argued that it is "too manipulative" and "destroys 'the reality of space' … that provides the necessary relationship between the cinematic image and the real world," and such issues should be considered with the use of nonlinear structures in contemporary fiction as well (108). Nonlinear narrative structures disrupt chronological causality in contemporary time novels in much the same ways as Kuleshov's and Eisenstein's montage experiments and lead readers to draw conclusions that are influenced by the revised order of the narrative, with which the author has tampered in specific ways to affect specific results. Thus, viewing the temporal disruptions of contemporary time novels through the lens of montage theory reveals that

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[29] The five categories or "methods" are metric, rhythmic, tonal, overtonal, and intellectual or ideological, and they "may be used simultaneously within any given sequence" (Cook 106).

[30] One example of this type of montage comes from Eisenstein's 1928 film *October* in which "he offers a montage of various religious icons, beginning with a Baroque statue of Christ and concluding with a hideous primitive idol" that he described as being "assembled with a descending intellectual scale—pulling back the concept of God to its origins, forcing the spectator to perceive this 'progress' intellectually" (Cook 108; qtd. in Cook 108).

these disruptions can be used by the author and/or narrator to influence, and potentially manipulate, the reader's perceptions of causality, subverting the realism and chronological causality that would be created and encouraged by a linear, chronological narrative structure.

Chatman has drawn connections between fiction and film narrative structures, arguing that "events in narratives are radically correlative, enchaining, entailing" and that regardless of their linearity, the sequence of events always impacts causality for the reader, though that causation may be "explicit" or "implicit," because "our minds inveterately seek structure, and they will provide it if necessary" (45). Chatman provides this example: "Unless otherwise instructed, readers will tend to assume that even 'The king died and the queen died' presents a causal link, that the king's death has something to do with the queen's" (46). He argues that this is the case regardless of the degree to which the sentence is rewritten to be more or less explicit because "at the deeper structural level the causal element is present in both" (Chatman 46). This is why the reordering of the narrative structure temporality in these novels must be noted and explored. Even using Chatman's simple example, a reader will draw different conclusions if they are instead told: The queen died and the king died. When events are related chronologically, the reader will naturally infer that the chronological order of events is the causal element of the story, but when events from different times are montaged together, in a nonlinear fashion, then the causal element of the story is subverted by the multiplicity of possible causes. Chatman also brings Paul Goodman's theory of probability to bear, suggesting that "the working out of a plot (or at least some plots) is a process of declining or narrowing possibility. The choices become more and more limited, and the final choice seems not a choice at all, but an inevitability" (46).

Nonlinear narrative structures in contemporary time novels play with this idea of probability, often turning it on its head, and demonstrate how montage causality encourages probability in a way that tricks readers into thinking events will inevitably turn out one way, only to have the narrative structure twist and reveal that other potential futures exist after all. Writing amid postmodernism in 1978, Chatman acknowledges that "theory must recognize our powerful tendency to connect the most divergent events" and references a postmodern "narrative experiment in which the reader shuffles his own story from a box of loose printed pages" which "depends upon the disposition of our minds to hook things together" because "not even fortuitous circumstance—the random juxtaposition of pages—will deter us" (47). The nonlinear narrative structures of the contemporary time novels discussed herein fall on the narrative structure spectrum somewhere between the traditional chronologically driven narrative and "a box of loose printed pages." They eschew the explicitness of chronological causality for a more implicit montage causality.

In his analysis of plot, Chatman develops two different classifications for narratives: resolved and revealed plots. He references Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as an example of a resolved plot and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* as an example of the revealed plot and defines resolved plots as involving "a sense of problem-solving, of things being worked out in some way, of a kind of ratiocinative or emotional teleology," whereas with revealed plots "the emphasis is elsewhere; the function of the discourse is not to answer ['What will happen?'] nor even to pose it. ... It is not that events are resolved (happily or tragically), but rather that a state of affairs is revealed" (Chatman 48). For these reasons, Chatman argues that "a strong sense of temporal order is more significant in resolved than revealed plots" because "[d]evelopment in the first instance is

an unraveling; in the second, a displaying" (48). What makes the nonlinear narrative

structures I study unique is that the plots of these contemporary time novels are

simultaneously resolved and revealed: the unraveling of these novels does not necessarily

produce a straight-forward story line (or plot), but rather a series of tangled knots that

readers must stop and unpick for themselves in order to knit the story together

(resolved), a story which may end up being more about a particular state of affairs than

the specific events that have been narrated (revealed).

Ireland and Roof, scholars of postmodern retrograde narratives, have observed

that such narrative structures demand greater engagement and work from their readers.

Ireland points out that retrograde narratives have their roots in mystery and science

fiction but, much like nonlinear narrative structures in the 21st century, they have been

slipping into mainstream fiction throughout the latter half of the 20th century, including

in John Banville's *Kepler* (1981), Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* (1991),[31] Elizabeth Jane

Howard's *Long View*, and Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006) (Ireland 32). The increased

popularization of this narrative structure is especially interesting considering that one of

the demands of retrograde narratives or "telling-in-reverse" structures is "strict

concentration from viewers" (or readers) as such a text "is no longer open to easy

consumption by immediate provision of contextual data, but involves a constant testing

of hypotheses, an unsettling adjustment of perspective in the face of an ever-changing

Gestalt" and that the experience of encountering "calamities before knowing their

causes" is disturbing to the reader (Ireland 33). Ireland argues that although the origins

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[31] Although Ireland lumps Amis' novel in with other retrograde narratives—both fictional and dramatic texts—it does not function in quite the same way as Ireland's other examples because it is less episodic than the others and the reversed temporality is experienced by the narrator in addition to the reader.

of the retrograde narrative structure can be traced back to "Classical antiquity," the retrograde structure contrasts starkly with the opening exposition methods of "nineteenth-century classic realist texts" and "can reinforce the element of surprise and curiosity when the material is precisely not familiar" (36). He also argues that "the past becomes a *sine qua non*[32] for telling-in-reverse, with plots linked to earlier relationships and events, and an overall stress on how and why, rather than what" (Ireland 36). Nonlinear time novels take such disturbance a step further, not merely unsettling readers or demanding their attention, but forcing them to step into the role of detective trying to piece together not just the clues to a mystery, but to the narrative itself. Ireland explains this, writing, "What drives the reader on, however, is the need propelled by clues scattered by the narrator to ascertain the original springs of action, to learn how relationships were first formed, issues first broached: these facts are located not in the future but in the past" (34). This is somewhat true for the nonlinear time novel because the chronological aspects of the nonlinear narratives tend to incorporate clues or traces of the past or moments of traditional analepsis in addition to the temporal disruptions and montages. However, when the narrative structures are more achronological than reversed, the author introduces the possibility that the "facts" or causes are not solely located in the past, but may be located in a more ambiguous, simultaneous temporality that encompasses or surpasses past, present, and future. In addition to the disturbance to the reading experience that Ireland argues is created by a reversed narrative, Roof suggests that such narrative structures create more work for the reader. She argues that a "casual reordering of temporality" in a narrative "so that the scenes do not follow the

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[32] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this means "indispensable, absolutely necessary or essential" ("Sine qua non, *N.*").

plot's chronology produces two plots in the place of one" (Roof 17). Roof applies this argument strictly to retrograde texts, specifically Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*, but a story does not have to be strictly told in reverse to contradict "the plot's chronology." Therefore, her theory of plot production by the reader, seems apt for analysis of nonlinear narratives as well. According to Roof, who is using the narratological meaning of plot as the "underlying causality that binds events together," one plot is produced by the reversed order of events, while another plot follows the chronological order of events (Cobley). She takes this a step further, though, and contends that "[t]he interplay of the two plots—one backward and one forward—which together gradually expose who knew what when produces a third plot that both characters and audience must construct by piecing together the evidence gathered from the other two plot lines to discern what really happened" (Roof 17). I build on Roof's theory by applying it to nonlinear time novels. In these novels, the nonlinear narrative structures come in and complicate the production of plots further because these narrative structures usually contain multiple timelines or perspectives, each of which must be reassembled chronologically by the reader, and the entire nonlinear structure of the combined narratives creates an additional fourth plot that competes with Roof's third plot that the reader has constructed of each narrative thread on its own. Therefore, ultimately, each reader's detective work produces a fifth plot as the reader attempts to piece together the puzzle of what is (was or will be) happening in the nonlinear time novel.

  The combination of these narratological and film editing theories (see Figure 2) reveals how the authors of contemporary time novels employ temporal anachronies (whether in isolation or in a series) to resolve the implicit causalities that are emphasized by montaging multiple time periods and perspectives. These acts of

montaging engage with their readers' innate desire to make connections, assess probabilities, and puzzle things out for themselves just as mystery novel detectives must do. Therefore, the nonlinear contemporary time novel does not present these achronological moments (i.e., temporal disruptions) as flashbacks or flashforwards but instead montages different times together to examine the form of time itself and critique the ease with which we infer causality in narratives and beyond.
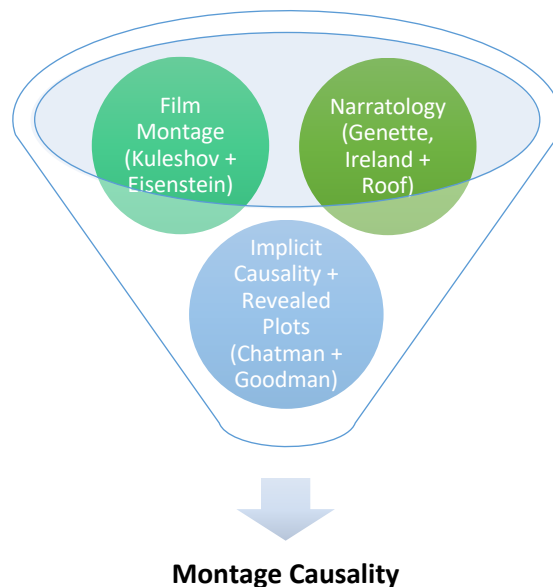
Montage Causality

Figure 2. Montage Causality
Summary graphic illustrating the theories that I have combined to theorize montage causality.[33]

Conclusion

So, what does it mean to experience a nonlinear, disordered temporality in a novel that provides no scientific explanation for its convoluted achrony? I intend to show through this study that not only do these nonlinear narrative experiments in simultaneity have political significance, but that they make it blatantly clear that temporality is a feminist issue in the 21st century by challenging the normalizing effect of

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[33] This SmartArt is an homage to chapter 12 of Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.

linear forms of time. In subsequent chapters, I will explore a variety of nonlinear narrative structures that range from a few sporadic temporal disruptions (e.g., *The Gap of Time* and *A Visit from the Goon Squad*), to an overall nonlinear single-helix structure (e.g., *I Was Anastasia* and *The Clockmaker's Daughter*), and finally to those that achieve a paradoxically non-simultaneous (i.e., delayed) simultaneity (e.g., *How to Be Both* and *Girl, Woman, Other*).

At this point, I return to the quote from *Doctor Who* with which I opened this chapter: "People don't understand time. It's not what you think it is. … People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect. But actually from a nonlinear, non-subjective viewpoint it's more like a big ball of wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey stuff" (Moffat 29:43-30:12). My overview of the history of temporal theory has shown this quote to be quite apt in a number of ways. First, the sheer number of conflicting and contradictory theories of temporality show that time is indeed difficult for us to understand. Second, perhaps the reason that theorists have struggled so long to come to a working understanding of temporality is due to the—potentially faulty and normalizing—assumption that time is linear, "a strict progression of cause to effect." Third, since linear and subjective temporalities have failed to account fully for the lived human experience of temporality, it is time to employ a more "nonlinear, non-subjective" approach. And although some of the contemporary time novels I examine do attempt to portray simultaneous temporality, that simultaneity is inherently paradoxical and delayed in fiction. Thus, these narrative structures fall short of authentic simultaneity and collapse into a gordian knot of "wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey stuff."

Chapter 2:

"One Time and Another Become the Same Time":

Temporal Disruptions and Cyclical Temporalities in

Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* and

Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

"TIME: I that please some, try all; both joy and terror

Of good and bad, that makes and unfolds error,

Now take upon me, in the name of Time,

To use my wings … "

—Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*

"And time that runs so steady and sure runs wild outside the clocks. It takes so little

time to change a lifetime and it takes a lifetime to understand the change."

—Jeanette Winterson, *The Gap of Time*

"A feeling … [t]hat we have some history together that hasn't happened yet."

—Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Introduction

Jeanette Winterson's novel, *The Gap of Time* (2015), and Jennifer Egan's novel, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011), belong to the genre of contemporary time novel because they employ temporal disruptions at specific moments in their narrative structures and contrast two forms of temporality—linear and cyclical—to model that cyclical temporalities are the best way in which to escape the eternal present and imagine possible futures. In addition, Winterson and Egan introduce the idea of simultaneity to

written narratives by incorporating the theme of music production into their narratives' content and structure to encourage readers to hold past, present, and future events in their minds at the same time, while the linear reading experience provides the delay that Jay Lampert argues is inherently part of experiencing simultaneity. Winterson reimagines Shakespeare's 1611 play, *A Winter's Tale*, and presents a "cover version"[34] focusing on how Time acts as a player in her characters' lives—shaping and reshaping their identities—as well as on how gaps in temporality (and pauses in music) affect the reading experience. In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Egan deals with time and its effects on her characters by presenting their lives as an interconnected web of moments montaged together rather than as a progressive, linear chronology with an explicit causality; the novel is divided into an A side and a B side, like a "45" record in pop music. Although Winterson's and Egan's novels can be read as examples of contemporary realism in that the worlds they portray feel familiar, the temporal disruptions within them actually serve to undermine that realism: they disrupt chronological causality and subvert traditional, patriarchal tropes, to create a fragmented, and potentially predestined, temporality that seeks a way to move forward into a multiplicity of new, uncertain futures.

The Nonlinear Narrative Structure of *The Gap of Time*

In the original version of *A Winter's Tale* first performed by Shakespeare's company in 1611, there is a gap of time in the play's narrative while Perdita grows up from the baby found by the shepherd and his son, Clown, (Act 3) and becomes the woman with whom

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[34] The choice to provide a summary of "The Original" followed by "The Cover Version" is Winterson's and not part of the other retellings in Hogarth Press's Shakespeare series (www.penguinrandomhouse.com/series/HSR/hogarth-shakespeare).

Florizel falls in love (Act 4). This is the same "gap of time" in which Hermione is dead, or in hiding, depending upon how one interprets the reunion at the end of the play. Although Winterson emphasizes the role of time in her synopsis of "The Original" that precedes her "Cover Version," the temporality of Shakespeare's play is strictly chronological and the narrative structure is linear.

In both versions, the main story is one of trust and distrust: Leontes (Leo)[35] suspects that his wife, Hermione (MiMi), and his best friend Polixenes (Xeno) have been conducting an affair for the past nine months and that the baby his wife is carrying (Perdita in both versions) is not his. Leontes confides his suspicions to his manservant Camillo (Cameron), who warns Polixenes that Leontes intends to kill him. Leontes ends up publicly confronting Hermione with his accusations and throwing her in prison. The main person who protests Leontes' outrageous behavior is Paulina (Pauline) a noblewoman, who tries to use the baby Perdita to make him see reason. However, Leontes instead declares the child a bastard and orders her to be killed, but at Paulina's persuading he agrees to allow the baby to be cast out to a remote place in Bohemia, which is ruled over by Polixenes. Even though an oracle supports Hermione's side of the story and calls Leontes a tyrant, he refuses to accept that he could be mistaken until after his young son, Mamilius (Milo) and his wife have both been declared dead and Antigonus (Tony) has abandoned Perdita only to find himself "*pursued by a bear*" (Winterson, *Gap* 5). It is at this point that the original story has what Winterson refers to as its "Gap of Time" as it fast-forwards sixteen years to when Polixenes' son, Florizel (Zel) meets Perdita, who has been found and raised by a shepherd (Shep) and his son

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[35] The names in parentheses are those used by Winterson.

(Clo), and Florizel and Perdita fall in love. Neither of them knows that the other is actually royalty until Polixenes reveals himself as Florizel's father and forbids the young couple to see each other again. This outburst results in Florizel and Perdita returning to Leontes' court in Sicilia, where Paulina has spent the last sixteen years making Leontes repent of his jealous behavior towards Hermione and Polixenes. Perdita's true parentage is quickly revealed, and everyone, including Polixenes, is easily reconciled. Then, Paulina confesses that she has had a "statue" made of Hermione and invites everyone to come view it; it is so lifelike that Leontes goes to kiss it, but Paulina stops him and instead has the statue step down and come to life to reunite their family, in what appears to be a happy ending for everyone, except Mamilius, who is still dead.

In contrast to Shakespeare's original, Winterson begins her story out of order, starting with Shep and Clo finding the baby Perdita abandoned in a hospital "BabyHatch" (*Gap* 15).[36] This first chapter ends with a metanarrative moment in which Shep tells the reader: "I am learning to be a father and a mother to [Perdita]. She asks about her mother and I say we don't know. I have always told her the truth—or enough of it. And she is white and we are black so she knows she was found. The story has to start somewhere" (Winterson, *Gap* 23). One of the effects of this choice of beginning is that the reader (if they have not read Shakespeare's play or Winterson's "original" version summary) may be like Perdita and Shep, unaware of what came before Shep finding her, until Winterson takes her story back in time—not as a flashback, but as a temporal disruption in the narrative's chronology—to just before Perdita's birth: the

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[36] Winterson references the original play when Shep shares the history of the "BabyHatches." He says they're a modern adaptation of medieval Foundling Wheels and then says, "Or you could leave it wrapped up in the woods for the dogs and wolves to raise" (*Gap* 13). This is what Autolycus thought would happen when he begged Leontes to let him abandon baby Perdita rather than kill her in the original play.

reader meets Leo and Milo in what seems to be a happy family moment in the second chapter. In this way, Winterson introduces a Leo who is on the verge of succumbing, but has not yet fully succumbed, to jealousy and violent outbursts against MiMi and Xeno. Figure 3 serves as a two-dimensional representation of the narrative structure to demonstrate the nonlinearity of its structure and pinpoint where the main temporal disruptions occur within Winterson's time novel.
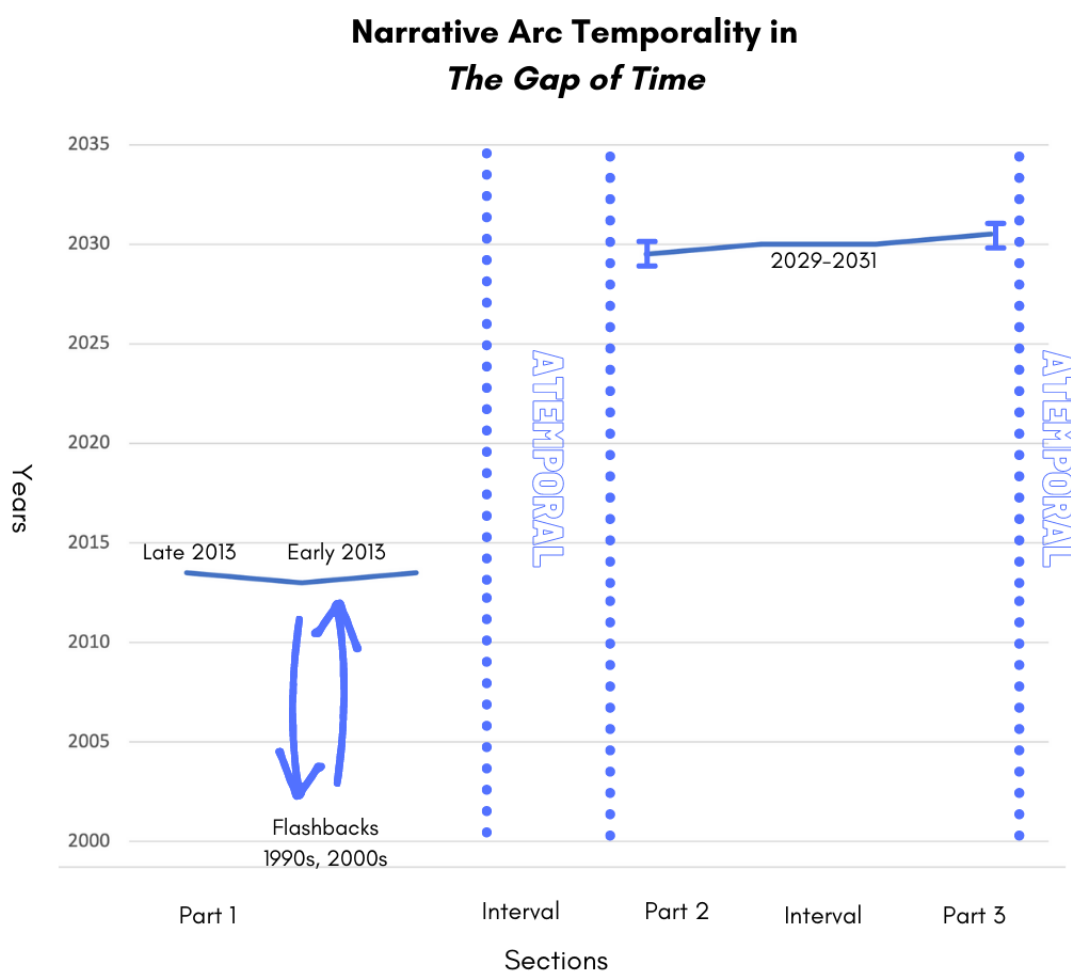
Figure 3. Narrative Arc Temporality in *The Gap of Time*
Two-dimensional graphic representation of the temporality of the narrative structure in Winterson's novel. The ⊥ symbols indicate years that are not precisely specified in the text.

As shown in Figure 3, Winterson shuffles the chronology of part 1 in chapter 1 using achronological flashbacks to relate Leo's history with both Xeno and MiMi. These

flashbacks are distinct from the moments of temporal disruption that happen elsewhere in the novel because they fit Gerard Genette's definition of analepsis[37], and they are happening within Leo's perspective and timeline rather than montaging other temporalities and perspectives together. Winterson also takes the story on a queer turn that is perhaps hinted at in the original play, but not fully developed, by portraying Leo and Xeno as adolescent lovers in addition to being childhood friends. This brings another dimension to Leo's jealousy because he is simultaneously jealous of both Xeno and MiMi.

After Leo appears in chapter 2, part 1 follows a fairly chronological structure until it ends with a scene that seems to have directly preceded the events related by Shep in the first chapter, thereby creating a narrative structure that circles around but does not perfectly meet—a spiral. One of the main differences between the original play and Winterson's retelling at this point is that Leo's jealous behavior happens more privately—in a deserted parking garage and at Pauline's home—so that his behavior does not incur the public censure that was directed at Leontes in the original. Winterson then steps back from her main narrative and inserts an "interval" chapter that philosophizes about "the early separation of earth-moon" and how the moon influences our lives here on Earth. When Winterson returns to the story, it is after the gap of time: the teenage Perdita is organizing her adoptive father's 70th birthday party. Throughout this chapter, Winterson switches from straightforward narrative into moments of labeled dialogue that are reminiscent of a screenplay or play script. There are also moments that return to the time of Perdita's birth, not quite 18 years ago; however, these are not specific flashbacks for either Perdita or Clo but rather additional information that Winterson

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[37] Genette defines analepsis as "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier in the story than the point in the story where we are at any given moment" (40).

shares directly with her reader as transcripts of news clippings (*Gap* 182). Even though part 2 is ostensibly set in the future (approximately 2029 or 2030), it has more 20th-century references than any of the other parts of the story and it, too, ultimately circles back to the night that Winterson opened with, when Shep and Clo found Perdita in the BabyHatch, only this time readers get the account as recollected by Autolycus and reported in the clippings that Clo had saved to give to Perdita when she turned eighteen. Overall, part 2 focuses solely on Perdita's and Zel's storylines with only the briefest references to Leo and MiMi by Xeno when he shows up at Shep's birthday party.

Part 2 is followed by a second "Interval" chapter. However, unlike the first interval that functioned as a break from the main narrative, this interval gives the reader snapshots of things that are happening with Perdita, Zel, and Xeno that set up where everyone will be at the beginning of part 3. Part 3 shifts back to Leo's narrative at first, but then unites the two narratives as Perdita and the rest of the New Bohemia cast of characters find themselves relocating to London for the revelation of Perdita's rediscovered parentage. In contrast to the original play, the climactic moment occurs when Shep reveals MiMi's necklace to Leo and Perdita, thereby proving that Perdita is Leo and MiMi's lost daughter. Winterson gives readers this moment directly, whereas Shakespeare had relayed it all secondhand through witnesses to the moment, choosing to reserve his climax for the revelation that Hermione is not dead. However, while Winterson also reveals that MiMi is still alive, she has foreshadowed this outcome throughout the novel, and she does not allow her reader to witness an actual family reunion as Shakespeare does. She describes MiMi as "standing like a statue in the light. … She doesn't move. Then she does" on a stage in a theatre (Winterson, *Gap* 267). Then, she tells us how Leo and Xeno find each other and "[t]hat which is lost is found," but she

does not show Perdita's reunion with her mother as Shakespeare does when he has the only words spoken by the resurrected Hermione directed towards her newfound daughter (Winterson, *Gap* 267). Instead, Winterson pulls back from the story and enters a metafictional moment of literary criticism before diving back into Perdita's perspective for the final words of the novel, which paint a possibility of multiple futures rather than any specific events.

 The Gap of Time is not Winterson's first encounter with fluctuating time or temporality. In *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), Winterson presents the following "lies" about temporality in our lives under the heading of "Hallucinations and Diseases of the Mind" after presenting four scenarios of people who have gotten "lost" in time[38]:

Lies[39] 1: There is only the present and nothing to remember.

Lies 2: Time is a straight line.

Lies 3: The difference between the past and the future is that one has happened while the other has not.

Lies 4: We can only be in one place at a time.

Lies 5: Any proposition that contains the word 'finite' (the world, the universe, experience, ourselves …)

Lies 6: Reality as something which can be agreed upon.

Lies 7: Reality is truth. (90)

These lies introduce many of the same themes that Winterson continues to play with in *The Gap of Time*, such as nonlinear temporality and predestination. This does not mean

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[38] Winterson's lost characters are reminiscent in some ways of Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim.

[39] "Lies" is plural in the original text.

that Winterson's novels are dealing with temporality in the same way though: in *Sexing the Cherry* Winterson's main character time travels, whereas in *The Gap of Time* the reader, not the characters, travels through time. In *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson sends her character through time to explore history and historiography, not the form of temporality itself. In *The Gap of Time*, Winterson focuses her attention squarely on the forms of temporality and their impact on our lives, while still questioning how we narrativize that time with postmodern techniques.

Two Distinct Places in Space and Time: Leo's London and Perdita's New Bohemia

Winterson has chosen to use the original setting of *The Winter's Tale*, Sicilia, as the name of Leo's company that is headquartered in London rather than as a physical location for Leo. This contrasts sharply with the choice to locate Xeno (and, later, Perdita) in an ambiguous part of America called New Bohemia; Winterson never clarifies whether New Bohemia is a city or a state, nor where within the United States it might be located. In this way, although Leo's narrative has the trademarks of literary realism, Perdita's narrative is much more fantastical or dystopic, thereby undermining the realism of the novel as a whole and introducing the idea of a future beyond the present (although this future has not yet fully managed to shake itself loose from the baggage of the nostalgic long now).

Book Section	Perspective	Place	Time/Temporality
Part 1	Shep, 1st person	New Bohemia	Later 2013
	Leo, 3rd person	London	Early 2013 w/ flashbacks to 1990s and early 2000s
Interval	Unidentified, 3rd person	n/a	Atemporal
Part 2	Perdita, 3rd person	New Bohemia	c. 2029
Interval	Zel, 1st person	In Transit	c. 2030
	Xeno, 3rd person	Video Game	c. 2030
Part 3	Perdita and Leo, 3rd person	London	2031
	Narrator/Author, 1st person	London	Atemporal
	Perdita, 3rd person	n/a	Atemporal

Figure 4. Perspective, Place, and Time/Temporality in *The Gap of Time*
Table charting changes in perspective, place, and time/temporality in Winterson's novel.

Leo's position in both space and time is realistic and precise. Winterson opens

his narrative in part 1 with a description of Leo and Milo "looking out of the full-length

window in Leo's London office towards City Airport and the Thames Estuary" and the

narrator says, "There was a big chart on the office wall of the routes served by the

airport" (*Gap* 24). The narrator also informs readers very quickly that "Leo had been fired

from his bank the year Milo turned four: 2008" and, since readers have been informed

that Milo is now nine on the previous page, they can confidently assume that Leo's story

is taking place in 2013 (Winterson, *Gap* 25). In contrast, Perdita's location in both space

and time is much more difficult to pin down. She is said to live in New Bohemia, the

same as Xeno, and she is referred to as American, which tells us that Winterson has

decided to locate New Bohemia (the presumably colonized version of Shakespeare's

Bohemia) somewhere in the United States. However, Winterson does not provide

enough concrete details about New Bohemia for the reader to locate it precisely within

the vast reaches of the United States. Perdita mentions New Orleans and compares the

Thames river to the Mississippi river later in the novel, responding to Leo's observation

that "the Thames is older than London—that mammoths drank here once" with "It's so

narrow[.] ... The Mississippi is like a world" (Winterson, *Gap* 229). Winterson also

mentions when first describing Xeno's home that there was "moonlight" and "the paint

on the front door had been softened and defeated by the hot, moist air" and Zel informs

Perdita that the house is "French" and "old," details which suggest southern Louisiana,

near New Orleans (*Gap* 187, 189). Shep also provides some clues when he says that it

"used to be a French colony. Sugar plantations, big colonial homes" and is near "the river"

that is "[w]ide as the future used to be," which parallels Perdita's later description of the

Mississippi River as wide enough to contain "a world" (Winterson, *Gap* 16, 17). And yet,

despite many details seeming to associate New Bohemia with Louisiana and the southern

United States, when Zel takes Perdita to Xeno's home in New Bohemia on a "Spring

day," the narrator mentions that Perdita opens a window "to bring some light from the

undarkened sky. At this time of the year the sky had light all night" (Winterson, *Gap*

189). This suggests a much higher latitude than the southern United States near

Louisiana[40] and is inconsistent with the other details, reinforcing the ambiguity of New

Bohemia's location. Perdita's position in time is equally imprecise. Although Winterson

tells the reader in her summary of the "original" story that this part is set "Sixteen years

later," when the reader actually reaches part 2 of the novel, Winterson does not say that

it has been sixteen years, but rather that it is "nearly eighteen years" since Perdita was

found by Shep and Clo, and that Shep had wanted to wait until she had turned eighteen

to tell her more about her origins but instead he's "turned seventy" (*Gap* 5, 132, 130).

Moreover, when Perdita finds out the truth about how Shep found her, she also learns

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[40] Although this could also be read as evidence that climate change has somehow impacted the timing of sunset in this future world, the change seems too significant to have occurred in the brief gap of time of only 18 years or so.

that she herself is a bit adrift in time and that she is actually "[a]round three months older than you are," according to Clo (Winterson, *Gap* 185). It is only when Perdita and Leo have been reunited in future London, that Perdita gives readers the concrete fact that it has been eighteen years since the fateful events of 2013—making it now 2031—when she says to Leo and Pauline, "Time has been standing still for eighteen years and now you want everything to happen at once" (Winterson, *Gap* 249). Thus, it is not until Perdita's narrative is reunited with Leo's that it gains the temporal specificity of Leo's narrative.

The Nonlinear Narrative Structure of *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

In an interview with Charlie Reilly published in 2009, prior to the publication of *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Egan describes this novel as "a constellation of intersecting lives" and "a polyphonic fictional world, something that has a more organic, tentacled, quality to it" that deviates from the "binary world" to which we often reduce things ("Interview" 441, 460). Her description aligns this novel with British postmodern fiction, which is also interested in subverting and dismantling binaries. In a 2011 review of Egan's novel, Jessica Jernigan describes Sasha's narrative in the first chapter of the novel as "not firmly attached to any single time or place" (3). Jernigan also describes the temporality of Egan's novel as "the only certainty in this novel: [Time]'s not stable, but it is inexorable" and argues that Egan's central concern is "time's effect" on her characters (4). This is one of the ways in which Egan's and Winterson's novels are similar. Both are interested in investigating how experiences of temporality and different forms of time affect characters in different ways. And both present those differences along very distinct divides, with linear-thinking characters seemingly having a much more difficult time accepting the past and imagining the future(s) than their cyclical-thinking counterparts.

As with Winterson's *The Gap of Time*, this time novel shows a marked interest in music at both a structural and a contextual level. The novel is divided into two parts: A and B, which Jernigan argues correspond to the A and B sides of "45" records in which the first side appeals to a broad audience and becomes the popular hit, while the second side is allowed to be more experimental and eccentric (5). However, "A" and "B" also suggest that we are all traveling from point A to point B, to describe our lives in teleologically temporal terms. The characters themselves repeatedly refer to getting from point A to B as well as questioning how they have found themselves at particular point Bs.[41] Even though the characters seem to answer this question at times, the structure of Egan's novel implicitly acknowledges the impossibility of ever fully doing so: the temporal disruptions between chapters purposefully replace this expectation for chronological causality with montage causality and subvert reader expectations. Furthermore, the chapters themselves do not support fully either the "two sides" or the teleological reading of the meaning of A to B. While there are some more "experimental" (read: postmodern) elements to the stories in part B, they are not uniformly so. And, while the final chapter is possibly the latest, chronologically speaking, many of the chapters in part B actually precede the events in part A, thereby turning on its head the idea that our lives progress linearly from point A to point B.

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[41] At the end of part A, for example, when after many years Scotty confronts his former friend Bennie, he demands, "I want to know what happened between A and B. ... *A* is when we were both in the band, chasing the same girl. *B* is now" (Egan, *Visit* 101). Bennie answers, "I've busted my balls," as if that's the only explanation for why he has been successful in life and Scottie has not, but Scottie retorts with "Ditto" to challenge Bennie's very upper-middle-class American assumption that those who do not do well in life simply are not trying hard enough (Egan, *Visit* 101). Additionally, in part B, chapter 7 is titled "A to B" wherein Bennie's eventual ex-wife meets with a former rock star, Bosco, who was originally discovered and promoted by Bennie early in his career. Bosco tells Stephanie, "The album's called *A to B*, right? ... And that's the question I want to hit straight on: how did I go from being a rock star to being a fat fuck no one cares about? Let's not pretend it didn't happen" (Egan, *Visit* 127).

This time novel is organized around intersecting ideas and characters rather than chronology.[42] Egan begins her novel by dropping readers into Sasha's life, mid-way through, though they cannot be sure exactly when in time that is. Sasha mentions at this point that she had worked for Bennie Salazar in the past, and the second chapter introduces the reader to Bennie himself. Though neither will narrate any subsequent chapters, Sasha and Bennie will continue to be the two main characters of the larger narrative, which focuses on how their lives and social circles intersect in evolving ways. The novel opens with Sasha talking to her therapist about a date she goes on with a man named Alex (who will reappear as the narrator of the final chapter of the book, working for a sixty-year-old Bennie). Sasha's story is one of recovered party girl and addict (in her case not so much drugs but rather an addiction to stealing small things that have more sentimental than monetary value) who has grown up, married, and birthed two children. Told in a straight-forward fashion, this narrative trope would not be new or innovative. Similarly, Bennie's story of wanna-be rockstar turned producer who cheated on his ex-wife is also a familiar narrative trope. It is only through Egan's temporal disruptions and manipulations that Sasha's and Bennie's stories take on new meanings and interest: Egan disrupts and subverts such patriarchal tropes and stereotypes as the affair with the best

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[42] In fact, Egan nearly kills Chronos in her novel, both literally and figuratively. Rather than literally personifying time as Winterson does through Xeno, Egan incorporates a bassist named Chronos in a band that Lou manages called the Mad Hatters. At one point during the Safari trip, Chronos leaves the jeep their guide is driving them around in and is seen "skulking among the lions, holding his camera close to the faces of the sleeping male and female, taking pictures" (Egan, *Visit* 69). When a lioness no one was paying attention to because she was "gnawing at the zebra" attacks Chronos and the guide is forced to shoot and kill her to save him, one of the other characters questions, "Is Chronos dead?", another responds, "I'm sure he's not," and then the first character asks, "Why isn't he moving?" (Egan, *Visit* 69-70). At a metaphorical level, this conversation participates in Egan's overall questioning of time throughout the novel by asking her reader, Is time dead? Then, why isn't it moving? Her book does not move forward in a typical linear fashion, yet like the bassist Chronos, it is not dead, merely stitched together with visible, postmodern seams.

friend; the much older man having sex with a teenage girl; the beautiful, but dumb, blonde actress; the self-hating gay man; the troubled teen girl runaway; and the troubled woman being psychoanalyzed by an older man. Like Winterson, Egan forces her readers to question what the present means to them and what our temporal experience does to the identities we construct for ourselves both now and in the future.

Egan's Fixed Points in Time

Winterson has one major temporal disruption in her novel with a smattering of other less consequential disturbances that ripple out from that one, whereas every chapter in Egan's novel represents a disruption in the temporality of the narrative structure. Nilges describes her novel as "structured around competing temporalities" with the narrative tenses not always matching the temporality of a given chapter, explaining:

> Chapters set in the present are narrated in past tense ... to establish the logical link between our present and the past for which characters nostalgically long. Chapters set in the future are narrated in future perfect (in periodic conversation with simple present tense) and convey the sense that the future is preestablished by the problematic temporal relation to the present." (115)

Figure 5 is a two-dimensional representation of the nonlinear narrative structure of Egan's time novel and shows how the temporality of Bennie's narrative arc is fixed, whereas the temporality of Sasha's narrative is more fluid and ambiguous. The green arrowed line shows the path taken by the reader with Bennie's and Sasha's narratives montaged together to create the larger narrative arc of the entire novel.

Egan makes some of her temporal disturbances more drastic by providing precise details within some chapters which allow readers to locate the events in time, yet some of the chapters are more ambiguously located in time in a way that is similar to Perdita's narrative in Winterson's novel. The temporal markers are part of Egan's construction of the illusion of realism within her novel, but they also make the illusion more obvious when the smaller ambiguities she introduces undermine that realism.
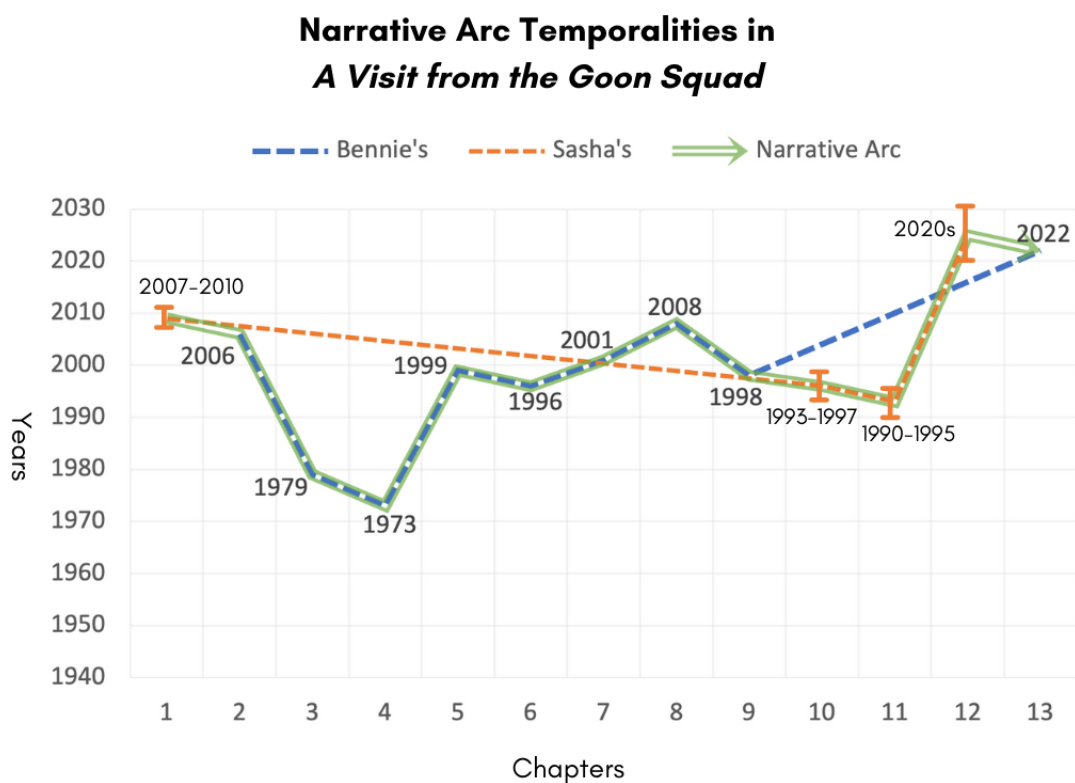
Figure 5. Narrative Arc Temporalities in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*
Two-dimensional graphic representation of the temporality of the two narrative arcs in Egan's novel. The ⊥ symbols indicate years that are approximated rather than being firmly established in the text.

Chapter	Perspective	Narrative Voice	Narrative Tense	Temporal Setting
1	Sasha	3rd person	Past	2007-2010
2	Bennie	3rd person	Past	2006
3	Rhea	1st person	Present	1979
4	Lou	3rd person	Present	1973
5	Jocelyn	1st person	Present	1999
6	Scotty	1st person	Past	1996
7	Stephanie	3rd person	Past	2001
8	Dolly	3rd person	Past	2008
9	Jules	1st person	Present	1998
10	Rob	2nd person	Present	Mid-1990s
11	Ted	3rd person	Past	Early 1990s
12	Alison	1st person	Present	2020s
13	Alex	3rd person	Past	2022

Figure 6. Perspective, Voice, Tense and Temporality in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*
Table tracking the changes in perspective, narrative voice, narrative tense, and temporal setting for the chapters of Egan's novel.

The chapters of Bennie's timeline are much easier to pin down to specific years and places, whereas the chapters associated with Sasha are vaguer and more ambiguous. For example, details, such as the age of Bennie's son Chris, allow readers to deduce the following: chapter 2—which is from Bennie's 44-year-old perspective—occurs in 2006; chapter 3—which is from the perspective of Bennie's high school friend Rhea— chronicles events from 1979, when Bennie was 17; chapter 4—which is from music producer Lou's perspective—takes place around 1973; chapter 5—which is from the perspective of another of Bennie's high school friends, Jocelyn—leaps ahead to 1999; chapter 6—which is from the last of Bennie's high school friends, Scotty—returns to 1996; chapter 7—which is from the perspective of Bennie's ex-wife, Stephanie—occurs circa 2001; chapter 8—which tells the story of Stephanie's former boss, LaDoll or Dolly— happens two years after "The Party" that Bennie references in chapter 2, so this is now 2008; and chapter 13—which is from Sasha's former lover Alex's perspective—happens when Bennie is 60, so it is now 2022. In contrast to these very specific time-markers for

the chapters comprising Bennie's storyline, Sasha's part of the narrative mostly contains age-markers, so that the reader knows approximately how old she is in each part of the story, but not precisely when in time these chapters are taking place. Thus, it is possible to order Sasha's chapters chronologically as follows: chapter 11—Sasha's uncle follows her to Naples to bring her back to her family; chapter 10—Sasha's fake boyfriend, Robert Freeman, Jr., drowns in the East River while swimming with her eventual husband, Drew Blake; chapter 1—Sasha tells her therapist about her date with Alex and a wallet that she stole from a woman in a public bathroom; and chapter 12—Sasha's daughter creates a PowerPoint presentation explaining their dysfunctional family dynamics. While it is possible to place the first three chapters loosely within Bennie's timeline (chapters 10 and 11 are likely set in the early to mid-1990s, while chapter 1 takes place a few years after 2006), chapter 12 is notable for being purposefully ambiguous as Sasha's daughter Alison includes a slide with the date "May 14th & 15th, 202–" at the beginning of her presentation. Therefore, although readers may assume that the final chapter, chapter 13, is the latest chapter in the chronology, it is possible, even highly likely that chapter 12 takes place after the final chapter. The ambiguity of chapter 12's timing fits with the other chapters from Sasha's timeline because Egan associates ambiguity with Sasha from the very beginning of the novel.

Linear Temporalities Versus Cyclical Temporalities

The representation of space and time in *The Gap of Time* makes Perdita's portion of the narrative feel less stable than Leo's portion is. Leo's narrative is bounded and confined by a teleological, linear time that Julia Kristeva associates with men and history, whereas Perdita's time is more fluid and circular, which Kristeva associates with women:

female bodies are associated with "cycles, gestation, [and] the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature" (16).[43] Winterson emphasizes the connections between Perdita, MiMi, Pauline, and cyclical temporality in the first interval chapter's focus on the moon, with its cycles of waxing and waning. The narrator explains, "The moon controls earth's tides. The daily ebb and flow of our life here. And because of the moon, earth's climate is stable. Moon's gravitational pull means that earth doesn't wobble too much. Scientists call it obliquity. The moon holds us fast" (Winterson, *Gap* 122). In the same way, throughout the novel, Winterson portrays Perdita and Pauline as being like the moon; they keep other characters in their lives stable. It is when Leo distances himself from MiMi and Pauline that he becomes unstable and "wobbles" too much. In addition, when Shep finds Perdita, he feels like his life has stopped the wobbling that began after his wife's death. Shep later says that although he has lost his faith in God, he does have faith in Perdita because she "was a kind of faith in her own right. He believed in her" (Winterson, *Gap* 144). The narrator makes the relationship with cycles even clearer with the final lines of the first interval chapter, when they say:

> There are thirteen moons every calendar year.
>
> They measure time differently on the moon.
>
> The moon orbits the earth once every 28 days
>
> As though she's looking for something she lost.
>
> A long time ago. (Winterson, *Gap* 122)

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[43] Although the temporal experiences of many of Winterson's characters do align with Kristeva's gendered categorizations, there are notable exceptions, and the distinction between cyclical and linear is more relevant to my argument than the gendered distinction, so I will focus on the cyclical/linear dichotomy.

These lines also suggest that the moon is maternal, symbolizing Mimi, looking for her lost daughter, Perdita, who can be symbolized by Earth itself or simply as on Earth somewhere. This perception of cyclical time as stable (or monumental[44] in Kristeva's words) and distinct from the historical, teleological time of Leo fits with how Kristeva views women's time as disconnected from "a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear, and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression and arrival—in other words, the time of history" (17). Kristeva also describes linear time as "obsessional"—an indication that those experiencing it want to feel a mastery or sense of control over the time in their lives—which is another way in which Leo's character and narrative epitomize Kristeva's linear temporality (18, 23). Leo's problems with MiMi begin with his obsessive conviction that she is cheating on him with Xeno. Winterson does not present Leo's story in a completely linear fashion though. She problematizes his linear timeline with analeptic memories that disrupt the linearity of his narrative to go back to various periods of Leo's life, not in a chronological fashion as traditional narrative structures often do but in one that is more associative, so that his flashbacks function more like actual memory and he remembers past events that shed light on current events rather than remembering moments from earlier and then progressively later. This creates a slightly more circular and discontinuous narrative structure for Leo even though his narrative is still firmly grounded in time and place, so that it ends up presenting aspects of both linear and cyclical temporalities and provides some hope that Leo may be able to escape from the linear present in which he is mired.

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[44] Kristeva borrows the term "*monumental time*" from Nietzsche and defines it in direct contrast to "the time of linear history, or *cursive time*" as "the time of another history … which englobes these supranational, sociocultural ensembles within even larger entities" (14).

Throughout Winterson's novel, many of the characters in her story, especially Leo, are obsessed with the idea of "Superman reversing time" so "Lois Lane doesn't die" (*Gap* 92). After he thinks that MiMi is dead, Leo contemplates this idea fully, thinking to himself, "*Light belts the globe three times a second. Can I not do the same? Take us back to a time where none of this has happened.* There's the world hanging in space. There's Superman beating the speed of light—turning all his love into speed and light—and forcing time to defeat itself" (Winterson, *Gap* 92). But Leo's contemplations always conclude with the thought, "But you can't reverse time, can you?" The one exception occurs when Milo runs out in front of the truck on the airport tarmac and Leo thinks, "Superman, rewind time" (Winterson, *Gap* 233). Like Shakespeare, Winterson does not describe Milo's death but just leaves it at that. And Leo cannot reverse time and undo his actions because, even though Winterson starts his story before he makes his decision, she has already told readers of the consequences of Leo's irrational anger and of Perdita being lost in New Bohemia. Thus, Leo is fated to make the mistakes he makes because of Winterson's nonlinear narrative structure. And when he makes those mistakes, he immediately tries to distance himself from them. He cannot erase them, so he consoles himself by thinking, "When was all that? It felt like a long time ago. There was no one here. It must have happened a long time ago" (Winterson, *Gap* 93). Leo's mistakes and self-consolation reinforce the disadvantages of linear forms of time. But there are also references through this time novel to time having dual properties, such as when the narrator says, "And then everything happened in slow motion and too fast" (Winterson, *Gap* 109). This duality of time encourages readers to look for other forms of time that have advantages over linear temporality.

When Winterson shifts to Perdita's narrative in part 2 of the novel, she immediately draws parallels between time and water, saying, "Beyond lay the river, like possibilities, like plans, wide as life when you are young and don't know that plans, rivers, possibilities must sooner or later empty into the ocean beyond. But today there is no beyond" (*Gap* 125). On the one hand, this idea of there not being a predestined "beyond" or a future reflects the crisis of futurity that Mathias Nilges has described as plaguing our contemporary society. On the other, the lack of "beyond" directly opposes Leo's story in part 1, which was introduced with readers already knowing the "beyond" of his plans for Perdita from the prologue "Watery Star" and the summary of Shakespeare's original play. Part 2 is also one of the few places in the story in which Winterson does not explicitly signal to her reader that we have moved forward in time. In this way, she subverts her readers expectations by completely ignoring the one place in the original play during which Time actually sets foot on the stage and speaks to the audience directly:

> Impute it not a crime
>
> To me or my swift passage that I slide
>
> O'er sixteen years, and leave the growth untried
>
> Of that wide gap, since it is in my power
>
> To o'erthrow law, and in one self-born hour
>
> To plant and o'erwhelm custom. (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* 4.1.4-9)

The character of Time then summarizes what has passed in the sixteen years that have been skipped over and finishes with a dare to the audience:

> Of this allow,
>
> If ever you have spent time worse ere now;

If never, yet that Time himself doth say

He wishes earnestly you never may. (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* 4.1.29-32)

But in complete contradiction to Shakespeare, Winterson specifically provides only the vaguest of settings at the commencement of this chapter, informing her reader four times at varying intervals that it is "Saturday morning. Spring day" (125, 126, 129, 133). However, Winterson does not reveal just how much time has passed until we are introduced to a Perdita who is able to "[kick] Clo out of his bed early that morning and [send] him shopping" and Shep gives her "a soft, worn leather pouch," saying "I was waiting till you turned eighteen, but instead I turned seventy" (*Gap* 125, 130). And it is not until two pages later that the narrator explicitly states, "The past was a long way away. Nearly eighteen years' drive" (Winterson, *Gap* 132). Thus, it is eight pages into the chapter, and three repetitions of "Saturday morning. Spring day," before readers know that fewer than eighteen years have passed since they last saw these characters.

This is also the point at which the story moves into the literal future as a bit of addition reveals that if this part of the story is indeed sixteen to eighteen years after Leo's narrative in part 1, which was mostly set in 2013, then Winterson has now transported her reader forward into the years 2029 to 2031. Although Winterson provides very precise and realistic time markers in part 1, she does not do much in part 2 to indicate to her reader that this is a future world. In many ways, she does the exact opposite, with repeated references to a yet more distant past. First, Autolycus manipulates (or swindles) Clo into trading his brand-new Chevy truck for a 1980s DeLorean, saying, "Wouldn't [Shep] like to wind back the clock? ... That car is more than a car—it's a Time Machine. You're buying Time, and who wouldn't want the gift of time for their

seventieth birthday?" (Winterson, *Gap* 142). Also, Zel mentions that Autolycus's classic

cars have "a retro button. Pre-selected songs from any decade you wanted: 50s, 60s, 70s,

80s. Press it and what you heard from the square honeycomb grille in the dashboard was

the past" (Winterson, *Gap* 146). In addition, Perdita and the other girls, HollyPollyMolly,

who are in The Separations with her, are portrayed as singing songs from the 1960s and

1970s such as Betty Everett's "It's in His Kiss" and Bette Midler's version of Tom Waits'

"Shiver Me Timbers" (Winterson, *Gap* 143, 155). All these references constitute a more

recent, memorable past for the reader in 2015 or 2019, but it feels like it should be more

distant for this future world that is at least another decade away. The most recent past to

which Winterson ties this part of the book is a list of questions that Holly says is

intended to make people "fall in love without really trying"—a list that was published by

Arthur Aron in 1997. These questions that HollyPollyMolly start asking the group that

includes Clo, Zel, and Perdita also repeat the way in which Leo told MiMi that he loved

her in part 1, i.e., by sending a written list of questions and answers to her via Xeno

(Winterson, *Gap* 68-69). The anachronismistic and nostalgic aspects of Winterson's

future world reflects Nilges' argument: "Unable to produce our own cultural futures, we

nostalgically reanimate those of a different time and long for idealized moments when

easy futures were said to be readily available. The futures of our present are thus

temporally intriguing. They are untimely and strikingly anachronistic ... as futures that

belong to a different moment in time" (5). Although the anachronism of Winterson's

future time might make it seem as if cyclical temporality is no more successful than linear

temporality at escaping the collapse of the future into the unchangeable present, a thread

of forward-thinking undermines this nostalgia and encourages the reader to view the future with increased optimism.

While Leo and Xeno tend to be focused on the past and wishing to go back in time or reverse it, Perdita and Zel tend to look forwards to the future. Perdita does this when she is with Zel before Shep's birthday party, when "she wished that everything that had to happen had happened. That time would intervene and free them. That they could begin" (Winterson, *Gap* 148). It is also while the reader is in Perdita's perspective that the narrator breaks in and says, "Sometimes it doesn't matter that there was any time before this time. Sometimes it doesn't matter that it's night or day or now or then. Sometimes where you are is enough. It's not that time stops or that it hasn't started. This is time. You are here. This caught moment opening into a lifetime" (Winterson, *Gap* 165). Perdita, Zel, and the others who experience a more cyclical temporality are not fighting time as Leo and Xeno seem to be, rather they embrace the multiplicity of options that time presents to them.

Winterson's contrasting of cyclical and linear temporalities is not restricted to the structural differences that reflect Kristeva's theory, though. She also distinguishes between the ways in which characters who experience a more linear temporality tend to live looking backwards, obsessed with the ability (or more accurately their inability) to change the past, whereas characters who experience temporality as cyclical seem to be more forward-facing, able to see the multiplicity and possibilities of the future. In contrast, Egan's characters seem largely to be obsessed with the past and with figuring out how it is that they have found themselves in a particular future, but there is still a contrasting of linear and cyclical temporalities at play in Egan's novel as well.

While the cyclical/linear divide is not quite as obvious in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, the women in Egan's time novel are more accepting of the ravages of time than the men are: the men talk about Time being a goon that beats you up. First, Bosco brings it up with Stephanie and her brother Jules, asking them: "Time's a goon, right? Isn't that the expression?" (Egan, *Visit* 127). Jules says he's "never heard that" but he cannot disagree with Bosco's assertion (Egan, *Visit* 127). Stephanie refuses even to participate in this part of the conversation and quickly steers them away from it. Bennie reiterates Bosco's sentiments while encouraging Scotty to perform at the Footprint in the final chapter: "Time's a goon, right? You gonna let that goon push you around?" (Egan, *Visit* 332). Scotty's response is more fatalistic than the others when he says, "The goon won" (Egan, *Visit* 333). Overall, the men spend more time looking backwards and complaining about how time treats them harshly, which parallels the ways in which Leo and Xeno are obsessed with the past in *The Gap of Time*. For example, Scotty visits Bennie halfway through their lives and demands "to know what happened between A and B. ... *A* is when we were both in the band, chasing the same girl. *B* is now" (Egan, *Visit* 101). Jules and Bennie express similar attitudes at various points of the narrative; they want to know why time is beating them up, why things have turned out as they have. They want to know the point, the teleology of their temporal experience. This aligns with Kristeva's theory because she connects masculine time with "a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear, and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression and arrival—in other words, the time of history" (17). This is the form of time with which Egan's linear-thinking characters, like Winterson's, are obsessed. And, as mentioned earlier, Kristeva associates linear temporal experience with obsessive behaviors much

like the ones Egan depicts (18). In contrast to the way in which Egan narrativizes

Bennie's story achronologically, Bennie views things in strictly linear terms of "departure,

progression and arrival" (Kristeva 17). Bennie and former bandmates want to know what

chronological causality has brought them to this point of their lives. Alex, who

eventually works for Bennie, epitomizes this feeling when he "[feels] a perverse need to

go backward, to understand Lulu, to pinpoint why exactly she disconcerted him" (Egan,

Visit 318). Nilges also examines the ways in which Egan genders time in this time novel,

describing it as "sympathethic portrayals of sad men who are unable to deal with

growing up, who cannot find hope or a way forward in life" (116). This inability to move

forward in life parallels the desire to reverse time that Leo and Xeno feel in Winterson's

novel.

While I largely agree with Nilges' assessment of the men in Egan's novel and I can

see "how women are forced to serve as bearers of male nostalgic projections," I take issue

with his argument that Sasha is "a mere gateway to the past, existing in [Benny and

Alex's] minds as perpetually past, static in time" because Sasha's temporality is

ambiguously fluid rather than static, and her narrative arc participates most

emphatically in the imagining of more optimistic futures. Sasha's narrative is not a

straight-forward recital of events as many of the chapters from Benny's timeline are;

instead, Sasha is telling her story to her therapist, Coz, and as such the narration shifts in

and out of the night's events Sasha describes and her therapeutic experience. Egan also

shares Sasha's thoughts about what she wants to say to her therapist and what she

thinks he wants to hear, demonstrating her agency as a "narrator" of the story of her life.

All of this coalesces to make the reader feel unanchored in time while reading Sasha's

narrative, whereas Bennie's narrative is a conventional third-person, limited, omniscient

narrative with myriad age and time markers sprinkled throughout it as well as location markers so that the reader feels completely secure in when and where it is taking place. Egan manages to create this security even while conveying the impression that Bennie himself does not feel securely anchored in time: he keeps falling in and out of flashback moments,[45] such as when the narrator observes, "Bennie was caught in a loop from twenty years ago: lunging over the sill toward the Mother Superior like some haywire figure on a clock, again. Again. Again" (*Visit* 21). The note that the memory distracting Bennie from what his executive producer is saying to him is from twenty years ago enables the reader to remain on secure temporal ground even though Bennie's personal temporal experience is shaking and stuck in a repetitive loop. This reinforces that the forms of temporality that this novel is interested in are of the larger narrative rather than the protagonist's perspective. And, despite all of the time-markers in Bennie's timeline that seem so reliable, Egan does use Sasha to warn readers that Bennie may not be 100 percent reliable:

> "Two years ago they sounded ... different."
>
> Sasha gave [Bennie] a quizzical look. "It wasn't two years," she said. "It was five."
>
> "Why so sure?"
>
> "Because last time, I came to their house after a meeting at Windows on the World."
>
> It took Bennie a minute to comprehend this. "Oh," he finally said. "How close to—"

---

[45] These analeptic moments within some chapters are distinct from the temporal disruptions occurring at the chapter breaks because they are happening within a character's perspective and exist in relation to the current story, rather than serving to fracture the overall narrative structure.

"Four days." (*Visit* 33-34; ellipsis in source)

At the same time that Sasha corrects Bennie's internal temporality, she also provides a concrete timeline for this chapter. Windows on the World was a restaurant on the top floors of the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City, which was destroyed in the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. So, the one temporal marker that Egan definitively connects to Sasha is a traumatic date burned into the minds of an entire generation of Americans. Yet, although Egan alludes to this date, she does not state it outright. She forces her reader to do a bit of detective work. It is also at this point that Sasha angrily reminds Bennie that he has previously told her "Five years is five *hundred* years" in the music industry, further emphasizing the pessimistic perspective of time that Bennie has (Egan, *Visit* 34).

In contrast to the linear perspectives of Benny and his cohort, Sasha and her daughter Alison seem to be much more aware of having control over time and narratives. Sasha shows this in the reader's first encounter with her in her psychiatrist's office, when she observes:

> More than once, Coz had tried to connect the plumber to Sasha's father, who had disappeared when she was six. She was careful not to indulge this line of thinking. "I don't remember him," she told Coz. "I have nothing to say." She did this for Coz's protection and her own—they were writing a story of redemption, of fresh beginnings and second chances. But in that direction lay only sorrow. (Egan, *Visit* 8-9)

Whenever the reader encounters Sasha throughout the novel, she displays an awareness of the story she is telling, a sense of control over how her life and time are portrayed. For

example, she carefully chooses a "fake boyfriend" to put on a show for her stepdad, again exerting agency over her own narrative to some extent. But there is also a repetition and circularity to her narrative, especially when her first chapter ends with the words "another, then another, then one more" that ties her perspective to Kristeva's cyclical temporality (Egan, *Visit* 18). Alison's agency over her narrative is demonstrated by the telling of her story through a PowerPoint presentation that she herself has created. Although many of the slides have clear narrative paths, some of them employ "SmartArt" cycles and matrices that allow readers to choose their own path through the slide, such as "Walking to the Car," which has a circle comprised of four quadrants of text with a bubble of additional text attached to each quadrant, and "Slide Slogans from School That I Fire at Mom (just to annoy her)," which has four light text bubbles surrounding a dark text bubble with Sasha's response (Egan, *Visit* 238, 254; see Figure 7).
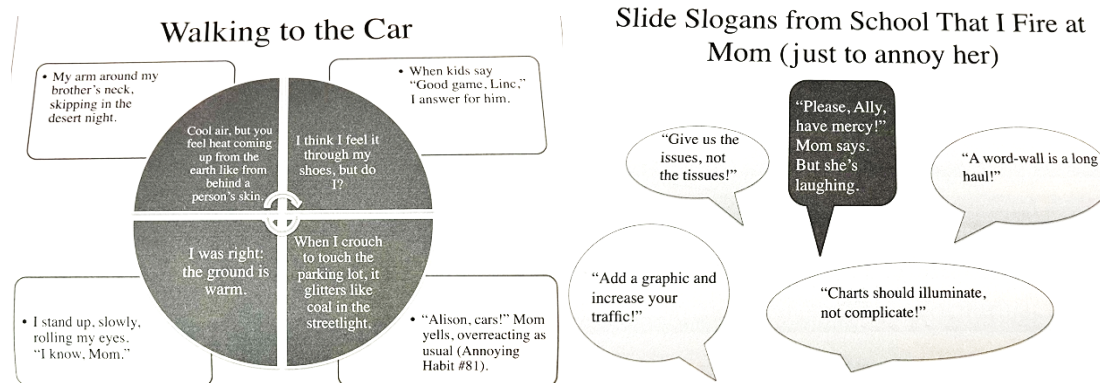
Figure 7. Pages 238 and 254 from *A Visit from the Goon Squad*
PowerPoint Slides from *A Visit from the Goon Squad* that encourage readers to choose their own reading path through the slide (Egan, *Visit* 238, 254).
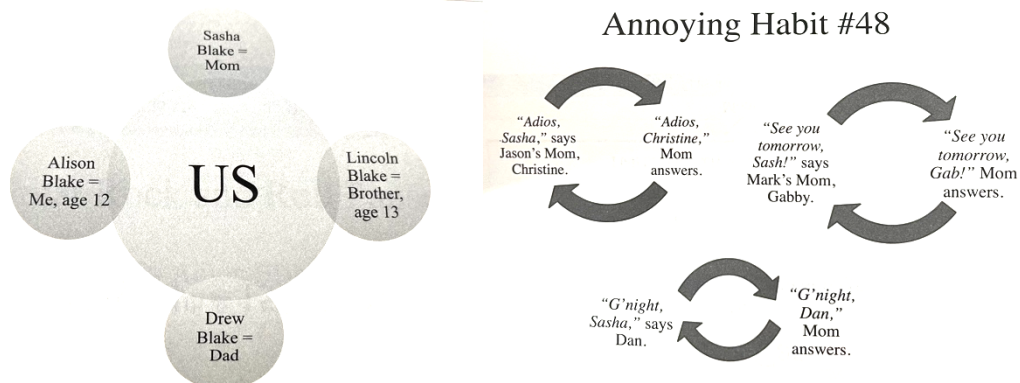
Figure 8. Pages 236 and 239 from *A Visit from the Goon Squad*
PowerPoint slides from chapter 12 that encourage circular or cyclical reading patterns within the slide (Egan, *Visit* 236, 239).

There are also slides that encourage a circular or cyclical reading pattern such as "US" and "Annoying Habit #48," both of which use circles or curved arrows, and slides that leave the path completely up to the reader as with "Mom's 'Art'," which is a collage of shapes and notes that seems intended to mimic Sasha's own art—and calls to mind the clutter of Sasha's tables piled up with "things she'd stolen" all the way back in chapter 1, which is aptly titled "Found Objects" (Egan, *Visit* 236, 239, 265, 14-15; see Figures 8 and 9). Alison also quotes Sasha as saying, "I never looked back" in reference to her life before settling down with her husband (Egan, *Visit* 255). This refusal to look back illustrates the difference in Sasha's temporal perspective from that of Bennie and his friends.
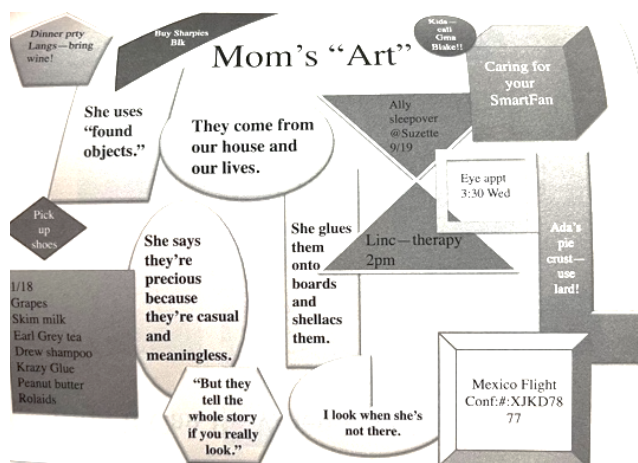
Figure 9. Page 265 from *A Visit from the Goon Squad*
Example of a collage PowerPoint slide from chapter 12 (Egan, *Visit* 265).

Nilges argues, "Like Sasha in the imagination of the men of *Goon Squad*, women in the context of the origins of futurism exist as the negative other of the futurity that is the time of men" (118). Although women may have been at a disadvantage where futurity was concerned in the past, Nilges' argument discounts the ways in which Egan's, and also Winterson's, time novel demonstrates a desire to reclaim futurity for both women and men and attempts to combat the normalization of gendered temporality. The nonlinear narrative structures of their stories also counter Nilges' assertion that "women remain trapped in time, in the timelessness of the everyday, in the perpetual present to which they remain confined not just as a result of social norms but in order to prop up the excited futurity and thus the temporalized masculinity of futurism" by modeling new forms of time that may enable women, and any others who are able to use cyclical temporality, to break down the binaries of gendered temporality and imagine futures that are hopefully less bound by the patriarchal gender roles of the past and present (118).

The Delayed Simultaneity of Dystopias, Predestination, and Surveillance

The idea that time is not easily divisible into past, present, or future plays on some of the most contested parts of temporal and phenomenological philosophy. While we like to put very decisive markers around past and future, phenomenologists have had a difficult time agreeing upon what constitutes the actual present time because it is so fleeting and ephemeral, and it is even more impossible to catch and pin down than Peter Pan's shadow. Before analyzing the connections between music and simultaneity in these novels, I want to explore the ways in which the vague and ambiguous future that Winterson presents through Perdita's narrative has a dystopic quality to it that is

comparable to the final chapters of Egan's novel, one of which is ambiguously set some time in the 2020s and the other of which is set circa 2021 or 2022. The dystopic quality of these futures emphasizes two ideas that are related to the paradox of delayed simultaneity: first, surveillance or being constantly watched or on display and, second, the predestination or loss of free will created by the nonlinear narrative structure.

Upon first glance, the dystopic, nostalgic aspects of the futures depicted in Winterson's and Egan's novels seem complicit in the collapse of future into past described by Nilges. However, while the linear temporalities that Winterson and Egan depict promote and support the argument that we are living in a perpetual present, the cyclical temporalities model a different kind of temporality, a temporality that is more future-focused and emphasizes possibility and a positive approach to the future that defies the declaration that the future has ended. Even though Winterson does not explicitly depict the future for her reader, she does hint at it being at least vaguely dystopic. For example, Shep thinks to himself:

> [T]hese last ten years he had lost faith in his faith. The world was getting darker, not brighter. The poor were poorer, the rich were richer. People were killing each other in the name of God. What kind of a God wanted his followers to act like they were gun-slung avatars jihading it through "World of Warcraft"?
> If this was the end of time then fire it right back into eternity and get it over with.
> (Winterson, *Gap* 144)

Perdita's final thoughts, which conclude the novel, also hint at a bleak future because "the world is low on goodness these days so our lives may come to nothing," and she poses a rhetorical existentialist question to readers: "We will have dreams but will they come true?" (Winterson, *Gap* 272). These observations and comments create a dystopic

feeling and a sense that all is not right in this future world, despite MiMi's return and Perdita's reunion with her biological family. Winterson purposefully undercuts the happiness of Shakespeare's climax by hinting at larger social problems in her future world.

At the end of the novel, in a metafictional moment, Winterson tells her reader, "*The Winter's Tale* is a play where the past depends on the future just as much as the future depends on the past" (*Gap* 269). She also writes, "It's a play about forgiveness and a world of possible futures—and how forgiveness and the future are tied together in both directions. Time is reversible" (Winterson, *Gap* 268). The declaration that time is reversible seems to indicate that time is linear, however, this linearity is countered by Winterson's assertions that "a world of possible futures" exist. Moreover, Winterson's nonlinear narrative structure belies the reversibility of time by predestining the consequences of Leo's jealous outrage and lending itself to a reading of the story as inevitable. Winterson's epigraph at the beginning of the novel also suggests such an interpretation of the story as she has quotes from Robert Lowell's poem, "For Sheridan," which begins with the lines: "We only live between / before we are and what we were" (Lowell, lines 1-2). However, the lines that Winterson has chosen to include are from the end of that poem and they call into question whether she wants to suggest that free will can rewrite Fate's *Book of Ages*[46]:

> Past fifty, we learn with surprise and a sense
>
> of suicidal absolution

---

[46] From Chiang's "Story of Your Life," this is the book that contains all the events of the past, present, and future simultaneously.

> that what we intended and failed
>
> could never have happened—
>
> and must be done better. (Lowell, lines 17-21, qtd. in Winterson, *Gap* iii)

And yet if what failed could never have happened, then does that mean that, as with Ted Chiang's *Book of Ages*, past, present and future are all equally fixed and immutable so that what works out, that which has been done best, is what happened and what does not work out "could never have happened"? Thus, Leo must send baby Perdita with Tony to New Bohemia because when we reach that part of the story, we already know that she has been/will be found and raised by Shep and Clo, and as Pauline points out at the end of the novel, "what kind of childhood would it have been" for Perdita to have grown up with Leo and MiMi fighting, grieving, and getting divorced? If Shep and Clo had returned Perdita as a baby rather than raising her as their own, then Perdita would have had to deal with:

> The divorce, the horror of everything that happened afterwards. Milo. And Leo would have had Perdita half the time, MiMi the other half, and all the misery of loss and mistake and the two of them not able to speak to each other. ... I don't know that MiMi could have been a mother to her. MiMi had a terrible breakdown. It wasn't only Perdita—it was Milo too. (Winterson, *Gap* 257)

Or does the quote suggest that Winterson wants to argue for a free will that allows us to rewrite and correct the past from the future? Growing up in the loving home of Shep and Clo might be preferable to what Perdita would have experienced if they had returned her, but what if Leo had never gotten jealous in the first place and Perdita could have grown up with Leo and MiMi raising her together and alongside her older brother, Milo? This seems to be a possible scenario if we consider Lowell's quote and Winterson's talk

of time's reversibility and of forgiveness in the final chapter. However, none of the characters ever suggest that Leo might have been able to act differently under the circumstances in 2013 and, as previously mentioned, the narrative's structure also implies that this is impossible by beginning with Perdita getting lost and found. Moreover, although Winterson never states outright that MiMi is dead and foreshadows her "resurrection" from the very beginning of Leo's narrative, she does not present any chance for Milo's death to be undone.[47] Leo tells his son Milo, "When the dinosaurs became extinct, ... they didn't really die, they went into hiding until they could come back as aeroplanes" (Winterson, *Gap* 25). Milo asks, "When we die, do we go into hiding until we can come back as something else?" and Leo responds, "Your mother thinks so because she is a Buddhist" (Winterson, *Gap* 25). Therefore, returning to the conundrum presented by an omniscient book of ages, if our actual futures have already been written down, as Perdita's has in "Watery Star," is there any free will? In one way, Winterson seems to be agreeing with Chiang, presenting the story as a lesson in the importance of forgiveness, which theme she interprets in her moment of metafictional literary criticism of the play during the final chapter. Leo must act as he does and MiMi must go into hiding until Pauline has made Leo realize he needs forgiveness and MiMi is ready to provide that needed forgiveness. Yet, in another way, Winterson evades this question by not showing readers the full reunion of Leo and MiMi or MiMi and Perdita. She avoids giving readers a concrete future for these characters, especially Perdita and Zel, and instead provides a vaguely sketched out future for Perdita: perhaps, she stays with Zel,

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[47] This is also true in the original play; however, in a production performed by The National Ballet of Canada in November 2015, a statue of Mamillius does come to life alongside Hermione for the final family reunion, which can be viewed as an even greater miracle of forgiveness (*The Winter's Tale: A Ballet*).

but they may or may not live happily ever after as fairy tales promise. Rather, she speculates that perhaps history will repeat itself and they will "hurt each other so much that we will deny that what happened happened" and finishes by minimizing her experience as merely an "atom and jot" in the history of the universe (Winterson, *Gap* 272). Yet, atoms are of the greatest importance despite their minute size as they comprise practically everything in the universe. Moreover, despite the ambiguous ending, Winterson has already shown readers a possible, predestined future by setting the past part of her novel in 2013 (contemporaneous with the publication year of 2015) and the future part, that feels contemporary, in a decade yet to come at the time of writing this (2022).

Although Winterson's "future" is nearly ten years further out than Egan's, it is the latter future that feels more distant in some ways. Although Egan's dystopia has a more definite year in one chapter (2022 in chapter 13), Egan also gives her reader a more subtle and ambiguous future in chapter 12. Although Egan's future time has arrived at the time of writing this (2022), like George Orwell's *1984*, that fact does not lessen the impact of her warning about the direction in which our society is heading. The prescience of some of the details Egan incorporates into this potential future actually increases the impact of her warning, even more so than Winterson's future, which is vaguer and more nostalgic than foreboding.

In chapter 13, Egan mentions fifteen years of war (presumably set off by the September 11 terrorist attacks), followed by a baby boom, and later mentions that "warming-related 'adjustments' to Earth's orbit had shortened the winter days, so that now, in January, sunset was taking place at 4:23," which is a drastic change for the

amount of time that has passed in the novel (*Visit* 322).[48] The dystopic details in Alison's chapter (chapter 12) are more subtly introduced, but still seem extreme for the brief time that has supposedly passed. Alison mentions that "when I was little, there were lawns. / Now you need a lot of credits for a lawn or else a turbine, which is expensive" (Egan, *Visit* 242). Alison also makes numerous references to "miles of solar panels" that have been set up in the desert near her family home, describing them as "a black ocean I've never seen close up" (Egan, *Visit* 251). Later in the chapter, Alison goes for a walk with her dad on "the old golf course" that she describes as having "lots of grayish swells and dips, like the moon" and "the clubhouse is still there, roped off and collapsing" (Egan, *Visit* 289). As in the final chapter, this feels like a further off future than just one or two decades, making it anachronistic and "belong[ing] to a different moment in time," but in the opposite direction from Winterson as it is more futuristic than nostalgic (Nilges 5). Egan also seems to imply that Arizona has restricted water in some way in this future, so a golf course can no longer be feasibly maintained in a desert and this resource guzzler has now become an energy maker with solar panels that "go on for miles" and "were built, years ago" (*Visit* 291). Interestingly, Alison does not seem to view these solar panels as good for her or the environment. She describes them as "evil," "like angled oily black things," and "robotic ninja warriors doing Tai Chi" and notes that their construction was originally protested even though "they're actually mending the Earth" because "Their shade made a lot of desert creatures homeless" (Egan, *Visit* 291).

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[48] Recorded sunset times for New York City in January 2021 ranged from 4:40 pm on January 1 to 5:13 pm on January 31; the only change from January 2010, when Egan's novel was published, is that the sun set at 4:39 pm on January 1, 2010 (NOAA).

Another way in which Egan creates a mood of dystopia that feels remarkably prescient is the insidious nature of social media in her future world. Alex makes a point of noting that "since the Bloggescandals, the term [parrot] had become an obscenity" and that "'Who's paying you?' was a retort that might follow any bout of enthusiasm" in online posts (Egan, *Visit* 315). Egan is writing in 2010, but this feels like the Russian and conservative social media disinformation and manipulation that affected the 2016 and 2020 U.S. Presidential Elections, the 2016 U.K. Brexit vote, the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022), and other political events in countries around the world. And even though Alex says that nobody trusts what anyone else says online anymore, the fact that he does not even have to suggest attending Scotty Hausmann's concert to his wife because she has already heard about it "from, like, eight different people" combined with the "throng of people that overwhelmed the sidewalk and filled the streets" on the way to the concert shows that social media in Egan's future world is still able to influence people despite the knowledge held by those self-same people that people are willing to be "bought" as Alex sees it (*Visit* 329, 330, 315). The question Egan seems to pose with this last chapter is does this kind of social media influence and marketing campaigning take away our free will? Everybody who is walking towards Scotty's concert keeps repeating the same information, until it comes to seem like the propaganda of the brainwashed masses: "He's supposed to be really good live" (Egan, *Visit* 329). So, is it possible to have free will in a society inundated with influencers, fake news, and fake social media accounts? Or do we willingly suspend our free will when we scroll through our Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok newsfeeds? To explore such willing suspensions further and how they intersect with simultaneity in fiction, I need to take a brief detour to the genres of fantasy and science fiction.

Narrative Simultaneity and A Willing Suspension of Free Will

In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, J.K. Rowling introduces her readers to the wizarding world's version of time travel: the time turner. This device allows its wearer to go back and relive a certain period of time. The time turner that Hermione receives so that she can attend multiple classes at the same time only allows her to travel back a few hours at a time, but Rowling suggests that there may be other time turners that can go further back. The number one rule of using a time turner is that "*You must not be seen*" (Rowling 288). Hermione tells Harry that this is because "loads of [wizards] ended up killing their past or future selves by mistake" thinking they'd gone mad when they "meddled with time" and saw themselves (Rowling 292). However, what this rule actually accomplishes is two-fold: first, it tells the reader that wizards cannot travel back to erase past events completely (i.e., like rewinding a video tape and recording over a previous recording); and second, it limits the possible futures rather than expanding them (Ceraldi). What neither Rowling nor Hermione address is the issue of free will that arises out of the way this type of time travel operates: when Harry and Hermione travel back a few hours, they do not actually change any of the events that had happened previously (Rowling 288). The future is settled, already determined, because the past plays out exactly as it did the first time, it is just that we cannot understand it all the first time around (Ceraldi). This predetermination is emphasized when Harry says, "We were walking down to Hagrid's three hours ago ..." and Hermione responds with, "This *is* three hours ago, and we *are* walking down to Hagrid's[.] ... We just heard ourselves leaving ..." (Rowling 290; first and third ellipses in source). What changes is that the reader is now "in" on the backstage machinations that previously had been unexplained.

For example, on the first pass through this series of events, the reader does not know who cast the protective spell[49] that scared off the dementors[50] as they were about to suck the souls out of Harry and his godfather. At the time, Harry believed that somehow his dead father had cast it to save him. However, the second pass through these events reveals that Harry was actually the one to cast this spell and that his past self had simply registered his future self as his father because he had not been aware of time travel at the time in question. But the key point is this: the Patronus spell is cast in both series of events. Therefore, there was never a series of events in which Harry and Hermione were not present twice (Ceraldi). What this scenario presents is a situation of simultaneity that Rowling has chosen to retell in a chronological, linear fashion. However, the actions taken by the future Hermione and the future Harry are happening at the exact same moment that their past selves were first living through the events. This simultaneity of past and future actions is similar to the way in which Louise in "The Story of Your Life" experiences her life differently after she learns the Heptopod language. The events of her life do not change, but the way (or order) in which she experiences them does. When she learns that her daughter will die in the future, she still chooses (or has to choose) to conceive and give birth to her. In a similar way, Winterson and Egan both create simultaneous situations in which the past, present, and future are all happening at the same time in their novels, though unlike Rowling they implement a nonlinear narrative structure in their narrativization of stories that emphasizes the predestination of the future by relaying events achronologically.

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[49] The spell created a corporeal Patronus in the form of a stag.

[50] These are guards from the wizard prison, Azkaban.

In *The Gap of Time*, Perdita is found by Shep at the same time that Leo is raging at

MiMi for committing supposed adultery at the same time that MiMi is giving birth at

the same time that Perdita is reunited with her biological family. All of these characters

are able to make a choice in the moment, but once it is made, they are stuck with that

choice. It cannot change because its consequences are already playing out. This is a kind

of predestined free will that Winterson hints at with references to time being circular

throughout her novel. For example, early in the novel Xeno attempts to explain his video

game idea[51] to Leo, saying, "I'll make time circular—like the Mayan calendar; each level of

the game will be a time frame—specific but porous, so you may be observed from another

level—and you may be aware of another level. It may be that you can operate

simultaneously on different levels—I don't know yet" (Winterson, *Gap* 65). Here,

Winterson connects temporality with the idea of the Panopticon, which though it

originated in the 1700s with Jeremy Bentham was applied to broader societal surveillance

by postmodernist Michel Foucault in 1975. Foucault's Panopticon connects the question

of how we experience time in our daily lives with the idea that authorities may be

watching for misbehavior at any time and that individuals internalize such expectations

of authorized surveillance to censor themselves. Social media complicates the idea of the

Panopticon, however, because it enables all of us to become both watchers and watched,

but the amount of curation and control that individuals exert over what appears on their

social media is not always apparent and transparent. This idea of operating

simultaneously on different levels also feels like an apt description of the nonlinear

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[51] The video game that Xeno is designing, also named *The Gap of Time*, personifies time in addition to making it cyclical. Xeno says, "At Level 4, Time becomes a player. Time can stand still, move faster, slow down. But you are playing against Time too" (Winterson, *Gap* 46).

narrative structure of Egan's novel. The characters in her novel seem to be operating in multiple spaces at the same time and, as such, the threads that connect them to one other overlap and create a scenario where one seemingly minor detail can ripple through myriad lives.

As with Winterson's moments of disrupted temporality, Egan's chronologically shuffled narrative structure gives her reader the sense that her characters are also operating with this kind of predestined free will. The narrator makes her reader consciously aware of it when observing in the final chapter, "Alex felt what was happening around him as if it had already happened and he were looking back" (Egan, *Visit* 336). Another example is that by the time readers learn about Sasha running off to Naples and her uncle trying to bring her back home, they have already read two other chapters in which Sasha is back home. This is the equivalent of Rowling having related the events from the perspective of future Harry and Hermione before those from their past selves. Likewise, the reader knows beforehand that Stephanie and Bennie are going to end up divorced and that her brother Jules is going to attack actress Kitty Jackson during an interview. Even minor characters are granted a predestined foreshadowing, such as one of the Samburu warriors on Lou's safari trip, who "[t]hirty-five years from now, in 2008 ... will be caught in the tribal violence between the Kikuyu and the Luo and will die in a fire. He'll have had four wives and sixty-three grandchildren by then, one of whom, a boy named Joe, ... will go to college at Columbia and study engineering, ... marry an American named Lulu and remain in New York ..." (Egan, *Visit* 61-62). Although the reader does not know it at this point, the "American named Lulu" will appear in two chapters in part B of the novel. These future asides are told through moments of prolepsis in the story and are distinct from the moments of temporal disruption and montaging.

The narrator gives a similar flash-forward for Mindy at the end of the chapter, fast-forwarding to show her reader that despite protestations to the contrary throughout the chapter, Mindy does become Lou's third wife, give birth to two of his daughters, and not return to graduate school to finish her PhD until she is forty-five (Egan, *Visit* 82). Notably, Egan's narrator informs her reader that Mindy remembers the events from this chapter "as the last happy moment of her life when she still had a choice, when she was free and unencumbered" (*Visit* 81-82). However, if we read the story as simultaneous, which Egan definitely encourages with her overall nonlinear narrative structure and moments of prolepsis in this chapter, then Mindy made all these choices (of her own free will) at the same time. Ergo, it happens just as Chiang's *Book of Ages* foretells, creating dramatic irony as the readers of the book have knowledge of the characters' lives of which the characters themselves are unaware. Another way to interpret these moments of predestination versus free will is with the theory of fixed points in time upon which *Doctor Who* operates. Most events in time are fluid and can experience slight shifts, bending without breaking, but certain important or essential events are fixed points in time and cannot be changed. This is like the way in which Harry and Hermione influence events with their time turner trip. They do not go back and attempt to stop the villain, Peter Pettigrew, from escaping, rather they focus on two smaller, but perhaps more important acts, saving the lives of Harry's godfather and a condemned hippogriff. Assessing Winterson's and Egan's novels with this approach, Winterson's choice to begin her novel with Shep finding Perdita emphasizes the moment in which Perdita is both lost and found and establishes it as a fixed point in time. This must always happen, or the events of the time novel will not take place. What MiMi does with herself during

the intervening years, while she is either hiding or "dead," does not affect the other events of the narrative and so Winterson leaves those out. Perdita's and Leo's narratives are the ones that affect the plot, so they are the ones that are told. In the case of Egan's novel, there is a multiplicity of fixed points in time anchoring the events of the narrative as a whole, though the biggest event seems to be the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and how they changed the people and the skyline of New York City.

The nonlinearity of these narrative structures may imply that Winterson and Egan are removing all suspense from their novels. However, this is where the theories of Ken Ireland and Judith Roof become relevant: both argue that disrupting causality in a story encourages readers to focus on the "how and why" of the story and forces them to piece the plot together themselves (Ireland 36, Roof 17). Neither Winterson nor Egan bother to build suspense in their novels because the stories they are telling have been told before. Winterson subtitles her novel "*The Winter's Tale* Retold," and Egan seems to acknowledge that it is not the plots of her chapters that make them interesting to the reader but rather the ties that bind the myriad stories together. The novel is like Sasha's tables full of stolen objects, "the pens, binoculars, the keys, the child's scarf … . It looked like the work of a miniaturist beaver: a heap of objects that was illegible yet clearly not random. … It contained years of her life compressed" (Egan, *Visit* 14-15). Thus, what catches the readers' interest in these novels is not a suspenseful plot that leaves them wondering what happens next, but rather manipulations and subversions of archetypes and familiar tropes through the authors' strategic deployment of a causality that is associative rather than chronological. Causality is revealed in how things intersect with one other through being "collected," or montaged together rather than presented in a chronological fashion.

Therefore, although the limitations of the printed word as a medium make it pretty much impossible to write a novel in which events can be experienced simultaneously, the nonlinear narrative structures of Winterson's and Egan's novels can be read as attempts to play with and question what role simultaneity plays in our lives. Egan acknowledges the linearity of the novel as a medium in an interview with Charlie Reilly, saying:

> There is always a tension that a writer grapples with: you are trying to make a number of things seem to happen at once, but you can only proceed word by word. With writing it's such an essential problem, and I think it's one reason people are drawn to other artistic forms: they feel more liberated from the limitations of chronology. ("Interview" 454)

Egan's words seem fatalistic, but this interview actually precedes the publication of *A Visit from the Goon Squad*; at one point during the interview, Egan references what seems to be this book as one of the books that she is currently working on, so it makes sense that such a frustration might be foremost in her mind at the time.

The Simultaneity of Surveillance

Another element of dystopic fiction that Winterson and Egan incorporate into their novels is surveillance, though they use it differently. Winterson incorporates surveillance as a performance of simultaneous temporality: Leo is watching and interpreting the video feed from MiMi's bedroom at the same time that MiMi, Xeno, and Pauline are in her bedroom. There is no audio for the video, which makes Leo so angry that he "[throws] his Himalayan white cushion at the screen" (Winterson, *Gap* 54). Winterson's narrator gives her reader two perspectives in this chapter: Leo's biased,

jealous perspective and interpretation of the surveillance and a contrasting, unbiased

narration that seems to be portraying the actuality of the surveilled events. Unlike

surveillance in dystopias such as George Orwell's *1984*, MiMi and her friends do not

know that Leo is watching them, so the surveillance is not controlling their behavior as it

would in Foucault's panopticon. However, Leo does intend to use the surveillance

against MiMi, to hold her accountable for her supposed transgressions, which is what

the Big Brother government in *1984* does with their surveillance of Winston and Julia's

affair (which comes from a telescreen that has been covered up so that they think they

are in a safe, surveillance-free space at the time). Leo expresses his desire to use the

surveillance to control MiMi and her sexuality when he proposes "to webcam her cunt.

Then he'd sit inside her and see it coming" (Winterson, *Gap* 55). This not only shows

how Leo wishes to control MiMi and her sexuality; it demonstrates how he is jealous not

only of Xeno (for supposedly having sex with MiMi) but also of MiMi (for getting to

have sex with Xeno).[52] In contrast, Egan's references to surveillance operate in a more

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[52] Winterson takes Shakespeare's reference to Polixenes and Leontes' childhood relationship ("We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i'th' sun, / And bleat the one at th' other; what we changed / Was innocence for innocence ..." [Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* 1.2.66-68]) and turns it into a full relationship, which has some of the gender fluidity and homosocial aspects of Shakespeare's time in it. However, she also pushes it further into a more 21st-century understanding of sexuality as a spectrum. She describes Leo and Xeno's relationship at boarding school, writing, "They didn't want to be like the other boys and that was just as well because they weren't like the other boys" (Winterson, *Gap* 33). The narrator then tells the reader that "One night ... they had sex. It was a cliché. Shower. Hard-on. Three-minute handjob. No kissing" (Winterson, *Gap* 33). Leo is the initiator for many of the subsequent encounters between the two boys, but he maintains that *he* is not gay, bisexual, or queer, though he also says that "Leo wanted Xeno to give him away—to be the one handing him over to MiMi. Instead he gave Xeno the ring—because that is what the best man carries for the bridegroom" (Winterson, *Gap* 53). In this way, Winterson portrays Leo as wanting to take part in traditions that are typically seen as belonging to a feminine gender role and the choice of the less commonly used "bridegroom" over "groom" emphasizes this as Leo wants to be both bride and groom at his wedding. In addition, Leo often makes seemingly homophobic comments about Xeno, saying things such as "Xeno was a bit of a girl anyway" and referring to him as a "FUCKING FAGGOT" while he's watching the surveillance tapes (Winterson, *Gap* 34, 55). At the same time that Leo is convinced that Xeno must be gay, he is equally convinced that Xeno is having sex with his wife MiMi (Winterson, *Gap* 32). Although, overall, Egan's novel presents a more heteronormative sexuality, the chapter that focuses on the

Foucauldian way because the surveillance attempts to control the characters' behavior. However, once again, the surveillance in the novel does not fully fit the Orwellian model because, for Egan, the surveillance is being performed by capitalist, corporate entities rather than a government one. Egan imagines an expansion of social media that has insidiously invaded our lives and is being manipulated by corporations to the point that there is widespread "suspicion that people's opinions weren't really their own" (*Visit* 315). Many of Egan's characters comment on the fact that they feel like they're being watched but Egan does not always provide concrete evidence of the watching. For example, Sasha's explanation of why she wants Rob to be her "fake boyfriend" is to fool her stepdad who "told her he was hiring a detective to make sure she 'toed the line' on her own in New York" (Egan, *Visit* 192-193). She tells Rob, "Someone could be watching me right now[.] ... I feel like someone is" (Egan, *Visit* 193). She chooses Rob because he looks like a clean-cut guy, not "druggy," and she alludes to past events that the reader will learn about in the next chapter when her uncle follows her to Naples (Egan, *Visit* 193). In addition to characters who feel as if they're being watched, Egan also presents characters who watch others. In "Safari," Egan describes Lou watching his daughter Charlie dance by the fire, alone at first and then with the African warriors who are

drowning of Sasha's "fake" boyfriend, Robert Freeman, Jr., does develop parallels to the Leo–MiMi–Xeno love triangle. Rob, like Leo and Xeno, has had sexual encounters with both sexes. However, there is a different quality to Rob's denial of his homosexuality. Leo's denial of homosexuality is more of an argument for pansexuality—he loves Xeno because he is attracted to Xeno's personality, in spite of, or at least not because of, him being a particular gender (Winterson, *Gap* 34). Rob's assertion to Sasha that "I'm not a fag" after relating a story about a high school sexual encounter with a fellow teammate from his football team and his attempt at self-consoling thoughts that "It wasn't you in the car with James. You were somewhere else, looking down, thinking. That fag is fooling around with another guy. How can he do that? How can he want it? How can he live with himself" reveal an underlying self-loathing that Leo does not seem to experience, although he repeatedly makes a distinction between himself having feelings for Xeno and Xeno having multiple homosexual relationships, which according to Leo makes Xeno—but not Leo himself—gay (Winterson, *Gap* 146).

leading the tour. Charlie is aware of Lou's eyes on her as she experiences "a charge for her in simply commanding the fickle beam of her father's attention, feeling his disquiet as she dances, alone, by the fire"; meanwhile, Lou "lets go of Mindy's hand and sits up straight. He wants to grab his daughter's skinny arm and yank her away from these black men, but does no such thing, of course. That would be letting her win" (Egan, *Visit* 61). There is power in both the watching and in knowing one is being watched; Charlie and her father engage in a non-verbal power struggle as Charlie asserts her entry into the realm of womanhood while Lou wants to pull her back into childhood. As with Leo's watching of MiMi, Lou's watching of Charlie is an attempt to control female sexuality that is perceived—by these two men—as dangerous.

The power struggle between watcher and watched is also very relevant in considering the simultaneous surveilling power of social media because it has also been wielded as a weapon against women as well as queer and trans individuals whose sexuality threatens the patriarchal cultural authority. These individuals have to deal with the double-edged sword of social media which simultaneously allows them to exert control over how they share their sexuality with the world and allows others to rip that control away. There are wide-ranging examples of how patriarchal, misogynistic control of female, queer, and trans sexuality has been asserted through social media, from harassment campaigns like #GamerGate and online promotion of violence against women to non-consensual sharing and posting of intimate images (Buni and Chemaly), from social media companies' sexist and racist censorship of content that they deem sexual or "inappropriate" to the co-opting of body-positive trends like #silhouettechallenge by people who remove filters and other effects from posted videos (Hallqvist, Zhang). Roxane Gay says of this social media problem:

Privacy is a privilege. It is rarely enjoyed by women or transgender men or women, queer people or people of color. When you are an Other, you are always in danger of having your body or some other intimate part of yourself exposed in one way or another. ... What these people are doing is reminding women that, no matter who they are, they are still women. They are forever vulnerable. ("Nude Photos Leak")

In contrast to Winterson's portrayals of watchers as holding more power, Egan's portrayals tend to emphasize the power held by the watched. For example, Mindy also encounters the power of watching or being watched when she realizes "vaguely" that her flirty conversation with their guide in the jeep while the others were distracted by the pride of lions might have been overheard by Mildred even though Mindy felt that they were "effectively alone inside the jeep" when the others "all climb on top of their seats and jam their upper halves through the open roof" of the jeep (Egan, *Visit* 70, 67). However, Egan repeatedly mentions the fact that "being old and female" Mildred and her companion Fiona are "easily missed" and overlooked or ignored by the others on the safari (which reflects social media's preference for allowing provocative images of thin, young, white women more often than those of women of color and plus-sized women). The narrator observes when the story of the lion encounter is being retold that "It doesn't occur to the children to ask Mildred, who was also in the jeep, what she saw" (Egan, *Visit* 72). Mildred could have power from seeing things when others forget she is there, but she does not seem to realize or exercise her power. Egan connects all of these moments of watching to surveillance with her flashforward mention of Lulu's husband, Joe, who is the grandchild of one of the warriors dancing with Charlie. Joe becomes "an expert in visual robotic technology that detects the slightest hint of irregular movement"

and creates "a scanning device that becomes standard issue for crowd security" (Egan, *Visit* 62). This ties into the final chapter of the book, which takes place in a dystopic future time, circa 2021, that is after the wars begun in the 2000s have ended, in the midst of a second "baby boom" (Egan, *Visit* 313). In Egan's vision of the future, social media has become ubiquitous and insidious. Even though Alex is disdainful of such influence, he is still involved in it because he lets Bennie persuade him to lead a "blind team" of "parrots" who promote Bennie's new musician, his old high school friend, Scotty Hausmann. As captain of the "blind team," Alex mentions that he "monitors his blind parrots: checking their pages and streams for raving endorsement of Scotty Hausmann, adding truants to a 'violators' list" (Egan, *Visit* 327). Alex uses the social media network to spy on his "friends" and to control both their behavior (paying them through Bennie to promote Scotty) and society's behavior (making them think that Scotty's music is worth listening to). Alex notes that he does not even have to suggest that he and his wife and daughter go to the concert because she comes to the idea on her own after hearing about it through her friends on social media (Egan, *Visit* 328). On their way to the concert, Rebecca says she heard "from, like, eight different people" that Scotty's "supposed to be really good live" (Egan, *Visit* 329). She thinks, "It's almost strange" but the friend she is talking with denies this, asserting that "People are getting paid"; however, Rebecca counters this with "[b]ut these are people I know," which reveals the insidious nature of social media influence because it feels less like advertising or marketing when you think it is just the opinion of a friend (Egan, *Visit* 329). As Alex and Rebecca approach the concert, there is mention of more dystopic, governmental influences in this society: "choppers were converging overhead, flogging the air with a sound Alex hadn't been able

to bear in the early years—too loud, too loud—but over time he'd gotten used to it: the price of safety. Today their military cackle felt weirdly appropriate" (Egan, *Visit* 330). Alex also mentions "visual scanning devices affixed to cornices, lampposts, and trees" that sound like the device invented by Lulu's husband, Joe, though when Egan introduces him at the end of the chapter he is still working on his Ph.D. in robotics at Columbia University (Egan, *Visit* 331). All of this comes together to create a future that feels simultaneously real and not real. It is a believable extension of what is happening in our society both in 2022 as I write this and in 2010 when Egan's novel was published. This is a future in which people have given up some expectations of privacy, of not being watched, to ensure a safer society, but it is also a future in which the openness of social media sharing has been monetized and corrupted. However, Lulu would probably say that labeling it corrupt is a "disingenuous metaphor" or "calcified morality" that is part of the system of "atavistic purism" (Egan, *Visit* 319, 320, 319). Although the final chapter is from Alex's point of view and Alex is a millennial (having come of age in the late 1990s), Lulu's character gives us an opposing perspective, even perhaps a more optimistic one, of this dystopic future. Thus, Egan leaves her reader questioning whether this dystopic future is actually as bleak as Alex perceives it to be or if it is simply the case of members of the previous generation complaining about the one that follows after them (*Visit* 319-320).

Having explored how the dystopic aspects of these novels affect the model of delayed simultaneity in fiction and call into question the ability of characters in a nonlinear narrative to have free will, I want to examine the gaps and pauses that Winterson and Egan create and question and to explore how music and temporality

work together to create a challenging temporal experience for Winterson's and Egan's readers that evokes simultaneity.

Simultaneity of Musical Pauses and Temporal Gaps

Music and temporality might initially seem to be two distinct and separate themes in Winterson's and Egan's time novels. However, David Couzens Hoy observes that "Husserl's favorite example of a temporal object is a melody" because it "requires a stretch of connected time" (50, 54). Husserl theorizes that the present comprises memories of the immediate past and immediate future, retention and protention, in addition to our experience of the now, so that we can experience a series of notes simultaneously as a unit, an "all-at-once," rather than as individual notes in separate moments of time (Couzens Hoy 54). Our ability to enjoy music, to hear a melody rather than individual notes, proves the simultaneity of our temporal experience. Lampert also uses Husserl's theory to argue that our experience of our world as simultaneous always requires construction, whether it is a recognition that all sides of an object exist simultaneously despite our inability to view them all at once or a coordination of disparate events that "are happening at once" but "take place on different time scales," such as someone walking down a busy street with all its overlapping activities and sounds (18-19). Lampert proposes: "Simultaneity is constituted by the crossover of differential time flows, each with its own anticipation and retention patterns, some densely packed with short sub-events, some drawn out, some temporarily static" (19). If music demonstrates that listeners can piece together immediate past, present and future moments and hold them together all at once in their minds, then one of the effects of the musical themes in Winterson's and Egan's novels is to model a musical form of delayed

simultaneity as readers must retain the nonlinear "notes" of the story in their mind despite the inherent delays of the novel as a form. In addition to referencing music production, both of these novels also focus on pauses in music, intervals and other moments of silence that occur mid-song. According to Nilges, these pauses serve a literary purpose akin to the moments of black screen that Todd McGowan referenced in *Out of Time* by giving readers a chance to pause their reading and think critically about "the Now out of which new forms of thought may arise" (111). Therefore, pauses within time novels are not "a dead end for thought and temporality" but the moments of respite from reading that "make possible a reflection on time itself and thus encourage the creation of new forms of telling time" (Nilges 111).

Although *The Gap of Time* could be approached as a typical *in medias res* narrative structure, Winterson disrupts such an expectation in the way that she disorders other aspects of the narrative both with achronological flashbacks and with the two "Interval" chapters that separate parts one, two, and three from each other. As intervals, these chapters create a literal "space of time intervening between two points of time" in the larger story; however, if considered as a musical term, an interval represents "the difference of pitch between two musical sounds or notes, either successive (in melody) or simultaneous (in harmony)" ("Interval, *N.*"). Thus, a musical interval is a gap between notes, in the same way that these chapters serve as gaps between times and narratives. Interval is also commonly used by the British in lieu of intermission during a performance or production, such as a play. By inserting these two intervals where Shakespeare's play took two of the four act breaks, Winterson reminds her reader that this is a fictional construct inspired by a theatrical text. This multiplicity of meanings of "interval" is just one of many hints that Winterson incorporates musical and theatrical

apparatus into this story to serve a metafictional purpose. In calling her version of the story a "cover version" rather than an adaptation, Winterson again ties it specifically to music because "cover version" typically refers to "a recording of a song, etc., which has already been recorded by someone else" ("Cover *N. 1f.*"). The musical terms "interval" and "cover version" also identify music (and music production) as one of the main themes woven through MiMi's and Perdita's stories that connect the mother and daughter together in spite of the gaps of time and space that separate them, both literally and figuratively. Changing MiMi from the stately Queen Hermione into a popular music sensation who seems to be a blend of Edith Piaf and Madonna is another way in which Winterson brings music to the forefront in her novel. Although Winterson's introduction of MiMi through Leo's reading of her Wikipedia page appears to be a dash of realism, it is undermined by the fact that it is a fictional allusion, and the reader knows it. But MiMi being a singer allows Winterson to create a connection between mother and daughter that Leo actually enforces when he finds the song MiMi has written to her unborn baby titled "Perdita" and includes it in the briefcase with the money and jewelry that he sends away with the newborn Perdita. Shep teaches Perdita this song as a child, and she becomes a singer in her own right even though she has been separated from her mother all these years. Thus, MiMi's song is able to close the temporal gap between mother and daughter.

As noted previously, many of Egan's characters are either directly or tangentially involved in the music industry. There are numerous references to music and songs throughout the novel, but there is one chapter in particular that focuses on the temporal aspect of music. This is chapter 12, "Great Rock and Roll Pauses," which is written as a PowerPoint presentation by Sasha's daughter, Alison Blake, who refers to it as her "slide

journal" (Egan, *Visit* 253). This chapter has received considerable attention from reviewers and critics for its unique construction, but what I find interesting is its content. Alison uses her presentation to capture the dysfunctional dynamics of her family, which largely arise out of her autistic brother Lincoln's obsession with pauses— "a 'full rest' is four beats long, a 'half rest' is two beats"—in rock songs (Egan, *Visit* 243). Lincoln's comments indicate that he is intrigued by the subversion of expectations that the pauses create: "You think, Hey, the song didn't end after all—but then, 26.5 seconds later, it does end" (Egan, *Visit* 244). According to Lincoln, gaps in the music should signal the end of a song, but he notes that this is not always the case, so it upsets the listeners' expectations in a similar way to how Egan's gaps in time between her chapters disrupt the readers' expectations so that they do not know where the story will go next. Alison quotes Sasha explaining this to her husband: "The pause makes you think the song will end. And then the song isn't really over, so you're relieved. But then the song *does* actually end, because every song ends, obviously, and THAT. TIME. THE. END. IS. FOR. REAL." (Egan, *Visit* 281). Alison also demonstrates how her brother's associative thinking leads him from the desire to say, "I love you, Dad" through the connections that his dad is from Wisconsin, Lincoln loves music, his dad loves him, Steve Miller is from Wisconsin and had a popular band "fifty-something years ago" and "Fly Like an Eagle" was one of their well-known songs to Lincoln telling his dad about a pause in that song instead of actually saying "I love you" (Egan, *Visit* 249). However, Lincoln's pauses are not all silent ones. In this instance, he notes that "there's a partial silence ... with a sort of rushing sound in the background that I think is supposed to be the wind, or maybe time rushing past!" (Egan, *Visit* 249). Lincoln's interpretation of the pause again ties time and music

together and emphasizes the impossibility of stopping time, which is part of what makes time a goon for Egan's characters. Alison inserts pauses into her own narrative by creating intentional blank spaces in the "SmartArt" used on some of her slides and including blank slides (Egan, *Visit* 282, 302, 304).

Figure 10. Pages 282, 302, and 304 from *A Visit from the Goon Squad*
Examples of blank PowerPoint slides from chapter 12 (Egan, *Visit* 282, 302, 304).

The PowerPoint formatting allows Alison to have a kind of control over timing and temporality that a traditional, text-based narrative would not. Not only can she insert literal pauses into her story, blank spaces that force the reader to pause in the act of reading (even if they turn these pages quickly), but she can also compress multiple events into one slide, thereby compressing time for her reader. Alison later identifies sounds that are like Lincoln's pauses when she walks in the desert with her dad and she comes to the conclusion that "[t]he whole desert is a pause" but also declares that they "[w]alk for Several Years" (Egan, *Visit* 287, 297). Nilges argues, "The pauses in Egan's novel, especially in the PowerPoint chapter, transform the present stillness of our time into an opportunity to read time itself" (113). The PowerPoint presentation also allows for Egan to present a more simultaneous story, even with these built-in delays. Alison slows down and speeds up time based on how much information she includes in each slide. Egan presents ideas in a way that allows the reader to decide in which order to read Alison's notes or bullet points. On Alison's return from her walk with her father, she

compresses past, present, and future all into one slide in text boxes recessed within one another becoming progressively smaller in which she notes the following fears:

That the solar panels were a time machine.

That I'm a grown-up woman coming back to this place after many years.

That my parents are gone, and our house isn't ours anymore.

It's a broken-down ruin with no one in it.

Living here all together was so sweet.

Even when we fought.

It felt like it would never end.

I'll always miss it. (Egan, *Visit* 299)

Alison also resorts to graphs to help Lincoln analyze the pauses for length versus haunting power, the necessity of pauses, the amount of song remaining after the pause ends, and "the persistence of pauses over time" (Egan, *Visit* 305-308). In this way, Egan uses this chapter to emphasize two themes of her novel: the simultaneity of temporality, which is proven by music, but also the importance of pauses or disruptions in that temporality, which subvert the expectations of readers or listeners, provide literal space and time for readers to critique forms of time, and create the delay upon which simultaneity depends. As with songs, which Sasha observes must always have an end, novels must also end. But there is some relief to be felt by the fact that when readers leave Sasha and Bennie at the end of their respective chapters it is not actually the end of their respective stories. The pauses between chapters are a momentary delay in the reading experience (a temporal disruption), but readers can breathe sighs of relief when Sasha or Bennie reappears in a subsequent chapter, except for the final chapter, when the novel must actually end.

Although Winterson's and Egan's narratives are the most chronologically ordered that I examine in this study, both authors make their reader consciously aware of time throughout the novels, and gaps in time and temporal disruptions are woven throughout the content of these narratives in addition to their structures. Their temporal references thus function in a way that is similar to how Winterson referenced history in her earlier novels. Those earlier novels are classified as definitively postmodern. Thus, Winterson, and Egan as well, serve as an example of how contemporary authors have not turned their backs on postmodern ideas and concepts but rather are adapting them in ways that allow them to continue the questioning of how we narrativize our lives, historically and temporally. Winterson's first reference to temporality emphasizes how difficult it is to separate history from time. She asks her reader to consider, "Isn't there always a history to the story? You think you're living in the present but the past is right behind you like a shadow" (Winterson, *Gap* 12). Egan also references history and time when Bennie says to Alex, "[W]e have some history together that hasn't happened yet" (*Visit* 311). As for references to temporal gaps and disruptions, Shep defines them as "where one time and another become the same time" (Winterson, *Gap* 19). This same time is one that encourages readers to pause and think about time both in these novels and in their lives.

Conclusion

At first glance, it might appear that Winterson's and Egan's novels are simply postmodern novels written after postmodernism, utilizing postmodern techniques and participating in the centralization or normalization of postmodernism. Yet, this does not account for the ways in which these authors do not merely reproduce postmodernism, they expand upon it and build it into something new and original: contemporary time

novels that demonstrate how linear temporality can become past-obsessed whereas cyclical temporality remains open to a multiplicity of possibilities in the present and the future. These two novels show that even a limited number of temporal disruptions can undermine the realism of the overall reading experience. Some readers like the detective role that this structure forces them into, while others go to great lengths to reorder the texts, even suggesting that the author should re-issue the book in a chronological edition (Brown). In a review of *A Visit from the Goon Squad* for the *National Post* in 2012, Robert Fulford notes that Egan has admitted to being inspired by both Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* and HBO's *The Sopranos* for the structure of her novel: she wanted to create "the sense of movement in all directions, but not necessarily forward" (qtd. in Fulford). In an interview with Karen Ohlson, Egan explains how she began by trying to structure the novel in a reverse chronological order but

> [u]ltimately, I think, I was letting time dictate my structure too much. I needed to let go of chronology, period, and to not let time determine the order of the chapters so much as curiosity and payoff: What are the best surprises I can give to the reader? Oddly—sort of ironically—the time payoff was bigger when I let go of chronology altogether. ("Interview")

As Egan notes, the ability of such a predestined, rather than suspenseful, narrative structure to create surprises for readers is ironic. This is something that Winterson also achieves, perhaps even more ironically, since the story she is telling is more than 400 years old.

In both *The Gap of Time* and *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, the characters with linear temporal perspectives, such as Leo, Xeno, Bennie, Scotty, and Alex, are caught in a trap

of thinking of time as a journey towards a destination, from point A to point B. It's a competition, a race. And they waste time wishing they could reverse time and undo their mistakes instead of looking forward. In many ways, these characters seem to be caught in a world of binaries, an unchanging present, while the characters with cyclical temporal perspectives have been able to move beyond these constrictive binaries to a newly imagined future. These characters, which include MiMi, Perdita, Zel, Sasha, and Alison, reflect the mindset of Chiang's narrator, Louise, choosing to make the choices necessary for the future to unfold as they know it should. Perdita and Alison, especially, know the choices they must make and the consequences of those choices—good and bad—and they are prepared to make them anyway. Winterson and Egan show their reader both characters who are in control of their narratives and characters who seem to be fighting and battling theirs. The linear thinkers are stuck in repetitive loops, fighting against a teleological, linear time that they want to defeat. They force time into this shape as they try to induce it to defeat itself. In contrast, cyclical thinkers such as Perdita and Alison accept the risks they know are in their futures. Perdita's final thoughts tell readers this most particularly as she chooses to stay with Zel, accepting the risk that he could become Leo 2.0, that their love could disintegrate until "Maybe we'll hurt each other so much that we will deny that what happened happened. We'll find an alibi to prove that we were never there. Those people didn't exist" (Winterson, *Gap* 272). Still, Perdita insists that she must at least try to face this potential future, this love that is "The atom and jot of my span" (Winterson, *Gap* 273). Alison, likewise, is both annoyed and embarrassed by her mother and thinking about how she wants to be like Sasha. Alison scrutinizes her mother and documents what she refers to as annoying habits #48 and

#92[53] that seem critical of her mother and, yet, when she finds a picture of Sasha in the book Jules writes about Bosco, *Conduit: A Rock-and-Roll Suicide*, she notes that "She looks like someone I want to know, or maybe even be" (Egan, *Visit* 258). Alison also comments on her own future self in a slide titled "What I Suddenly Understand," when she says, "My job is to make people uncomfortable. + I will do it all my life. → My mother, Sasha Blake, is my first victim" (Egan, *Visit* 262). These choices are in line with Nilges' proposal that "[i]nstead of escaping the present and nostalgically longing for past futures, we must address the challenge of the Present-Indefinite by inhabiting the present actively, as risk" (108). Winterson and Egan both choose to show their reader the next generation in their stories, while suggesting that that next generation can only be if we are open to the myriad possibilities and risks of a future that is paradoxically past and not past, present and not present, future and not future simultaneously.

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[53] According to Alison, annoying habit #48 is how Sasha mimics the way others say good-bye to her and annoying habit #92 is how Sasha suggests to Alison that her journal ought to be actually written on "*paper*" rather than on PowerPoint slides (Egan, *Visit* 239, 253).

Chapter 3:

"You *wanted* to believe that I was Anastasia":

The Single-Helix Narrative Structure, Narrator Agency, and

the Detective-Reader Experience in Ariel Lawhon's *I Was*

Anastasia and Kate Morton's *The Clockmaker's Daughter*

"They say if you want to tell a story right, you gotta start at the beginning. …
But I wasn't the only dame in Gotham looking for emancipation. This is our story.
And I'm telling it, so I'll start where I fucking want."

—Harley Quinn, *Birds of Prey: The Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn*

"I'm erasing myself from the narrative.
Let future historians wonder how Eliza reacted when you broke her heart."

—Eliza Schuyler Hamilton, *Hamilton: The Musical*

"Anna still distrusts time itself. She suspects that it is in league with the enemy and the
wretched memories buried in her mind. She fears that time will forever be slower for her,
that each injustice and hardship and cruelty will have to be lived through at half speed."

—Ariel Lawhon, *I Was Anastasia*

"There was no such thing as the right time[.] … Time was an idea: it had no end and no
beginning; it could not be seen or heard or smelled. It could be measured, sure enough,
but no words had been found to explain precisely what it was."

—Kate Morton, *The Clockmaker's Daughter*

Introduction

In chapter 2, I focused on the impact that strategically placed temporal disruptions could have on the realism of a largely chronological narrative, and how the theme of music encourages an understanding of a nonlinear narrative as having the delayed simultaneity of the notes of a song. In this chapter, I turn my attention to nonlinear narrative structures that sustain those temporal disruptions throughout the novel, montaging two or more temporal threads in an oscillating pattern to create what is best described as a single-helix narrative structure because it spirals through time, typically between multiple narrators. This nonlinear narrative structure is particularly appealing to writers of historical fiction and mystery novels because it lends itself to the creation of suspense even as it reveals future effects before past causes, and it allows narratives from multiple time periods and multiple perspectives to be woven together into one cohesive story. In addition to creating suspense, this narrative structure also creates an interactive reading experience in which readers are forced to take on the role of detective and piece together a fractured, montaged narrative rather than just swallowing whole a more accessible linear, chronological story, and it gives the narrator—who often lacks agency in the events of her own life—the opportunity to exert control over how her story is told to the reader. This is important in historical fiction especially because, as Helen Lewis observes in an article about Netflix drama *The Crown*, "Historical drama might … warp our attitude toward history, encouraging us to expect that cause and effect are obvious, or that world events hinge on single decisions by identifiable individuals. Academics have been trying to demolish the great man theory of history for more than a century, television dramas put it back together, brick by brick." Lewis' argument echoes that made by Nassim Nicholas Taleb about the roles played by

narrativity and causality in dimension reduction. In writing historical fiction that subverts the obvious chronological causality, authors are fighting against dimension reduction as well as a return to the "great man theory." There are myriad examples of this narrative structure in contemporary novels,[54] but not all of them can be categorized as contemporary time novels. The novels I have selected for this chapter—Ariel Lawhon's *I Was Anastasia* and Kate Morton's *The Clockmaker's Daughter*—are notable amongst their peers because they use the single-helix narrative structure to model different forms of time, especially those similar to the cyclical temporalities emphasized by Jeanette Winterson and Jennifer Egan, and to critique the immediacy that plagues our contemporary society.

In the last chapter, Winterson and Egan juxtaposed two types of temporal experience: cyclical and linear. In contrast, Lawhon and Morton use the narrators and narrative structures of their novels to suggest that there is perhaps an experience that is beyond the conventional bounds of quotidian temporality and history, which is messier and more simultaneous, like puzzle pieces loose in a box or continuously updating social media newsfeeds. Yet, despite this increased simultaneity, the serial temporal disruptions of the chapter breaks continue to create the delays and pauses in which Mathias Nilges has argued the work of reading and critiquing time happens. In defining the genre of the contemporary time novel, Nilges argues:

> The time novel gives us ways of conceiving time as form (as opposed to
> immediate experience), which in turn hinges upon a return to a version of

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[54] These include, but are not limited to, the following: Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, Morton's *The Forgotten Garden*, Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*, Kate Atkinson's *A God in Ruins*, Willig's *The Secret History of the Pink Carnation* series, and Kate Quinn's *The Alice Network* and *The Huntress*.

literariness that is directly committed to understanding literature as the medium

of mediation able to make legible the origin of the crises associated with our

moment's commitment to immediacy. The novel allows us to read the time of the

present otherwise, in its contradictory plurality, uncovering the latencies and

possibilities in the now that ... become the basis for hope and a newfound

sociality, and in connection to the temporally plural "coming community" that

stands opposed to the fractured individualism of the now/me-time of

contemporary capitalism. (24)

While the single-helix narrative structure does not promote the plurality of futures that

the cyclical temporalities did in chapter 2, its montage causality does encourage readers

to think critically about forms of time and to hope for a better future. Lawhon uses a

retrograde narrative technique within her oscillating nonlinear narrative structure to

trick her readers into believing in the myth of the lost Russian princess Anastasia

Romanov even in the face of contradictory DNA evidence in the real world, whereas

Morton lifts her readers literally outside of time by narrating from the perspective of a

dead Victorian woman's spirit haunting an English manor turned Edwardian girls'

finishing school turned history museum.

As with Winterson's and Egan's novels, these novels are both set in worlds that

seem to be, or at least could have been, our own. And yet, the oscillation of the single-

helix narrative structure continually undermines the realism of the setting to create a

reading experience that is not temporally realistic at all. And, somehow, even though

these nonlinear time novels reveal the future ahead of past events, they still create

suspense for their readers who are driven to discover the causes behind and parallels

between the events that have been revealed by the narrators. In creating this suspense as

disembodied omniscient figures, the narrators employ an agency that they are unable to exercise in the embodiment of their own lives as characters in patriarchal societies.

In contrast to the contemporary critical idea of a "literature of reconstruction," the single-helix narrative structure does not represent a "reconstructed" story but rather fractures the story as it is told, so that readers experience temporality in and of itself rather than the temporality of the novels' protagonists. The narrators of these novels present these temporal fractures as a deliberate choice they have made in their storytelling, with Anna Anderson describing it as "unwinding [her] memory—all the twisted coils" in *I was Anastasia* (Lawhon 1), and Birdie describing her spectral experience of memory and temporality as "memories forming different pictures depending on the order in which they fall" in *The Clockmaker's Daughter* (Morton 60). In this way, they use their nonlinear narrative structure to control the information the readers receive, when they receive it, and to an extent how they interpret the information by disrupting chronological causality and replacing it with a montage causality. The oscillations of the nonlinear single-helix narrative structure uniquely affect historical fiction because the author is able to generate dissonance between the readers' desire for a particular outcome and their knowledge of historical fact that aligns questions of how we narrativize the temporality of our daily lives with postmodernism's questioning of historiography and how we narrativize our past, both public and personal. In this way, these narrative structures draw inspiration from and build upon British postmodern literature, theories, and techniques, rather than opposing them.

The Nonlinear and Retrograde Narrative Structure of *I Was Anastasia*

Lawhon's *I Was Anastasia* combines a retrograde narrative structure similar to those of Christopher Nolan's *Memento* or Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* with a traditional forward-moving narrative to create a spiraling nonlinear narrative structure that shifts between two distinct perspectives: Anna Anderson and Anastasia Romanov. Thus, Lawhon combines historical subject matter with a dramatic narrative structure that undermines and disrupts the realism of that subject matter. This montaged structure encourages readers to draw parallels between the characters of Anna and Anastasia and to fall into the trap of believing that Anna and Anastasia are actually the same person, and it gives Anna-as-narrator agency over her own story in a way that she did not have agency in her own life. If these narratives were not sandwiched together like a song mash-up to create this nonlinear single-helix structure, it would be far more difficult to trick readers into believing this.

Anna's narrative tells the story of her legal battles and attempts to be officially recognized as Anastasia Romanov by the German courts and the remaining Romanov relatives. Her story is told in reverse order, though, so readers begin the novel by meeting an elderly Anna who is fed up with the rigamarole of her failing court case and then proceed past the Anna who must ingratiate herself with the remaining Romanovs on to the Anna who is in an asylum possibly suffering from amnesia after a suicide attempt, and finally, at the end of the novel, readers meet the pregnant, grief-stricken Anna who was injured in an explosion at a WWI munitions factory shortly after learning that her fiancé has died in the war. In contrast, Anastasia's narrative is more straightforward historical fiction and relates the events of Anastasia's imprisonment by the Bolsheviks in chronological order from the first coup and house arrest to her final moments outside the

Ekaterinburg mine in which history has revealed her to have been buried. Lawhon brings

these two narratives together and, rather than delivering them to her readers

independently, she montages them together; it is this act of montaging that creates the

single-helix narrative structure that spirals back and forth between the two timelines as

demonstrated in Figure 11.[55] The single-helix narrative structure both complicates and

disrupts these two stories as readers simultaneously attempt to disentangle them and to

piece them together.
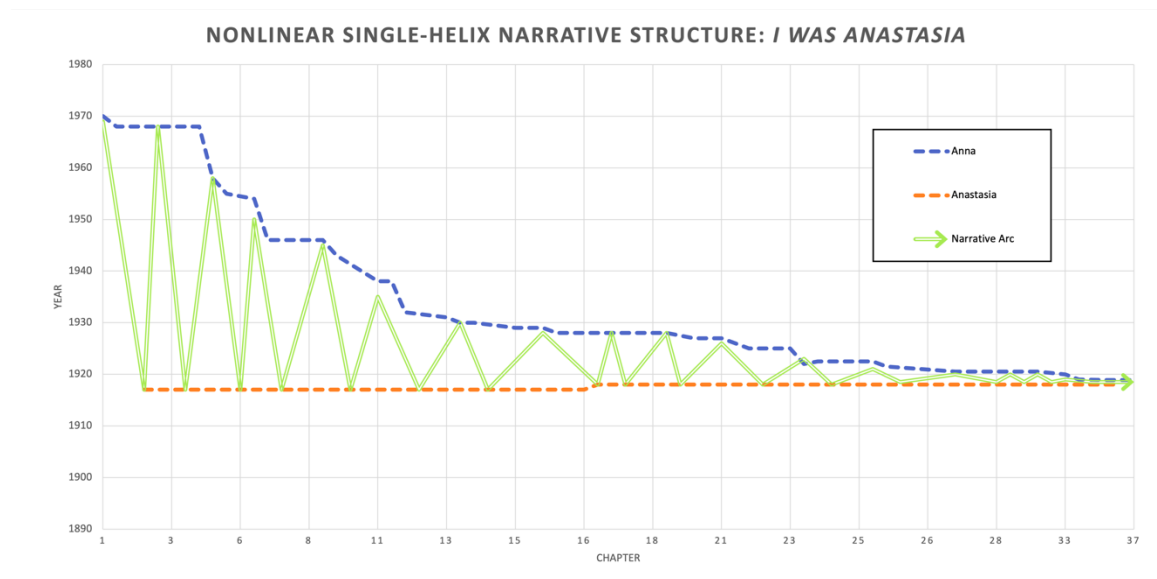
Figure 11. Nonlinear Single-Helix Narrative Structure: *I Was Anastasia*
A two-dimensional depiction of the spiraling, >-shaped narrative arc created by Lawhon montaging Anna's and Anastasia's narratives. The solid green, arrowed line representing the narrative arc is the order in which the chapters appear in the novel. The blue and orange lines represent the chronologies of each narrative individually.

In Figure 11, the years are on the vertical axis and the chapters are on the horizontal one

to demonstrate that Anna's narrative moves backwards across multiple decades whereas

Anastasia's moves forwards and spans only two years. The solid, arrowed line is the most

important because it traces the path that readers take through the novel, oscillating

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[55] I have created graphs such as Figure 11 as two-dimensional representations of this narrative structure to demonstrate why I describe it as both nonlinear and helix-shaped.

between Anna's and Anastasia's narratives to create what would be a helix were it depicted in three dimensions. Throughout Lawhon's time novel, chapter breaks montage different moments of time next to one another, creating moments of temporal disruption, such that readers are transported from 1968 Virginia to 1917 Russia in the turn of a single page at the beginning of the novel and, later, as the spiral tightens, from 1920 Berlin to 1918 Ekaterinburg and back again to Berlin in fewer than 10 pages. These temporal disruptions encourage readers to draw parallels not only between the two timelines but also between the characters of Anna and Anastasia and to fall into the narrator's trap of believing that Anna and Anastasia are the same person. The temporal disruptions in the narrative structure serve three purposes: first, they create suspense as Lawhon often leaves her readers hanging when she shifts between narrators; second, they undermine the realism that the historical basis of her story encourages; and, third, they indicate the agency that Anna-as-narrator exercises over her act of storytelling. This not only gives Anna-as-narrator agency that she does not have in her own life but also allows her to manipulate readers by controlling the order in which events are related. Lawhon wants her readers to question who Anna Anderson *really* is, and she complicates this process by relating Anna's fictionalized life story alongside Anastasia's. This creates an ambiguity and uncertainty in the supposed realism of the novel because even if readers *know*— historically and scientifically—that Anna is not Anastasia, readers are put into the position of those who met Anna in real life before the age of the internet, facial recognition, DNA testing, and the ability to Google and fact-check people in mere seconds (Lawhon 407). This ambiguity also serves as a critique of the culture of immediacy that social media has created and that Nilges diagnoses as a problem stemming from "[t]he inability to imagine and historicize the time of the present" (23).

The people and events that Lawhon writes about are *real* in that they are historical figures, but that does not mean that her novel creates the feeling of a mirror held up to reality. Rather, the structure of her novel disturbs her readers' immersion into the past as the readers only learn snippets of Anna's life and must piece together the truth from the reversed fragments. Readers may be confused in the beginning because Lawhon does not provide any expository details in the opening chapters of Anna's life, and they must simply trust that all will eventually be explained and make sense. The time novel's spiraling structure combines with the traces and foreshadowing to undermine the realism of the novel's historical context and to create suspense despite the fact that readers who know the history on which the novel is based already know how it must end. In doing so, the novel forces readers into the role of detective following a trail of clues and red herrings through the novel and piecing together the fragmented narratives of both Anna and Anastasia.

Traces and Foreshadowing in *I Was Anastasia*

In addition to the single-helix structure, Lawhon uses two literary techniques to bait the trap for her reader: traces that cross from Anastasia's timeline into Anna's, and foreshadowing both between the two timelines and within Anna's reversed timeline to hint at things that readers cannot fully understand until later in the novel. Sabine Gross and Steve Ostovich introduce the concept of traces in their study of literary temporality as "subtle, hardly discernible, yet hav[ing] dramatic effects" (1). They go on to define a trace as "cut[ting] across the boundaries of the temporal and the spatial" or "the insertion of space in time" according to philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (Gross and Ostovich 1; qtd. in Gross and Ostovich 1). Gross and Ostovich observe, "Traces provide

evidence of a past, encouraging us to decipher them and thereby to make discoveries that happen in the present and may affect the future. Traces can be followed, and they can lead us back in time. … In deciphering or making traces, we can forge connections both to the past and to the future" (1-2). There are traces, both major and minor, littered throughout single-helix narratives that can be followed both forwards and backwards in time as the temporality of the narrative shifts among past, present, and future timelines. These traces encourage readers to take on the role of detective and make connections and follow montage causality links. Jo Alyson Parker discusses what she calls the "narrativizing impulse—that impulse whereby we attempt to shape the traces of the past into a meaningful pattern, creating a plot" in her analysis of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* (22). Parker identifies "three letters inserted into a book, a poet's inscription, an old primer, two unsigned reviews, game books, a sketch, a memorial to Thomasina, and (ultimately) a brief paragraph in a garden book" as the key traces in *Arcadia* that are (mis)interpreted by historians Hannah Jarvis and Bernard Nightingale and refers back to Valentine's speech about how difficult it is "to spot the tune" amongst the noise of the world (31, 32). Parker argues that Hannah's and Bernard's historical interpretations are "analogous to that of finding a pattern in the scientific realm, as Valentine has described it" (33). In the same way, the reappearance of traces throughout *I Was Anastasia* and *The Clockmaker's Daughter* encourages readers to seek out patterns, to interpret the history of the narrative (not to be conflated with the history upon which the narrative is based), and to reach conclusions that are unencumbered by, or contrary to, chronological causality.

The traces in *I Was Anastasia* often act similarly to props that have a "'transtemporal' quality" in postmodern dramas such as Stoppard's *Arcadia*, which shifts

between two time periods without changing the sets or staging, so that a sleepy tortoise serves as a pet and paperweight in both 1809 and in 1993, interacting with Septimus and Valentine as Plautus and Lightning, respectively, and an apple placed on a desk in 1993 by Hannah can be eaten by Septimus in 1809 (Parker 25; Stoppard 734, 750, 765, 766). Stoppard addresses these temporal traces in his stage directions for Act 1, Scene 2, writing:

> *The action of the play shuttles back and forth between the early nineteenth century and the present day, always in this same room. Both periods must share the state of the room, with the additions and subtractions which would normally be expected. In the case of props—books, paper, flowers, etc., there is no absolute need to remove the evidence of one period to make way for another. However, books, etc., used in both periods should exist in both old and new versions. ... On the above principle, the ink and pens etc., of the first scene can remain. Books and papers associated with Hannah's research, in Scene Two, can have been on the table from the beginning of the play. ... During the course of the play, the table collects this and that, and where an object from one scene would be an anachronism in another (say a coffee mug) it is simply deemed to have become invisible.* (747)

Parker notes, "There is no actual time travel here, however. Although Stoppard intermingles past and present-day characters in the final scene of the play, they never actually interact" (25). This is also true of the characters in the single-helix time novel, especially Lawhon's *I Was Anastasia.* And although the "transtemporal" quality that Parker associates with the turtle and the apple in *Arcadia* may seem like time travel, Stoppard's stage directions make it clear that that is not his intention. In *I Was Anastasia,* Lawhon does not just reverse cause and effect, she plants traces such as an icon of a saint,

a photo album, and a paper knife in advance of explanations of their importance to encourage readers to believe Anna's claims. One of these traces, the icon of Saint Anna of Kashin, appears three times in the novel: first, when Anastasia's mother hands it over to the captain of the Imperial Guard with a whispered "You know what to do with it" and a message she tells Anastasia is "The sort I hope we do not need" (Lawhon 33, 34); second, among the few prized possessions at Anna's home in Unterlengenhardt, Germany, that she "would rather keep hidden" from "the relentless stream of visitors" (Lawhon 39); and, third, in a German antique shop run by a Russian immigrant who trades in "[s]mall things of sentimental value to those loyal to the old regime" (Lawhon 268-269). Unlike many of the other traces planted by Lawhon throughout the novel, the icon is an item that seems to call to Anna rather than just being thrust upon her by supposed family friends. Anna finds it on a dusty shelf in the shop and "raises it to her mouth and blows away a thin layer of dust" before the shopkeeper reveals its past to her and then gifts it to her free of charge (Lawhon 270). Lawhon simply refers to Saint Anna of Kashin as the "holy protector of women," but there is more to her story than meets the eye (Lawhon 33). Saint Anna of Kashin (also known as Anna Kasinskaya or Anna Kashinskaia) has a fascinating history in the Russian Orthodox church because she was originally canonized in 1649 only to be demoted from the sainthood in January 1678 by an orthodox council in Moscow (Greene 77-78). Despite her demotion, Saint Anna never lost her following in Kashin, where she was referred to as "little mother Anna" and described as "the very image of a Christian woman ... a loving, suffering woman, ready to sacrifice her strength and means for the well-being of those near to her" (qtd. in Greene 80). After

many petitions to the tsar,[56] Saint Anna was reinstated by Nicholas II in June 1909 (a decade before Anastasia's narrative begins in the novel); her local following was sanctioned by the church once more, and a church in St. Petersburg was consecrated to her the following year (Greene 82, 89). During her life, Anna of Kashin was a princess who, like Anastasia and Anna, lived in turbulent times and lost most of her family members and loved ones to those who sought power.[57] Thus, in addition to the fact that Saint Anna of Kashin was venerated as a protector of women, she is also significant to Anna's and Anastasia's stories as a survivor of the torture and slaughter of much of her immediate family, and therefore her icon's recurrence throughout the novel symbolizes the lost Russian princess.

Anastasia's (and Anna's) paper knife is another example of a trace in the book. The paper knife appears first in Anastasia's narrative in part 1. When she discovers it on a table beside the settee where she listens to Kerensky attempt to intimidate her father in his study, she says, "I pick it up and run my finger along its hard, flat edge, then carefully tap the point with the pad of my finger. With any pressure at all, it will slice through not just paper but skin as well" (Lawhon 112). She speculates that "Kerensky must have overlooked the paper knife" when confiscating other, more obvious weapons

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[56] One of which, in 1908, included the presentation of "an 'ancient' icon of Anna Kashinskaia" to Nicholas II by "a delegation of dignitaries from Kashin" (Greene 82).

[57] She was the daughter of Dmitri Borisovic, prince of Rostov, born in the mid-to-late thirteenth century, and she died circa 1368, although the exact dates of her birth and her death are contested (Greene 76). In 1294, she married Michael Jaroslovic (also known as Mikhail Iaroslavich), prince of Tver (Walsh 46). In 1318, her husband was martyred by the Golden Horde (specifically, Khan Uzbek) as part of their military campaign in north-eastern Russia (Martin 139). Following her husband's death, Anna of Kashin is described as exhibiting "a combination of unconditional love and a resigned endurance of God's will" before she entered a convent in Tver, taking the name Sophia (Greene 80, Walsh 46). Later, at the request of her youngest son (and possibly her only remaining family), Basil (or Vasilii), she relocated to the convent of Dormition in Kashin, taking the name Euphosyne, where she would live out the rest of her life (Walsh 46).

throughout Alexander Palace and then, deciding that "it has an edge and a point that might come in handy," she discreetly slips it into her boot (Lawhon 113). The paper knife goes largely unmentioned until part 2, when it reappears in Anna's narrative as Gleb is critiquing her for not recognizing a portrait of "her" (read: Anastasia's) great-great-great grandmother, Queen Louise of Prussia, hanging on a hotel wall, which he says is "the sort of mistake your detractors will use against you" because "[t]hey are looking for any small detail to delegitimize your claim" (Lawhon 205). The narrator observes, "The handle is mother-of-pearl" just as Anastasia mentioned in her narrative, and it "bears the crest of Empress Alexandra," who was Anastasia's mother, before informing readers, "It has been in Anna's possession for many years, and it's one of the few things she brings with her every time she moves" (Lawhon 205). Anna uses the paper knife to mock Gleb, asking him first whether he is familiar with it and then, when he says, "No," responding with "mock outrage," saying, "If you were truly Gleb Botkin, you would know this paper knife was once in the possession of your sister" (Lawhon 205). Then, Anna references Anastasia's former tutor, whom readers have already seen testify against Anna in the German court earlier in the book, asserting, "But clearly you are a fraud. I shall send you to Pierre Gilliard for interrogation" (Lawhon 205). At this point, it is not clear whether Anna is joking or serious about Gleb's sister Tanya having had the paper knife, but its appearance at the beginning of part 3, proves this to have been true, when Tanya gives the knife to Anna along with an apology she says Gilliard had relayed to her that "he always regretted taking it from [her] at the train station" and "used to lie awake at night and wonder if he'd robbed [her] of [her] only means of protection" (Lawhon 292). Tanya concludes with, "He has never forgiven himself" for abandoning Anastasia and her sisters to their fates in Ekaterinburg (Lawhon 292). Before this revelation occurs, however,

Lawhon shows readers how Anastasia keeps the knife with her in captivity (259). Anastasia contemplates using it to defend herself and her sisters against the lecherous soldiers guarding them, imagining herself "slashing at [Semyon's] arrogant, cruel, hideous face," but is unable to bring herself to do so (Lawhon 286). The final appearance of the knife is later in part 3 in the scene that Tanya referenced in her conversation with Anna at the Ekaterinburg train station, after Anastasia has failed to protect herself or her sisters against the soldiers on the train and Gilliard has been told he can go no further with the girls. Gilliard notices something amiss with Anastasia's boot laces and whispers to her, "Please, for the love of God, do not say it is a knife" (Lawhon 308). She responds in the negative, emphasizing, "It is a *paper* knife" (Lawhon 308). Gilliard is nonplussed by this answer, asking, "Have you lost your mind? Do you think these men will make a distinction between a paper knife and a regular knife?" and assuring her that it will only result in her punishment (Lawhon 308). They argue amongst themselves, but the end result is Gilliard kneeling down, pretending to re-tie the laces on her boot while actually slipping the blade up his sleeve in a "sleight of hand ... so swift I almost do not see" Anastasia tells her readers (Lawhon 309). In this way, Lawhon reveals how Anastasia was separated from the knife and how it came to be in Anna's possession, all the while maintaining suspense and curiosity in her readers even though they likely know how Anna's and Anastasia's histories are predestined to end.

Mapping the Structure of the Single-Helix Narrative

What disrupts and complicates these two stories is the way in which Lawhon entangles them, encouraging her readers to draw parallels between the events in Anastasia's life and Anna's behavior as an adult. One of the issues with this structure is

the fragmentation of its episodic nature. Lawhon must feed Anna's story to her readers in small self-contained pieces, rather than as a continuous stream of events because Anna does not live her life in reverse as characters in novels such as Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* do. Ken Ireland argues that the "retrograde narrative" structure "solves the problem about writing about someone not famous" as it allows the writer to begin with "the character as [she] is now" and "seize the reader's interest straight away," (31). He eloquently describes this process as "mov[ing] backwards, in stages, tacking like a sailboat against the wind. Familiar time flow—out the window [and] an air of disruption from the start" (Ireland 32). This fits with Lawhon's decision to use this narrative structure with Anna rather than Anastasia as Anna is the less famous of the two, especially the part of her life before she was touted as the lost princess. Ireland also speculates that this approach may be particularly apt for mentally unstable characters who already have a fragmented experience of life because "the logic of presentation in episodic stages matches the unstable mentality of the subject" (32). Although Anna is depicted throughout the novel as battling with her mental health, the combination of the retrograde structure with the single-helix structure eliminates much of the mental instability that might normally be associated with such a structure by providing the narrator Anna with agency over her storytelling that the character Anna lacked in her own life.

The increased popularization of the single-helix narrative structure is especially interesting considering that one of the demands of retrograde narratives or "telling-in-reverse" structures is "strict concentration from viewers" (or readers) as such a text "is no longer open to easy consumption by immediate provision of contextual data, but involves a constant testing of hypotheses, an unsettling adjustment of perspective in the

face of an ever-changing Gestalt" and that the experience of encountering "calamities

before knowing their causes" is disturbing to readers (Ireland 33). Ireland argues that the

retrograde narrative structure, although its origins trace back to "Classical antiquity,"

contrasts starkly with the opening exposition methods of "nineteenth-century classic

realist texts" and "can reinforce the element of surprise and curiosity when the material

is precisely not familiar" (36). He also argues that "the past becomes a *sine qua non*[58] for

telling-in-reverse, with plots linked to earlier relationships and events, and an overall

stress on how and why, rather than what" (Ireland 36). Thus, such a structure

undermines the realism inherent in a novel that is heavily reliant upon historical facts.

Additionally, the single-helix structure takes such disturbance a step further, not merely

unsettling readers or demanding their attention, but forcing them to step into the role of

detective to piece together not just the clues to a mystery, but the narrative itself. For

instance, the opening chapter relays the news that Anna's court case has failed in the

German courts, but readers do not learn the details of the court case or even why it is

taking place in Germany until much later in the novel. Thus, the calamity of losing her

court case precedes the testimony of the court case and both the reasons it mattered and

the reasons it failed. Ireland explains this, writing, "What drives the reader on, however,

is the need propelled by clues [read: traces] scattered by the narrator to ascertain the

original springs of action, to learn how relationships were first formed, issues first

broached: these facts are located not in the future but in the past" (34). This is largely

true for Lawhon's novel because even the forward-moving narrative (Anastasia's) is

firmly located in the past—a past that remains ambiguously and tenuously linked to

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[58] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this means "indispensable, absolutely necessary or essential" ("Sine qua non, *N.*").

Anna's until the last possible moment. However, in the other nonlinear time novels that I examine, the fact that their narrative structures are more achronological than reversed as Lawhon's is introduces the possibility that the "facts" or causes are not solely located in the past, but may be located in a more ambiguous, simultaneous temporality that encompasses or surpasses past, present, and future.

Like narratologist Gerard Genette, Ireland uses letters to demonstrate the retrograde narrative structures of the works that he analyses. Using such a system, the structure of Lawhon's novel would appear as *Z-Y-2A-YY-2B-YYY-X-W-2C-V-U-2D-UU-T-2E-S-R-Q-2F-P-O-2G-2H-OO-2I-OOO-2J-N-M-L-2K-K-J-2L-JJ-I-2M-H-2N-HH-2O-HHH-2P-HHHH-G-2Q-GG-2R-GGG*. The bolded letters represent Anna's narrative with letters doubled to show when a subsequent episode is set during the same year as a previous episode. Thus, it can be seen how Anna's narrative covers many years at the beginning but then slows down and relays several episodes in the span of two years at the end. This final year is the same year in which Anastasia's narrative ends: 1918. The letters preceded by "2" represent Anastasia's narrative, which is restricted to the two years of her revolutionary incarceration: 1917 and 1918. Ireland also describes this type of narrative structure as "teasing" because the retrograde structure "may evoke incidents … not yet witnessed by the audience" and thus fuel the reader's curiosity by creating suspense about what came before instead of the typical suspense of what is to come (34). In many ways, Lawhon is able to create suspense about both the past and the future simultaneously in her novel as there are moments in Anastasia's timeline that teasingly allude to moments in Anna's future narrative, but also moments in Anna's future narrative that hint at moments in her past that are still to come for the reader.

On its own, Anna's narrative has much in common with the historical theme of Amis' *Times Arrow* (1991), which tells the story of a German doctor from Auschwitz who is in hiding in post-war America. Both novels employ a telling-in-reverse structure that forces readers to work to interpret the story and reconstruct it into a forward-moving plot to make sense of events. Where Anna's narrative differs from that of Amis' *Time Arrow* is that Lawhon does not interpret time as moving in reverse with Anna growing younger, like Amis' multi-named protagonist,[59] but simply presents Anna's memories to her readers as a reversed series of chronologic episodes. Lawhon does tie her narrative structure to the unreliability of human memory in the "Fair Warning" that she issues to her readers in the voice of Anna before part 1 begins: "If I tell you what happened that night in Ekaterinburg I will have to unwind my memory—all the twisted coils—and lay it in your palm. It will be the gift and the curse I bestow upon you" (1). In referencing "Ekaterinburg," where Anastasia died, Anna introduces the first red herring for her reader. Anna's description of her memories as "twisted coils" aptly describes the structure that Lawhon has created in the novel, which spirals between Anna's and Anastasia's experiences and towards the point of Anastasia's possible escape from "that night in Ekaterinburg" and Anna's initial claim to be the lost Russian grand duchess. Anna herself issues a challenge to her audience at the beginning, saying that whether or not she is Anastasia Romanov or an "impostor[.] ... A fraud. A liar. ... [I]s for you to decide, of course. Countless others have rendered their verdict. Now it is your turn. But if you want the truth, you must pay attention. Do not daydream or drift off. Do not speak

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[59] Amis' male protagonist moves progressively backwards from his ironic American identity, Tod T. Friendly, through the nondescript John Young to the Portuguese-identifying Hamilton de Souza, and finally lands in his original German identity of Odilo Unverdorben (which translates from German as "unspoilt").

or interrupt" (Lawhon 1). This paratextual "warning" from Anna serves a couple of purposes: as I mentioned before, it ties the narrative structure and style directly to memories, which contrasts with Amis' postmodern novel and myriad other speculative and science fiction novels that portray their characters as actually experiencing their lives in the reversed or achronological order in which their stories are read. Anna did not experience her life in reverse; however, she is making a conscious choice to share it with readers in reverse because "you must understand why the years have brought me to this point and why such loss has made the journey necessary" (Lawhon 1). This "Fair Warning" and the "I told you so" section that follows the conclusion of part 3 are the only moments in the novel in which Anna (as narrator) speaks to her readers in first person, and it is also in these paratextual sections that she establishes agency over the telling of her story; an agency that she repeatedly seems to lack in her own life story as her friends and medical staff members repeatedly tell her what she can and cannot do. To reinforce this lack of agency, the body of Anna's narrative is told by a third-person narrator who, although focalizing on Anna, does not share her inner thoughts; this narratorial choice keeps readers at arm's length from the character Anna because readers are not privy to Anna's deepest thoughts. So, readers can see how Anna behaves but do not always completely understand the motivations behind that behavior and cannot know whether Anna is telling the truth or lying. Lawhon explains in her author's note that she wrote the novel in this way specifically to show "the evidence both sides had to offer" and to ensure that her readers would "be unsure all the way through because that is how Anna's contemporaries felt. They did not have the benefit of history or DNA or proof. They only had what sat before them: a scarred, maligned woman with a striking resemblance to Anastasia Romanov" (403).

In complete opposition to the distance Lawhon creates with Anna's narrative style, she puts her readers directly in Anastasia's first-person focalization in the chapters that retell her historical experiences. If readers interpret the story as all being told to them by Anna as the paratextual notes from her perspective that precede and follow the story encourage them to do, then it appears that either Anna is more comfortable relating that part of her life or she is making a concerted effort to relay that side of the story as if she herself experienced it, thus weighting the scales in her favor. This is supported by Lawhon's choices to emphasize particular events and traces from Anastasia's narrative that connect to Anna's narrative and pull her readers into the trap of believing Anna's claims. Lawhon makes a point of telling her readers in her paratextual Author's Note that "there are two sides to this story: one shimmering with privilege and affluence and nobility, the other blunted by sorrow and privation and neglect. What we forget as a culture is that *both* stories are worthy of our attention" (402). Lawhon also observes: "Anna Anderson has been called 'a cunning psychopath,' a 'vulgar adventuress,' and a 'first-rate actress.' … She has been assigned the role of villain for decades. But I like to think she is misunderstood. I believe there was so much more to her life and her motives than her detractors care to admit" (403). Although Lawhon claims to be leaving it up to her readers to decide what to think about Anna, I am not fully convinced of this. I found the novel to be continually encouraging me to believe Anna's claims to be Anastasia despite the ending of the novel, which conclusively proves that she has been lying the whole time by revealing that Anna's amnesia, scars, and other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder all stem from her involvement in a munitions factory explosion in Romania rather than from surviving imprisonment and a firing squad in Ekaterinburg, Russia. Throughout the narrative, Lawhon portrays Anna as having been encouraged to

play the role of the lost Russian Princess by others, who want to use her and her claims

to the crown (and subsequent funds) to benefit themselves, either directly or indirectly.

The paratextual sections of the novel combined with the single-helix narrative structure,

however, establish that Lawhon has an interest in restoring to the much-maligned Anna

control of her own narrative and thereby casting her in a more sympathetic light.

Lawhon speaks specifically to her choice to write Anna's narrative using reverse

chronology in her paratextual Author's Note, writing, "I enjoy nonlinear timelines and I

knew the only way to bring this novel to a proper close was to tell Anna's half backward.

I knew from the beginning that she was not Anastasia—the DNA research is crystal clear

in that regard—but I *wanted* her to be" (407). This is the same feeling that the book

engendered in me—a desire that Anna *would* somehow be shown to be Anastasia even

though I, too, know all of the historical evidence proves that she absolutely cannot be.

Lawhon writes that when researching Anna's life, she "read all the Anna Anderson

biographies backward from last chapter to first, so [she] would remain a little off balance

while writing the book" and she compares the structure she has created for the novel to

"juggling chainsaws. Only the chainsaws are on fire and you're blindfolded" (406).

However, as much as I wanted the happy-ending reveal that Anna was indeed the lost

duchess Anastasia, I agree with Lawhon's assertion that she "gave us the ending we need,

instead. And ... it is far more satisfying that way" (407). I will discuss the ending she gives

readers in more detail below, but first I want to tease out Lawhon's incorporation of a

retrograde narrative structure from the larger nonlinear narrative structure.

What Ireland overlooks in his analysis and classification of retrograde narrative

structures is the difference between a reversed chronological structure and a reversed

temporal experience. Amis' *Time's Arrow* is different from most of the other works that

Ireland considers in that although his protagonist lives his life in forward chronology, his narrator (who is inside the head of the protagonist but is not to be conflated with him as he says, "I have no access to his thoughts—but I am awash in his emotions") is experiencing the protagonist's life in reverse order (part 1, chapter 1). Although Amis' narrator seems somewhat aware of this reversal, saying, "It just seems to me that the film is running backward," this knowledge does not influence his interpretation of the events he witnesses (part 1, chapter 1). Thus, despite his awareness of things being reversed or "weird," when the protagonist makes charitable donations of toys to children and money to his church the narrator relays these experiences as a greedy man stealing toys and money:

> The toy ... will be offered to him by the smiling child. Tod takes it. And backs away, with what I believe is called a shit-eating grin. The child's face turns blank, or closes. ... Then he heads to the store to cash it in. ... Can you believe this guy? He'll take candy from a baby, if there's fifty cents in it for him. Tod goes to church and everything. ... We sit in lines and worship a corpse. But it's clear what Tod's after. Christ, he's so shameless. He always takes a really big bill from the bowl. (Amis, part 1, chapter 1)

The narrator also perceives the protagonist's doctoring as unhealing people so that they are worse off when they leave him than when they arrived: "Put simply, the hospital is an atrocity-producing situation. Atrocity will follow atrocity, unstoppably" (Amis, part 1, chapter 3). In contrast to this reversal of doctoring as unhealing, the narrator experiences the protagonist's experiences at Auschwitz as a birthing of people from fire and gas rather than a killing of them: "The world, after all, here in Auschwitz, has a new habit. It makes sense" (Amis, part 2, chapter 5). This effect has less in common with other

retrograde narratives such as *Memento* and *Betrayal*, and more in common with Kurt

Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The fact that Billy Pilgrim experiences his life

achronologically means that even though Vonnegut employs a nonlinear narrative

structure, the novel is technically matching Pilgrim's temporal experience as a character

within the novel. Ireland does acknowledge this difference by terming Amis' novel a

"whole-text retrograde" but I think it makes more sense to distinguish the temporality of

the narrator or protagonist from the temporality of the narrative structure and, therefore,

of the reader. Ireland uses Genette's theory to examine the novel, arguing that "analepsis

is not involved, since there is no retrospective evocation of earlier events, but rather a

deviant presentation of the narrative instance" (35-36). Lawhon also employs a "deviant

presentation" in that her narrative does not have a present moment from which to flash

forward or backwards, but overall her narrative choices contrast sharply with Amis'

because she relays Anna's narrative as a retrograde, episodic structure that is interrupted

by Anastasia's narrative to create a nonlinear, fractured narrative structure with both

Anna and Anastasia experiencing the episodes of their lives in a forward, chronological

temporality. Amis' reversed temporality fits in with the British postmodern desire to

question historiography by encouraging readers to reinterpret life, war, and the atrocities

of the holocaust through his "deviant" presentation of his protagonist's life as well as the

events and aftermath of World War II. Lawhon's structure contrasts with Amis' to call

less attention to the historical aspects of her story and more attention to her questioning

of temporality and memory as well as the agency of the narrator who is controlling the

temporal structuring of the narrative as a whole.

  This is where Roof's theory comes into play as she argues that the disordered

causality of nonlinear or retrograde narrative structures creates multiple plots (see

Figure 12) (17). Extrapolating from Roof's theory, one plot is produced by the narrative of Anna's life in reverse (plot 1a), while another plot follows Anna's life as it would have actually occurred (plot 2). Then, a third plot is created by readers as they attempt to reconcile Anna's life in the order it was presented with Anna's life in the order it was lived. The single-helix narrative structure comes in and complicates this further because, although it appears to present readers with the second, forward-flowing plotline, in actuality, Anastasia's narrative is an additional initial plot (plot 1b), and the nonlinear structure of both narratives read together creates a fourth plot that competes with and complicates the third plot that readers have constructed of Anna's life on its own. And, ultimately, all of the readers' detective work produces a fifth plot as they attempt to work out how Anna and Anastasia are (or are not) connected.

Plot Number	Perspective	Creator
1a	Anna's Narrative (retrograde)	Author
1b	Anastasia's Narrative (chronological)	Author
2	Anna's Narrative (chronological)	Reader
3	Anna's Narrative (reconciled)	Reader
4	Single-Helix Narrative (Anna's + Anastasia's)	Author
5	Single-Helix Narrative (reconciled)	Reader

Figure 12. The Five Plots of *I Was Anastasia*
Table detailing which plots are created by the author versus those created by the reader, extrapolating from Roof's theory.

Thus, in spite of some chronological elements present in each of the narratives, whether they are forward-moving or retrograde, on the whole, the single-helix narrative structure is akin to a box of loose puzzle pieces that readers must reassemble for themselves. Fragmented narratives in and of themselves are not a new phenomenon; however, the agency that narrators such as Anna assert over their stories introduces the idea of reader-manipulation (similar to the manipulation attributed to Eisenstein's montage techniques) into the mix to complicate this process further.

Temporal Disruptions, Trauma, and Montage Causality in Nonlinear Narratives

Although Ireland does not recognize what I have labeled "temporal disruptions" (those moments when the narrative montages one temporal moment next to another), he does argue that when narrative temporality shifts are "unforewarned," "reader expectations are subtly reversed by the sequential and aesthetic effect, which disrupts continuity and security, while enforcing a total readjustment of perspective through its reverse shift of timelevels" (37). He distinguishes this type of surprise shift in temporalities from ones that are signaled as Vonnegut and Amis do in their works because the opening segments of the narratives have to "do double duty" as they are "the terminal point of the whole text" in addition to being "its opening section" (Ireland 37). Lawhon acknowledges this "double duty" by titling part 1 of her novel "The End and the Beginning," and she also attempts to ease her readers through the narrative temporality shifts or disruptions by introducing most of them with date and place labels of varying degrees of specificity (3). Opening with the later chronological segment also creates dramatic irony as the readers know more than the characters do during the subsequent chapters that occurred before the opening chapter. But there is also a lot that does not make sense to readers early in the novel. For instance, when Prince Frederick calls to relay the verdict from the German appeals court, Anna refuses to speak to him, noting, "She hasn't forgotten what Frederick did, hasn't forgotten the burn pile behind her cottage at the edge of the Black Forest. All those charred little bones" (Lawhon 6). This makes no sense to readers until chapter 3 when Anna explains that she "can tolerate the fact that Prince Frederick has had her home cleared of rubbish … but she cannot forgive him for allowing the town to gas and cremate her animals. Sixty-two cats—she knew each and every one of their names—and four dogs. Murdered. Gone. Euthanized and

turned to ashes" (Lawhon 40). In this way, there are things that readers know early on, such as that Gleb is Anna's oldest friend (having been a family friend of Anastasia as well) and that he dies before the court case is resolved, but there are also references that Anna makes that do not make sense to readers until later. Another example that comes later in the novel is Anna's memory of having birds in a Manhattan apartment, which Lawhon slips into chapter 3 but that readers might not even remember having read by the time they encounter Anna with her pet birds in chapter 17.

In her analysis of Pinter's 1978 postmodern play, *Betrayal*, whose narrative structure is very similar to that of Anna's narrative when examined independently of Anastasia's, Susan Harris Smith describes the retrograde narrative structure of the play as "'Roughed-up history' [that] eschews smoothness for a coarse, uneven surface in which sudden, disruptive acts of violence disturb and agitate the illusion of a coherent, comfortable narrative about the past and certainly dispel any impulse to be nostalgic" (70). She notes:

> One way to achieve that roughness is the strategic reversal of time, which allows for an investigative revisiting, an imaginative reconsideration and a thoughtful reflection on the constructedness of historical narrative, personal or public. In particular, this strategy can highlight catastrophic events, their cultural situatedness, and their consequences. From the simple reverse chronology of a personal relationship to the complex deconstruction of an embedded cultural fixture, going back in time, reversing time, and crossing times frees the playwright to analyze the psychological and political ramifications of a past event. (Harris Smith 70)

Harris Smith also argues that "a traumatic confrontation triggering the sudden shifts in reverse chronology disrupts the expectations of realism" and that "[i]ronically, this structure strips away all artifice by artificially altering the time sequence, forcing the audience to confront the deconstruction of what would prove to be an illusion. The end result is the indisputable, truthful version of events" (67, 70). Harris Smith's postmodern take on realism and truth as constructs with which fiction engages is an appropriate perspective from which to view Lawhon's historical fiction because Lawhon attempts to impart a truth or an authentic story to readers without the baggage of literal (or literary) realism. In addition, the narrative structure of *I Was Anastasia* allows readers to look at Anna's story from all sides and see how the events of her life shaped her into the person that the world needed her to be: the lost princess Anastasia. Both Anna's and Anastasia's storylines are rich with historical details and based on research into the historical Anna Anderson and Anastasia Romanov, respectively. What is interesting is that Lawhon chose to write this book after DNA evidence had been discovered that concretely proves that Anna Anderson was a fraud and that Anastasia Romanov definitively died in the Soviet Union with her family in 1918. Yet, Lawhon does not tell her readers the story in a way that encourages them to see this scientifically proven truth. Indeed, she does exactly the opposite. She encourages her readers to believe Anna's story and undermines the facts of the DNA evidence.

Ireland argues that one purpose of retrograde narrative structures is to place "an overall stress on how and why, rather than what" (36). Lawhon takes this "stress on how and why" to the next level with the single-helix structure that her dual narratives create and, like its postmodern predecessors, it brings a new perspective to history with which her readers are already familiar. In addition, the emphasis on how and why rather than

what also encourages readers to "imagine and historicize the time of the present," which Nilges argues is critical to overcoming the crisis of the eternal present (23). This is best seen by closely examining how the nonlinear narrative structure functions at the end of Lawhon's novel, which is a climax not only of the plot, but also of the montaging of the dual narratives in a way that is somewhat reminiscent of the intermingling of time periods at the end of *Arcadia*. Parker argues, "Through the intricate temporal structure of Stoppard's play, we discern the pattern-making activity that makes us matter, that makes beauty out of an ocean of ashes, that mitigates the destructive power of time, and that, even in the presence of death, gives us a glimpse of Arcadia" (36). The final four chapters of *I Was Anastasia* oscillate between Anastasia and Anna, creating a similarly intricate temporal structure that lessens the blow of the realization that Anastasia did not survive her traumatic encounter with death, but that Anna did.

In chapter 1, I laid out a theory of montage causality, a causality that is created by the juxtaposition of scenes from different time periods or perspectives to create a nonlinear temporality within the narrative structure. Montage causality requires a more engaged reader willing to piece the puzzle together than chronological causality, which can be more accessible, does, but montage causality can also be used to manipulate the reader. One of the best examples of how this structure functions comes from the end of Lawhon's novel: a climax not only of the plot, but also of the montage causality created by the sustained temporal disruptions between Anna's and Anastasia's narratives, the end is used by Anna-as-narrator to lead the reader to believe that she actually was Anastasia. The final four chapters of the novel are brief and alternate between Anastasia and Anna. Chapter 34 describes the trauma suffered by Anastasia and her family in the cellar of Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg, Russia, on July 17, 1918. Anastasia describes her

family members dying all around her and her executioner screaming, "Why won't you die?" as he repeatedly stabs her with his bayonet: "nothing pierces the corsets. Mother's ridiculous jewels form a diamond-hard barrier that protects my heart and lungs" (Lawhon 388, 387). She says, "Darkness swallows me immediately. ... But I am not dead. Not yet. And I do not stay unconscious for long" (Lawhon 388). The temporal disruption of the chapter break montages this moment with Anna's description of injuries that could have resulted from Anastasia's trauma:

> There is blood everywhere. On her face. Her hands. Her clothes. It covers the floor and the wall behind her. She can taste it in her mouth and smell it in her hair. Like rust and salt and liquid warmth. There is also pain. Pain beyond reckoning or explanation. It feels as though someone has pulled white-hot coals from the bowels of hell and placed them at dozens of points along her body. (Lawhon 389)

Unlike Anastasia's chapter that is specifically located in time and space, Anna's narrative is only identified as "Praying to Die" in 1918. As with Anastasia, this chapter also ends with Anna passing out from the pain, "her last thought a prayer for death" (Lawhon 391).

When Lawhon returns to Anastasia for the last time, the location is Anastasia's historical resting place, the Four Brothers Mine outside Ekaterinburg, but the memory is out of place, anachronous with her thus far forward-moving narrative, because it is actually an analepsis to the night on the train when the soldier Tomas protected Anastasia from the fate of rape and assault that two of her sisters experienced—a fate that the reader was previously manipulated into believing Anastasia had shared, encouraging the reader to connect the two women to each other. This moment of analepsis is distinct from the other anachronous temporal disruptions throughout the novel because it fits Genette's definition of a moment that interrupts the current

temporality of the story, the moment of Anna dying on the ground outside the mine, rather than actually shifting the story to a different temporal moment. This final moment serves to dispel the parallel between Anna and Anastasia and, although Lawhon could not let Anastasia escape, she does let her outlive her family just long enough to hear "the sound of the cannons in the distance" that signals the belated approach of the White Russian Army and "the barking of a dog nearby" that signals that Tomas has escaped with her beloved dog (Lawhon 395). In this way, even though Lawhon does not fully rewrite history, she does find a way to leave both Anastasia and her reader with a glimmer of hope. This hope is important because, as Nilges argues, the time novel "is directly wedded to a new politics of hope and possibility" (25). This moment of hope in Anastasia's narrative is followed by the complete revelation of Anna's background as a worker in a WWI munitions factory who accidentally dropped a grenade upon learning that her fiancé and the father of her unborn child had been "killed in action in Amiens, France, on August 9" (Lawhon 396). In this final chapter, Lawhon calls her reader's attention to both memory and time as she says of Anna:

> It was as though her mind was cleaved upon reading that telegram: one half eerily calm and the other disintegrating into myriad pieces that ricocheted inside her skull. But between these two halves a curtain was drawn, and Anna's conscious mind was trapped on the still, quiet side, unable to process the horrific reality that Hans is dead. (396-397)

Lawhon then slows down the duration of her narrative's temporality to the point where mere seconds last for paragraphs. In this way, Lawhon mimics a slow-motion sequence in a film, counting down: from six seconds, when Anna "cannot access the necessary panic or the words to warn her supervisor"; to five seconds, when "She may as well hear

the tick of a clock in her mind, counting down until the people in front of her are

obliterated"; to four seconds, when "She tries to speak but still the words do not come";

to three seconds, when she "Tries to wave. Tries to get her supervisor's attention"; to two

seconds, when "The curtain in her mind shudders and splits apart at the realization that

she too is about to die"; and finally, not to one second, but to "Hellfire. / Thunder. /

Shrapnel" (Lawhon 397-398). This slowing of narrative temporality acts in a sense like

the pauses discussed in chapter 2, giving readers a chance to slow down and experience

individual moments of time and the form of time as a whole. Overall, the single-helix

narrative structure disrupts chronological causality in these oscillating Anastasia-Anna

narratives and leads readers to draw conclusions that are influenced by the revised order

of the narrative. This revised order prompts specific results: Lawhon makes her readers

think that Anna is actually the lost princess Anastasia.

The Temporality of Memory and Identity

In this nonlinear time novel, Lawhon ties temporality to memory and identity.

Ireland observes that "the topic of memory itself is key to all retrograde narrative. … In

practice, telling-in-reverse requires viewing or reading the text at least twice" as it is

"[t]he reader's natural instinct to process material forwards, relating the new to the most

recent" (37-38); retrograde narratives "complicate" this instinct with "tension between

prior-in-text but later-in-time" moments and references (37). Lawhon ties her narrative

structure to the unreliability of human memory: recall the "Fair Warning" issued in the

narrating voice of Anna before part 1 in which she refers to the act of "unwind[ing]"

memories that are stored as "twisted coils" (1). Anna herself issues a challenge to her

audience at the beginning, saying that whether or not she is Anastasia Romanov or an

"impostor[.] ... A fraud. A liar. ... [I]s for you to decide, of course. Countless others have rendered their verdict. Now it is your turn. But if you want the truth, you must pay attention. Do not daydream or drift off. Do not speak or interrupt" (Lawhon 1). This "warning" from Anna serves a few purposes: first, it ties the narrative structure and style directly to memories, which contrasts with other speculative and science fiction novels that portray their characters as actually experiencing their lives in the reverse order in which their stories are read; second, it asks for the kind of close attention that Ireland argues is necessary to process retrograde narratives; and, third, it indicates that Anna is the one in control of how her story will be told.

In contrast to the paratextual "Fair Warning," which references the site of Anastasia's final trauma, Ekaterinburg, Anna's narrative begins with a time-marking sentence that foreshadows the end of the novel by flashing back to the traumatic moment that led her to be first confused with the lost princess Anastasia fifty years ago, when "Anna threw herself off a bridge in Berlin" (Lawhon 5). Lawhon makes sure to note that although this was not a singularly traumatic moment for Anna, nor "her first brush with death," it had been "the only one that came at her hands," in other words, the one trauma over which Anna had total agency (5). Thus, Lawhon immediately puts the theme of agency (or lack thereof) front and center for her readers. The narrative returns quickly to the "present" moment of this chapter— February 17, 1970—and Anna "sits in this living room, two thousand miles from her past, waiting for a verdict" (Lawhon 5). In this way, Lawhon personifies temporality and the past by making them something from which one can be physically distant.

Anna and the Myth of Anastasia

As I read *I Was Anastasia*, I found myself wanting to believe Anna's story, and desiring the happy ending promised by this nonlinear narrative structure along with the title of the book: Anna *was* Anastasia. Lawhon leads her readers to this point, but then she subverts their expectations by unambiguously proving that these two seemingly similar women are not and cannot be the same. And, yet, the title is not a lie. For a time, even if it was not *real* (whatever that means), Anna could truthfully say "I was Anastasia" because she kept Anastasia alive in our collective cultural memory. She mocks her readers with this fact in the paratextual afterword, appropriately titled, "I Told You So." She begins by reminding them that "I *never* promised you a happy ending. I have lived long enough to know that such things do not exist. In the end there is only the truth, and it isn't my fault that you don't like it very much" (Lawhon 399). Then she arrogantly states: "[T]here would be no legend without me. *I* am the one who stopped [Anastasia] from being a tragic little footnote in history. *I* kept Anastasia Romanov alive for decades" (Lawhon 399). And she is right; society remembers this one Russian princess more than any other because of Anna Anderson. And, in the end, can we blame Anna? Is the trauma Anna suffered actually any less important than that suffered by Anastasia? She reminds her readers that it was not originally her fiction, her lie; it was thrust upon her by those who "desperately … want this fiction to be true," who "perpetuated it with your irrational hope and your willing suspension of disbelief"—who "*wanted* to believe that I was Anastasia" (Lawhon 399, 400).

The Nonlinear Narrative and Spectral Storytelling of *The Clockmaker's Daughter*

In *The Clockmaker's Daughter*, and in her other novels,[60] Morton employs a nonlinear narrative structured by a patchwork of times, places, and people. What distinguishes *The Clockmaker's Daughter* is that the multiplicity of stories is tied together by a single place at multiple points in times—the fictional Birchwood Manor—and an omniscient spectral narrator—the ghost of Lily Millington née Albertine "Birdie" Bell (whom I shall refer to as Birdie hereafter just as Morton does in the novel). With Birchwood Manor as the hub of the story, the novel is again similar to Stoppard's postmodern play *Arcadia*, which shows one manor house at two distant points in time, 1809/1812 and 1993. Morton goes further by presenting Birchwood Manor in myriad time periods, spanning the mid-Victorian era through World Wars I and II to 21st-century Britain. As with Stoppard's play, part of Morton's aim is to show what is lost or misinterpreted by history, but Morton pushes beyond postmodernist interests in historiography to involve and possibly implicate her readers in her process. Her nonlinear narrative structure forces her readers into the role of detective in a similar way to Lawhon's novel (using traces and foreshadowing), with readers trying to assemble the myriad pieces of the story from the disparate storylines into the answers to the two burning questions: What actually happened at Birchwood Manor in the summer of 1862? And how did Birdie end up dying there? The single-helix narrative structure that Morton creates also grants agency to the spectral Birdie as she narrates the framework of the story and ends on the hopeful note that her story will finally see the light of day.

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[60] These include *The House at Riverton* (2006), *The Forgotten Garden* (2008), *The Distant Hours* (2010), *The Secret Keeper* (2012), and *The Lake House* (2015).

Growing up impoverished in Victorian London's Seven Dials district, Birdie has a clear lack of agency in her real life with many of her actions controlled by Mrs. Mack, the woman who "adopted" her when her father supposedly sailed to America to make a home for the two of them after her mother's death. Birdie eventually reveals that just before her death, she learned from Mrs. Mack's biological son, Martin, that she was *sold* to Mrs. Mack by her father's friend, Jeremiah, after her father was trampled to death the day he and she were to have sailed to America (Morton 434). Mrs. Mack herself is reminiscent of a character out of a Charles Dickens novel with her enterprising business comprising child pickpockets and petty thieves and her eventual negotiations with Edward Radcliffe for Birdie to become his model (with the proceeds going to line Mrs. Mack's pockets, more so than Birdie's). Birdie says of Mrs. Mack:

> Over the years, I had become her most reliable earner, and in my short life, there
> was one thing I had learned for certain: people become used to riches quickly, and
> even if they've done nothing themselves to earn the wealth, once it's been had,
> they consider it their due. Mrs. Mack believed that she was entitled to everything
> that I was and that I had…. (Morton 435)

Although Birdie does attempt to deceive Mrs. Mack and flee from her to America with Edward, her plan fails because her agency is so restricted that in order for her to obtain permission to visit Birchwood Manor with Edward, Birdie must tell Mrs. Mack Edward's plans to paint Birdie wearing "the priceless Radcliffe Blue" diamond necklace and that "within a month I would return with riches the likes of which they'd never seen" (Morton 435). Unfortunately, Birdie underestimates both Mrs. Mack's patience and her greed: Mrs. Mack's son Martin shows up only a couple of weeks into her stay at Birchwood, "checking up on her" and pressuring her to return to London with the

diamond heirloom (Morton 430). Birdie's lack of agency while alive contrasts sharply with the way in which she exhibits control over the narrative after her death, boasting, "Time no longer binds me; ... [p]ast, present, and future are one. I can slow memories down. I can experience their events again in a flash" (Morton 377). The only point at which Birdie says she lacks control is in regard to the events immediately preceding her death in the summer of 1862; of those moments, she says, "They gather speed, no matter what I do to stop them, rolling like a coin let go at the top of a hill, picking up pace as they hurtle towards the end" (Morton 377).

Morton's patchwork narrative structure comprises two main types of chapters in the novel: third-person narratives labeled with "chapter" numbers and first-person narratives labeled with roman numerals (see Figure 13). The third-person-narrated chapters focalize on myriad characters—including archivist Elodie, academic Leonard, student Ada Lovegrove, and treasure hunter Jack—and are typically labeled with the year in which they are set. The narration is in third-person and typically limited to a single character's focalization (although there is a segment in which a satchel serves as the focalizer). In counterpoint to the multiplicity of stories told in these chapters, the first-person-narrated chapters are all from a single perspective: the spirit (or ghost) of Birdie. While the third-person chapters are typically very temporally bound, Birdie's narration tends to flit back and forth across time as she relays her current experiences in and around the manor, her previous experiences haunting the manor since her death, and her memories of her actual, physical life in Victorian London (1844-1862), which she

lived both as Birdie and under the pseudonym, Lily Millington.[61] Figure 13 demonstrates the achronological ordering and nonlinear structure of Morton's novel, with a dotted blue line that traces the temporality of Birdie's chapters and a dotted orange line that traces the third-person chapters. Separating the two types of chapters shows that Birdie's temporality shifts often guide the ordering of the chapters that are not narrated by her. The solid green arrowed line connects all of the chapters and depicts the path through the novel that the reader takes.
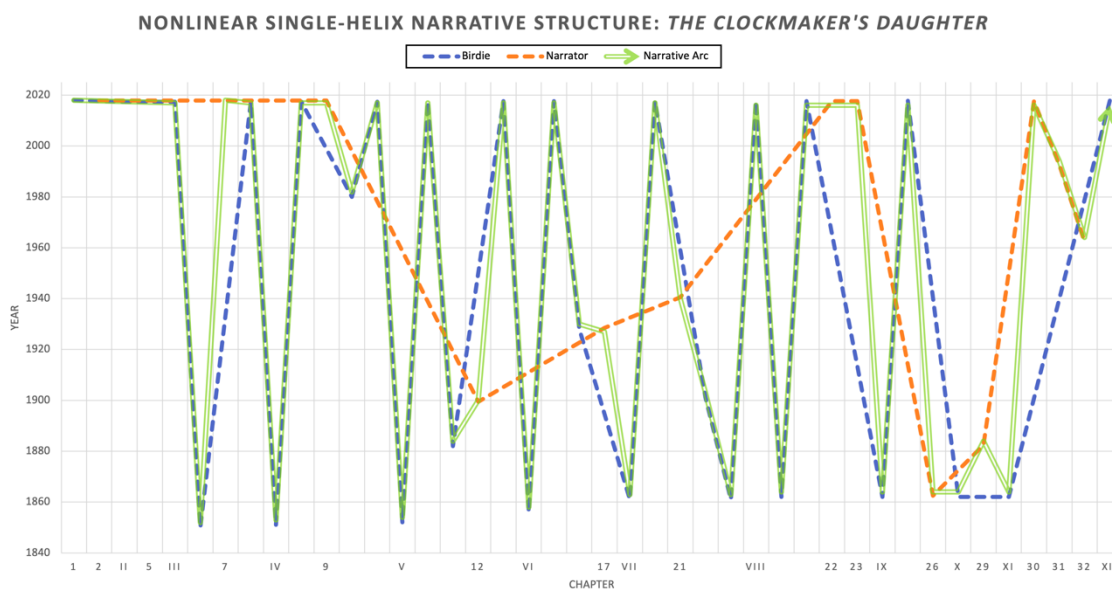
Figure 13. Nonlinear Single-Helix Narrative Structure: *The Clockmaker's Daughter*
A two-dimensional depiction of the nonlinear, spiraling narrative arc that montages Birdie's memories with the third-person narratives. The solid green arrowed line representing the narrative arc is the order in which the chapters appear in the novel.

Morton's novel begins and ends with Birdie's "spectral" perspective, and Birdie tells us from the beginning that "I remember [Edward]. I remember everything" (3). Morton also begins and ends her novel at Birchwood Manor. Therefore, Birdie's story

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[61] When the American edition of *The Clockmaker's Daughter* was published in 2019, there was additional paratextual matter in the back, a "Chronology of Birchwood Manor" that organizes the major events from the novel, without significant spoilers, into a chronological ordering by year (Morton, American ed. 486).

does not begin at the beginning or end of her life as Anastasia's and Anna's do, but rather in the middle; however, this is not a typical *in medias res* structure. Instead, Birdie begins her story with snippets of disjointed memories that hint at events from the Victorian storyline but do not make sense until they are later more fully developed. In this way, Morton, like Lawhon, relies heavily on foreshadowing and, in fact, many of the references Birdie drops in her opening chapter do not make sense until it is re-read after reading the rest of the book. For example, she spends a few paragraphs describing "the main flight of stairs" in Birchwood manor and mentions "floorboards and wall panels with clever concealments" and a corner of the stairs whose "warmth" is "almost unnatural" (Morton 4). Her interest in stairs and "clever concealments" does not make sense until readers reach Lucy's chapters in part 3, when Lucy describes searching out and finding priest holes in her brother Edward's home—Birchwood Manor (Morton 406-407). Lucy herself experiences a moment of panic and claustrophobia when she slips into the priest hole in the stairs:

> The space was tight: not high enough for her to sit unless her head was bent so far forwards that her chin was touching her chest, and so she lay down flat. The air inside was stale and close; ... the realization that she was lying in a secret chamber, designed to keep a man concealed from enemies bent on his destruction, with a trapdoor that might ease closed at any moment, leaving her alone in a pitch-black space, drowning in thick, broiling air, no one aware of what she'd found and where she'd gone, began to push in on her from all sides. She felt a sudden panic constricting her lungs, her breaths becoming short and loud, and she scrabbled into a crouched position as quickly as she could, hitting her head on the ceiling of the chamber in her rush to get free. (Morton 407)

Lucy's panicked thoughts foreshadow Birdie's eventual fate when Lucy conceals her from her "brother" Martin in that same priest hole before hiding herself in the second one, which Lucy describes as "a very different prospect" with "a different feeling entirely from the stairwell chamber: there was something comforting about this hiding place" (Morton 407). Although Lucy intends to tell her brother of her discovery, she is sidetracked from that revelation by none other than Birdie and so it happens that no one other than Lucy knows about the presence of the priest holes in the house until Lucy and Birdie are in desperate need of a place to hide when Birdie's past literally catches up with her. Birdie concludes her description of the stairs and corner by saying "at last I learned the truth" about the cause of the warmth and "I know this place as I know my own name" (Morton 4). This makes no sense on the initial reading, but upon re-reading, it is clear that this place is the priest hole in which Birdie becomes trapped and dies near the end of the novel (but at the beginning of the story). The reader's introduction to Birdie is also an introduction to her simultaneous temporal perspective, which she describes as "[i]t was long ago; it was yesterday" (Morton 4). However, although Birdie makes some sly and coy references to haunting and ghosts—saying, "Edward said that [Birchwood Manor] was haunted. It wasn't, not then," and "[n]ot a ghost, oh, no, not that"—readers do not know yet that the unnamed first-person narrator is no longer alive (Morton 3, 6).

Nonlinear Temporality, Memories, and Identity

Birdie's identity throughout the novel is fluid and shifting. In the past, she says that she was "reborn" three times during her life: first, as Albertine "Birdie" Bell, the clockmaker's daughter, then as Mrs. Mack's pickpocket ingenue who would take on the name of another girl, Lily Millington, who died shortly after Birdie joined Mrs. Mack's

troupe, and finally as Edward Radcliffe's model, muse, and lover. Birdie repeatedly mentions her ability to remember the past, saying, "They have all gone. They are all long gone. And the questions remain mine. Knots that can never be untied. Turned over and over again, forgotten by all but me. For I forget nothing, no matter how I try" (Morton 29). She references bones just before this in a way that implies her memories are tied to bones, which does two things: firstly, for the initial reader, it implies that she may be dead, but, secondly, it foreshadows Lucy, Edward's younger sister, returning to the estate twenty years after Birdie's death and transferring her remains (which are but bones by this time) from the priest hole to a triple-lead-lined casket that Lucy entombs in the garden beneath a Japanese maple tree (Morton 462). Birdie describes her feelings at this occurrence, saying, "As my name, my life, my history, was buried, I, who had once dreamed of capturing light, found that I had become captured light itself" (Morton 464). Over the course of the novel, Birdie's identity merges more and more with the house itself—Birchwood Manor—until she closes the novel by telling her readers, "I do not wish to be set free. I am of this house, this house that Edward loved; I *am* this house" (Morton 481). In this way, Birdie's identity over time (or beyond time) shifts away from her human roots and merges with the house that she haunts.

In addition to referencing her memories, Birdie also describes herself as being "outside time" and says (with a heavy dose of foreshadowing since one of the characters of the novel is an archivist who will be involved in curating the supposed history of the house and Lily Millington or Birdie herself):

> Human beings are curators. Each polishes his or her own favored memories,
> arranging them in order to create a narrative that pleases. Some events are
> repaired and buffed for display; others are deemed unworthy and cast aside,

shelved belowground in the overflowing storeroom of the mind. There, with any

luck they are promptly forgotten. The process is not dishonest: it is the only way

that people can live with themselves and the weight of their experiences.

(Morton 60)

Birdie reiterates, "It is different over here. I remember everything, memories forming

different pictures depending on the order in which they fall" (Morton 60). This cues

readers to pay attention to the order in which Birdie tells her story. And although Birdie

does not claim agency over the order in which the memories "fall," she does claim agency

over the story that she is narrating by repeatedly asserting that she remembers

everything or is incapable of forgetting anything since becoming a ghost (Morton 60).

These claims are in stark contrast to those made by the narrator about other characters

having fallible memories, such as when Elodie begins a journey to learn why a sketch she

has found misplaced in her archives seems familiar to her. Birdie's references to her

infallible memory contrast with the way in which Morton references memory when

writing from other characters' perspectives. For example, when Elodie first stumbles

upon the sketch of the house that she will later learn is Birchwood Manor, she describes

herself as having a "strange sensation, like the glimpse of a memory she couldn't grasp,"

which "disquieted her" (Morton 26). Thus, it is more difficult for Elodie to access her

memories than it is for Birdie. Birdie's control over memories also parallels the way in

which Anna's ordering of her memories and those of Anastasia changes the "picture" or

"perception" of their connection. Like Anastasia, Birdie has a reputation that she wants

to correct with her version of events: "I am remembered as a thief. An imposter. A girl

who rose above her station, who was not chaste. And I was all of those things at different

times, and more. But there is one thing they accuse me of which is not just. I was not a

murderer. I did not fire the gun that day that killed poor Fanny Brown" (Morton 133).

Birdie also explains that "Time passes differently when I'm alone in the house ... . Past,

present, and future are meaningless; I am outside time. Here and there, and there and

here, at once" (Morton 60-61). In this way, Birdie is more like the Anna-as-narrator who

speaks to readers in the paratextual sections of *I Was Anastasia*, and also the narrator of

Amis' *Time's Arrow* who informs his reader, "Some sort of bifurcation had occurred, in

about 1959, or maybe even earlier. I was still living inside, quietly, with my own

thoughts. Thoughts that were free to wander through time" and later describes himself

as "I who have no name or body—I have slipped out from under him and am now

scattered above like flakes of ash-blond human hair" (Amis, part 2, chapter 4; part 2,

chapter 6). Although Birdie has agency as one of the narrators of *The Clockmaker's Daughter*,

her agency as a ghost has limits just as her agency as a poor woman in Victorian society

had. She calls attention to this numerous times throughout the novel, beginning with her

first chapter, when she says, "I had no choice; I stayed behind" at Birchwood Manor

(Morton 6). This is also the first indication that readers receive that this narrator is not a

typical human character.

Subverting Plot and Upending Narrative Structure

At first, part 1 of Morton's novel appears to be setting up a fairly typical romantic

plotline. Elodie Winslow, an archivist, is in the midst of planning her wedding to

Alastair, or more accurately being forced to allow his mother Penelope to dictate the

planning of said wedding. This narrative hits all of the beats of a romantic comedy

plotline: Elodie seems ambivalent if not outright disinterested in her wedding plans; her

best friend Pippa does not like her fiancé (and it is not difficult for readers to agree with

her); and Birdie's chapters introduce the perfect hero figure, the mysterious treasure hunter, Jack. On their own, the chapters that follow Elodie, even beyond part 1, would create the perfect (and predictable) romantic-comedy arc that readers know and love (or love to hate). However, after setting up these expectations in part 1, Morton then disrupts the romantic-comedy narrative structure by dropping Elodie from part 2 until chapters 22 and 23 at the very end. Instead, part 2 takes readers back in time to three sub-plots that reveal that this novel is *not* just another romantic story of boy meets girl, and Elodie—contrary to appearances in part 1—is *not* our heroine. These subplots follow the three other "special ones" in whom Birdie took an interest over the years as she haunted (or was forced to haunt) Birchwood Manor: student Ada Lovegrove, historian Leonard Gilbert, and single mother Juliet Wright. Elodie is still connected to this part of the story, though, because Juliet's narrative reveals that she was Elodie's great grandmother.[62] Birdie reveals her memories of her "special ones" in her chapters that precede their stories, but her memories are from her perspective and limited to the time the characters spent actually in or around Birchwood Manor. The intervening third-person-narrated chapters present a fuller portrait of each character and also emphasize how these characters are not only important to Birdie but play a key role in solving the mystery (or mysteries) of what happened at Birchwood Manor in the summers since 1862. They are also all linked in tangential ways as Juliet flashes back to the memory of first stumbling upon Birchwood Manor during her honeymoon in 1928, when she encountered a soldier who readers can recognize as Leonard Gilbert (Morton 306-307).

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[62] Elodie Winslow is the daughter of Winston Winslow and Lauren Adler. Lauren Adler is the daughter of Beatrice Wright Adler, who was Juliet and Alan Wright's first-born child and sister to Freddie and Tip Wright.

Then later, on a Friday evening at the local pub, Juliet runs into Dr. Ada Lovegrove who has become an archaeologist and professor at New York University since leaving Birchwood Manor after the closure of Lucy's school (Morton 321). But although each of these subplots provides clues to what happened in the past and contains traces of the past (like the transference of the Radcliffe Blue diamond over the years), it is impossible to piece together the whole truth of the mystery until part 3. Reviewers of the novel including Caroline Tew and Jess Righthand dislike part 2, critiquing it for slowing down the pacing of the novel and making the novel "overpopulated" according to the *Kirkus* staff ("The Clockmaker's Daughter"). However, without this section, the traces throughout the novel would be vaguer and more difficult to connect, and removing it would undermine the narratorial agency that Birdie has over the novel, even when she is not directly narrating it.

Part 3 begins with Lucy's narrative of the events of the summer of 1862, rather than beginning with Birdie's narrations as the previous sections of the novel did. Lucy at first seems to be on the fringes of the story that she narrates and an odd choice of perspective for a third-person relation of this story, in which Edward Radcliffe and Lily Millington/Birdie seem to be the hero and heroine, doubling the romance plot of Eloise's storyline. However, Morton eventually reveals that this choice is not just deliberate, but necessary, as Lucy Radcliffe is the only one who can tell the story of the summer of 1862 at Birchwood Manor because she is the only person who knows the full and complete story, at least until Jack and Elodie dig up the casket buried under the Japanese Maple as Birdie suggests they are going to do after the novel ends (in this way, Lucy's character's role is perhaps also similar to that of Thomasina in Stoppard's *Arcadia*). Birdie's chapters in part 3 serve to explain the origins that were left intentionally oblique in part 1 of the

novel: her human origins (how she really came to be living with Mrs. Mack and the Captain and why her father never sent for her to follow him to America), and her ghost origins (why it is that Birdie haunts Birchwood Manor but Fanny, who was murdered there, does not).

Part 4 revisits key moments in a reverse chronological order to tie up the final loose threads. As predicted, Elodie throws off Alastair and hooks up with Jack, but rather than foregrounding this storyline, Morton shoves it to the back, practically out of the novel entirely. Instead of Elodie and Jack's relationship bringing about the happy ending of the story, it is the knowledge that they will be able to piece together all (or at least most) of the disparate pieces of the past and finally know Lucy's secret and Birdie's story and, potentially, learn the location of the long-lost Radcliffe Blue that provides a hopeful resolution for readers. Elodie's and Jack's love story is only important in that it is the final connection between all of the disparate pieces of the past. This is what allows Birdie to feel satisfied that her story has finally been told, though she does not talk of being "at peace" or "at rest" or "crossing over"—rather she denies "an assumption that ghosts and apparitions [long] for release. That we 'haunt' because we are trapped" and hints at a future point at which she may decide (or need) to tell her story once again:

> I might even tell my story again someday, as I did to little Tip, and before him,
> Ada, weaving together threads from Edward's Night of the Following with the
> things my father told me about my mother's flight from home, the tale of the
> Eldritch Children and their Fairy Queen. It is a good story, about truth and honor
> and brave children doing righteous deeds; it is a powerful story. (Morton 481)

This hints at the way in which historiography can be cyclical—a story that is found or discovered may be lost again and eventually need rediscovering or retelling, which once

again takes us back to Stoppard's *Arcadia* and the attempts of the historians to piece together what had happened there in the 19th century—and also provides a glimmer of hope for readers. Birdie also observes how history can change how people are perceived in an *Arcadian* fashion: "There is a lot of interest, too, in Fanny. She has become a tragic heroine, impossible though that is for one who knew her in life to believe" (Morton 131). In addition to showing how historians can misinterpret the traces of the past in the process of attempting to piece together bits of history into a seemingly complete narrative, Stoppard also shows how history repeats itself in a cyclical way when Valentine restates the chaos theory, which Thomasina theorizes in 1809, to Hannah:

> It's an iterated algorithm. ... What she's doing is, every time she works out a value for *y*, she's using *that* as her next value for *x*. And so on. Like a feedback. She's feeding the solution back into the equation, and then solving it again. Iteration, you see. ... It's the technique I'm using on my grouse numbers, and it hasn't been around for much longer than, well, call it twenty years. (Stoppard 1.4.9-28, 1.4.30-32).

When Hannah asks Valentine whether Thomasina could have actually developed the same theory he is using back in 1809, Valentine scoffs at the idea and says, "No, of course she bloody couldn't!" and then explains, "Actually I'm doing it from the other end. She started with equation and turned it into a graph. I've got a graph—real data—and I'm trying to find the equation which would give you the graph if you used it the way she's used hers. Iterated it. ... It's how you look at population changes in biology. ... It's about the behaviour of numbers" (Stoppard 1.4.58-80). However, in contradiction to Valentine's claims, at the beginning of the play, in response to finding a proof for

Fermat's last theorem, Thomasina speculates to her tutor Septimus, "If you could stop every atom in its position and direction, and if your mind could comprehend all the actions thus suspended, then if you were really, *really* good at algebra, you could write the formula for all the future" (Stoppard 1.1.124-128). Septimus responds in a suppressing manner, "Yes, as far as I know, you are the first person to have thought of this (*Pause. With an effort.*) In the margin of his copy of *Arithmetica*, Fermat wrote that he had discovered a wonderful proof of his theorem but the margin being too narrow for his purpose, did not have room to write it down" (Stoppard 1.1.129-133). In this way, Septimus indicates yet another cycle of history from Fermat to Thomasina. Throughout *Arcadia*, Stoppard creates dramatic irony and satirizes historians through the juxtaposition of his two time periods. Morton does this as well with her nonlinear narrative structure and montaging of Birdie's narratives with those of Leonard, Eloise, and Jack in particular. Stoppard shows his audience the truth and then the "history" that the academics put together. In contrast to Stoppard, Morton does not show her readers the history directly. She forces them to try and piece together what truly happened and what people think happened and where they went wrong. Everything in the novel is connected through two narrative access points: Birdie's ghostly narration of her life and the life of Birchwood Manor, and Elodie's quest to understand from whence the satchel and its contents came and why they are in the archives in which she works. What both Stoppard and Morton also do is co-opt the audience or readers into the position of acting as detectives and participating in the act of historiography itself, albeit a fictionalized one. Where the play and the novel differ is that Hannah and Bernard are working almost in competition with each other and arrive at what Stoppard shows his audience are false conclusions, whereas Morton

depicts two timelines of researchers: Leonard interviewing an only somewhat truthful

Lucy for his book on Edward, and Elodie (who reads Leonard's book in 2017) and Jack

working together to puzzle out the mystery of how Birdie connected James Stratton to

Edward Radcliffe and where the Radcliffe Blue has ended up. While Elodie and Jack

seem to be on the right track as Birdie ends the novel, Leonard's conclusions about what

happened in the summer of 1892, like those of Hannah and Bernard in Stoppard's play,

are based on incomplete evidence and assumptions and thus reveal half-truths at best.

Intertextuality and Traces of the Past

In contrast to Lawhon's fictionalization of historical figures from the lives of

Anna Anderson and Anastasia Romanov, Morton historicizes her fictional characters,

dropping in references to fictional biographies, archives, and Wikipedia articles to make

the Victorian figures of Edward Radcliffe and James Stratton appear to have existed.

Morton's references are similar to ones Winterson inserts into *The Gap of Time*, though

Winterson has more of a mix of fictional and real-world references. Despite the

fictitiousness of Morton's historicizations, they serve the dual functions of creating a

seemingly real, fictional world and adding to the novel's intertextuality. For example,

Elodie works in the archives of Stratton, Cadwell & Co., which is a fictional company

created by a fictional Victorian character, James Stratton, whom Birdie knew in her life

as "Pale Joe" (Morton 365). Elodie also has extensive knowledge of the Victorian era that

adds intertextuality to her narrative, such as when she takes a bus "north from Charing

Cross to Hampstead" and notes that she has chosen that method of transit over the

underground because her view of the Crossrail excavation by Tottenham Court Road is

"a glimpse of the past so real it could be touched," taking her back to "when Charles

Dickens was making his daily walks, and alchemists plied their trade in the sewer-lined streets of the Seven Dials" (Morton 15). Lucy also references a more contemporary (to her) Charles Dickens when she overhears Edward's friends discussing whether Birchwood Manor has ghosts and thinks to herself about the "translucent" ghosts in *A Christmas Carol*, recalling "the description of Marley's ghost dragging his chains and padlocks; the way Scrooge could look right through him to the buttons on the back of his coat" (Morton 409). Morton never puts readers directly into Stratton's point of view, but she does relate myriad "historical" details about Stratton throughout the novel. The same is true of Edward Radcliffe, one of the founding members of the Magenta Brotherhood, which seems to have been heavily inspired by the Pre-Raphaelites and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The name Radcliffe also references one of the most influential writers of the gothic genre, Anne Radcliffe, which is apropos since Morton's novel draws very heavily on 19th-century gothic tropes and influences.

As with *I Was Anastasia*, there are physical props, or traces, that resurface throughout the novel and serve to connect the multiple storylines together, including amongst others a satchel and the Radcliffe Blue diamond. The satchel appears first in Elodie's storyline as her discovery of it in an unlisted box in the Stratton archives initiates her quest to identify the house in the sketch that she finds tucked away inside the bag (Morton 9). Morton draws her reader's attention to the satchel by switching to its perspective when Elodie opens the box in which it has been trapped since 1966: "The pinpricks of sudden light were a shock, and the satchel, pressed deep inside the box, exhaled. The journey had been long and it was understandably weary" (10). This passage serves multiple purposes. First, it calls attention to the satchel in a way that sticks in readers' minds so that they recognize it when it appears in other times and places

throughout the novel. Second, it allows Morton to present another view of Elodie that is not limited to Elodie's own thoughts and perspective mediated by a third-person narrator. The narrator speaks as if the satchel itself observes Elodie:

> At the other end of the gloves was a woman: young, with fawn-like arms leading to a delicate neck supporting a face framed by short black hair. She held the satchel at a distance, but not with distaste. Her touch was gentle. Her mouth had gathered in a small neat purse of interest, and her dark eyes narrowed slightly before widening as she took in the hand-sewn joins, the fine Indian cotton, and the precise stitching. (Morton 10)

This is a unique way of introducing Elodie's appearance to readers, rather than having her appraise her own appearance in a mirror. The final purpose served by this passage is to link objects with memories. As Elodie opens the satchel to examine its contents, the satchel remembers when it "had been shiny and new. Made to order by Mr. Simms himself" and then as the light illuminates its contents, it experiences "[a]n onslaught of memories—fragmented, confused" that include "a bell tinkling above the door at W. Simms & Son; the swish of a young woman's skirts; the thud of horses' hooves; the smell of fresh paint and turpentine; heat, lust, whispering. Gaslight in railway stations; a long, winding river; the wheat fragrance of summer—" (Morton 11). The satchel only retains these memories until it finds Elodie, at which point it declares, "everything, at last, was blank and quiet. It was over" (Morton 11). In this way, the satchel identifies Elodie as the one chosen to unravel the secrets of its past even though she does not actually receive the memories from it, but rather because it seems to recognize her as someone who will search for the truth behind its existence and presence in this box of unlisted materials that have been misplaced, abandoned, and forgotten for more than fifty years. The light

that seems to activate the satchel's memories is also an important theme throughout the novel.

The satchel continues to resurface throughout the novel. Elodie herself conducts "a meticulous inspection" of it, noting "one of the buckles bore a set of five hallmarks suggesting that it was sterling and British-made," "the duty mark showing Queen Victoria's head," and the initials "W.S." that confirm the satchel's own memory of being made by William Simms, "a high-end manufacturer of silver and leather goods with a Royal Warrant and ... a shop situated in Bond Street" (Morton 35). She also finds an entry in Stratton's 1867 journal that refers to both Edward and the satchel, detailing how Edward came to visit him late one evening: "*His manner was that of a crazed beast, his eyes wild and his long hair disheveled by the constant raking to which it was subjected by his fine, pale fingers. He emanated a captured energy, like a man possessed*" (Morton 53). Stratton says that Edward asked him to hold onto a few personal items for him, then gave him "*a leather satchel, empty but for a single book of sketches*" and "*made [Stratton] swear to keep the bag and sketchbook safe*" without revealing whom they should be safeguarded for or from or when he might return to collect them (Morton 53). While this entry reveals that Edward Radcliffe and James Stratton were connected, it keeps readers in suspense about the how or why of the matter. Working alongside Jack Rolands, Elodie pieces together that the girl who called herself Lily Millington had been the "little girl who lived in unsavory circumstances" with whom Stratton had "formed an unlikely friendship in his childhood" after finding a letter written from "BB" to "J" about her imminent departure for America (Morton 364). The letter also indicates that she "*[has] enclosed a photograph*" for him "*to remember me by*" (Morton 365). Birdie eventually reveals in her narrative that the satchel was actually a

gift that she purchased and presented to Edward with the money she had been saving for a ticket to America, noting, "Immediately, he put the strap over his shoulder, and from that day, until the last, I did not see him without the satchel" (Morton 373). Thus, these traces of the satchel explain where it came from and why Stratton (or as Birdie knew him, Pale Joe) placed a document case containing a framed photograph of Birdie/Lily inside the satchel alongside Edward's monogrammed sketchbook.

Lucy also takes note of Lily's gift to Edward and mentions feeling envious of "how much he loved it" before she snoops inside the satchel, which Edward has left in his studio at Birchwood Manor, and finds the Radcliffe Blue and the "tickets for a Mr. and Mrs. Radcliffe, traveling to New York City on the first of August" (Morton 428). This is the moment in which the satchel and the heirloom diamond cross paths in the novel. The diamond is teased out to readers early on as well, when Elodie reads about the "historical" version of what happened at Birchwood Manor in the summer of 1862. Elodie learns about the diamond through Leonard Gilbert's biography, *Edward Radcliffe: His Life and Loves*, in which he "posited a theory that the model had been an accomplice to the robbery in which Frances Brown was shot dead, fleeing afterwards to America, taking with them the Radcliffe family's heirloom pendant" and suggesting for the first time that Edward had actually been in love with Lily Millington and was heartbroken over her disappearance rather than Fanny's murder[63] (Morton 122). Elodie reads Gilbert as skeptical of Lily's involvement in the disappearance of the diamond, but notes "Gilbert went into some detail about the pendant, for it turned out that the diamond it contained was no ordinary gem. The twenty-three-carat stone was a blue diamond so rare and

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[63] While Leonard does ferret out this truth from his interviews with Lucy, he fails to glean the truth of how Birdie died or learn that she never made it to America.

valuable that it had its own name: the Radcliffe Blue" (Morton 123). The traces of the diamond do not begin with the Radcliffe family, though. Elodie learns from the biography:

> The lineage of the Blue could be traced back in time to Marie Antoinette, for whom the remarkable stone had first been set in a pendant; back further to the mercenary John Hawkwood, who obtained the gem during a raid on Florence in the fourteenth century[;] ... back further still to tenth-century India, where it was said—apocryphally, in Gilbert's opinion—that the stone had been plucked by a traveling merchant from the wall of a Hindu temple. ... [W]hen the stone fell into the hands of the Radcliffe family in 1816, it was reset in a filigree gold casing and threaded onto a fine chain to sit at the hollow of the neck. (Morton 123)

While nearly drowning, Ada Lovegrove finds the diamond in the Upper Thames River that flows by the manor when she senses a presence in the water: "as her brain was burning, she saw something ahead of her, a bright blue shining light, a jewel, a moon, and she knew, somehow, that if she just reached out and grabbed it, the bright blue light would show her the way" (Morton 182). Ada survives, but another schoolgirl, May Hawkins, drowns, ultimately leading to the school's closure in 1901; Birdie remembers how afterwards Ada reveals the "shining stone" to Lucy when she is caring for Ada and Ada tells her, "my very own amulet found me, right when I needed it, and it protected me from harm. Just like you said it would" (Morton 333). Birdie does not reveal how Lucy responds to this revelation from Ada, which is interesting because later in Lucy's 1882 narrative readers learn that Lucy was responsible for the diamond ending up in the river after Lucy discovers that Lily had not run away as the police had believed in 1862 but instead had suffocated to death inside the tinier of the two priest holes that Lucy had

found in the manor because a concussion had caused Lucy to forget that Lily needed to be let out after Martin had murdered Fanny and run off (Morton 456-457). Lucy decides to toss the diamond in the river rather than burying it with Birdie's remains because "[t]he earth gave up her secrets easily, but the river would carry its treasure out to the fathomless sea" (Morton 459). Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately for Ada, Lucy is wrong about the diamond allowing itself to be carried out to sea. Later in life, Ada returns to the village of Birchwood and ends up passing the diamond along to Tip, saying, "I have a feeling it belongs with you. That it knew you'd be here and found a way to get to you. … Keep it safe, and it will do the same for you" (Morton 475). Tip treats it as a "shiny stone" of little value and ends up putting it with other items he finds "honest or beautiful or interesting" onto a charm box that he makes for Elodie after her mother's death to protect her (Morton 476). This is ironic because Elodie mentions hiding her valuable engagement ring in "her childhood charm box" and observes she "didn't know a lot about jewelry; she would be hard pressed to spot the difference between a priceless diamond and a glass pretender" (Morton 356). At the end of the novel, readers realize that Elodie has had the Radcliffe heirloom the entire time and that Jack will likely not return it to Ada's granddaughter, Rosalind Wheeler, who sent him to track it down, because Elodie may never even realize what she has. Thus, Lucy's wish that the diamond will disappear forever comes to pass, and Morton seems to ask her readers if this is actually worse than the Radcliffe family storing it in a "safe-deposit box at Lloyd's of London" and rarely wearing or enjoying it for the fifty years or so that it belonged to them (Morton 123-124).

Themes of Time and Light

In addition to the way in which Morton has structured her novel, she also calls attention to time and temporality in the content of the novel, beginning with the title itself—*The Clockmaker's Daughter*. And yet, clockmaking itself hardly comes into the book at all. The main comment that Birdie makes on clocks is to explain that her father's "Great Project was the creation of a Mystery Clock, the construction of which involved long sessions at his workbench and frequent surreptitious visits to the Court of Chancery, where patents of invention were enrolled and issued" (Morton 66). Birdie does not fully explain the Mystery Clock other than that it was intended to be "a clock whose pendulum appeared to move without the benefit of a mechanism" but she does transition from her father's plans for the clock to his thoughts on time itself, recounting, "There was no such thing as the right time, he explained. Time was an idea: it had no end and no beginning; it could not be seen or heard or smelled. It could be measured, sure enough, but no words had been found to explain precisely what it is. As to the 'right' time, it was simply a matter of agreeing to agree" (Morton 66-67). Another way in which Morton closely connects Birdie to clocks and the theme of time is by having Edward present her with "the most beautiful wall clock that [she] had ever seen. The box casing and face were both made of finely crafted wood, with Roman numerals inlaid in gold, and delicate hands with tapered arrows" (375). She remarks to her readers, "Its bestowal was Edward's way of demonstrating that he knew me, that he understood who I really was" (Morton 375). This clock makes its way to Birchwood Manor, where Lucy will note it when she returns after her brother's death: "in the Mulberry Room downstairs the wall clock was keeping count. Lily Millington's clock, still ticking" is ironic because Lucy is

about to open up the priest hole in the stairs and uncover Lily Millington's (Birdie's) long-forgotten remains (Morton 443).

Although it is Birdie who is the actual clockmaker's daughter of the title, Elodie is introduced to readers as a character who is steeped in time and temporality. Chapter 1 opens with the temporal marker "Summer 2017," which alerts readers to the temporal setting of Elodie's narrative. "It was Elodie Winslow's favorite time of day" the narrator says, and "the moment was Elodie's alone" because her boss and co-workers have already gone home for the day (Morton 7). Elodie's favorite time is "a certain point in the very late afternoon [when] the sun seemed to hesitate in its passage across the sky and light spilled through the small glass tiles in the pavement directly onto her desk" (Morton 7). This is also the time at which Elodie makes herself a cup of tea using a timer whose "grains of sand [slip] through the glass" because she "preferred her tea when it had steeped for three and a half minutes exactly" (Morton 7).

Elodie also describes her work in the archive as "social engagement across time" during which she "put in long hours and engaged frequently with other human beings; they just weren't the living, breathing sort" (Morton 8). In addition, Elodie's encounters with the historical adventures of "Messrs. Stratton and Cadwell" are not chronological in nature, but similar to the nonlinear structure of the novel as a whole. Elodie describes "spen[ding] her days communing with the ... dusty artifacts of the long-dead, stepping into this account of a soiree on the Orient Express or that encounter between Victorian adventurers in search of the Northwest Passage" (Morton 8). Elodie also often loses track of time when she is working, noting in one instance that "Time had lost its shape again, its arrow dissolving into dust around her" (Morton 14). In this way, the single-helix narrative structure of Morton's novel better reflects how an archivist or historian

might approach a story as opposed to the chronological perspective of a single omniscient narrator. Moreover, the references to temporality and time do not stop after the introduction of Elodie but continue throughout the novel.

Elodie is not the only character to be closely associated with the theme of time. When the narrator takes readers into Leonard Gilbert's perspective to relate how he researched Edward Radcliffe for his dissertation in the post-World War I era, there is again an obsession with time and temporality that resurfaces as Leonard ponders "the importance of place" and "the fluidity of time" (Morton 221). Lucy talks to Leonard about time (of the universe) and space and physics, obliquely referencing Georges Lemaitre's theory that "the universe is expanding at a constant rate" and began with "[a] single atom that somehow ... exploded" (Morton 237, 238). Lucy also speculates about her more personal temporal experience when she confesses to him, "Oh, but it is the worst thing about getting old, Mr. Gilbert. Time. There isn't enough of it left. There is simply too much to know and too few hours in which to know it" (Morton 238). Lucy is also the one to bring up the paradox of time travel and simultaneity in the novel, responding to Leonard's observation that "entering [Birchwood Manor] felt ... like stepping back in time" with the assertion that time travel is "[a] logical impossibility, of course" because "[h]ow can one ever be in two places 'at the same time'? The phrase itself is a paradox. In this universe at any rate ... " (Morton 251, 252; final ellipsis in source). Lucy's simultaneity paradox differs from the one created by Morton's narrative as she is thinking of simultaneously existing in multiple time periods instead of the simultaneity of her temporal experience in a single time period.

In addition to weaving time as a theme throughout the novel, Morton incorporates light imagery, often tying light to memories, identity, and temporality, but

also foregrounding it in the artistic endeavors of Edward Radcliffe and the other members of the Magenta Brotherhood. Birdie says of Edward's art, "it is the light, the light, always the light, that makes his paintings sing" (Morton 348). Birdie also ties light to time when she says she learned "to tell the time by the sun" from her father when she was a child and then says, "It became my mission to capture light" (Morton 68). She describes how she made "tiny perforations" in the lid of "a small hinged tin" that she would set outside "in the sunniest place that I could find" but when "the top was burning hot" and "I slid the box of wonder open, there was no glittering captive waiting for me. It was just the empty inside of rusty old tin" (Morton 68). Birdie continues to find light elusive of actual capture: "Light was turning circles on the ceiling, in step with the shadows, and I was watching them dance. I reached up to clutch at them, but they slipped through my fingers every time ..." (Morton 437; ellipsis in source). Rather than returning to Elodie's narrative to show her and Jack solving the mystery, the novel ends with Birdie who says she has merged with the house to become one with the light she previously sought to capture: "I am the light in the window that you know cannot be there. I am the stars in the dark when you feel yourself alone" (Morton 482). Birdie also places herself in the liminal space of time and temporality by claiming to be both "the hands of the clock and the space in between" (Morton 482). Throughout the time novel, but especially in the final chapter, Birdie paradoxically both does and does not exist simultaneously; she is and is not telling this story to the reader as much of the narrative chunks are told by an unnamed omniscient narrator who is decidedly *not* Birdie. In this way, the paradox of Birdie's existence within and outside of temporality is similar to the paradox of delayed simultaneity.

In my discussion of the satchel as a trace, I mentioned that the satchel's memories were activated by light touching it when Elodie removed it from its unlisted box in the archives. There is a similar moment at the end of part 3, after Lucy reveals that she was in part responsible for Birdie's death, having helped her hide from Martin but forgetting that Birdie was hidden away until it was too late to save her. When Lucy inherits Birchwood Manor upon the death of her brother Edward in 1882, she returns to the house. Once there, she locates Birdie's remains and has them properly entombed with Birdie's story, or, as much of her story as Lucy herself has been able to learn (Morton 461-462). In Lucy's narrative, the narrator tells readers, "[J]ust as she spoke the words ['Your name was Albertine Bell.'], the attic window seemed ever so briefly to glow. Almost as if a lamp had been switched on inside" (Morton 462). This light in the attic window of Birchwood Manor refers back to a story that Edward told Lucy and Birdie about the night he first discovered the house as a child, lost in the woods on a moonlit night and looking for a safe haven; he told them, "he glimpsed a house on the horizon, a light visible from a window at its top, like a lighthouse in a storm, signaling the way to safety" (Morton 336). This experience inspires Edward in many ways: first to purchase Birchwood Manor for himself, second to paint *View from the Attic Window*, and third to tell his friends a story of a Fairy Queen.[64] Birdie also recounts the memorial Lucy held for the burial of Birdie's long-forgotten remains. Birdie first says that after everyone left the manor, she "evaporated, returning to the warmth and stillness of the house, slipping between the floorboards, settling with the dust, disappearing into the long, dark quiet"

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[64] Edward's Fairy Queen "cast an enchantment" over Birchwood Manor and its lands so that "a light can be glimpsed at times in the uppermost window of any house that stands upon this plot of land" representing the presence of her people (Morton 411).

(Morton 464). Upon Lucy's return to the house, Birdie says, "I was pulled back together by the arrival of my first visitor. And as my name, my life, my history, was buried, I, who had once dreamed of capturing light, found that I had become captured light itself" (Morton 464). Birdie knew how much the light in the attic window had meant to Edward and how it had made him feel safe as a child, and so as a ghost, she becomes that light and attempts to save others, namely Ada, Leonard, and Tip and his family—all the way down to Elodie. This is emphasized by the title of part 4, "Captured Light" and the way in which the final section of the novel revisits and emphasizes the connections between Birdie's "special ones" and also reveals the final hiding place, or perhaps resting place, of the lost Radcliffe Blue diamond in a charm box that Tip makes for Elodie that he hopes "to imbue" with "the same powerful idea, the same light and love, that the stone had when it was given to him" by Ada Lovegrove (Morton 476). In addition to tying light to the Radcliffe Blue and Edward's paintings, Morton also ties it closely to photography; there are multiple photographs that play key roles in driving the narrative forward, including one of Lily/Birdie and one of Elodie's mother, Lauren Adler, with a man who was not her husband, but whom readers eventually learn was Elodie's birth father.

The Character of a Place

A common complaint among reviewers of this novel is that it is "overpopulated" and does not seem to have a single protagonist for readers to follow through the novel ("The Clockmaker's Daughter"). I strongly disagree with this reading of the novel as I believe that there are three possible contenders for protagonist of *The Clockmaker's Daughter*: the eponymous Albertine "Birdie" Bell (also known as Lily Millington), whose first-person narrations guide the narrative structure of the novel as a whole and claim

narrative agency over the story; Elodie Winslow, whose maternal family line has been entangled with the manor and Birdie's ghost since 1928; and Birchwood Manor itself, which serves as the nexus for all of the novel's myriad narrative threads. Despite the title of the novel pointing towards Birdie as the protagonist, I personally find Birchwood Manor to be the most interesting character in the novel and enjoyed the many tiny ways in which the house interacted in different characters' lives and narratives. Morton encourages her readers to view the house as a character that has its own presence or life throughout the novel with the repeated references to lights in the windows as well as the uncanny draw that the house exerts on everyone, from Edward to Elodie, Juliet to Lauren, Lucy to Lily, and with Birdie's assertion that "Edward used to say that the river possessed a primeval memory of everything that had ever happened. It occurs to me that this house is like that, too. It remembers, just as I do. It remembers everything" (200). Although the novel is long and takes a meandering path through the fictitious history of Birchwood Manor, and Victorian to present-day England, Morton does a masterful job of weaving together a multiplicity of voices and personalities and, as she notes in her paratextual Author's Note, makes "use of narrative structures to tell cohesive stories about the disjointed past" (484). Of Elodie's process of researching and analyzing Edward's life, Morton says, "Her mind stitched links of cause and effect between these points" until she has pieced together an idea of what she thinks happened to him beyond the stark details of a fictional *Wikipedia* article (38); by using a nonlinear narrative structure for the novel, Morton likewise encourages her readers to stitch together "links of cause and effect" as they read and also to rip out and resew links as new information is revealed because, as with Elodie's initial, incomplete interpretation of Edward's life,

what can seem like a simple cause and effect early on, can end up twisting around completely by the end of the novel.

Conclusion

British postmodernism had a definitive interest in historiography, and the inextricability of time from history is evident in how both Pinter and Amis reference and play with time in their postmodern works, *Betrayal* and *Time's Arrow*, respectively. Stanley Kauffman writes: "Harold Pinter is in love with time—not the neat unceasing sequence of the clock but the time in our minds, the time in which we live and remember and fantasize, time expansible and contractile, infinitely contrapuntal, time tyrannical, and elusive" (qtd. in Gray 146). Amis also plays with the idea of how we experience time in our lives by creating a narrator who experiences all of one human life in reverse, thus reinterpreting everyday actions in new ways. This is also the time with which my authors, Lawhon and Morton, are playing: the simultaneous temporality of our daily lives, though they make it less subjective than it is in Amis' novel by distancing it from the protagonist's own temporal experience. In his analysis of Pinter's *Betrayal*, W. Russel Gray, quoting Michael Billington, makes a point about how "linear time 'is an artificial construct ... we create the past in response to the needs of the present and in order to shape the future'" (151; ellipsis in source). The single-helix narrative structure plays with the assumption that temporality is linear and aligns with Chapman's ideas of probability in narrative structure. The nonlinear temporality emphasizes a montage causality over chronological causality and in doing so subverts probability, as shown in my analysis of *I Was Anastasia* and *The Clockmaker's Daughter*, both of which encourage this new probability

in a way that tricks readers into thinking things will inevitably turn out one way, only to have the narrative structure flip on them and reveal that there is another option after all.

The other way in which temporality is important in these novels is that it empowers female characters who lacked agency (or felt as if they did) in their lives. This is a popular theme in many contemporary works, regardless of their degree of nonsequentiality. Lawhon and Morton both write female characters who are central to their novels and who feel powerless. This is not just limited to Anna and Birdie, either—although Birdie and Anna are the ones allowed to have agency over the narrative structure of their stories—but extends to Anastasia, Elodie, Lucy, and others as well. Just as Harley Quinn uses her narrative voice and control to restore agency not just to herself but also to the women who will become the Birds of Prey—Detective Montoya, Black Canary, The Huntress, and Cassandra Cain—Anna and Birdie use their narrative authority to grant agency (albeit somewhat limited at times) to the women whose lives they narrate in addition to their own. Thus, Lawhon, Morton and the myriad other writers who employ the single-helix narrative structure in their historical fiction are making a political statement in doing so: regardless of their time period—past, present, or future—women deserve to have autonomy within their lives and over their stories. As Morton writes near the end of her novel, "Time makes the impossible possible" (472).

Chapter 4:

Simultaneous Presents and Delayed Paradoxes:

Present-Tense Narratives and the Multiplicity of Nonlinear

Temporal Aporias in Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* and

Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*

"Because if things really did happen simultaneously it'd be like reading a book but one in which all the lines of the text have been overprinted, like each page is actually two pages but with one superimposed on the other to make it unreadable."

—Ali Smith, *How to Be Both*

"we don't exist in a vacuum, children, … we are all part of a continuum, repeat after me, the future is in the past and the past is in the present"

—Bernardine Evaristo, *Girl, Woman, Other*

"But if delay assembles past, present, and future, without the usual ordering principle, what kind of time is this?"

—Jay Lampert, *Simultaneity and Delay: A Dialectical Theory of Staggered Time*

Introduction

In 1935, Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger proposed a thought experiment on the quantum mechanics' theory of superposition in response to Neils Bohr's assertion that the specific position of a subatomic particle in space "remains indeterminate until it has been observed" ("Schrödinger's cat"). Schrödinger pointed out that if one were to enclose a cat in a box with a capsule of poisonous gas that has equal chances of being or not being released within an hour, it would be impossible to know whether the gas had been released or the cat was alive or dead until one opened the box and observed the cat

(Blackburn). This thought experiment has since become part of the fabric of popular

culture as short-hand for the paradoxically, simultaneously possible and impossible, and

it is referenced in television shows, fiction, and even its own eponymous card game.[65] In

addition to demonstrating paradoxical impossibilities in general, Schrödinger's cat

parallels Jay Lampert's discussion of simultaneity and delay in the works of Husserl and

Derrida: "That the now exists at the same time as itself seems obvious, but it becomes

less obvious once we ask when a now perishes. If the now perishes at the same time as it

exists, then it both exists and does not exist at the same time, which is impossible" (151).

Ali Smith and Bernardine Evaristo create similar paradoxes of simultaneity and delay in

the nonlinear narrative structures, verb tense shifts, characters, themes, metafictional

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[65] Just to name a few of the many, many examples, some of which treat Schrödinger's cat as a literal cat while others maintain the theoretical, hypothetical aspect of the thought experiment: On *The Big Bang Theory*, Sheldon applies the thought experiment to Leonard and Penny's potential dating relationship and also to the status of his friendship with Leonard when Leonard may or may not attend a party hosted by Sheldon's nemesis, Wil Wheaton ("The Tangerine Factor," "The Russian Rocket Reaction"). Penny also attempts to explain Schrödinger and his cat to her date while walking upstairs to her apartment, but she is stymied when he asks whether Schrödinger is the character "From the Charlie Brown cartoon?" and she tries to explain again from the beginning ("The Codpiece Topology" 12:49). In *Young Sheldon*, this confusion of Schrödinger with *Peanuts*' Schroeder is repeated with Sheldon's father in the car, so Sheldon attempts to explain the experiment to his father and brother, who both want to know the cat's name and are relieved when Sheldon says they can optimistically think of the cat as alive ("Cape Canaveral, Schrödinger's Cat, and Cyndi Lauper's Hair" 11:08-12:04). Playing the titular character in the show *Bones*, Emily Deschanel plans to open a keynote talk by joking: "Erwin Schrödinger gets pulled over by the police for speeding. The officer says, 'What's in the trunk?' Schrödinger says, 'A Cat.' The officer says, 'Well, I need to see.' So the police officer opens the trunk and says, 'This cat is dead.' Schrödinger says, 'Well, it is now'" ("The Corpse at the Convention" 00:08-00:29). In an episode of *Rick and Morty*, Rick explains to Morty and Summer that their argument has "somehow created a feedback loop of uncertainty that split our reality into two equally possible impossibilities. … We're entirely hypothetical" ("A Rickle in Time" 4:15-4:35). Rick then opens the garage door to reveal a black void mostly filled with innumerable floating cats, which Rick assumes are Schrödinger's cats because "they both are and aren't, just like us" ("A Rickle in Time" 4:47-4:50). Douglas Adams references it in *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* (1987) when two characters argue about the hypothetical cat and one explains to the other that "It's just an illustration" for an argument, "not something you'd actually do" (129-130). Additionally, tucked in amongst a litany of paradoxical beliefs that Sam recites to Shadow in *American Gods*, Neil Gaiman alludes to it more obliquely as "there's a cat in a box somewhere who's alive and dead at the same time (although if they don't ever open the box to feed it it'll eventually just be two different kinds of dead)" (349). In addition, *Schrödinger's Cats* is a 2015 card game described as "a pseudo-scientific card game of strategic uncertainty," in which players play as different "cat physicists" wagering (and potentially bluffing) against each other over how many of the cards in play each round have boxes labeled as follows: alive, dead, empty, or The Heïsenbërg Uncertainty Principle (wild card) (O'Neill, *Schrödinger's Cats*).

elements, intertextual allusions, and other postmodern writing techniques used in their

novels *How to Be Both* (2014) and *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019). As with Schrödinger's cat,

which is simultaneously dead and alive as long as the box is unopened, these narratives

conflate past, present, and future so that the stories they are telling readers are

simultaneously happening and not happening now, then, and in the future. Both novels

play with verb tenses so that some "past" events are relayed to the readers in the same

present tense as the "present" events that are currently happening. In addition, Smith

and Evaristo both project their readers into the futures—both real and imagined—of

their characters; however, Smith routinely uses the future tense whereas Evaristo often

switches to a present-perfect or past tense, making these future events seem to have

already occurred. Regardless of tense, these futures are largely optimistic and hopeful,

reflecting Mathias Nilges' argument:

> [T]he novel allows us to understand the current crises of temporality and futurity
>
> not as the categorical end of time and the future but as the result of a change in
>
> the temporal regime upon which our material world rests. This change brings
>
> with it a crisis of imagination that demands to be confronted[.] ... Through its
>
> engagement with the temporal crises of our moment the novel formulates striking
>
> accounts of its possibility and indeed of its crucial importance in our time. (33)

There is also a simultaneous fluidity or aporia[66] in the performative identities—gender,

sexuality, and race—of the characters in each novel so that they are difficult to classify or

label. The themes of being both (two things at once) or being difficult to categorize

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[66] As mentioned previously, aporia is used in the philosophical sense of a conundrum or "a perplexing difficulty" rather than in its deconstructionist sense as "an insuperable deadlock" at which a "text deconstructs itself" ("Aporia, *N.*" *OED*; Abrams and Harpham 80).

(neither at once) emerge from both works, in Smith's obviously with the title *How to Be Both* and in Evaristo's with the supplement in her title *Girl, Woman, Other*. Overall, Smith and Evaristo both weave together a multiplicity of present- and past-tense narratives to create complex narrative structures that blur and twist the lines of linear temporality: they create tangles and knots that must be carefully picked apart *and* they evoke Schrödinger's paradoxical cat as these narratives, much like temporality itself, both are and are not simultaneous. The paradoxical delayed simultaneity of Smith's and Evaristo's time novels models "the plural temporalities," that Nilges argues, "interrupt the uniform temporal regime of the 'now time' of global capital" (25).

A Present-Tense Undermining of Realism

The tangled, knotted narrative structures created by Smith and Evaristo can be read as a progression of those I examined in chapter 2 using Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* and Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Winterson's and Egan's novels work to bring together multiple narratives and emphasize the interconnectedness of their characters' lives; however, Smith's and Evaristo's novels do more to push against the traditional bounds of fiction by incorporating present tense into the narratives and blurring the generic lines between poetry and prose. Smith and Evaristo also represent an advancement of the reader-as-detective trend and the nonlinear single-helix narrative structures in chapter 3 from Ariel Lawhon's *I Was Anastasia* and Kate Morton's *The Clockmaker's Daughter*. Lawhon's and Morton's call to solve a mystery transforms into Smith's and Evaristo's calls to action against (or at least recognition of) social injustices, such as racism and homophobia, which they view as tied to the social binaries, classifications, and categorizations that postmodernism wanted to break down. In

addition, Smith and Evaristo complicate the nonlinear helix structure by creating

multiple helices throughout their narrative structures rather than just one. The call-to-

action aspect of Smith's and Evaristo's novels has elements of what Irmtraud Huber and

Wolfgang Funk term "reader response-ability," which they do not clearly define beyond

"the reader's authentic responsibility in their encounter with the text" (152). Instead,

they argue that contemporary literature "seen through the prism of reconstruction" as "a

strategy of reading" "vouchsafes for the authenticity of the individual literary encounter"

(Huber and Funk 152, 153). In an interview in 2013, Linda Hutcheon explains reader

response-ability as emerging from the translations of Bakhtin in the 1980s and defines it

as "the need or ability to respond and the *responsibility* to do so. … [I]t's not just the ability

and the desire to respond [as with reader-response theory], but the ethical compulsion

to respond" (Hutcheon, "Interview" 382). Although Hutcheon describes this as

originating in the postmodern theorizing of the 1980s, Huber and Funk describe reader

response-ability as an aspect that distinguishes 21st-century fiction from postmodern

fiction, arguing: "Literature is thus conceived as a 'formal act-event' which both

conditions and appeals to the reader's response-ability, a challenge in which 'to respond

fully to a literary work is to be responsively and responsibly aware of [its] otherness, and

of the demands it makes upon us'" (154). Thus, Huber and Funk seem to be arguing for a

political or ethical response from readers to the fiction they are reading, and Smith's and

Evaristo's novels do encourage readers to engage with political issues and critical theory.

However, while I find this small piece of their argument plausible (though not actually

distinct from the aims of at least some postmodern writers), I find that the rest of their

arguments in support of reconstruction and metamodernism are largely based upon

misinterpretations and misunderstandings of postmodern literature and the

postmodernist movement. In contrast to Huber and Funk's reading of the demands for

reader response by these novels, I view Smith and Evaristo (among other contemporary

authors) as more interested in promoting theories of gender performativity, critical race,

and intersectional feminism—all of which came out of the postmodernist era: they

problematize traditional ideas of gender and race performativity by portraying a

multiplicity of perspectives simultaneously with a nonlinear narrative structure that

reminds the reader that these stories are fictional.

Although some critics[67] have tried to read Smith's novel (and will likely try to

read Evaristo's in the near future) as a reconstructed, authentic (read: realist) text that

participates in the so-called "return to realism," the nonlinear structures of the novels

and the use of present tense mark them as time novels. The use of the present tense on its

own constitutes a giant stumbling block for interpreting these novels as realist. Their

present-tense narratives push the boundaries of a reader's willingness to suspend

disbelief by combining third-person points of view, both omniscient and limited, (and

some first-person points of view as well) with multiple narratives written in present

tense. By writing in the present tense, Smith and Evaristo ask their readers to believe

that this story is happening concurrent with the act of reading. The readers must ignore

the present in which they exist and are reading a physical book and believe that the

events of the book are what is happening now. In contrast to this idea that the story

---

[67] Yvonne Lieberman writes on Smith's use of what Lieberman terms "the real," which she claims should be viewed as distinct from "mimetic" or "'realistic' representation" and which seems to include ekphrasis and other allusions to real-world art or events (136-137). Huber and Funk focus on Smith's novel as an example of what they term "reconstructive" and "authentic" fiction (151-152). All three argue that the novel should be considered an example of "metamodernism" rather than "postmodernism" in spite of openly acknowledging its many postmodern elements because Lieberman argues it lacks the pessimism of postmodern literature whereas Huber and Funk argue that it encourages the reader to look for a depth in the novel that postmodern literature supposedly lacked (Lieberman 137; Huber and Funk 152).

itself is happening in the current moment of now created by Smith's and Evaristo's use of the present tense, both authors allude to "real" things, events, and places that have fixed points in time—whether or not they are directly revealed within the text—that are in the readers' pasts.[68] This phenomenon, which I will label "temporal dissonance," thereby undermines the realism of the text and, in very postmodern self-reflexive fashion, reminds readers that they are reading a novel. Additionally, both Smith and Evaristo present the reader with multiple present-tense narratives that are identified as happening at different times. For example, Smith's *How to Be Both* contains two different narratives, one told by Francescho, the ghost of a Renaissance painter, and the other about a present-day young woman named George. George's narrative contains two distinct present-tense timelines, but one of these contains time markers indicating that although it is written in present tense and seems to be happening *now*, the story events of this timeline actually take place approximately six months before the other present-tense timeline, which is occurring in both George's and Francescho's narratives. In contrast to this double-helix nonlinear narrative structure, Evaristo's multiple present-tense timelines overlap with each other more so than Smith's do, but there is still temporal dissonance created for readers both by the co-existence of so many *nows* and by at least one present-tense timeline that can be dated to decades before the others. Therefore, the simultaneity of these narrative structures actually creates a temporally dissonant reading experience that undermines any aspects of realist conventions and

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[68] These allusions have played a large role in leading other critics to classify their writing as "real" or "authentic."

models a form of simultaneous temporality that encourages plurality rather than the flattening and uniformity of immediacy and capitalist time.

The Simultaneous Temporality of Now

As mentioned in chapter 1, the temporal concept of "now" is problematic for phenomenologists because the moment that the word "now" is written down, it has already passed. Simultaneity—events happening at the same time—creates what Lampert categorizes as a "struggle between convergent and staggered time" (1). Lampert's description of how simultaneity and delay create "elastic rhythms" fits the oscillating narrative structure created by the dual narratives of Smith's novel, which not coincidentally emulate the double helix of the DNA structure because DNA is referenced repeatedly in the text of Smith's novel (Lampert 1). Lampert's view of simultaneity and delay as codependent parallels the nonlinear, oscillating narrative structures of Smith's and Evaristo's novels, which create both convergences and divergences of past, present, and future in a way that creates a feeling of simultaneity despite the fact that the texts are experienced by the reader word by word, page by page. The ways in which simultaneity is created or evoked by Smith and Evaristo are like the self-reflexive, metanarrative texts of postmodernism. Such texts questioned how history and stories were narrativized and challenged binaries and supposed universally acknowledged truths; Smith and Evaristo are similarly questioning how time and the temporality of our daily lives are narrativized, often by using postmodern techniques best described as metatemporal. These metatemporal moments allow their time novels to critique historicized forms of the present in ways that enable readers "to read time as a form of knowledge" (Nilges 34).

Simultaneity and Genre Fluidity

Liebermann discusses the "blurring of generic boundaries" in her analysis of Ali

Smith's *Artful* and *How to Be Both*, but her argument focuses on how Smith's writing blurs

the lines between essay writing and fiction. I do not disagree with Liebermann, though I

think that Smith's "True Short Story" is a better example of this genre blur than *How to Be*

Both, but Liebermann's analysis overlooks how poetic in form and style *How to Be Both* is.

This is quite obvious in Francescho's narrative, which opens with a freeform poem, on

which Huber and Funk focus much of their analysis, but it also comes through in

George's narrative with its punning, limited page and chapter breaks, line breaks used

for emphasis, lack of quotation marks to separate dialogue from dialogue tags, and

strategic repetitions of important lines.

Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* also blurs the line between poetry and prose, but in a

different way than she has done in previous "novels in verse," which used more formal

poetic structures and rhyme schemes (e.g., *Lara* (1997) and *The Emperor's Babe* (2001)). The

e-book version of Evaristo's novel contains a paratextual note that describes the book as

"a fusion fiction" that "is formally innovative, with unconventional treatment of line

breaks, capitalization, and punctation" before assuring the reader that "This eBook

edition is correctly formatted per the author's intentions" (Evaristo, e-book).[69] What this

paratextual note terms "fusion fiction" uses a more prose-poetry paragraph style for the

text, with line breaks instead of periods (as well as eschewing sentence-case

capitalization and quotation marks around dialogue) except for the final line of each

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[69] This note is likely included in the e-book version to assure readers that the unconventional typesetting is not a glitch in the way that the book appears on their e-book reading device, but it does also function as paratextual categorization of the novel.

character's narrative. Like Smith, Evaristo uses line breaks and spacing as well as strategic repetition to emphasize key moments for her reader. These line breaks create the appearance of lists in the text, which are often tied to character's dreams or future imaginings. For example, one character "dreamed of employing an army of women cleaners who would set forth across the planet on a mission to clean up all the damage done to the environment"; Evaristo heads each of the paragraphs in this section with "she imagined" (170-171). Evaristo later provides a two-page list of "wishes" from another character to her absent mother, beginning each with the phrase "I wish you" (402-404). These wishes begin with "I wish you'd seen me spoil her, Ma, let her get her own way with everything because I couldn't say no to anything she wanted," and end with "I wish you'd met … your great-grandchildren, I only knew them for a little while" (Evaristo 402, 404).

Both time novels play with and push the dimensions of the generic forms of poetry and novels. For this reason, I have tried to preserve the poetic line breaks and unconventional use (or lack) of capitalization and punctuation from the original texts when quoting from both novels. Their willingness to play with grammatical rules and strictures is one of the ways in which Smith and Evaristo remain closely aligned with postmodern fiction, and thus it is part of what encourages readers to think critically about the forms of time modeled by the nonlinear narrative structures. Although Huber and Funk note the oscillating structure of Smith's novel and acknowledge that oscillation is viewed as a "crucial characteristic of that particular contemporary 'structure of feeling' … identif[ied] as 'metamodernism,'" they do not analyze the narrative structure in depth beyond crediting its oscillation with "induc[ing] … an engagement which appeals to the reader's authentic responsibility in their encounter with the text,"

and connecting its oscillations with George and her mother's discussion of primacy in art (151-152, 152, 158). While I do not necessarily disagree with Huber and Funk's analysis of the oscillation in Smith's time novel, their argument does not fully explore the potential of this nonlinear narrative structure, overlooking its engagement with forms of plural temporality and future possibilities.

The Novel Dual-Narrative Structure of *How to Be Both*

There are two dual (or dueling) narratives in Smith's novel. In what I consider to be a very postmodern experiment, Smith's novel is printed in two forms: one in which George's narrative precedes Francescho's and the other in which Francescho's narrative precedes George's. However, there is no indication in the printed versions of the novel that there are multiple versions, so readers may or may not realize that the novel exists in more than one form until they encounter the second part of the novel, which like the first part—regardless of the version—is also labeled "One." In contrast, the audiobook explains the choice of reading experiences to the reader with a brief preface:

> This novel is comprised of two narratives, Eyes and Camera. The print versions of this novel are intentionally printed in two different ways so that readers can randomly have different experiences reading the same text. In half of all printed editions of the novel, the narrative Eyes comes before Camera; in the other half of printed editions, the narrative Camera precedes Eyes. The narratives are exactly the same in both versions, just in a different order. For this audio version, feel free to start with whichever narrative you wish. (Smith, audiobook 0:16–0:52)

Meanwhile, the e-book version introduces it with the following, more poetically presented, preface:

> Who says stories reach everybody in the same order?
>
> This novel can be read in two ways and this e-book provides you with both.
>
> In one version, EYES precedes CAMERA.
>
> In the other, CAMERA precedes EYES.
>
> The stories are exactly the same in both versions, just in a different order.
>
> Eyes, camera. Camera, eyes.
>
> The choice is yours. (Smith, e-book)

Although changing the order of the audiobook is offered as an option, the default order is

Camera followed by Eyes, and the audiobook's chapters are simply numbered rather than

being labelled in such a way as to make starting with Eyes a clear choice. However, in the

e-book, there are links provided that take you either to the Camera or the Eyes narrative,

but if you just turn the pages, the Eyes narrative precedes the Camera narrative, which is

the opposite of the audiobook's default.[70] Regardless, these prefaces demonstrate that

the more control readers have over the reading format, the more explicitly the unique

format of *How to Be Both* is presented as a choice that the readers themselves get to make.

However, even though readers could also choose to read the printed version of the book

in a different order, there is no preface or other paratextual material in the printed copies

of the novel to suggest this as an option.[71]

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[70] This choice is likely due to the necessity of having a single file of the novel available for download from the reader's preferred platform as opposed to the ability of the publisher to print different versions of the physical book and sell them under a single ISBN.

[71] The duality of the printed version of *How to Be Both* is another example of a paradox as it exists in both forms simultaneously (i.e., Camera/Eyes and Eyes/Camera), and readers cannot know which version they will read until they open the book. This paradox is lessened by the increased power of choice given to readers of the e-book and audiobook formats which is necessitated by the different publication mediums.

Because these two narratives are both labeled "One," I will refer to them by the images on each parts' cover page as the above prefaces do: Camera (George's narrative) and Eyes (Francescho's narrative). The Camera narrative tells the story of teenage George as she simultaneously goes on a final trip to Italy with her mother and works through the grief of losing her mother by building a relationship with a new friend, H. The Eyes narrative takes a more metaphysical turn as it is narrated by the ghost of a Renaissance painter, Francescho, who relays both memories from her/his life in the 1460s and observations of a young "boy" in the 2010s that the reader may or may not recognize as George.

One reviewer describes the narratives as "twist[ing] around each other like complicated vines" (Day). However, they are more aptly described as the two strands that make up a double helix, which is defined as "a pair of parallel helices intertwined about a common axis: the postulated structure of the DNA molecule" ("Double helix, N."). Helix itself is defined as "anything of a spiral or coiled form, whether in one plane (like a watchspring) or advancing around an axis (like a corkscrew), but more usually the latter" ("Helix, N."). Huber and Funk make a similar observation about the DNA helix in their analysis, noting that in the opening and closing of Francescho's narrative: "[T]he distribution of the text on the page calls up the verse structure of poetry while at the same time suggesting the twisting shape of a DNA double helix, another symbol of significant doubleness that recurs throughout the text" (160). In Smith's time novel, the common axes of the two narratives are a Renaissance fresco painted by Francesco del

Cossa,[72] which is described in detail by both narrators in both parts of the novel, and George's second present-tense timeline, which is relayed to the reader by the omniscient narrator of the Camera narrative as well as by Francescho. In fact, Francescho as narrator enters a moment of metanarration during the Eyes narrative, itemizing what s/he has learned from previous painters, including "how to tell a story, but tell it more than one way at once, and tell another underneath it up-rising through the skin of it" (Smith 201/51[73]).

In an interview with Alex Clark, Smith echoes this idea of multi-layered storytelling and credits the Renaissance fresco from the Palazzo Schifanoia as well as the fresco form as a whole with inspiring the novel, explaining:

> You have the very first version of the fresco underneath the skin, as it were, of the real fresco. There's a fresco on the wall: there it is, you and I look at it, we see it right in front of us; underneath that there's another version of the story and it may or may not be connected to the surface. And they're both in front of our eyes, but you can only see one, or you see one first. So it's about the understory. I have the feeling that all stories travel with an understory. (qtd. in Clark)

One of the helix-esque aporias of the novel is which story actually *is* the understory, because each part functions as story or understory (or both), depending upon the order in which they are read and whether it is the reader's first time reading the book. In this way, Smith's reader actually experiences the question that George's mother poses to her:

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[72] Smith uses this spelling of Francesco's name in the Camera narrative to distinguish between the historical Francesco del Cossa and the fictional Francescho in the Eyes narrative. I will preserve this distinction by referring to the historical figure as Francesco del Cossa and to the character as Francescho.

[73] Because there are two versions of Smith's novel, all in-text citations for *How to Be Both* will provide the page number from the Camera/Eyes version, followed by the page number from the Eyes/Camera version, both of which are listed in the works cited.

But which came first? her mother says. ... The picture underneath or the picture on the surface?

The picture below came first, George says. Because it was done first.

But the first thing we see, her mother said, and most times the only thing we see, is the one on the surface. So does that mean it comes first after all? And does it mean the other picture, if we don't know about it, may as well not exist? (89/289)

In a very postmodern move, Smith leaves it up to her readers to decide for themselves which comes first: George's story or Francescho's. Both narratives are structured in such a way as to be largely achronological or nonlinear, so it is difficult to make the argument that chronology should dictate which story is the "understory." Just as George arranges the photos of her mother above her bed "so that there is no chronology," Smith arranges the events in each narrative without following any perceptible timeline, thereby removing the causal connections that chronology creates (41/232). In the end, what Smith accomplishes is a nonlinear, spiraling story that encourages the reader to perceive it as simultaneous even though the reading experience itself is linear. And, yet, as Lampert observes, the simultaneity of the story exists alongside a built-in delay because only one narrative can be read at a time. This paradox of delayed simultaneity creates a structure that both critiques the present as a form of narrative time and encourages readers to imagine the possibility of a different form of time in the future.

In addition to the spiraling structure of the dual narratives, there are connections (and traces) between the two narratives that create the ladder structure that makes it resemble the molecular structure of DNA. In the Camera narrative, George first asks her mother whether she thinks the fresco could have been painted by any women artists and her mother responds, "It's pretty unlikely that women worked on much that's extant,

certainly on anything we saw today" (Smith 95/296). In direct contravention of George's

mother's statement, the Eyes narrative reveals that Francescho was born a girl but cross-

dressed as a boy to be allowed to study painting.

After her mother's death, George and her friend Helena, who goes by H, research

Francescho and imagine "him" visiting the 21st century, speculating:

> He'd speak like from another time, H says. He'd say things like ho, or gadzooks,
>
> or egad. …
>
> Wouldn't it be better if we just imagine him talking like *we* do? George says. More
>
> empathetic?
>
> Yeah, but the language would definitely have been different, H says.
>
> Yeah, it'd have been Italian, George says.
>
> But Italian *then*, H says. The way they said things then. Which would be different
>
> from it now. Imagine. … What would he make of cars? … Little confessionals on
>
> wheels. Everything for him would've been about God, H says. (Smith 118-119/323-
>
> 324)

Depending upon in which order readers encounter the narratives, this is simultaneously

foreshadowing and flashback. Either way, it references the way in which Francescho

narrates her/his story and describes 21st-century technology. George also imagines

Francescho's "bones agitat[ing] … at her imagining them" (Smith 120/326) and the

beginning of Francescho's narrative hints at her/his possibly being brought back into

existence by the intensity of George's scrutiny of Francesco del Cossa's painting at the

museum, which occurs in the Camera narrative:

there are flowers that open for

all the world like

    eyes :

        hello :

            what's this?

                A boy in front of a painting. (Smith 163/5)

This theme of watching[74] continues in the Eyes narrative, as Francescho's spirit or ghost seems to be linked to George, following her around London and watching her watch Lisa Goliard, her mother's friend. These connections can seem straightforward, depending on the order in which the novel is read, but they are as twisted as the narrative structure itself, creating helices within helices, like a pair of mirrors set up to reflect into each other infinitely. For Smith, simultaneous temporality is like a fresco painting:

> It is like everything is in layers. Things happen right at the front of the pictures and at the same time they continue happening, both separately and connectedly, behind, and behind that, and again behind that, like you can see, in perspective, for miles. Then there are the separate details, like that man with the duck. They're all also happening on their own terms. The picture makes you look at both—the close-up happenings and the bigger picture. Looking at the man with the duck is like seeing how everyday and how almost comic cruelty is. The cruelty happens in among everything else happening. It is an amazing way to show how ordinary cruelty really is. (47/239)

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[74] Huber and Funk cover the themes of watching and seeing in greater depth in their article, so I will not explore that in greater detail here (158, 162-163).

Like the painting, Smith's book forces her reader to look at a plurality and multiplicity of aspects of the story (not just "both," but all). Lampert argues that simultaneity is not limited to things that happen at the same time because "there is a staggered plurality in the now. Simultaneity is not an identity of what is present in a moment, but the differential between two or more time-sequences. We might have concluded that simultaneity can never be contained in a single now, except for the fact that the now itself is precisely this not-yet-coordinated plurality" (9). In other words, Lampert believes that what we perceive as simultaneity is two-fold: one view of simultaneity is as a series of moments that are condensed into one simultaneous temporal experience, and the other perception of simultaneity is an attempt to align two or more unrelated events that are happening at the same time (9). Lampert brings in Husserl's philosophy that simultaneity and "temporal succession" are inextricably linked to show "simultaneity is built out of the collection into unity of moments and rhythms in successive time-streams. The indeterminacy in the ordering of those streams is both the problem for simultaneity as well as the framework out of which simultaneity has to be rebuilt" (9). This is similar to Smith's assessment of the fresco painting as conveyed through George and her mother's debate: choosing whether to focus on the "close-up happenings" or "the bigger picture" in the painted mural juxtaposes the two types of simultaneity into the successive plurality embedded in the act of viewing the fresco.

The Twisted Present Timeline Aporia of the Camera Narrative

Within the Camera narrative, Smith creates two present-tense timelines for George: one that occurs before her mother's death (PT1) and another that occurs after it (PT2). Each of these present timelines has moments of analepsis and prolepsis within it,

but there are also temporal disruption anachronies that montage the two present-tense timelines, PT1 and PT2, together so that while both of the moments seem to be happening *now*, the *now* of the story is actually separated by several months or years. Smith calls the readers' attention to this from the opening lines of the Camera narrative: "Consider this moral conundrum for a moment, George's mother says to George who's sitting in the front passenger seat. / Not says. Said. / George's mother is dead" (5/189). This reminder is repeated throughout the Camera narrative, almost like a self-help mantra. As the Camera narrative is told from a third-person perspective focalized through George, this repetition serves as a reminder to both George and the reader of the reality of George's life (not to be confused with reality in general or realism) that George's mother is in fact dead, despite the consistent and continual use of present tense for the PT1 timeline, which largely focuses on a trip to Italy on which George's mother took her and her brother in the year before her death. Even after the "Not says. Said." reminder, the narrative continues in the present tense with, "What moral conundrum? George says" and a present-tense description of the rental car her mother is driving (Smith 5/189). The return to present tense is a way in which Smith can montage the monumental time (as used by Julia Kristeva) of George's life after her mother's death (PT2) with the emotional time in which George's grief immerses her (PT1) to demonstrate that George's mother is not (yet) affectively dead for George.

When Smith transitions between her two present timelines for the first time, she calls the reader's attention to the shift with a metanarrative moment:

Consider it, for a moment, yes, why don't you, her mother says.

No she doesn't.

Her mother doesn't say.

Her mother said.

Because if things really did happen simultaneously it'd be like reading a book but one in which all the lines of the text have been overprinted, like each page is actually two pages but with one superimposed on the other to make it unreadable. Because it's New Year not May, and it's England not Italy, and it's pouring with rain outside and regardless of the hum (the hummin') of the rain you can still hear people's stupid New Year fireworks going off and off and off like a small war, because people are standing out in the pouring rain, rain pelting into their champagne glasses, their upturned faces watching their own (sadly) inadequate fireworks light up then go black. (11/196)

This moment of metafiction introduces the reader to the two timelines that will be mashed up and montaged together throughout the rest of the narrative. It also privileges one present (PT2) as the "authentic" present, the present that is truly in the *now*, but the reader will still experience both timelines in the present tense consistently throughout the narrative, which encourages a questioning of "when is *now*?" as well as a questioning of how to narrativize temporality and the experience of simultaneity. The aporia of present tense is that in many ways it is always a bit of a fiction as the now described has always already passed, and the line between present, past and future, both grammatically and phenomenologically speaking, is blurry and constantly displacing itself. When Smith's narrator tells the reader that a simultaneous reading experience would require words to be written over one another, Smith makes a point of showing how impossible her attempt at crafting a simultaneous novel is. Although Smith presents simultaneity in texts as independent of delay by insisting such a work would require text to overwrite text as if all the words were to be read simultaneously, Lampert contradicts this by

arguing "delay is part of the normal flow of events; without delays, all the phases of an event would happen at a single absurd moment" (12). He ultimately labels delay as "the other in time" that exists in complex symbiosis with simultaneity (Lampert 13). Lampert takes this further by arguing that even in our everyday lives, experiences that we think of as being simultaneous are not truly phenomenologically simultaneous. For example, I cannot be present in all of the rooms of my apartment at the same time, yet I understand that all of the rooms exist simultaneously even if I experience them on a delay as I walk from one room to the next (Lampert 22). George's mother uses the example of the sketched images beneath the painted fresco; Lampert uses a simpler analogy, a cup on a table, arguing: "All sides of an object like a cup coexist; ... they exist simultaneously. But my experiences of the cup are successive; ... the whole cup is never going to become present all at once, there is always delay in its presence" (17-18). Thus, we can apply the same paradox of simultaneity and delay to the time novel to acknowledge that the readers experience the many sides of a story in a delayed fashion but interpret these successively relayed stories as having occurred simultaneously within the world of the novel. However, unlike simultaneity in our daily lives, the simultaneity of the novel requires effort on the part of the reader (much as Lawhon and Morton required their reader to piece together plots and to solve a multiplicity of mysteries within their texts), and this requirement undermines the realism of the stories by turning the reader from observer into participant.[75]

To return to the narrative, though, this present moment in which George observes that the roof has been leaking in the corner of her bedroom "since they had the

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[75] This functions in much the same way as active and passive voice, with active voice putting the agent of the sentence in the subjective position and restoring the receiver of the action to the objective position.

roof redone last summer" shifts into future tense as George anticipates that "given time, enough bad weather and the right inattention" her room and its contents will turn to rot, and "[s]he will have the pleasure of watching it happen. ... She will lie in bed with all the covers thrown off and the stars will be directly above her, nothing between her and their long-ago burnt-out eyes" (Smith 13/197-199). The narrative then swerves into a conversation that George has with her father and her guidance counselor, the supposedly aptly named Mrs Rock that comprises labeled dialogue reminiscent of a screenplay or play script, which avoids having the tense markers of dialogue tags with "says/said" (Smith 13/199). This brief scripted moment of atemporality shifts into a present-tense introduction to Mrs Rock and the information that George has been signed up for "a series of Rock sessions" in lieu of her weekly PE double period, which then quickly shifts into past tense for the actual session with Mrs Rock (Smith 14/199). These "Rock Sessions" are generally related in past tense throughout the Camera narrative as if George is distancing herself from them. The narrative then transitions back to present tense (beginning with the PT2 narrative, but quickly shifting to the PT1 timeline) with another segue about what is said and unsaid:

How can that advert exist and her mother not exist in the world?

She **didn't** say it out loud, though, because there **wasn't** a point.

It **isn't** about saying.

It **is** about the hole which **will form** in the roof through which the cold will intensify and after which the structure of the house **will begin** to shift, like it ought, and through which George **will be able** to lie every night in bed watching the black sky.

It is last August. Her mother **is** at the dining-room table reading out loud off the internet. (Smith 15/201; emphasis added)

The future tense sentences can be read as a possible future that George is attempting to wish into being, but the short, declarative sentence, "It is last August" does not indicate a memory or flashback that George is having but a shift in the story's temporality, a temporal disruption that montages the two moments in time together. The reader time travels back to a moment when George's mother tells her about a meteor event and George dismisses it as "just pollution" and refuses to drive out of town with her mother to stargaze, saying, "There's no point," which echoes her earlier past-tense thought after meeting with Mrs Rock that "there wasn't a point" (Smith 18/204). At the end of the scene, her mother says, "If you miss seeing this with me you'll regret it for the rest of your days" and the narrator notes, "I won't, George says. / Not says. Said." (Smith 19/206). There is a brief past tense interlude following these lines that introduces George's mother's obituary, but then the obituary itself is relayed in the present tense, in short, italicized segments introduced by "It says" and "It mentions" as if the narrator or George herself is reading it and just relaying key pertinent details to the reader:

Dr Carol Martineau Economist Journalist Internet Guerrilla Interventionist 19 November 1962—10 September 2013 aged 50 years. It says, in the first paragraph, *renaissance woman.* It says *childhood Scottish Cairngorms education Edinburgh Bristol London.* It says *articles and talks ideology pay ratios differentials literal ideological consequences spread of UK poverty.* It says *thesis backed by IMF recognition inequality and slowdown in growth and stability.* It mentions her particular bugbear, *chief executive interests workforce kept low-waged.* It

says *discovery three years ago Martineau one of the anonymous influential satire Subverts*

online art movement thousands supporters imitators.

It says *tragic unsuspected allergic reaction standard antibiotic.*

The last thing it says is *is survived by.* That means dead. *Husband Nathan Cook and*

their two children.

It all means dead.

It all means George's mother has disappeared off, or rather into, the face of the

earth. (Smith 20/206-207)

This segment is important for two reasons: as part of the PT2 timeline, and as an

example of postmodern metafictional mediation. Smith does not give her readers the

actual text of George's mother's obituary as a written, material object for the readers to

interpret for themselves. Instead, the obituary is parsed and analyzed for readers: they

are given strings of keywords, words, and phrases that do not form complete sentences,

thoughts, or ideas and presented with the meaning of it all as George sees it—that her

mother is really, truly dead—rather than being able to form their own opinion of what it

means or what George's mother's life meant to the world because George's perspective is

that if her mother is gone, then nothing else has meaning for her, including the "advert on

TV with dancing bananas unpeeling themselves in it and teabags doing a dance" that

George thought about in Mrs Rock's office in the past tense just before all of this (which

actually occurs before the Rock sessions begin) happens in the present tense (Smith

15/201).

Smith's short sentences and phrases signaling tense shifts in the Camera narrative

are essential to help the reader keep PT1 and PT2 straight figuratively because the

timelines literally twist back and forth between past, present, and future, and actually because Smith, unlike Evaristo, rarely includes chapter or scene breaks in either narrative. When Smith does include chapter or scene breaks, they often function as metatemporal moments that represent significant moments in George's relationship with her friend H, who is helping George overcome the grief in which she has been mired following her mother's death. The first scene break occurs between a past-tense scene of George leaving Mrs Rock's office as Mrs Rock tells her, "Same time next Tuesday, Georgia, she said. I mean, after Christmas. First Tuesday after the holidays. See you then" and a present-tense scene of George awaking on her bedroom floor, "She'd fallen sleep and now she's woken up. / Her mother is dead. It's 1:30 a.m. It's New Year" to a knock on her front door by Helena Fisker (63/205-206). Temporally, this scene break is largely unnecessary; Smith has shifted between such temporally disparate scenes previously without any space or pause. This break is here to make the reader pay attention to Helena's arrival in George's life. This moment, very much in the present (PT2), matters because it is Helena—later referred to simply as H—who will pull George out of her present-tense past and into her present-tense present, not Mrs Rock, the supposed expert. This is demonstrated through the rest of the Camera narrative as all of the scenes in which George spends time with H are related in the present tense, whereas most of the conversations with Mrs Rock remain persistently past tense.

The second text break follows a rare present-tense conversation that occurs between George and Mrs Rock (Smith 115/320). This session follows a present-tense moment at school in which "George speaks and it's not that H doesn't reply, but she doesn't really speak back and tends to end her sentences by looking away, which doesn't make for easy continuous conversation" (Smith 110/313). The narrator says that Mrs

Rock is using a new "tactic" in her sessions with George, "to sit and listen without saying anything, then very near the end of the session to tell George a sort of story or improvise on a word George has used or something that's struck her because of something George has said" (Smith 110/314). George initially categorizes this in a metafictional way as "George in monologue plus epilogue by Mrs Rock" but then after relating a story about a conversation with her father on the way to school that morning (which is relayed by George in past tense), she observes alliteratively "Mrs Rock sits there silent as a statue. / That makes two people who won't really speak to George today. / Three, if you count her father" (Smith 111/314-315). This plurality of silences triggers rebellion in George (or as the narrator terms it, "stubbornness"), and "She **seals** her mouth. She **folds** her arms. She **glances** at the clock. It **is** only ten past. There **are** another sixty minutes of this session still to go (it **is** a double period). She **will** not say another word" (Smith 111/315; emphasis added). It is at this point in the scene that the narrator slows down to make the reader excruciatingly aware of the passage of time (in a similar but less life-and-death way to the ending of *I Was Anastasia*). First, the narrator notes the sound of the clock—"Tick tick tic."—and then the last second of the first minute of silence: "Fifty nine." Then, a description of Mrs Rock facing off with the stubbornly silent George. After that comes "Silence. / Five minutes pass in this silence. / Those five minutes alone pass like an hour" (Smith 111/315). At this point, the narrator slips into George's thoughts, which have drifted towards H and the parody song she wrote to Miley Cyrus' "Wrecking Ball," in which she rewrote all the lines to be about DNA as a study aid, except for "I will always want you," which she claimed was "just there for scansion"; H has tasked George with translating her parody version of the song into Latin as practice for that class as well (Smith 83/281-282). George ultimately ends up breaking the silence herself by asking

Mrs Rock if she can send a text. Mrs Rock initially denies George's request and parrots

school rules at her, "Because, as you know, if you get your phone out of your bag and I see

you using it on school property at a time that's not lunch hour, I'll have to confiscate it

and you won't get it back till the end of the week" (Smith 113/317), but then Mrs Rock

ends up telling George to follow her outside and, once they are beyond the school's main

gate, she says, "You can now get your phone out, Georgia, without breaking any rules"

(Smith 113/318). George takes her phone out of her bag and texts: "– *Semper is always ... Or*

there is a good word, usquequaque. It means everywhere, or on all occasions. Perpetuus means continual

or continuous and continenter means continuously. But I can't mean any of them because right now for me

they are just words" (Smith 114/318). This seems like it could be a text to H about

translating the DNA parody song into Latin; however, after Mrs Rock talks at George

about the implications of "talking and not talking" and the "decision to try to articulate

things" (Smith 114/318-319), George reveals to Mrs Rock that the text was sent "to a

phone number that no longer exists" so the only response she will receive when she next

takes her phone out is "the little red exclamation mark and the sign next to it saying not

delivered" (Smith 114-115/319). The implication here is that George is continuing to text

her mother's phone number even though it has been disconnected and the physical

phone is missing (an event about which George has proposed numerous conspiracy

theories regarding monitoring and minotauring[76]). Mrs Rock seems to be flummoxed by

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[76] George asks H whether she would "think words like deluded and paranoid and needs to be put on some kind of medication" if she told her friend that she thought her mother was being monitored by government spies (e.g., Interpol, MI5, MI6, and MI7) (Smith 85/284). H responds in the affirmative, but then gives a long speech in which she substitutes "minotaur" for monitor and seems to be satirizing what she's saying to George:

> I mean, it's not like we live in mythical times. It's not like we live in a world where the police, say, would ever minotaur the people whose son's murder they were supposed to be investigating, or

this paradoxical action, responding, "So you sent a message knowing that your message would never reach the person you sent it to?" and then she "blinks" and "glances at the clock" before asking George if she has "anything else you'd like to bring to the session today" and repeating her line that preceded the last text break: "Same time next Tuesday, Georgia[.] ... See you then" (Smith 115/319-320). The text break is followed by yet another present-tense scene between H and George in which George notes, "This is the third time H has come to the house" and they proceed to have an awkward conversation about H's family relocating to Copenhagen at the beginning of March that eventually veers into discussion of their research project on the renaissance painter Francesco del Cossa—who is the historical counterpart of Francescho, narrator of the Eyes narrative (Smith 115/320). The awkwardness between George and H largely stems from fear of rejection on both sides as their burgeoning relationship veers towards romantic. Spliced into this present-tense scene from PT2 as a lengthy parenthetical aside is a second present-tense scene that is from the trip to Italy in the PT1 timeline. This aside operates more like a flashback than many of the other PT1 present-tense scenes because it occurs within parentheses, and yet the use of the present tense disrupts the realism of the other

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the press would minotaur famous people or even dead people to make money out of them. ... It's not like the government would minotaur *us*, H says. I mean, not *our* government. Obviously all the undemocratic and less good and less civilized ones would do it to *their* citizens. But our own one. I mean, they might minotaur the people they needed to know about. But they'd never do it to ordinary people, say through their emails or mobiles, or through the games they play on their mobiles. And it's not like the shops we buy things from do it to us either, is it, every time we buy something. You're deluded and insane. There's no such thing as a minotaur. It's mythical. ... I think your imaginings are dangerous. Someone should monitor *you*. ... I'd have minotaured you for free, H says. She looks George laughingly and seriously right in the eye. (Smith 85-86/284-285)

This serves as yet another example of a simultaneous paradox as it is difficult for the reader to be certain whether H believes what she is saying or not, especially in the light of pre- and post-2015 revelations of just how much data is being collected, stored, and analyzed about us from our online and social media presences and just who has access to that data and analysis, and the potentially nefarious purposes for which might it may be used.

present-tense moment: it montages the two present-tense timelines together to create a temporal disruption. H draws George's attention to the word "Schifanoia" in the text she has brought over with her for research, and then the reader slips back to the PT1 timeline to hear George's mother pronouncing it: "*Skiff. A. Noy. A.*, she is saying. Translated, it means the palace of escaping from boredom" (Smith 117/322). The narrative then pulls the reader back into the PT2 timeline with the closure of the parenthetical aside and H continues to discuss the research project with George. This moment is similar to the moment from "Story of Your Life," when Louise uses her experience of simultaneous temporality to find the answer to her daughter's question, but Smith uses her nonlinear narrative structure to demonstrate a simultaneous temporal experience for George without any of the science-fiction trappings of Ted Chiang's short story (Chiang, "Story" 128).

The third line break occurs between a moment in which H and George are laughing about images of Francesco del Cossa's paintings that H has found online and "H leans towards George as if to kiss her on the mouth, yes, that close, so close that George for a second or two is breathing H's breath. / But she doesn't kiss George" and instead she says she'll be back and nods, to which "George shrugs" (Smith 122-123/328-329). The narrative resumes after the text break, declaring, "It's half an hour later" and the two girls are now discussing switching from a presentation "about a painter they don't know anything about" to "demonstrat[ing] the difference between empathy and sympathy with a simple mime" because the former "will take too much explaining and be too much hard work" and "they might too easily get caught out not knowing about things people knew about then, like how to grind the colours of paints out of beetles etc, or like about popes and saints and gods and goddesses and mythic and delphic whatever" (Smith

123/329). This text break not only literalizes the physical break that H and George take when H leaves the room for a moment, but it also emphasizes another point in which H is pulling George away from her PT1 past-present timeline as, prior to the text break, their project is directly connected with George's trip to Italy with her mother; however, after the text break, H pushes her literally to cut ties with the past and connect with H in the moment through a modern mime about tripping and falling (Smith 123/329-330).

The fourth text break is different from the others because it contains ellipses[77] but similar to them because it once again follows a session with Mrs Rock, this one once again in past tense (Smith 154/368). This is notable because the scene that precedes it begins with George realizing that she has written an email to H using "in its first sentence, the future tense, like there might be such a thing as a future. / !" (Smith 147/359). Then, George remembers in past tense a conversation with her brother Henry from "yesterday" about how remembering that their mother is dead "is like an earthquake," though she shifts into present tense briefly to describe the earthquake aftermath photos from his schoolbook (Smith 148/360). George thinks to herself that "It's a natural disaster and it looks a bit like a fashion shoot. Well, almost all photos of roughed-up places, so long as there are no actual dead people in them, look like a fashion shoot" (Smith 149/361). Then, the narration shifts back into past tense, and she imagines a conversation with her mother, which is in past tense rather than the present tense of her actual conversations with her mother:

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[77] While the text break occurs in both editions of the book, the three dots are only present in the Anchor Books edition, likely because the text break coincides with a page break in that edition unlike in the Penguin edition, where it occurs in the middle of a page.

Sooner or later, George's mother said in her head, *the ones with the dead people in them will look like a fashion shoot too.*

Fashion shot. Ha ha.

That would make a good Subvert.[78] (Smith 149/361)

Then, still in past tense, George resumes her light-hearted conversation with her brother from the day before in which she attempts to jolly him out of "hanging his head like a done flower" until her jokes about the Richter scale segue to George having told Mrs Rock, "I am between you and a hard place" (Smith 151/363). These moments are also connected by punning that is both delayed and simultaneous. In the middle of this session, George has what she calls "a moment of future-tense vision" in which she sees herself coming home in the summer to find her father watering the lawn while listening to "a Beethoven symphony … through the precious Bose headphones nobody else is allowed to touch" (Smith 153/366). This moment of "future-tense vision" harkens back to the moment in which George realized that the email she was writing to H earlier was also in future tense. The narrator then returns the reader to the session with Mrs Rock by saying, "But back to now, or rather then," which acknowledges that this future analeptic moment is situated not within the PT2 timeline, but within a proleptic moment that has been montaged amidst George's present-tense visit to a gallery that contains a painting by Francesco del Cossa (Smith 153/366). Unlike the other text breaks, when the narrative resumes, George is not with H, who is now living with her family in Denmark, but is instead by herself at the gallery, in the present tense, "ready

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[78] This is George's mother's term for satiric political art commentary adverts that she published—anonymously at first—in newspapers and online as a "*Journalist Internet Guerilla Interventionist*" (Smith 20/206).

and waiting" with "plans to count the people and how long and how little time they spend looking or not looking at a random picture in a gallery" (Smith 155/368). The narrator interrupts the narrative at this point with another metafictional, ironic note that recalls postmodernism's questioning of narrative structures and archetypes:

> This is the point in this story at which, according to its structure so far, a friend enters or a door opens or some kind of plot surfaces (but which kind? the one that means the place where a dead person's buried? the one that means the place where a building's to be built? the one that means a secret stratagem?); this is the place in this book where a spirit of twist in the tale has tended, in the past, to provide a friendly nudge forward to whatever's coming next. (Smith 155/368)

This is one point at which the reading experience diverges, depending on whether the reader has the Camera/Eyes version of the novel or the Eyes/Camera version. Those with the Eyes/Camera version already know Francescho's side of this double-helix narrative and can connect Francescho to the painter George knows as Francesco del Cossa and to the painting that George is observing people observing. To those readers, the reference to "a spirit of twist in the tale" alludes to Francescho's ghostly summoning that literally twists across the opening pages of the Eyes narrative (Smith 161/3). To readers of the Camera/Eyes version, though, this same phrase serves as foreshadowing of the narrative shift that is to come in just a few pages. After describing George's current setting, the omniscient narrator casts forward into the future (which contrasts with the other future-tense moments in the Camera narrative that were focalizations of George's own future visions and desires) and informs the reader of the future events that George "doesn't know yet" in which George will spot her mother's friend and lover (or possibly monitor/minotaur), Lisa Goliard, in the gallery and decide to start tracking her (Smith

155/368-369). This future prediction ends with a vow by future George that explicitly references eyes on the page next to the illustration of the eyes that mark the beginning of the next narrative: "In honour of her mother's **eyes** she will use her own. She will let whoever's watching know she's watching" (Smith 158/371; emphasis added). The chapter ends with another metafictional reference to verb tenses:

But none of the above has happened.

Not yet, anyway.

For now, in the present tense, George sits in the gallery and looks at one of the old paintings on the wall.

It's definitely something to do. For the foreseeable. (Smith 158/371-372)

Even though Smith ends the Camera narrative with a definitive full stop (or period), the fact that "foreseeable future" is a cliché makes readers notice the missing word and possibly even fill in the blank that is not a blank.

In addition to these text breaks, there are two actual chapter breaks in the Camera narrative (Smith 71/267, 129/337). The first chapter break separates the time when Helena Fisker first visits George from the time she becomes a close enough friend that George simply refers to her as H. The end of the first chapter, much like the end of the narrative, refers metafictionally to tense: "That makes it three times since September that George has laughed in an undeniable present tense" (Smith 69/266). The next chapter begins with "The first time H comes to the house again after New Year," so that one pattern that can be seen with these text breaks is that they mark four moments in which H enters and significantly impacts George's life after her mother's death (Smith 71/267). The second chapter break comes between a present-tense scene of George and her mother debating the lyrics to a Pet Shop Boys song while driving through Italy in the

PT1 timeline and a past-tense scene of George asking the women at the gallery's information desk about Francesco del Cossa and the portrait of St. Vincent of Ferrara in the PT2 timeline (Smith 129/337). As with the fourth text break, this chapter break is not explicitly linked to H, but the present-tense scene with George's mother was montaged with a scene in which H says to George, "Your turn. ... To tell me something you remembered, ... [w]hen we looked at the pictures" (Smith 127/334). The narrator immediately responds with the temporal conundrum: "It is last May. It is Italy. They are in the hire car on the way back to the airport" (Smith 127/334). This metatemporal moment disrupts realist complacency, operating similarly to the metafictional and metatheatrical moments that were so popular among postmodern writers and which Smith herself continues to utilize. The first chapter break signals a turn in George's relationship with H; the second chapter break signals a turn in George's relationships with herself and her dead mother, now that H has moved away and they can only communicate electronically, via text and email, though, as shown previously, emailing with H encourages George to live not only in the present, but to look forward to the future. The past-tense opening of the gallery chapter quickly segues to the time marker, "That was three weeks ago near the start of March," (which also coincides with when H and her family moved to Denmark) and a present-tense scene from the PT2 timeline of George making regular visits to Room 55 of the gallery where Francesco del Cossa's painting is displayed (Smith 130/339). Although H does not return in the Camera narrative, the end of the Camera narrative reveals that George is going to explore her mother's bisexual relationship, perhaps to gain a better understanding of her own feelings for girls before H returns in the continuation of the PT2 timeline that is related to the reader through Francescho's observations of George in the Eyes narrative, which

ends with Francescho watching the two girls painting two eyes on a brick wall that faces Lisa Goliard's front door (Smith 312/183). This is the same wall on which the narrator leaves a future George sitting at the end of the Camera narrative. In this way, Smith manages to create yet another simultaneous paradox in which George both has and has not yet followed Lisa Goliard home, a temporal aporia that is further influenced by having read, or not, the Eyes narrative. This paradox also creates a moment of hope for George's future (a future in which she will have succeeded in moving beyond the grief-filled presents in which she has been trapped) with the multiple possibilities that exist at the ends of both narratives.

Bergson's Theory of Memory-Images and the Two Present-Tense Timelines in Smith's Camera Narrative

Lampert defines Bergson's term "memory-image" as "a mental image representation of something no longer present," "something that takes place in the present, rather than the survival of the past as such" (137-138). A memory-image is like a snapshot or, in more literary terms, a flashback. When we consciously remember or reminisce about a specific event that occurred in the past, we are re-experiencing a past moment in the present moment, which phenomenologists view as one type of simultaneity. In contrast to this conscious remembering of the past, Bergson postulates a "pure memory" state as "an event we experienced but are no longer aware of," "not the content of any present experience" but "the flow that survives in itself, rather than the instrumental image" (Lampert 137). Memory-images allow us to remember and re-experience our past; pure memory in contrast gives us tools and resources to navigate present and future events that are similar to events we have previously navigated

(Lampert 137). Claudia Hammond makes a similar argument when she discusses how we use our memories to "pre-experience events" or engage in "future thinking," which "is different from actively planning, and it is a skill that sets us apart from other animals" (216). Claudia Hammond argues:

> By recombining old memories we are able to project ourselves into the future, giving us endless combinations from which to select the most plausible possibilities. Like a remix, utilising these memories allows us to preview future events in a window in the mind. ... Memory is essentially a reconstructive process; when we want to re-experience an event we don't summon up a tape from the library. We reconstruct it and even alter that memory if new information has changed our views since it first happened. A similar process takes place when we imagine the future. (219)

The process of recombining memories is so innate to most of us that we are not usually aware of it happening, but one of the things that Smith's narrative structure does is to tease apart the various aspects of a simultaneous temporal experience, calling attention to forms of delayed simultaneity and encouraging readers to interact with them and critique them. To distinguish these two types of temporal phenomena (the memory-image and pure memory), I turn to George in Smith's Camera Narrative. When George remembers what the Palazzo Schifanoia looked like when she went there with her mother while she is working on her school project with H, the remembering is an example of a memory-image that George is consciously recalling. However, pure memory occurs when Francescho observes George in the Eyes narrative:

> [D]oing a curving and jerking thing both, with the middle of her body, she went up then down then up again, sometimes so low down that it was a marvel to see

her come back up again so quick, sometimes pivoting on one foot and sometimes

on the other and sometimes on both with her knees bent then straightening into

a sinuous undulate like a caterpillar getting the wings out of the caul, the new

imago emerging from the random circumbendibus. (Smith 214/66)

In this moment, George is dancing in a way that emulates her mother's dancing, using

pure memory to guide her body through her own version of the Twist that she

remembers (in the Camera narrative) her mother had enjoyed (Smith 6-7/191-192).

Lampert argues that, according to Bergson, although memory-images and pure memory

can both be simultaneous with the present, this simultaneity presents itself in different

ways because memory-images exist outside of "actual time" whereas pure memory

coincides with our perceptions of the present (138). He explains how this creates a

virtual simultaneity between a memory-image and the present:

Just because [a memory-image] is not on the same kind of time-line as the present

event, it can be simultaneous with the present, earlier on the same time-line as

the present actual event. If there were only one kind of time-line, past and present

obviously could not be simultaneous; but if there are two kinds of time-orders

(one being a time-line—a series of presents; the other something like a time-

storehouse, the pure past), then the two can coexist virtually simultaneously

(though obviously not in the same sense in which two events at the same present

moment on a time-line are actually simultaneous). In short, the memory of the

past still exists in the present, albeit not in the way the actual is present. Memory

persists in a quasi-temporal form of being. Like arithmetical propositions,

memories are available procedures not limited to any actual time, past or present.

(Lampert 138)

Smith creates a paradox within the Camera Narrative by relaying two distinct timelines in the present tense: the narration of George's trip to Italy with her mother (PT1), and the narration of George's growing friendship with H (PT2). As discussed above, Smith provides metatemporal moments in the text that alert the reader to the fact that the trip and the friendship are happening in two different presents; the first happens before George's mother dies and the second takes place afterwards. George and the narrator also remind the reader that the earlier present-tense timeline is anachronistic by repeating the phrase "Not says, said. / George's mother is dead" throughout the Camera Narrative (Smith 5/189). This paradox makes more sense if we apply Bergson's theory of memory-images to the PT1 timeline. Although the narration is all in third-person, it is limited to George's perspective and the narrator's observations of George, thus we can interpret the timeline in which George is befriending H and recovering from the trauma of losing her mother as the "actual present" and the timeline in which George is visiting Italy with her mother and younger brother as a "memory-image" that the present George is currently remembering. Therefore, these two timelines coexist in a virtual simultaneity for George. The co-existence of multiple presents can be read as a critique of how we have become trapped in the eternal present and George's struggle to move beyond these simultaneous presents models the possibility of escape that exists if we relearn how to imagine optimistic future possibilities for ourselves. What keeps the PT1 timeline from reading as a traditional flashback is two-fold: Smith's use of the present tense and the inclusion of past-tense flashbacks within each of the dueling present-tense timelines. In contrast to the virtual simultaneity that George may be experiencing as she works her way through the grieving process, for readers the two presents are not such a realist experience of simultaneity; rather, the presence of multiple present-tense timelines jars

readers out of a comfortable, accessible, realist reading experience and creates a postmodern-esque metatemporality that raises questions of how plural temporalities can be narrativized and how we can learn to imagine possible futures once again.

The Aporias of Gender and Sexuality in Smith's Eyes Narrative

The Eyes narrative not only switches focus from George to Francescho, but it also switches focalization from third-person limited with a narrator who occasionally steps out of George's thoughts to inform the reader about things that George cannot know for herself to a first-person narration focalized through a Renaissance ghost named Francescho. This is the ghost of the historical painter Francesco del Cossa, whom George researches and discusses in the Camera narrative, and because of the inherent anachronism of being the ghost of a Renaissance-era painter, Francescho does not always understand what is going on.[79] The other difference between Francescho's narrative and George's is that Francescho's uses the present tense only to refer to the current moment in time in which Francescho observes George. Francescho's remembrances of the past are related fully in past tense to show that Francescho is firmly situated in the present rather than in an atemporal void (in contrast to the spectral narrator, Birdie, from *The Clockmaker's Daughter*). One reason for this choice of focalization is to remove the need for any gendered pronouns. Francescho is referred to exclusively by first- and second-person

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[79] For example, Francescho describes George's tablet as "a holy votive tablet" and observes:

> [T]his place is full of people who have eyes and choose to see nothing, who all talk into their hands as they peripatate and all carry these votives, some the size of a hand, some the size of a face or a whole head, dedicated to saints perhaps or holy folk, and they look or talk to or pray to these tablets or icons all the while by holding them next to their heads or stroking them with fingers and staring only at them, signifying they must be heavy in their despairs to be so consistently looking away from their world and so devoted to their icons. (Smith 195/43-44)

In this way, Francescho serves as an outsider perspective from which Smith can critique her 21st-century society and its obsession with immediacy.

pronouns throughout the narrative. Smith also changes the spelling of her/his name from the historical spelling used in the Camera narrative—Francesco del Cossa—to emphasize the fictionality of this Francescho. In contrast to historical fiction such as Lawhon's *I Was Anastasia* that incorporates copious historical facts, Smith has chosen to fictionalize a historical figure about whom extremely little is known. These choices allow Smith to make of Francescho a Schrödinger's cat of gender: Francescho both is and is not a woman, a man, a trans character, and/or a non-binary individual. For these reasons, I will try to avoid pronouns where possible or use the combined "s/he" and "her/his"[80] to refer to Francescho to preserve this ambiguity and bothness (and to follow Francescho's own example of referring to God as "the Fathermother Motherfather" (Smith 191/39)).

One of the other ways in which Francescho's character is anachronistic is the feminist perspective through which Francescho views women from her/his time period. In response to Francescho observing George's repetitive watching of a porn video "through the small window she holds in her hands," Francescho remembers the women that Francescho performed "acts of love" with during her/his life: Ginevra, Isotta, Meliadusa, Agnola "and the others" (Smith 215-216/67-68). Francescho narrates:

> None of them earned anywhere near her true worth in money : all of them
>
> suffered misuse, at the very least the kind of everyday misuse you hear any night
>
> through the walls of such a house [brothel], and though these women and girls

---

[80] Although Francescho can be read as a trans or non-binary character, I have chosen to use "s/he" and "her/him" to refer to Francescho to emphasize the simultaneity and bothness of the character's gender identity and expression and to avoid the anachronism of gender-neutral pronouns with which Francescho would not be familiar. This also distinguishes the character of Francescho, who has not self-identified as non-binary, from the "gender-free" character of Morgan in *Girl, Woman, Other* whose preferred pronouns are "they/them" (Evaristo 328).

were the closest thing alive I ever met to gods and goddesses, the work they did

would first pock them on the surface like illness then break them easy as you

break dry twigs then burn them up faster than kindling. (Smith 234/90)

This anachronistic feminism is followed by revelations of each woman's fate: Ginevra to

"one of the blue sicknesses," which is a reference to the black plague; Isotta just

disappears, though Francescho hoped that it was by her choice rather than something

more sinister, saying "I liked to think of her smiling with her eyes and mouth both

(which means love) at a lover or friend or at least at someone whose money she shared

equally"; and Agnola washes up in the river with her hands and feet bound (Smith

234/90-91). Meliadusa is the only one whose fate remains unrevealed other than the

disclosure that she was responsible for causing the rift between Francescho and her/his

friend Barto Garganelli by revealing that Francescho was not the man Barto believed

"him" to be (Smith 235/91).

Francescho met these women through Barto, with whom Francescho has a

complicated relationship that reads as homosocial until Barto learns that Francescho is

not biologically male. He accuses Francescho of being "false" to him, but Francescho

counters this, saying, "You've known me all along, I said. I've never not been me" (Smith

235/92, 236/92). Nested within this flashback is a further flashback as the Francescho

speaking with Barto reflects:

[T]here'd been many times when Barto'd seen me naked or near-naked, by

ourselves swimming, say, or with other boys and young men too and the general

acceptance of my painter self had always meant I'd been let to be exactly that –

myself – no matter that in 1 difference I was not the same : it was as simple as

agreement, as understood and accepted and as pointless to mention as the fact

that we all breathed the same air ... . (Smith 236/92-93)[81]

Barto has no issue with feeling attraction for Francescho when it is a feeling that he

thinks he cannot act upon, but once he realizes that Francescho is "other than I thought,"

he becomes unable to ignore his feelings for Francescho, who points out that "the fault is

with your thinking, or with the person who has changed your thinking, not with me"

(Smith 236/93). This is when Francescho realized: "that [Barto] loved me, and that our

friendship had been tenable on condition that he could never have me, that I was never to

be had, and that someone else, anyone else, saying out loud to him what I was, other than

painter, broke this condition, since those words in themselves mean the inevitability, the

being had" (Smith 236-237/93). Francescho's realization is foreshadowed by the story

that Barto shares, a paradoxical story about a fish he almost caught, when they first meet

each other by the river, saying: "But it's the best fish I've ever caught, that fish I didn't

catch, cause it's a fish that will always be with me now and never be eaten, it'll never die,

that fish I'll never land" (Smith 202-203/53). Francescho is the fish that Barto will never

catch. Barto walks away from Francescho at this point of the story, but the two

eventually mend their friendship, with Francescho becoming godparent to Barto's boys[82].

Although there is no indication that their relationship is sexual at this point, Francescho

observes, "I was permitted, but conditionally, to the parts of his life over which his wife

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[81] Francescho's colon usage in the Eyes narrative consistently puts spaces on both sides of the punctuation mark; this is not a typo.

[82] Francescho makes another anachronistically feminist comment at this point, lamenting that "I'd have liked all the same to be guardian to his girls since girls got less attention when it came to colours and pictures, which meant the loss of many a good painter out of nothing but blind habit : but his wife did not want her girls to have the life of painters" (Smith 280-281/145).

had no jurisdiction," which indicates that Francescho is possibly perceived as a rival by Barto's wife despite Francescho's lack of sexual interest in Barto (Smith 280/145).

Francescho's description of a third category, painter, that is simultaneously both genders and none is emphasized thematically throughout the Eyes narrative. In contrast to George, who repeatedly argues for distinct binary classifications, Francescho prefers the androgynous or ambiguous both, which is presented less as a combination of two categories than as an additional state of being that exists between them. A foreigner that Francescho encounters while traveling to a new painting job labels Francescho with a foreign word, which Smith does not provide to the reader, that he defines as "you who are more than one thing. You who exceed expectations" (240/98). In this way, Smith perhaps indicates a desire on the part of Francescho to identify as non-binary, though this book was published before the term had been popularized; as such, "foreign" here can simultaneously be read as lingual and temporal, the traveler could be speaking another language or could be from another time, i.e., the future.

Although there is compelling evidence to read Francescho as a cisgender lesbian or bisexual, the title of the novel indicates that Smith does not intend for her reader to view Francescho as tidily fitting into any single category or label. Arguably, these labels could be viewed as anachronistic because Francescho's physical life pre-dates them, yet the ghost Francescho comes into existence in the mid-2010s, when such terms are becoming increasingly commonplace; thus, they are simultaneously anachronistic and not anachronistic. Also, although many of the men in Francescho's world are attracted to Francescho as a young man, Francescho does not seem to reciprocate this attraction, thus encouraging the reader to view Francescho as a cross-dressing lesbian. George's mother's sexuality is also ambiguous; George reveals her mother's affair with a woman

while she is married to a George's father in the Camera narrative. George's reaction to her

mother's affair is negative, but it is unclear whether George is upset about the affair

because of the betrayal of her father and family, or because the affair is with a woman and

therefore complicates her mother's sexuality and makes her difficult to categorize.

George expresses a strong desire for clear binary categories at the beginning of the

Camera narrative, declaring to her mother: "Past or present? ... Male or female? It can't be

both. It must be one or the other" (Smith 9/194). Her mother encourages George to

accept ambiguity in the world by responding: "Who says? Why must it?" (Smith 9/196).

As a whole, the Eyes narrative seems to support George's mother's side of the argument,

to break down strict categorization and binary classifications in the world, especially in

the performance of gender and sexuality. Her argument is firmly rooted in

postmodernism and juxtaposed to George's, which is more reminiscent of modernism.

Smith does not provide a clear resolution to the argument, but her narrative favors the

postmodern throughout.

As a child, Francescho loses her/his mother and performs her grief by wearing her

mother's clothes, which were "empty of her still smelling of her," even though they are

"so big and me so small it was as if I'd dressed in a field of sky" (Smith 182/28). After a

few weeks of this, Francescho's father tells her/him to stop because "[i]t is like your

mother has become a dwarf and as if her dwarf self is always twinkling away in all the

corners of the house and the yard, always in the corner of my eye" (Smith 182/29).

Francescho's father then offers to send Francescho to school and "train you up in the

making and using of colours on wood and on walls, you being so good with your

pictures," but only if Francescho "could be like your brothers" with "a bit of imagining"

and "a bit of discretion" and wear "your brothers' clothes" (Smith 184-5/30-31).

Francescho initially responds with, "You know I am not like my brothers" but Francescho's father argues "nobody will take you for such training wearing the clothes of a woman. You can't even be an apprentice to me, wearing the clothes of a woman" but, he continues, "when you are established, when it is clearly established in others' eyes as to who you have *become* – / He raised an eyebrow. / – we will get you into a painters' workshop or find you a master of panels and frescoes and so on, and we will show him what you can do and we will see if he'll take you on" (Smith 184/30, 185/32). Upon the promise of artistic training, Francescho makes the transformative decision to "become" a boy, not because of body dysphoria but because of the limited gender roles in Francescho's patriarchal society, and describes the moment of transformation in a moment that evokes paintings such as Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and Georgia O'Keefe's close-up paintings of flowers: "I pulled on the ties and I loosened the gown front : I stood up and the whole gown slipped off the clothes trunk and then slipped down away from me like the peeled back petals of a lily and me at its centre standing straight like the stamen : I stepped out naked over its folds : I held out my hand for the leggings" (Smith 186-187/33). Regardless of the reasons or the impulse behind it, this symbolic sloughing of one gender identity for another can also be read as indicative of a trans narrative, which is emphasized by Francescho's father responding with an invitation to Francescho to choose a new name for her(him)self. Francescho even describes the moment of renaming as transformative: "On that day with that blessing and that new name I died and was reborn" (Smith 189/36). The reader is never told Francescho's original name, but Francescho does indicate that this choice is influenced by the fact that "My mother's name began with an f" (Smith 187/33). Francescho makes the sound "Ff" and Francescho's father, thinking it is a "Vv" sound, suggests "Vincenzo?" but Francescho

"thought of my mother's French-sounding name : I thought of the French shape that means the flower her name meant" (Smith 187/34, 188/35).[83] Even without knowing Francescho's mother's specific name, in linking Francescho's new name to her/his late mother's name, Francescho maintains a tie to her/his female identity while simultaneously taking on the performative aspects of a male identity. Thus, Francescho is simultaneously both female and male, cisgender and trans. Although this idea of "both" seems to reinforce the outdated idea of a gender binary, being both actually creates additional categories that are not wholly one thing or its opposite and thereby, in true postmodern fashion, being "both" challenges and breaks down assumed binary labels.

Having lived through a patriarchal period that associated gender closely with the clothes one wore as evidenced by the significance of changing from wearing women's dresses to boys' pants, Francescho initially views George as "[t]his boy I am sent for some reason to shadow" (Smith 194/43). It is not until the ghost of Francescho looks George full in the face that Francescho acknowledges "he looks very girl" but still does not stop referring to George as "the boy" (Smith 199/49). Francescho's revelation that "This boy is a girl" does not come until the beginning of the second chapter of the Eyes narrative, when Francescho reveals that what gave the "boy" away was "the unbroken undisguised voice of what can only be girl" (Smith 213/65). The paradox of this comes not from Francescho's confusion towards the performance of gender in the 21st century (e.g., girls wearing pants and having short hair), which is completely foreign to Francescho's 15th-century Renaissance experience, but from the structure of the novel itself such that only

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[83] Although Francescho's mother also remains unnamed, it is possible that her name was some version of Frances, the French version of "Francesco" which means "free one or Frenchman," or Franca, a contracted form of the Italian Francesca which means "a free woman," but also "flowering, in bloom" which relates to Francescho's description of the name as meaning a flower ("Francesco"; "Franca").

readers who have the Camera/Eyes version of Smith's book will be able to recognize that the boy/girl that Francescho is shadowing is George from the Camera narrative in their initial reading of the Eyes narrative. For readers with the Eyes/Camera version of Smith's book, the figure Francescho shadows is both boy and girl and/or neither, a non-binary individual. There is also gender ambiguity and androgyny in the Camera narrative as George insists on being called by her chosen nickname—George—rather than her full (and feminine) name, Georgia; and Helena's name is shortened to its first initial—H. Overall, the paradoxical simultaneity and fluid ambiguity of gender and sexuality in Smith's novel encourages readers to see how the effects of time as a form extend beyond our present experience of temporality.

The Twisting Plurality in the Novel Structure of *Girl, Woman, Other*

In some ways, I read the narrative structure of Evaristo's novel as an evolution of that of Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Both stories focus on the intersections in characters' lives and emphasize the ways in which a group of people are connected to one another. However, Evaristo also brings intersectionality to bear in a more black feminist theoretical way as well, looking at the intersectionality of her characters' identities (e.g., British/black/playwright/liberal/mother/lesbian) alongside the intersections of their lives with others (e.g., mother/daughter, student/teacher). Such intersections occur in time and, in Evaristo's novel, the use of the present tense creates a plurality of timelines that are paradoxically simultaneous and delayed. Lampert postulates that simultaneity and delay are two sides of the same temporal coin; neither can exist without the other, but they contradict each other, creating a perpetual cycle of temporal aporia (1). In discussing Bergson, Lampert "distinguishes 'simultaneity'—two

instantaneous perceptions apprehended at the same time—and 'contemporaneity'—two flows experienced at the same time" but acknowledges that Bergson considers both to be "forms of 'simultaneity'" (128). The first instance of simultaneity is like George's idea of a simultaneous story that has all of its text printed over itself on the same page so that it is "apprehended" by the reader at the same time; the second has more in common with Evaristo's narrative structure which layers multiple timelines or "flows" of time on top of each other, with chapters from different characters' perspectives using different tenses, even when they describe contemporaneous experiences. Lampert also describes time and time-flow as "not just continuous rhythm," but as "both the piling up of and the subsequent differentiation of one rhythm and the next" (132). The structure of Evaristo's novel creates a similar effect: both piling up a stack of stories of women/womxn/womyn living in and around 21st-century London, England, but also teasing out and differentiating their experiences to demonstrate the intersectionality of lived experience while simultaneously contradicting ideas of representative lived experience. As with Smith's title, Evaristo's also calls attention to categories and classifications, the labels that we find comfort in applying to those we encounter each day. Categorizations can be tools of oppression and suppression, which is why the popularization of the labels "realism" and "authenticity" are so potentially dangerous in the hands of contemporary critics. Evaristo pushes back against gender, genre, and genetic classifications using postmodern writing techniques and theory in the temporal pluralities of her narrative structure, creating a paradoxically simultaneous novel that spirals around in a way that is both the same as and different from Smith's *How to Be Both*.

Unlike Smith's novel, Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, has a single printed format. However, this does not mean that Evaristo is not also playing with structure. Her novel

is broken down into five chapters followed by an epilogue, but the first four chapters comprise three smaller sub-chapters, each focusing on a different character. These groups of characters are each more closely related to each other in addition to being connected to the larger cast of characters; moreover, the groupings emphasize mother-daughter relationships, which also prominently feature in both parts of Smith's novel. Each chapter contains both present- and past-tense narratives and even the narratives that begin in the past often shift into the present and/or future.

The novel begins in Amma Bonsu's present-tense perspective, whose play *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* is opening at the National Theatre in London that night, and the next present-tense narrative is from Amma's daughter's perspective as she waits in the theatre for the play to begin. These two sections revolving around the opening night of the play are followed by a fully (other than the final line) past-tense chapter about Amma's former theatre partner Dominique, "who moved to America nearly thirty years ago / she considers it her home" (Evaristo 112). Chapters 2 and 3 move away from the theatre although the play is mentioned and there are overlaps and encounters with characters from chapter 1. Chapter 4 brings the reader back to the theatre after the play is over from the viewpoint of social media influencer Morgan who is also attending the opening of the play. Chapter 5 differs the most from the other chapters as it is not broken down into named perspectives, yet it still shifts between perspectives of characters the reader has encountered before. It begins after the play's opening night with the only male perspective included in the novel: Dr. Roland Quartey, who is the father and sperm donor of Amma's daughter, Yazz, whose narrative follows Amma's in chapter 1. Evaristo presents Roland as somewhat of a stereotype of the typical patriarchal male professor, but she intersectionalizes his character in contradictory ways by making him black and

conservative while also by putting the reader in his thoughts so that the reader can see the insecurities and vulnerability hidden behind all his posturing and pomposity. All of this serves to make Roland a more interesting and complicated figure with whom the reader may be more willing to empathize. Chapter 5 is also firmly grounded in the events of the play's "After-party" at which many of the characters that readers met previously are encountered in the *present*-present.

Most of the present-tense narrative timelines in Evaristo's novel belong to the main present-tense timeline (PT-A) that is introduced at the beginning of the novel with Amma walking through London and meeting with her friend Sylvester before attending the opening night of her play at the National Theatre. Yazz continues PT-A as she sits inside the theatre and remembers or comments upon the other audience members who are seated nearby—her friends Waris and Courtney, her mum's friend Sylvester, her dad Roland and his partner Kenny—as she waits for the play to begin (which happens as her chapter concludes). Carole also fits into PT-A as she goes about her workday before the play that her husband has strongarmed her into attending that night. However, while LaTisha's present-tense narrative likely coincides with Carole's, there is no mention of Amma's play or anything else to place it specifically within the PT-A timeline. The PT-A timeline recedes into the background of the novel until Morgan's timeline intersects with it as they attend Amma's play and post a review of it on social media during the after-party: "Just seen #TheLastAmazonofDahomey @NationalTheatre. OMG, warrior women kicking ass on stage! Pure African Amazon blackness. Feeeeerce! Heart-breaking & ball-breaking! All hail #AmmaBonsu #allblackhistorymatters Book now or cry later,

peepalls!!! @RogueNation" (Evaristo 334).[84] This moment carries on into the final chapter, which focuses more specifically on the events of the play's after-party. The epilogue picks up the threads of the PT-A timeline as Penelope (who taught at Carole's school with Shirley) reads a published review of Amma's play while riding the train north to meet her biological mother, Hattie (who is also Morgan's grandmother), whom Penelope discovered to be a relation through an Ancestry DNA kit.

PT-A is not the only present-tense timeline in the novel, however. Yazz also has a present-tense narrative about her experience thus far at University (PT-B), which explains how she comes to be at the play with only "two members of her uni squad, the Unfuckwithables" and without her former friend Nenet (Evaristo 41). The choice of present-tense for this incident is especially interesting as it seems to have occurred recently (in the past year or so) but most definitely before the beginning of PT-A. The next two present-tense narratives (PT-C and PT-D) to surface are more decidedly set in the past than Yazz's, though. PT-C appears in Carole's narrative during a past-tense flashback that she experiences while walking to a meeting; therefore, the use of present tense at this point serves to distinguish this flashback within a flashback. The use of present tense for the nested flashback is also ironic, though, because the initial flashback was preceded by Carole telling herself to "delete all negative thoughts, Carole, release the past and look to the future with positivity and the lightness of a child unencumbered by emotional baggage" (Evaristo 119). Carole remembers how she was invasively searched at

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[84] Evaristo is definitely critiquing the present's culture of immediacy and these kinds of social media influencer reviews while in Morgan's perspective as Morgan observes "soon there'll be no need for proper critics, the so-called 'experts' who've been running the show since forever, ... it's all about the democratization of critical opinion" but her partner Bibi "says the so-called democratization of reviews means the lowering of standards, and that subject knowledge, history and critical context are at risk of being lost in favour of people who only know how to write in attention-seeking soundbites" (333).

customs "in a country known for its terrible record on human rights," and then she remembers *remembering* "such memories she'd locked away ... / that had lain dormant for years after *it* happened, when Carole was thirteen and a half" (Evaristo 119). On the next page, Evaristo segues into an inconsistent PT-C with a declarative statement reminiscent of Smith's: "it is the night before LaTisha's party and Carole and her mother are sitting at the washed-out Formica kitchen table" (120). The party itself is narrated in the past tense until Carole disassociates in the middle of being raped:

> Carole forces herself to think of her favourite number, 1729
>
> the only number that can be the sum of two numbers to the 3rd degree in different ways
>
> one to the power of three is one
>
> twelve to the power of three is 1728
>
> add them to get 1729
>
> there's also ten and nine, each to the power of three, which is then 1000+729
>
> (Evaristo 126)

The narrative immediately returns to past tense, noting "after minutes or hours or days or years or several lifetimes had passed, it stopped" (Evaristo 126). By using present tense inconsistently, before the party when Carole is safe in the comfort of her mother's kitchen *and* when she is able to disassociate herself fully from what is happening to her, Evaristo emphasizes how Carole has distanced herself from pieces of her past and how even when they come back to her as what Bergson would term a "memory-image" she holds the most traumatic memories at a greater distance from her psyche by keeping them in the past tense.

In contrast to the inconstancy of PT-C, PT-D is a full-immersion into a present-tense narration of Shirley's history at Peckham school, where she taught Carole and LaTisha and worked alongside Penelope. That this present-tense narrative takes place long before the rest is evident in the opening lines of the chapter: "Shirley / (not yet Mrs King) / arrives at Peckham School for Boys and Girls / ... / she's wearing a light grey pencil skirt and jacket, powder-blue blouse, grey neck-tie, black patent leather court shoes, and her pride" (Evaristo 217). Although the description of Shirley just beginning her teaching career and not yet being married indicates that this present-tense narrative is not contemporaneous with the others, the narrator does not give specific time period markers. Halfway through, in section three, the chapter is dated to sometime in the 1980s through Shirley commenting that "grammar schools attempted to level the playing field ... and made it possible for brighter children to receive a better education / or else those public school boys would still be running the show as if it was the 1890s and not the 1980s" and obliquely referencing Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as "our nation's current *Commander-in-Chief* ... love her or loathe her" (Evaristo 229). One of the effects of the present-tense narrative is to create irony between how Shirley imagines her future will turn out and how it actually turns out. This creates both temporal dissonance and dramatic irony because readers have encountered Shirley as Mrs King in Carole's and LaTisha's narratives in chapter 2 (Evaristo 129). Shirley thinks that "she isn't going to be a good teacher but a great one / one who'll be remembered by generations of working-class children as the person who made them feel capable of achieving anything in life," but the teacher Shirley becomes is "an old bat, Fuck Face, the school dragon, she wouldn't let anyone get away with anything, who put them in detention for turning up only five minutes late to class, which was just plain evil, and then she'd *dare* say it was for

their own good, to learn discipline, which was *outrageous*, they all agreed" (Evaristo 218, 129). The real irony of Shirley's narrative, though, is that as it progresses through her career and she becomes more jaded and frustrated by her inability to effect positive change in her students or the system, the narrative shifts from an active, energetic present tense to a past-tense future that seems already to be set in stone and unable to change. In this way, Shirley represents those people in our society for whom the present has become eternal and unchangeable with no way out.

The final distinct present-tense timeline is PT-E and occurs even further back than Shirley's, when Hattie's mother, Grace, tries to get a department store job with her schoolmates only to be turned away because of her skin color. The appearance of this present-tense moment within Grace's largely past-tense recitation of her life emphasizes that racist behavior such as this is not firmly located in the past but remains a problem in the present. Thus, Evaristo employs the present tense not just to convey simultaneity or contemporaneous occurrences, but also to impart a sense of immediacy and urgency to her readers about the enduring nature of racism and demonstrate that not everything has changed and progressed as much as we would like to believe. This is also one of the effects of the PT1 timeline in the Camera narrative of Smith's novel; the reader experiences the events from before George's mother's death as more immediate because they are relayed in present tense. Thus, the anachronistic present tenses in both time novels are tinged with a bittersweetness that is mitigated by the hopeful possibilities of the potential futures Evaristo and Smith imagine or hint at for their characters.

Simultaneity and Paradox in the Performative Identities of *Girl, Woman, Other*

In contrast to the gender ambiguity of Smith's novel, Evaristo's Megan/Morgan self-identifies as "gender-free" and the past-tense sections of her section in chapter 4 are narrated with a knowledge of gender theory that the character themselves did not have at that point in their life (Evaristo 328). The narrator observes that Megan's "mother was unthinkingly repeating patterns of oppression based on gender" because "her mother wanted her to look cuter than she already was / like the cutest of the cutest cutie pies" and "she was determined to dress Megan up for the approval of society at large, usually other females who commented on her looks from as early as she can remember" even though "wearing trousers really shouldn't have been an issue for a girl born in her time," which is the 1990s (Evaristo 307, 308).

Morgan explains their identity to Yazz who has excitedly told them, "she was thinking of becoming non-binary as well, how *woke* was that?" by explaining:

> being trans wasn't about playacting an identity on a whim, it's about becoming your true self in spite of society's pressures to be otherwise, most people on the trans spectrum felt different from childhood ...
>
> it's something inside you, ... not a trend, although others might adopt a trans position as political statement, which is okay when it comes from a place of integrity, of solidarity, when it's a genuine rejection of society's gender impositions
>
> not because it's hip or woke
>
> it's why women became political lesbians years ago, choosing to have sexual relationships with women because they'd had enough of sexist men
>
> not because they no longer desired them (Evaristo 338)

Morgan's assertion that "being trans" is about standing up to "society's pressures to be otherwise" contrasts with Francescho's narrative about becoming like her/his brothers in order to be allowed to study painting and arts, which is why Francescho's character does not read as clearly trans or non-binary as Morgan's does. In the subsequent part of chapter 4, which focuses on Morgan's grandmother, Hattie, whom they refer to as G G, Hattie says of gender-free Morgan, "the funny thing is, nothing's changed about Morgan since she became a gender granary non-binding whatsit, other than changing her name from Megan to Morgan, which is fine, Hattie can live with that / ... / Morgan looks the same (like a boy), acts the same (boyish) and to all intents and purposes is the same (Megan)" (Evaristo 352).

In addition to the many homosexual and lesbian relationships (as well as the heteronormative relationships) in *Girl, Woman, Other*, there are also more ambiguous (and simultaneous) relationship preferences depicted, such as Carole's mother, Bummi, wishing that she could simultaneously maintain relationships with both men and women. For Bummi, the relationships she has with women are distinct from those she has with men: "she admitted to herself she had been hungry for a long time, had ignored it because she would never consider taking another husband / to replace someone irreplaceable was impossible / this was different, Omofe was a woman" (Evaristo 180). However, eventually Bummi caves to "the shame she had tried to suppress" and ends the relationship with Omofe because she "could no longer relax enough to enjoy herself" (Evaristo 180). At the end of the chapter, when Evaristo shifts into present tense, Bummi, who has since remarried a man named Kofi, admits she "misses Omofe more now than she did when they split up / ideally she would like to have both her and Kofi in her life – a pipe dream because only men are allowed to be polygamous" (187). Bummi's desire for a

simultaneous bisexual relationship is similar to the way in which George's mother has an affair with Lisa Godard while remaining married to George's father (and also recalls a bit of Leo's simultaneous attraction to both MiMi and Xeno in Winterson's novel). George's anger at her mother's unconventionality reflects the approbation that Bummi assumes would be directed at her if she tried to live openly in such an arrangement. Amma also expresses a preference for "non-monogamous relationships," though her interest is only in women (Evaristo 22). After detailing her past relationship history, the narrator says, "Amma long ago lost interest in bed-hopping; over time she began to crave the intimacy that comes from being emotionally, although not exclusively, close to another person" and then explains that she is currently involved with "Dolores, a graphic designer based in Brighton, and Jackie, an occupational therapist in Highgate / they've been in the picture seven and three years respectively and are both independent women who have full lives (and children) outside of their relationship with her" (Evaristo 22). In this way, Amma reminds me a bit of Francescho and her/his relationships with multiple women from the local brothel, though Francescho does not have the privilege to sustain the relationships with these women because the brothel madame accuses Francescho of making her girls unsatisfied with their lives as prostitutes, giving them "airs and graces" (Smith 233). And, then, there's the unhealthy relationship that Shirley's mother, Winsome, is having with her son-in-law, Shirley's husband Lennox. Winsome's attraction to Lennox begins innocently enough, with her feeling drawn to him for being "both a dish and ambitious," and "she reassured herself her attraction to Lennox wasn't a betrayal of Clovis [her husband] or Shirley because it wasn't acted upon" (Evaristo 271). However, it quickly goes from existing only in Winsome's mind to actually happening in her life when Lennox shows up at her house, knowing Clovis will be at work, and has

sex with her until "she was completely out of her mind and inside her body" (Evaristo 273). She justifies the continuation of this affair for "over a year" because her own husband had never even kissed her "full-on," because "she was nearly fifty / she deserved to have this / him," and because "Lennox had urges, it was better she satisfy him than he left her daughter / for another woman" (Evaristo 272, 273). In the end, Lennox ends the affair and Winsome never asks why, but she also never stops fantasizing about him and "wished he hadn't awakened a longing in her that he wouldn't satisfy" (Evaristo 274). Overall, what all of these relationships have in common is an element of simultaneity to them, of wanting more than one thing at the same time, which ties back into the simultaneity of the temporal structure of the novel. These relationships also contain wishful aspects that suggest a desire for more possibilities in the future.

In addition to the paradoxical simultaneity of the performative gender and sexuality identities in *Girl, Woman, Other*, Evaristo also depicts myriad ways in which the women (and to a lesser, but still present, extent the men) in her novel feel they must represent themselves *and* their minority racial identities in 20th- and 21st-century British society. These feelings span the spectrum from Shirley's misguided desire "to be a great teacher *and* an ambassador / for every black person in the world" to Roland's frustration "that he'd had to engage with *race* and was ... seen as a spokesman for cultural diversity / which he resolutely is *not*" (Evaristo 222, 412-413). Initially, Penelope seems like the odd girl out in Evaristo's story, a stereotypical middle-class, privileged white feminist who does not recognize her own privilege. However, the epilogue reveals that the adopted Penelope's ancestry is not as white as she had always assumed, "imagin[ing] her ancestors were from that region [York], going all the way back to the stone ages,

probably / ... possibly with Viking ancestors, perhaps she's descended from a Viking warrior queen" (Evaristo 446). Instead, Penelope's Ancestry DNA results reveal that she is only 87% European and that she has 13% African heritage (Evaristo 447). These results bring on what Penelope terms "post traumatic stress disorder" as she suffers the effects of "a collision between who she thought she might be and who she apparently was" (Evaristo 446). In this way, Penelope, like Francescho, becomes a Schrödinger's cat character, because she both is and is not Black simultaneously. She has African heritage, and her mother is Black; however, she not only passed as white her entire life but has been influenced by and blind to the systemic racism that surrounds her. Her first reaction to her test results is not only racist but also anti-Semitic as she notes in response to the 16% European Jewish line in her results that "being Jewish is one thing but never in a million years did she expect to see Africa in her DNA" (Evaristo 447). In addition, she immediately "imagined her ancestors attired in loincloths running around the African savannah spearing lions, at the same time wearing yarmulkes, eating open-topped rye sandwiches and paella, and refusing to hunt on the Sabbath" (Evaristo 448). Penelope is not even satisfied with her European heritage because "only 17% of her was British which was a terrible disappointment, she was actually more Irish than British, which in all likelihood meant her ancestors were *potato farmers*" (Evaristo 448). With these labels and the stereotypical implications Penelope attaches to them, Evaristo satirizes and critiques the society that has racially oppressed her and others by pointing out that even if you appear to be white, your DNA is unlikely to be as "pure" as you imagine. But to return to the temporality aspect of this scene, Evaristo nests this flashback in the end of the PT-A timeline as "Penelope / is hurtling towards her eightieth birthday in two days' time while hurtling north on an intercity train" (439). Evaristo's

choice of diction here conflates Penelope's movement through time with her movement through space. The narrator also reveals that Penelope "feels like she's going to the ends of the earth, while simultaneously returning to her beginnings / she's going back to where she began, inside her mother's womb" (Evaristo 450). This conflation of past, present, and future is reminiscent of how Francescho and George experience time in Smith's novel, all of which exemplifies Lampert's question of "what kind of time is" created when the "usual ordering" of past, present, and future are disrupted by the dueling forces of simultaneity and delay (157).

Evaristo's choice of which narratives to tell when creates the convergence and divergence of timelines that Lampert identifies as being inherently part of a simultaneous temporality, and the decision to delay the revelation of how Penelope fits into the novel until the epilogue emphasizes the importance of delay's role in simultaneous temporality as it adds to the context of Penelope's earlier story, but also answers the question of what happened to Hattie's secret first daughter, Barbara, who was taken away from her shortly after being born. Evaristo also provides a bit of redemption for Penelope's character, who ultimately reveals a willingness to change her racist viewpoints as she confronts her past by meeting her biological mother, Hattie, who is also Morgan's grandmother. When they do meet at the very end of the book, Penelope's final thoughts are very time-centric and no longer obsessed with the color of her mother's skin: "how wrong she was, both of them are welling up and it's like the years are swiftly regressing until the lifetimes between them no longer exist / this is not about feeling something or about speaking words / this about being / together" (Evaristo 452).

Overall, the nonlinear narrative structure and multiplicity of perspectives in Evaristo's novel emphasize the fluidity of both temporality and performative identities—

be they gender, sexual preference, or racial. The simultaneity and delay created by the nonlinear narrative structure and the many temporal disruptions within it also emphasize that paradoxes and aporias of the present time are unavoidable in 21st-century society and should be embraced and explored rather than being feared. Embracing the plurality of the present rather than attempting to reduce it to something uniform and easy to categorize is modeled as the way forward into a future of myriad possibilities.

The Spiraling Connections of DNA, History, and Simultaneous Temporality

Both Evaristo and Smith link DNA to history and make it a prevalent theme within their novels. Evaristo does so most blatantly in the convergence of Penelope's and Hattie's narratives. Smith does so in the Camera narrative when George discovers the DNA cycle path in Cambridge, England, and simultaneously records the path with her phone's camera as she rides along it. Then, George directly connects the helix shape of DNA to how she imagines history itself to be in the form of a spiral or spring:

> What if history, instead, *was* that shout, that upward spring, that staircase-ladder thing, and everybody was just used to calling something quite different the word history? What if received notions of history were deceptive? ... Maybe anything that forced or pushed such a spring back down or blocked the upward shout of it was opposed to the making of what history really was. (Smith 147/358-359)

Penelope is shaken to her core when she first learns that her genetics do not match the ancestry she assumed she had had; however, upon meeting her biological mother, Hattie, Penelope wants to connect to herself, her ancestry, and her past. George also uses DNA—through a mnemonic study song and a London bike trail—to reconnect herself with H—and thus the world—after her mother's death. Smith's postulation that history

is shaped like a spring, which is another type of helix-shape, directly connects history and DNA. Therefore, I do not think it coincidental that both Smith and Evaristo focus on DNA in novels that challenge temporality and chronological narrative structures in order to create spiraling structures that disrupt the realism of their narratives and emulate the shape of DNA itself. The association of simultaneous temporality with history and DNA emphasizes the importance of time as a form to our existence and continuation into the future.

Conclusion

In their respective novels *How to Be Both* and *Girl, Woman, Other*, Smith and Evaristo use nonlinear narrative structures alongside verb tense shifts, metafictional elements, intertextual allusions, and other postmodern writing techniques to evoke the feeling of simultaneity while at the same time continuously undermining the realism of their fictional works with the metatemporality of their narrative structures and references to time. In addition to calling our attention to female agency and embodiment as the texts analyzed in chapter 3 did, these works also force the reader to think about how we narrativize temporality in fiction and non-fiction as well as how we consume simultaneous "stories" in our own lives—via social media streams such as Instagram and Facebook—and whether those stories are any less curated and fictional than novels are. Nilges argues, "Far from merely confirming the crisis, the contemporary novel forwards detailed accounts of the sources of the crisis of temporality, and it helps us imagine time differently, in ways that wrest hope and the possibility of change from the grip of a seemingly inescapable present" (33). Thus, the co-existence of simultaneous presents and the paradox of delayed simultaneity in Smith's and Evaristo's time novels critiques

the crisis of the present and also models ways to break free from the mire of the present and imagine futures full of hopeful possibilities.

Conclusion:

Nonlinear Contemporary Time Novels and the

Paradox of Delayed Simultaneity

"The function of the novel today, therefore, is not a matter of its struggle against time's passing and its desire to remain novel. Instead, the novel's function and value lie in its ability to serve as a medium for thought that allows us to know our time differently and to create ways of telling time beyond the confines of the long now."

—Mathias Nilges, *How to Read a Moment*

When I first encountered Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* in the spring of 2016, I had no idea how to approach an analysis of this unconventional novel; I simply knew that I wanted to study it in greater depth and figure out what it was doing. I spent at least six months teasing it apart before I realized that the most fascinating parts of the novel for me were its twisting narrative structure and the existence of multiple present-tense timelines in the same narrative. This discovery inspired me to seek out other contemporary novels that might be playing with time and temporality in similar ways (though no one is doing exactly what Smith does), and the study you have been reading is the result of that long and arduous search. Looking at time and temporality in contemporary novels began as a very isolating study because no one seemed to be reading these novels in the way that I was. The few scholars who were reading these novels (and, with the abundance of contemporary novels and the delay inherent in the process of publishing articles and other criticism, this pool of scholars was already limited) were routinely looking at aspects that I found much less interesting than the nonlinear temporality and achrony built into their narrative structures. Therefore, I was

excited (and relieved) to encounter in March 2022 Mathias Nilges' book arguing for the importance of the novel and the rise to prominence of the contemporary time novel.

In the preceding pages, I have shown that the popular categorizations for post-2000 Anglophone novels—realism, authenticity, reconstruction, and metamodernism—overlook the crucial element of time in the content and narrative structures of nonlinear contemporary time novels. These labels not only fail to recognize the significance of time as a form in these novels, but also suppress the multiplicity and diversity of contemporary novels, especially those novels written by women and other marginalized authors. Nilges argues, "The time novel gives us ways of conceiving time as form (as opposed to immediate experience)" which enables us

> to make legible the origin of the crises associated with our moment's commitment to immediacy. The novel allows us to read the time of the present otherwise, in its contradictory plurality, uncovering the latencies and possibilities in the now that ... become the basis for hope and a newfound sociality, and in connection to the temporally plural "coming community" that stands opposed to the fractured individualism of the now/me-time of contemporary capitalism. (24)

I have built on Nilges' argument in two ways in particular: by looking at selected contemporary time novels from British, Australian, and American authors to demonstrate that the time novel is of global interest; and by focusing specifically on those time novels that employ nonlinear narrative structures to create new ways of narrativizing time and temporality for readers. I have also demonstrated the ways in which these nonlinear narrative structures critique the immediacy of social media to encourage their readers to think critically about the role that various platforms play in

our contemporary society and the extent to which we allow them to influence us, especially considering that much of the content of our social media newsfeeds is not much less fictional (or curated) than a novel itself.

The nonlinear narrative structures of the time novels I have studied rely on montage causality to disrupt chronological causality and create a paradoxical delayed simultaneity to disrupt the linear reading experience. This delayed simultaneity presents in different forms, but despite their variations all these novels critique the temporal crisis diagnosed by Nilges and model new forms of time that encourage us to imagine a multiplicity of hopeful possible futures. Winterson's *The Gap of Time* and Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* compare linear and cyclical temporalities to demonstrate that, while linear forms of time exacerbate the problem of a perpetual present, cyclical forms of time visualize plural temporalities. Lawhon's *I Was Anastasia* and Morton's *The Clockmaker's Daughter* model the political importance of this cyclical temporality with the achronological montaging of multiple timelines and perspectives that restore autonomy to their female narrators. Finally, Smith's *How to Be Both* and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* critique the crisis of the present through their use of multiple present-tense timelines in their novels to create narratives that, like Schrodinger's cat, both are and are not simultaneous. Overall, the varied forms of simultaneous temporality and time that are presented in these nonlinear contemporary time novels serve as examples of how the present time and its obsession with immediacy can be re-understood and re-imagined. This re-envisioning of the present is needed to enable us to move forward out of the long now in which society has become mired into unlimited futures full of hope and possibility.

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2015-2022, Ph.D. in English

Honors and Awards:

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Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society, 2002
Alpha Lambda Delta National Honor Society, 2002
Golden Key National Honor Society, 2005
Dean's Scholarship (DU), 2011-2013
President's Entrance Scholarship (UWO), 2015

Related Work Experience:

Teaching Assistant, University of Western Ontario,
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Social Coordinator, Graduate English Society,
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Women's Concerns Commissioner, Society of Graduate
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Co-Chair, Graduate English Society, 2019-2020
Interim Treasurer, Graduate English Society, 2021

Conference Papers:

"'You wanted to believe that I was Anastasia': The Non-Linear Helix Narrative Structure, Narrator Agency, and the Reader-as-Detective in Ariel Lawhon's *I Was Anastasia*." Revised and presented at ACCUTE Conference 2021 at University of Alberta, hosted virtually, 27 May-4 June 2021.

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"'One Time and Another Become the Same Time': Temporal Disruptions in Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time*." Presented at ACCUTE Conference 2019 at University of British Columbia in Vancouver, BC, June 2019.

"'Forcing Time to Defeat Itself': Gendered Temporalities in Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* and Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*." Presented at Western University in London, ON, for 2019 McIntosh Lecture Competition, May 2019.

"Fashioning an Aristocratic Identity for Posterity: Anne Clifford and the Rhetoric of Clothing." Revised and presented at 2018 International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, MI, May 2018.

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"Shirley Jackson's Urban Space Conspiracy: Paranoia and Female Theorization in 'Pillar of Salt' and 'Nightmare.'" Presented at DIS/EASE: 2016 DAGSE Conference at Dalhousie University in Halifax, NS, August 2016.

"The Caustic Pen Is Mightiest: A Tradition of Female Satire in the Novels of Jane Austen, Ivy Compton-Burnett, and Muriel Spark." Presented at the University of Denver English Department Roundtable, May 2013.

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