# The Novel of Liberal Lament: Reading Identity in Novels by Atwood, Coetzee, DeLillo, McEwan and Morrison in the Period of Liberal Ascendancy (1989-2008)

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# Abstract

This thesis interprets a corpus of five novels and identifies a genre called the novel of liberal lament. The protagonists of Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* (1993), J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) and Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1997) are all recognisably liberal figures facing the heterogeneity of the world. The period in which these novels are written is one I call the period of liberal ascendancy, in which liberalism increases its influence internationally, despite challenges to its value system.

In order to investigate the novels' engagement with liberalism in the period, this thesis develops and demonstrates a reading model. This model prescribes two related areas of attention. The first involves Bakhtin's chronotope, which is defined in relation to his idea of dialogic identity formation. A close reading that concentrates on the time-spaces of the novels as sites of dialogic identity formation is followed by a consideration of the novels in light of Rawls's concept of public reason. The Rawlsian concept of formal debate as the basis for a democracy provides a closer focus on specific forms of dialogue that are part of the liberal tradition's political prescription for social construction.

What emerges from the reading is a tension in liberalism in the period between what is achieved and what might have been achieved. The first part involves a historical dramatisation of a liberalism that is economically strong and interpersonally weak. The second part involves a lament for a liberalism that might instead have been economically weak and interpersonally strong. Just as classical liberal economics is ascendant in the period, the liberal tradition of debate fails, but the novels imagine ways in which reimagined forms of debate might have made liberalism more responsive to the complexity of the world in the period.

# Contents

# Acknowledgements

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# Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

# Introduction

## The site of intervention: the period of liberal ascendancy

From the collapse of the Soviet Union until the global financial crash in 2008, the influence of the ideas of liberalism spread and deepened. This was true in the West, particularly the Anglophone West, but also, increasingly, around the world. Geopolitically, the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union was memorably captured by the neoconservatives in the Bush administration as the unipolar moment. As a matter of political philosophy, the twentieth century in the West might be described from 1918 onwards as first a contest between three ideologies, liberalism, communism and fascism, and then after 1945 as a contest between liberalism and communism, before entering a period in the 1990s of liberal ascendancy across the West. In his 1992 book *The End of History and the First Man*, Francis Fukuyama hailed this period of liberal ascendancy globally:

> From Latin America to Eastern Europe, from the Soviet Union to the Middle East and Asia, strong governments have been failing over the last two decades. And while they have not given way in all cases to stable liberal democracies, liberal democracy remains the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and cultures around the globe. In addition, liberal principles in economics – the "free market" – have spread, and have succeeded in producing unprecedented levels of material prosperity, both in industrially developed countries and in countries that had been, at the close of World War II, part of the impoverished Third World. A liberal revolution in economic thinking has sometimes preceded, sometimes followed, the move toward political freedom around the globe.[1]

Liberalism in the English-speaking world has a long tradition, of course, but its geopolitical ascendancy was mirrored in national political cultures as well. The Clinton and Bush administrations in the United States, although Democrat and Republican respectively, were not as ideologically opposed as had Reagan and Carter been at the end of the 1970s. In the United Kingdom, Tony Blair's New Labour's dominance for most of the period, while the Conservative Party sought to modernise to compete with it, tells a similar story of

[1] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992): xiv.

ideological settlement. However, the absence of a strong ideological opposition to liberalism in the period perhaps drew greater attention to the stability of older traditions. Legally, the liberal systems of the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States were some of the oldest, most stable systems in the world, with the institutions of a free press, independent judiciary, parliamentary and executive checks and balances, and the rule of law increasingly prized institutions around the world. South Africa's transition to a post-apartheid future in 1994 for example heralded what at the time was the most up-to-date liberal constitution in the world.

The South African constitution of 1994 was instructive of problems that liberalism was having to address in the period as well. Liberals were having to respond to concerns about the level of heterogeneity in society being too great for their models and institutions to accommodate. The post-apartheid South African constitution's Bill of Rights Section 31(1) protection of cultural, linguistic and religious communities specifically allows for the maintenance and preservation of particular cultural groupings and associations.[2]

If there were challenges within national cultures to liberalism, the same was true internationally. This was most visibly the case in conflicts between Western nations and some of the Muslim-majority nations of the world, with the Gulf War of 1990, the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001 and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, and the Iraq War of 2003 being some of the particularly significant events in the period.

In developing this thesis, I took as a working hypothesis the idea that readings of the contemporary realist novel would constitute a useful literary exercise for exploring the tensions outlined above. In this thesis, I join with others in literary studies today in seeing the realist novel as a form that is still productive and worthy of critical attention. In her 2016 introduction to an issue of *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* focused on realism, Lauren Goodlad offers an excellent account of some of the ways in which this genre continues to be useful and generative of discussion in the academy:

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[2] The Constitution states:

> 31. 1) Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community—
> (a) to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language; and
> (b) to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society (The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. "The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa," 13, http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/SAConstitution-web-eng.pdf/ [accessed August 13, 2019]).

> Catherine Gallagher and Harry Shaw question realism's supposed epistemological naïveté. As Shaw puts it, the particular strength of realist aesthetics rests on a "dynamic metonymy" that, without ever representing "the world 'directly,'" conveys some sense of what it is "really like".[3]

This thesis will argue that Goodlad's identification of dynamism in the modelling of social situations in the realist novel is one aspect of what constitutes its validity as a means of reflecting on values in society. I describe the novels in this corpus as realist not as a totalising label but as a practical way of thinking about a mode of literary presentation that these novels all employ quite extensively.

In the United States, Toni Morrison in 1997 published *Paradise* and Don DeLillo in 2007 published *Falling Man*; in the United Kingdom, Ian McEwan in 2005 published *Saturday*; in Canada, Margaret Atwood in 1993 published *The Robber Bride*; and in South Africa, J.M. Coetzee in 1999 published *Disgrace*. This thesis reads each of the five novels in this international corpus with a view to exploring the political situation in the Anglophone West in what I have called the period of liberal ascendancy. *Falling Man* and *Saturday* are both meditations on liberal Western culture after 9/11; *The Robber Bride* does the same in the context of the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union; *Disgrace* situates liberalism in a postcolonial context after the end of apartheid in South Africa, where liberalism is in various ways both challenged and enduring; *Paradise* concentrates on liberal values in a state of tension and contestation with black communities and women in the United States in the 1970s, but in a manner that anticipates the changes in liberalism, not least economically, into the 1990s.

I will borrow from John Rawls, of whom more later, in explaining why I have chosen this particular set of novels. In explaining the focus on foundational constitutional matters in developing his notion of public reason in *Political Liberalism*, Rawls insisted that his "aim is to consider first the strongest case"[4] and "the most fundamental matters".[5] He notes that if he can make his case work in the central situation, "we can then proceed to other cases".[6] The corpus I have chosen represents a geographical spread that allows for the international dimension of liberalism in the period to emerge, and it also represents a sample of novels that constructs recognisably liberal actors in their protagonists. I trust that if this thesis argument holds, exploration of other novels with a focus on liberalism in other geographical contexts in the period would also

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[3] Lauren Goodlad, "Introduction: Worlding Realisms Now," *Novel* 49, no. 2 (2016): 188.

[4] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 215.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

be susceptible to the treatment undergone in this thesis. I argue for a particular kind of literary reading I shall call responsive formalism, in which literary value resides in the interaction between reader and text. This introduction will now explain in detail how this form of reading operates in this thesis, before it explores ways of thinking about its validity as a research method.

## Bakhtin, meet Rawls

This thesis promotes a designed reading process. The design involves the linking of two thinkers, the literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin and the political philosopher John Rawls. More precisely, it involves linking Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, as developed in his 1937 essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope," with Rawls's concept of public reason, as developed in his 1993 book *Political Liberalism*. This introduction will later explain why a designed reading process is useful, but first I will discuss briefly why I have put Bakhtin and Rawls together in general terms.

There are three general affinities between Bakhtin's chronotope and Rawls's public reason I would identify as promising for their application as lenses in literary reading. These aspects are social, attitudinal and spatial. The first, the social, aspect is their interpersonal character as ideas. I join with other writers on Bakhtin in seeing one of his earliest essays, his 1920 "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," as having relevance for his later literary essays such as the one on the chronotope.[7] Bakhtin's rather elusive definition of the chronotope in "Forms of Time" sees space and time as related:

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.[8]

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[7] Clark and Holquist argue that this essay relates to all the rest of his work (Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, [Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984]: 69), as does Pam Morris, who sees it as only "ostensibly not concerned with language at all; it conducts a sustained investigation into the aesthetic and ethical relations of self and other, using the terms 'author' and 'hero' to signify this as a formal relationship" (Pam Morris, *The Bakhtin Reader* [London: Hodder, 1994]: 5).

[8] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): 85.

Bakhtin's dynamising of space by means of time, plot and history is concretised by careful reading of his earlier essay's treatment of identity formation by means of dialogue. In Clark and Holquist's careful analysis of the earlier essay, a picture emerges of how processes of identity formation construct Bakhtin's idea of sociality. Clark and Holquist note how in Bakhtin's conception, in a space occupied by two persons, "I may be with you in this moment, but the situation will look different from the unique places you and I occupy in it".[9] In the essay, Bakhtin notes of two people in spatial proximity that it "is possible, upon assuming an appropriate position, to reduce this difference of horizons to a minimum".[10] This is Bakhtin's conception of the interpersonal process of identity formation as a matter of human perception, but his aesthetic conception is intimately linked to it. In discussing spatial form in the aesthetic, he argues that the "visual inner form is experienced emotionally and volitionally *as if* it were visually full and complete".[11] For Bakhtin, the reader's imagination generates the full spatial image of a dialogue between two persons and this image imitates the lived experience of identity formation. This makes sense of the space and time relation in Bakhtin's chronotope, as the dialogic human identity process that Bakhtin sees as spatial in the earlier essay clarifies the relationship between time and space in the chronotope. This is why Bakhtin divides his ancient Greek genres into private and public spaces in the chronotope essay, as the spatial framing of the dialogic processes of human action and interaction by literary means, in the dramatic interactions of character types in a fictional narrative, is the central constitutive aspect of the chronotope in Bakhtin's conception.

Rawls's public reason is similarly interpersonal. Rawls sees the legitimacy of democratic society resting on the willingness of its citizens to engage one another in public reason. Only by establishing a core of shared values through public reason can citizens legitimately craft binding legal and cultural norms that are the constitutional basis for a democratic society. The process of debate, as an interpersonal interaction, is emphasised by Rawls:

> And since the exercise of political power itself must be legitimate, the ideal of citizenship imposes a moral, not a legal, duty – the duty of civility – to be able to explain to one another on

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[9] Clark and Holquist, *Bakhtin*, 68.

[10] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. Mikhail Bakhtin, Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990): 23.

[11] Bakhtin, "Author," 94.

> those fundamental questions how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason.[12]

Rawls thus stipulates a certain kind of interpersonal engagement as an ethical imperative in a liberal democracy. For Rawls, debate is a practical means of understanding what is socially acceptable and desirable. He sees some resemblance with Rousseau's social contract: "[Rousseau] saw voting as ideally expressing our opinion as to which of the alternatives best advances the common good."[13]

The similarity between Bakhtin and Rawls in thinking of social matters interpersonally recommends their combination in a designed reading process to me because it allows for a progressive reading, in the sense that the reading can move from the descriptive to the prescriptive, or from actuality to potentiality. Bakhtin's interpersonal conception of the dialogic formation of identity is looser and more capacious than Rawls's more formal, ethical demand for reasoned debate among citizens, and so a literary reading that first looks for Bakhtin's conception and then for Rawls's conception allows whatever interpersonal meaning the literary text presents to emerge before concentrating on the text's presentation of formal debate. The reading thus becomes richer, as the socio-historical situation in the novel is mapped out in the chronotope before the specific question of formal debate as a possibility, usually a future possibility in the context of the narrative events, is explored. One pattern in the novels in this corpus is that they all trace a potential for debate while noting its actual failures in the period. *Paradise* is a partial exception to this in modelling some relatively successful debates, but the emphasis is, as with the other novels, still on potential.

The second affinity between Bakhtin's chronotope and Rawls's public reason is attitudinal. Bakhtin's chronotope in foregrounding dialogue implicitly values an attitude of openness, but he also makes this explicit in his treatment of the ancient Greek genres he sees as generative of the chronotopic tradition of Western literature. He calls the chronotope of the public square, which he sees emerging in the Greek biography, "a remarkable chronotope"[14] and elaborates that everything, "down to the last detail, is public".[15] Bakhtin further develops his praise for the literary presentation of openness in his treatment of Dostoevsky's art in the chronotope essay, where he details what he sees as the chronotope of threshold there in fluid terms

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[12] Rawls, *Liberalism*, 217.

[13] Rawls, *Liberalism*, 219-20.

[14] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 132.

[15] Ibid.

of openness to experience: "[The] staircase, the front hall and corridor ... are ... where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man."[16]

For Rawls, the attitudinal aspect of public reason can perhaps be captured by the word reasonableness, although he uses a number of different words in his explanation of the concept. He talks of ideals that "all citizens may reasonably be expected to endorse".[17] Later, he describes the duty of civility as involving "a willingness to listen to others and a fairmindedness in deciding when accommodations to their views should reasonably be made".[18] Reasonableness is the word he most often uses as his attitudinal prescription for democratic citizens, but he also states in his later essay "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited" that "the criterion of reciprocity is an essential ingredient specifying public reason".[19] What links all of these attitudinal terms together – reasonableness, reciprocity, fairmindedness and willingness to listen – is a sense of moderation.

What recommends the combination of Bakhtin and Rawls as reading lenses in this thesis project to me in terms of their attitudinal aspect is their accommodation of difference. In a project aiming to see what realist novels can say about tensions between a liberal social model and a complex and heterogeneous world, ideas that allow for the emergence of tensions and for concentration on those tensions are useful. The antagonisms between Perowne and Baxter in *Saturday*, Nina and Martin in *Falling Man*, the protagonists and Zenia in *The Robber Bride*, Lurie and Melanie in *Disgrace*, and the men of Ruby and the women of the convent in *Paradise* are all literary representations of that tension that will emerge in this thesis and its reading process. These are the hard cases where attitudes of openness and moderation are most challenging, and a reading with these attitudes in mind puts that challenge, itself the challenge of liberalism in a complex world, at the centre of attention in constructing meaning in the novels under examination. There is also a particular usefulness in thinking sequentially of Bakhtin followed by Rawls here. Bakhtin's stress on openness and Rawls's focus on reason and reasonableness allow for consideration of the role of reason and emotion in dialogue. Bakhtin's greater elasticity once again allows for a reflection on Rawls's specificity in a critical manner. There will be more discussion on reason and emotion later on in this introduction.

The final affinity between the two thinkers that is relevant to this thesis is the importance of space in both of their ideas. Bakhtin's survey of ancient Greek genres, which he sees epigenetically as models that

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[16] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 248.

[17] Rawls, *Liberalism*, 217.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Rawls, *Liberalism*, 483.

can be, and in fact were, reactivated and adapted to suit the representational needs of later periods in Western literature, identifies three key genres. The first is perhaps the least significant. The adventure time novel is Bakhtin's term for the Greek romance narrative, in which the chronotope is purely formal. This is so in the sense that the plot of the narrative is all; there is no historical representation attempted. Bakhtin explains that specificity of character type, situation and development would "introduce its own *rule-generating force*, its own *order*, its *inevitable ties* to human life and to the time specific to that life".[20] This would detract from the concentration on the unfolding of the plot. The other two genres Bakhtin selects are the crucial ones for him, and the ones that justify his essay's subtitle: "Notes toward a Historical Poetics". These genres introduce private and public space into the tradition of the Western novel. The former genre Bakhtin labels the adventure novel of everyday life, in which an outsider character observes much of the central action of the narrative and in which domestic scenes predominate. Bakhtin describes these scenes as "[taking] place within four walls and for only two pairs of eyes"[21] and concludes that the "quintessentially private life that entered the novel at this time was, by its very nature and as opposed to public life, *closed"*.[22] Bakhtin sees the importance of this innovation, noting of the modern novel and its parlours and salons that "this is where *dialogues* happen, something that acquires extraordinary significance in the novel".[23] His other ancient genre, as we have already seen, is the Greek biography, which introduced the chronotope of the public square. The contrast with the sealed aspect of the private space is accentuated, as Bakhtin argues that "all the elevated categories, from that of the state to that of revealed truth, were realized concretely and fully incarnated, made visible and given a face".[24] Whether it is in his contrast between Dostoevsky's public spaces already noted and Tolstoy's "interior spaces – of townhouses and estates of the nobility"[25] or his treatment of Flaubert and Dickens, the interplay of public and private spaces is what generates the historical representational quality of the modern novel for Bakhtin.

The comparison with Rawls here is oddly ironic, at least at first glance. In explaining public reason by contrasting it with nonpublic reason, Rawls in an extraordinary footnote states that "there is no such thing as

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[20] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 100.

[21] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 122.

[22] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 123.

[23] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 246.

[24] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 132.

[25] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 249.

private reason".[26] This is not what one would expect from a major liberal philosopher. Bakhtin's association between private space and modernity is the received wisdom, and so this Rawlsian statement appears baffling at first. However, Rawls is minded, as I stated earlier in this introduction, to concentrate on illustrating the legitimacy conferred on a democracy by its reasoning in public, and so his rather cursory treatment of other forms of reason is partly explained by this emphasis. He does note, for instance, that there are reasoning processes in less public spheres, with nonpublic or social reason involving associations and interest groups, while "there is also, let us say, domestic reason – the reason of families as small groups in society – and this contrasts both with public and social reason".[27] It would seem, then, that for Rawls, reason has a dialogic quality and that this dialogue may occur in spaces that are more or less public.

The similarity in conceiving of space between the two ideas is apparent, as both see public space as significant and both conceive of spatial interactions ranging from more private to more public ones. As a matter of attention in a designed reading process, Bakhtin's chronotope as a precursor to Rawls's public reason suggests itself in the former's greater focus on identity formation, whether in private or public spaces. A reading process that aims to do justice to the representational complexities of literary realist novels does well to take identity as its starting point. It makes sense also to see the processes of identity formation in Bakhtin as cognitive preconditions to the formal debates about values between citizens in Rawls. The manner in which the protagonists in the novels in this thesis wrestle with their identities before attempting to debate with others, often unsuccessfully, is clearly drawn out by a reading process that aims to follow this development from identity formation to debates about ethics. What this reading model is suited to do is to establish a relationship between identity formation and ethical debate, in which the demands of the former require adaptation in the processes of the latter. I will in the relevant chapter detail how the uncertainty in Lianne's identity in *Falling Man* for instance draws attention to the usefulness of the observer role in debate between Martin and Nina. Particular aspects of debate and particular processes that might interact constructively with particular types of identity are thus foregrounded by a reading process that attends first to the Bakhtinian and then to the Rawlsian in the realist novels of the corpus of texts in this thesis. This introduction now turns to consider the designed reading process that is the analytical method of this thesis in more detail. Bakhtin and Rawls will be discussed in turn in more detail as the overall shape of the design is explored, before a specific discussion concerning liberalism and realism in the novel. The introduction will then end on some thoughts about the validity of this procedure as a research method.

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[26] Rawls, *Liberalism*, 220.

[27] Ibid.

## Concentrated constructive reading

The designed reading process that this thesis undertakes involves two stages, as I have already indicated, one inspired by Bakhtin's chronotope and the other by Rawls's public reason. The first, and longer of the two processes, concerns Bakhtin's chronotope. In fact, the Bakhtinian and the Rawlsian might be said to combine two different types of reading in a hybrid model. I will call these types constructive and concentrated reading. I will first indicate how my approach to chronotopic reading relates to other kinds already practised and published, in the course of which survey I will explain what I mean by constructive and concentrated readings.

One type of chronotopic reading involves locating the chronotope within one particular space in the narrative.[28] This is a recognisable close reading model, following the expected procedures of analysing literary language, but it aims to identify and isolate a particular space in order to extract meaning from the text. I call this a concentrated reading as it isolates a particular, relatively small part of the overall text as the central site of the text's meaning. It also prescribes in advance what it is in the text that is to serve as this isolated part: in this case a space.

A second type of chronotopic reading I see exemplified by Joy Ladin. Ladin takes as a starting point close analysis of the language of the text in question, building from what she calls local to major chronotopes. Ladin carefully discusses relationships between chronotopes in a text as well, identifying nine possible relationships, including a hierarchical one, which she exemplifies grandly in relation to Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, where many local chronotopes relate to the overall chronotope of memory for Ladin: "the local chronotopes are thus hierarchically related to the overarching chronotope as scientific data are related to an overarching theory".[29] This is what I call a constructive reading, and it is the kind of approach I take to Bakhtin's chronotope in this thesis. It aims to interpret the text as a whole by means of attending to the presentation of the chronotope in the text. It analyses units that Ladin calls local chronotopes

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[28] Tara Chittenden interprets Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* principally through the chronotope of the street corner (Tara Chittenden, "A Fold in the Road," *Journeys* 15, no. 2 [2014]: 86-103); Michael Riffaterre sees the staircase as the chronotope in Wilkie Collins' *No Name* (Michael Riffaterre, "Chronotopes in Diegesis," in *Fiction Updated*, ed. Calin-Andrei Mihailescu and Walid Hamarneh [Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 1996]: 244-56); Janice Best, in a more nuanced approach, foregrounds the bordello among other spaces in Gustave Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale* (Janice Best, "The Chronotope and the Generation of Meaning in Novels and Paintings," *Criticism* 36, no. 2 [1994]: 291-316).

[29] Joy Ladin, "Fleshing out the Chronotope," in *Critical Essays on Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. Caryl Emerson, (New York: G. K. Hall & Co, 1999): 227.

and constructs an overall major chronotope out of the relations between these units. Ladin's terminological work I find suggestive. I will use the term time-space to refer to particular chronotopic units in a text, and reserve the term chronotope for the overall chronotopic conception and interpretation of the text in question.

The difference between constructive and concentrated readings is then a difference of degree, not kind. Both begin with attention to the language of the text, and both aim to build an interpretation out of a passage of text that is cumulative, looking at text patterning and figurative language as one would expect of close readings of literature. However, concentrated readings aim to isolate a central part of the text and interpret the text through that central part, whereas constructive readings, without aiming to be exhaustive, as no literary reading could be, do try to account for the overall narrative structure of the text in interpreting the whole.

I would like to illustrate two further aspects of the constructive reading undertaken in this thesis at this point. One concerns the attitude involved in this kind of reading. Ronald Dworkin in his 1986 *Law's Empire* prescribes constructive interpretation in both legal and literary reading in the following manner: "Roughly, constructive interpretation is a matter of imposing purpose on an object or practice in order to make of it the best possible example of the form or genre to which it is taken to belong."[30] I take from Dworkin the idea of building a coherent interpretation of a literary text as a central aspect of constructive interpretation. Peter Lamarque in his 2009 *Philosophy of Literature* refers favourably to Dworkin and illustrates an aspect of character and event treatment in literary reading that arises from this view. He has in mind a teleological view of characters and events, in which characters and events in a work of literature are taken to serve the overall design of the work. Lamarque formulates the following principle: "*In literary works the explanation of why an episode occurs as it does and where it does often centers on the contribution the episode makes to the completed artistic structure.*"[31] Constructive interpretation thus involves the reader in putting cognitive energy into the building of a unity out of the literary text.

The other aspect of constructive reading, which nuances the first, concerns not the attitudinal but the procedural aspect of the literary reading. Riffaterre criticises Bakhtin for failing to distinguish an analysis of specific spatial-temporal indicators in a text from "the diegesis at large, from the whole space-time universe in which the narrative unfolds".[32] Riffaterre references Genette's definition of diegesis. While Riffaterre is surely right to notice how Bakhtin here enters narratological terrain in his chronotopic conception, Bernhard

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30 Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 1998): 52.

31 Peter Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature* (Malden: Blackwell Pub, 2009): 207.

32 Riffaterre, "Chronotopes," 244.

Scholz makes the same point but is more laudatory of Bakhtin's approach. Noting the structuralist chronological reading prescription in constructing a histoire that "is assembled in accordance with the ordering principle of chronology from events which first had to be extracted from their place in the textual continuum,"[33] Scholz sees Bakhtin's chronotope as making an advance on this conception:

> The chronotope of Structuralist narrative theory, which sequentially orders the manifold of events in terms of linear chronology and causality, locates the characters of a story on points of a temporal continuum which is itself an abstraction from "lived time", and, in so doing, dislocates them from the sequence of events in which we, as readers, see them, and they see themselves as agents.[34]

The advantage of constructive reading is its respect for the plotting of the novels in question, as it allows the sequential arrangement of the time-spaces in the novels to emerge as intended in the plotting. The idea of presumption is useful in thinking about constructive reading. The attitude I adopted was to allow the sequencing of the time-spaces to emerge from the reading and to try to build a coherent interpretation of their significance, presuming that a plausible means of doing so would be found. This is of course a reversible presumption if no such plausible means could be found. I will discuss this further in my exploration of the value of this reading model at the end of this introduction.

A third type of chronotopic reading is one I found instructive in linking Bakhtin to Rawls. In analysing *Manhattan Transfer*, Bart Keunen brings four models of a city from literary theory to bear on his reading of the novel, two inspired by literary movements, romantic and naturalistic, and two of his own labelling, "self-referential"[35] and "hyper-realist".[36] His approach is also concentrated, in the sense that he undertakes successive concentrated readings of one novel with a particular detailed treatment already in mind as a comparative lens through which to view the literary text under examination. This is not unlike my approach to Rawls in this thesis. The idea of formal debate is a particular and somewhat detailed idea of a time-space that I have been able to map comparatively onto at least one particular time-space in each of the novels in

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[33] Bernhard Scholz, "Bakhtin's Concept of 'Chronotope,'" in *The Context of Bakhtin*, ed. David Shepherd (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998): 163.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Bart Keunen,"The Plurality of Chronotopes in the Modernist City Novel," *English Studies* 82, no. 5 (2001): 428, although he relates this to modernism.

[36] Keunen, "Plurality," 431, although he relates this to postmodernism.

question in this thesis. The transformation of the family living room into a debate chamber in *Saturday*, the observed debates between Martin and Nina in the latter's apartment in *Falling Man*, the staged polemics of Zenia in the hotel in *The Robber Bride*, the unfulfilled potential of the university classroom in *Disgrace*, and the Ruby town meetings in *Paradise* all serve as helpful representations of arenas for debate in the novels. A rich reading emerges in each case of the relations between time-spaces in the first instance, a reading that is then nuanced by a further concentration on a debate space.

The principal advantage of the hybridised reading process designed for this thesis project in relation to these texts is this richness. It allows for two dimensions to emerge in the reading of the novels: one actual historical plane in the Bakhtinian and one potential plane in the Rawlsian. It further allows a plausible link between the two planes. I will call this process a concentrated constructive reading. This introduction now turns to outlining the pattern that emerges in the corpus of novels of this thesis in the course of the reading process undertaken.

## The textual pattern in the novel of liberal lament

The pattern in the novels in this corpus proceeds in three stages: I label these spaces of repair, the reparation dilemma and the potential of debate. These three stages construct a process, which proceeds from the dialogic dynamics of identity formation to the interpersonal social construction that might result from certain forms of debate. The first stage is the literary construction of an idea I call spaces of repair.

The units of analysis in the constructive part of the reading process in this thesis, the chronotopic reading, are what I have already called time-spaces. These are recognisable spaces in which the presentation of human activity in the narrative takes place. As this is a constructive reading process, it builds on certain principles of narration and genre. In each of these realist novels, a third person narrative perspective is employed, and the thoughts of either one (*Saturday* and *Disgrace*), two (*Falling Man*), three (*The Robber Bride*) or several (*Paradise*) protagonists are focalised. The readings in this thesis proceed from a presumption that the protagonists are central areas of attention, unless the narrative in some way reverses that presumption – as happens to some extent in *Disgrace*. All of the narratives complicate the centrality of the protagonists by their end, but the early focus on them allows for an initial idea to emerge that is put into relation with other ideas later on in the readings. Explaining this idea of spaces of repair involves two other ideas: liberal identity and home. The novels all have protagonists who are broadly recognisable as having

liberal identities, in terms of their cultural values. *Saturday* is the first novel in this corpus analysis partly because its protagonist, the London neurosurgeon Henry Perowne, is archetypal in this regard: a self-confident Enlightenment figure. *Falling Man*'s protagonists are both American professionals searching for ways of feeling liberated. *The Robber Bride*'s three protagonists are university-educated women who are in their different ways success stories of liberal feminism. *Disgrace*'s protagonist is a liberal arts professor and *Paradise*'s protagonists are women who are trying in the face of adversity to reconcile traditional liberal American values of freedom and personal dignity with the need to resist destruction of the possibility of those values.

The idea of home is important in the presentation of the perspectives of the protagonists as well. Once again, *Saturday* is the central case, as Perowne's family home is a paragon of homeliness: safe, liberating and contented. In each of the other novels, home is a presence in the narrative largely as a gravitational force that contrasts with the homely deficiencies of the living arrangements of the protagonists, but it is a force that is significant in the narratives because of its absence.

What this combination of liberal identities and home, either as reality or aspiration, achieves as an initial time-space in each of the narratives is a dynamic conception I call spaces of repair. What emerges as central in the initial time-spaces of the novels, whether as recognisably warm home spaces or as defective home spaces in some sense, is the cognitive process of identity formation in the protagonists. This is partly dialogic and partly introspective. *Saturday* illustrates this well in concentrating its narrative in a day, and so the fluid workings of Perowne's cognition are elaborated in the slow detailing of his waking rhythms. His consciousness moves amid various thoughts in undirected fashion as he wakes up at the start of the day, before his liberal identity is anchored by his interactions with his wife Rosalind. This liberal identity as a purposeful coherent unity is then directed into his work with his patients at the hospital, and this in turn fuels his sense of liberal identity. A move from fluid consciousness to identity and then to action is thus the central living process of the protagonists that is traced in the early stages of the narratives in question.

The presentation of this identity formation process from free consciousness to identity to action is highlighted by the initial principal time-spaces of the protagonists in all five novels. In the novels with less successful home spaces, it often involves a temporary debilitation before the identity formation process resumes. In *Falling Man*, the process begins after the shock of 9/11. *The Robber Bride* is structured around debilitating shocks to the protagonists' identities and the resumption of the identity formation process in three different life stages of childhood, young adulthood and middle age. In *Disgrace*, the ending of Lurie's sexual encounters with the prostitute Soraya temporarily leaves him in a state of inactive free consciousness

before he is able to reconstruct his identity through something like his previous dialogic interaction, this time with his student Melanie. In *Paradise*, Mavis literally runs out of fuel as her car breaks down and she contemplates giving up on life, before the example of hopeful perseverance of the hitchhikers she has met inspires her to the final effort that takes her to the convent.

Spaces of repair are practical spaces, then, in the sense that they are spaces of relatively controlled conditions where the identity can assemble and cohere out of free consciousness as a precursor to directed action. This introduction now turns to the second stage in the pattern identified among these novels in the designed reading process of this thesis: the reparation dilemma. Here, I will also indicate a generic label that I would advise using to describe the interpretation that emerges of the novels in this selection. I have called this corpus the novel of liberal lament.

The initial time-spaces of the novels, the home spaces, are all in the course of the narratives disrupted in some manner or other. The constructive part of the designed reading process, with its chronotopic focus, notes a pattern in which the liberal identities constructed for the protagonists are challenged in a sustained and profound manner by external forces representing the complexity and heterogeneity of the world. This heterogeneity might insert itself directly into the home space and thus disrupt it, as in the case of Zenia in *The Robber Bride*, or it might occupy a representational space that contrasts significantly with the home space, as in the case of Baxter's street space in opposition to Perowne's home in *Saturday*. However, this dramatic antagonist in the narrative always serves to throw the liberal identity of the protagonist into crisis.

The reparation dilemma is a problem that emerges out of this conflictual situation. The liberal identities in the novel are shown to adhere to the demands of the process outlined in the space of repair, where an identity crisis leads to a return to a debilitated state of free consciousness, but a coherent identity must reassemble in order for directed action to resume on the part of the protagonists. The reparation dilemma involves the possibility and promise of a reformed identity that the dialogic process Bakhtin identifies holds out. As the protagonists return to their spaces of repair in order to reconstitute their identity in light of their encounters with heterogeneity, the dynamic of identity formation could incorporate the encounter and lead to a changed identity, but it might also reject the encounter and rebuild the old identity. The process is the same and so the success of the venture is unclear. *Saturday* indicates a particularly difficult case of this dilemma, as Perowne's identity is very strong before his encounter with Baxter, and thus the success of any learning in terms of his identity appears particularly doubtful.

There is a serious crisis envisaged in these novels as a result of this dilemma in identity formation. The success of liberalism in constructing models of sociality that can respond to the complexity of the world is

called into question, and the particular novels in this corpus focus on different aspects of this problem. International conflict with societies outside liberalism's central sphere of cultural influence is one aspect of liberalism's encounter with heterogeneity that is presented as doubtful in *Saturday* and *Falling Man*, with the Iraq War protests artfully posing public spaces in contrast to the protagonists' private home spaces. The conflict within liberalism posed by the free market ideology of the Washington consensus and its replacement of the older liberal Keynesian postwar consensus, particularly in terms of the resulting levels of inequality, are central concerns in *Falling Man* and *Paradise*. The ongoing legacy of historical injustices within liberal societies is central in *The Robber Bride* and *Disgrace*.

The novels in this corpus thus ask two questions of liberal identity in the period: one of viability and one of legitimacy. The reparation dilemma shows how these questions relate to one another, as even if liberal identities remain viable, their legitimacy is doubtful if they cannot accommodate the complexity they encounter. Constructive reading of the novels draws out the particular ways in which this problem is imagined to manifest itself in the period, and this is why I call this corpus the novel of liberal lament. Its focus is on this identity crisis in liberalism in the period. There is one final part of the pattern that these novels identify, in the concentrated Rawlsian part of the reading process that the thesis undertakes. That part is the potential of debate.

The focus on critique of the state of liberalism in the period in the constructive reading of this thesis is somewhat nuanced by the addition of the Rawlsian concentrated reading to the process. This concentration identifies in each novel time-spaces that relate to the idea of formal debate and the arenas in which this activity could be imagined to take place. The impression that these debate spaces give is of a different plane: not the actual historical plane but a plane of potential. Because the constructive reading came first, the reader is not left with an easy impression of the transformative power of debate, but its practical availability as an option is accentuated by its affinity with the dialogic process of identity formation already undergone, and its particular attributes as a flexible, rules-governed activity provide reasons to trust in its potential for suitable adaptability to complex situations in the presentation of the novels.

What constructive followed by concentrated reading also highlights is the manner in which these debate spaces, despite their potential for generating durable social identities that are responsive to heterogeneity in the world, are in the course of the narrative usually contingent, makeshift spaces. The haphazard manner in which the living room becomes a debate chamber in *Saturday* is a clear instance of this. The novels invite the question of what the potential of debate might be if it were socially recognised as having potential and valued accordingly. In this sense, the novel of liberal lament appears to lament most

acutely liberalism's failure to recognise its own best tradition in the period in question. Attention in this introduction now turns to how this concentrated constructive reading design can be situated in the contemporary field of literary studies, before it concludes with some discussion of its validity as a research method.

## Concentrated constructive reading in context

Concentrated constructive reading as already described can be thought of as a category of reading. A more specific label might be applied to the particular concentrated constructive reading undertaken here, a label like liberal chronotopic reading. This reading has features that make it well suited to investigating literary engagements with the period of liberal ascendancy. This is perhaps best illustrated by contrasting it with two other reading types.

Liberal chronotopic reading is not a form of psychoanalytical reading of literature. The difference is instructive and it involves a question of emphasis. Where psychoanalytical reading of literature involves emphasising the relationship between the unconscious and the conscious, focusing on issues like trauma and repression, liberal chronotopic reading, in accentuating the relationship between the personal and the social that is the interpersonal, emphasises the cognitive and conscious dimension of human activity, as this is the outward-facing social aspect of human mental activity. However, a difference of emphasis is not a hard exclusion. Where the chronotopic structure of the novel demands it, psychoanalytical concerns can be foregrounded, as in *The Robber Bride*'s temporal structuring of the protagonists' lives to reveal issues of repression developmentally in their childhoods.

Similarly, liberal chronotopic reading is not a form of economic reading of literature either. There is a large and growing literature concerning neoliberalism, or the return of classical liberal economics, in the era in the West since the 1980s, but this is not a reading of that kind. Liberal chronotopic reading emphasises identity, not institutions. Social structures can come into reading of this kind, but the relation between the personal and the social, beginning with the former, is emphasised. Once again, a difference of emphasis is not a hard exclusion. Economic factors can enter into the readings, and powerfully, if the chronotopic structuring of the text demands that they do. The two novels emerging out of the United States, *Falling Man* and *Paradise*, find various ways of commenting on economic matters in their narratives. I will say more

about liberalism and capitalism in the penultimate part of this introduction after this contextual survey of Bakhtin and Rawls.

One of the strengths of liberal chronotopic reading emerges from this contrast. It is a reading practice that fills a gap between the psychoanalytical and the economic, or between the personal and the social. Its dialogic centring of the interpersonal makes it a useful contribution to thought about liberalism in the period of liberal ascendancy. This is the case also because in allowing for a reflection on liberalism in a manner that extends beyond the economic, it addresses a perspective on the reach of liberalism, as a matter of personal values, in the period that can be ignored or under-developed by economic readings, while still allowing for the economic and the interpersonal aspects of liberalism to relate to one another in a way that psychoanalytical readings might ignore or under-develop. The final strength of liberal chronotopic reading in addressing the engagement of realist novels with the period of liberal ascendancy is the relatively loose prescription it makes to its reader. A concentration on time-spaces allows the variety of treatments of those time-spaces, and the historical specificity the text explores, to emerge without severe reduction. In this sense, the novels themselves are historically specific, and varied, as the earlier survey of protagonists indicates; a reading process that allows for that specificity to emerge through its looseness is thus desirable. Other ways of contextualising Bakhtin and Rawls are worth discussing to shed further light on the workings of liberal chronotopic reading. It is to this contextualising that the attention of this introduction now turns.

The form of concentrated constructive reading I have called liberal chronotopic reading begins with Bakhtin's chronotope, as this is the more elastic conception that allows for constructive reading of novels as a whole. This introduction makes two broad claims: that Bakhtin's chronotope is a useful concept for reading realist novels with a view to engaging with liberalism in a period when these values are ascendant, and that it is capable of intersecting usefully with other critical perspectives. Some aspects of Bakhtin's context will strengthen both of these claims.

Michael Holquist stresses Bakhtin's major influences as classicist and German idealist from his time at university in St Petersburg from 1913.[37] His immersion in the philosophical traditions of Western thought is an important part of his usefulness as a thinker whose work provides a lens for discussing modern Western liberalism. Several scholars writing on Bakhtin have emphasised in particular the influence of Kant on his

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[37] Holquist states: "Bakhtin was influenced particularly by the great classicist F. F. Zelinskij; some of Bakhtin's key concepts can be traced back to suggestions in Zelinskij's works, primarily those dealing with the Roman oratorical tradition" (Michael Holquist, "Introduction," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): xxii). He also notes: "During these years Bakhtin laid the foundations of his prodigious knowledge of philosophy, especially classical and German thinkers" (ibid).

work.[38] At the same time, Bakhtin was also operating in a Marxist context. Pechey in particular situates Bakhtin's work in conversation with both Gorky and Lukács.[39] Bakhtin's relationship with Marxism is still a matter of uncertainty and his collaborations with Medvedev are the main site of speculation.[40]

In his focus on the dialogic, Bakhtin manages to address complex and varied relations between different perspectives. Dentith argues that Bakhtin's positions "press upon the diverse intellectual currents of Europe and America from unexpected directions, dialogizing in turn New Critical formalism, structuralism, Marxism, deconstruction and some versions of historicism".[41] To take one particular example of how Bakhtin's chronotope has been seen to have this bridging capacity, Lynne Pearce's work on the potential of the concept for feminist reading is instructive. In *Reading Dialogics*, it is precisely the dialogic aspect of the model of sociality that is praised in Pearce's readings of Winterson and Morrison: "The chronotope, for Morrison as for Winterson, is not the property of the individual – but is profoundly *intersubjective*, which would also account for why it is most effectively reconstructed through dialogic exchange."[42] My own corpus identifies the manner in which Bakhtin's chronotope can allow feminist concerns to surface in a text, particularly in *The Robber Bride* and *Paradise*. Ways of relating second and third-wave feminism in the West, an emerging concern in the period of liberal ascendancy, come to light in the novels under examination in this thesis precisely through the dialogic quality of Bakhtin's chronotope, as the time-spaces of different generations are constructively put in relation to each other in chronotopic reading.

Bakhtin's chronotope also engages usefully in developments in formalism since the poststructuralist critique. In his *Singularity of Literature*, Derek Attridge proposes a formalism that addresses the relationship

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[38] Clark and Holquist lay the stress on perception as a Kantian starting point in Bakhtin's thinking, a point I shall return to in discussing the chronotope (Clark and Holquist, *Bakhtin*, 71); Morson and Emerson argue for a distinction between the transcendence of Kantian time and space on the one hand and the immediacy of Bakhtin's conception (Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin* [Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990]: 367); Scholz argues for a nuanced application of Kantian principles of time and space in a natural context to Bakhtin's literary context (Scholz, "Chronotope," 153).

[39] In particular, Pechey sees Bakhtin as distinguishing his idea of the novel from Lukács's conception of the epic as a move toward variety in the literary (Graham Pechey, *Mikhail Bakhtin* [London; New York: Routledge, 2007]: 85-86); and he sees Bakhtin's writings in the late 1930s, including "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope", as responses to Gorky's contribution to the Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934, particularly in terms of countering a pro-Stalinist grand conception of the folktale in Gorky with a rebellious and unorthodox conception of his own (Pechey, *Bakhtin*, 90-91).

[40] Morris for instance argues that Bakhtin's 1929 collaboration with Medvedev on *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* offers a sophisticated Marxist treatment of literary interpretation (Morris, *Reader*, 10-11), but also that Bakhtin's reputation in Russia has been one of respect for his brave defence of traditions against Stalinism, including seeing him as influenced by early twentieth-century mystics (Morris, *Reader*, 2).

[41] Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1995): 88.

[42] Lynne Pearce, *Reading Dialogics* (London; New York: Routledge; Chapman and Hall, 1994): 188.

between text and reader with a particular emphasis. Attridge defines the literary with reference to the reading event, or performance. He addresses how the literary reformulates existing norms and then explains:

> It is only when the event of this reformulation is experienced by the reader (who is, in the first instance, the writer reading or articulating the words as they emerge) as *an event*, an event which opens up new possibilities of meaning and feeling (understood as verbs), or, more accurately, the event of *such opening*, that we can speak of the literary.[43]

Attridge's treatment of the readerly dimension of formalism as a response to poststructuralist criticism of structuralism is in a sense reflected in Bakhtin's own later 1973 essay "Concluding Remarks," an addition to his chronotope essay.[44] A renewed emphasis on the readerly dimension of the relationship between text and reader is a common thread in a number of formalist approaches to literature in response to poststructuralist critiques of structuralism.[45] Bakhtin's conception of the literary as relational is an important aspect of his thinking I will revisit in discussing the validity of liberal chronotopic reading as a research method.

Bakhtin's chronotope has also proven to be a useful bridging concept outside of literary studies. In the field of literary geography, Sheila Hones has identified two competing camps of humanist geographers and postcolonial geographers, and she argues for "a framework of mutual acknowledgement"[46] in the field. Bakhtin's chronotope is helpful in this regard. Georges Perec in his *Species of Space*, as a thinker in the humanist camp, talks of how physical presence in his childhood bedroom works powerfully on his imagination:

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[43] Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 59.

[44] Bakhtin notes: "this material of the work is not dead, it is speaking, signifying (it involves signs); we not only see and perceive it but in it we can always hear voices (even while reading silently to ourselves)" (Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 252). Later, "every literary work faces *outward away from itself*, toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent anticipates possible reactions to itself" (Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 257).

[45] Peter Lamarque for instance argues of literary texts: "They are 'institutional objects'. Thus, secondly, the existence of literary works depends on a set of conventions concerning how they are created, appreciated, and evaluated; in other words, on attitudes, expectations, and responses found in authors and readers" (Lamarque, *Philosophy*, 62). Wayne Booth in discussing the evaluative process of reading literature as integral to its significance in *The Company We Keep* argues: "we must both open ourselves to 'others' that look initially dangerous or worthless, and yet prepare ourselves to cast them off whenever, after keeping company with them, we conclude that they are potentially harmful" (Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep*, [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988]: 488).

[46] Sheila Hones, *Literary Geographies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 178.

> [T]he mere fact of knowing ... that the wall was on my right, the door beside me on the left (by raising my arm I could touch the handle), the window facing me, instantly evokes in me a chaotic flood of details so vivid as to leave me speechless.[47]

It will be remembered that Bakhtin's three temporal dimensions of space were time, plot and history. This is how space is rendered dynamic for Bakhtin, and Perec's description powerfully addresses the first and second of these concerns, as a personal story shapes a sense of self.

If the concerns of humanist geography bring out the ethical dimension of Bakhtin's approach to identity formation, the concerns of postcolonial geographers in the field of literary geography tell us something about its social and historical usefulness as a tool for generating conceptual models. Doreen Massey argues that a problem with conceiving of space as a dichotomy between the local and the global is that when the former is seen as particular and the latter as abstract, the real connections that do exist between people and places are lost.[48] Massey borrows from Gatens and Lloyd to suggest that a responsible approach to space is one concerning connectivity and again uses the notion of self as developing out of dialogue with an other:

> Gatens and Lloyd's notion of responsibility is relational (it depends on a notion of identity constructed in relation to others), and embodied (it thus connects with the arguments about not opposing an embodied place to an abstract space). It also implies extension – it is not restricted to the immediate or the local.[49]

The interpretive approach to chronotopic reading stresses this potential for the chronotope as well. By seeing time-spaces as both particular and focused in the first instance, and comparative and relational in the second, as they are assembled into a unity as a matter of literary interpretation, the chronotope has great potential for conceiving of space in the manner Massey advises. The chronotope thus allows for theoretical modelling of a historical moment socially because it has the potential to model difference comparatively in a network.

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[47] Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London; New York: Penguin, 1997): 22.

[48] Massey states: "The global is just as concrete as is the local place" (Doreen Massey, *For Space* [London; Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2005]: 184). She goes on to argue: "If space is really to be thought relationally then it is no more than the sum of our relations and interconnections, and the lack of them; it too is utterly 'concrete'" (ibid).

[49] Massey, *Space*, 192.

Rawls's context is also instructive in elaborating the usefulness of liberal chronotopic reading, and it is to this context that this introduction now turns. This thesis's designed reading process of concentrated constructive reading has Rawls's public reason as its second stage, a concentration of the longer constructive process that Bakhtin's chronotope provides before it. With this in mind, the manner in which this thesis engages with Rawls is somewhat different from the engagement with Bakhtin. As indicated in the initial comparison between the two thinkers, the larger and looser Bakhtinian concept of dialogic sociality allows for critical reflection on Rawls's formal debate and public reason. This contextual survey will thus identify three key aspects of Rawls's public reason to discuss in elaborating on the usefulness of the designed reading process of this thesis: the ideas of debate, reason and pluralism.

Debate, or public reason, is a process that for Rawls allows citizens to establish which values are shared by all and thus which values can form the basis of a democratic culture. He explains the practicality of the process as follows:

> The point of the ideal of public reason is that citizens are to conduct their fundamental discussions within the framework of what each regards as a political conception of justice based on values that the others can reasonably be expected to endorse and each is, in good faith, prepared to defend that conception so understood. This means that each of us must have, and be ready to explain, a criterion of what principles and guidelines we think other citizens (who are also free and equal) may reasonably be expected to endorse along with us.[50]

The openness Rawls demands of citizens in his call for good faith is a matter of clear communication of values for the purpose of constructing a legitimate society. In this, it is not dissimilar to ideas of long-standing in the liberal tradition. In his 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke defined civil discourse, as distinct from philosophical discourse, thus:

> First, By their civil Use, I mean such a communication of Thoughts and Ideas by Words, as may serve for the upholding common Conversation and Commerce, about the ordinary Affairs and Conveniencies of civil Life, in the Societies of Men, one amongst another.[51]

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[50] Rawls, *Liberalism*, 226.

[51] John Locke and Peter Nidditch, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975): 476.

Locke was also interested in clarity, openness and honesty in political communication of this kind.[52] It is centrally this idea of open, reciprocal exchange of views in a debating forum that the reading process in this thesis looks for in its concentrated second phase. The attitude is the crucial aspect. Rawls himself refers approvingly to Gutman and Thompson when he discusses civility.[53] They say of civility that it "requires a favorable attitude toward, and constructive interaction with, the persons with whom one disagrees".[54] Rawls thus offers a contemporary restatement of a central idea of the liberal tradition, and he centralises it in his conception of liberal democratic values. His concept of public reason thus allows for an identification of the engagement the novels in this corpus have with this part of the liberal tradition, and it is an engagement they all have. *Saturday* constructs a partly comic debate that is diametrically opposed to the ideal of debate in terms of the attitudes of its participants, and thus draws attention to that ideal in its absence.

Two areas of criticism that Rawls has received are particularly relevant to the reading process in this thesis. One relates to his stress on reason. The other is a criticism of his alleged failure to be pluralist. The Rawlsian stress on reason has been challenged by thinkers who see emotion as an important part of the political process. In her 2013 *Agonistics*, Chantal Mouffe argues that Rawls's rationalism does "not allow one to understand the crucial role played in politics by what I have called 'passions': the affective dimension which is mobilized in the creation of political identities".[55] One of the advantages of the hybrid reading in this thesis is that the larger Bakhtinian frame allows the narrower Rawlsian one to be seen in a critical context, and so the affective aspects of political discussion can come to the fore in nuancing the debate Rawls prescribes. *The Robber Bride*, for instance, focuses on how in some situations the targeted use of polemic can have useful political and ethical consequences. However, liberal chronotopic reading does not reveal a corpus of novels that simply overthrows reason in favour of emotion. The interaction between the intellectual and the affective is rich and complicated, with the somatic and affective rituals of the convent in

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[52] He further argued:

> The chief End of Language in Communication being to be understood, Words serve not well for that end, neither in civil, nor philosophical Discourse, when any Word does not excite in the Hearer, the same Idea which it stands for in the Mind of the Speaker (Locke, *Understanding*, 476-77).

[53] Rawls, *Liberalism*, 217.

[54] Amy Gutman and Dennis Thompson, "Moral Conflict and Political Consensus," *Ethics* 101, no. 1 (October 1990): 76.

[55] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics* (London; New York: Verso, 2013): 137.

*Paradise* as a precursor to the more formal debates of the town of Ruby being an interesting example of the kinds of creative engagement with the relationship between reason and emotion that the novels offer.

Rawls has been criticised by pluralists as well. Mouffe offers a clear statement of this position on Rawls (in this case also levelled at Habermas): "Although they claim to be pluralist, it is clear that theirs is a pluralism whose legitimacy is only recognized in the private sphere and that it has no constitutive place in the public one."[56] Richard Bellamy in *Liberalism and Pluralism* argues that Rawls "avoids the role of politics".[57] The difficulty for liberalism in accommodating heterogeneity is an important part of this thesis's interpretation of the novels under examination, but the extent of the criticism of Rawls by pluralists often looks misguided. Iris Young's *Inclusion and Democracy* argues for deepening democracy by "[encouraging] the flourishing of associations that people form according to whatever interests, opinions, and perspectives they find important".[58] Bellamy offers an alternative conception of democracy:

> [This model of democracy] incorporates the liberal concern with freedom and justice into the democrat's desire to ensure that citizens have an equal say in influencing and holding to account the rules and rulers governing them. As such it offers a means of both recognising and reconciling differences through the negotiation of fair compromises that embody mutual acceptance and accommodation.[59]

In fact, his process is perfectly compatible with that of Rawls. There is nothing in the attitude of mutuality and reciprocity in his process that opposes public reason in Rawls's handling. Young's desire for flourishing associations is entirely compatible with Rawls as well. He favourably defines nonpublic reason in terms of associations, as we have seen. Mouffe's objection is a more difficult one, asking fundamental questions about adversarial and consensual political legitimacy in a society. The reading process of this thesis does address that difficulty, as the tension between the liberal model of sociality and heterogeneity is highlighted. What is emphasised in the reading is the failure of liberalism even to attempt to find the consensual political legitimacy that debate might provide, and this failure is in part a lack of imagination about ways to address

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[56] Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 55.

[57] Richard Bellamy, *Liberalism and Pluralism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999): 66. He seems to have in mind the importance of activism over consultative political processes like the reasoning of courts: "The New Deal and the civil rights and environmental movements offer well-known instances of principled politics that have probably done far more in effecting social change than any isolated court case" (ibid).

[58] Iris Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 153.

[59] Bellamy, *Pluralism*, 140.

the concerns of those with a variety of positions and values in a manner that might respond to some of the concerns of pluralism. The imaginative processes that *Paradise* envisages and *Disgrace*'s implied calls for an imaginative rethinking of education are both examples of the attempt by these novels to construct debating fora that accommodate difference, or at least to begin to think about ways in which these fora might be constructed.

Before concluding this contextual part of the introduction, it is worth briefly discussing the name that entered the discussion with Mouffe's criticism of Rawls: Habermas. Habermas might be seen to be an alternative thinker who would be appropriate in providing the concentrating lens in the concentrated constructive reading process of this thesis. Habermas's ideal speech situation and Rawls's public reason have much in common. Habermas for instance describes how "the participants in argumentation mutually *presuppose* something like an ideal speech situation".[60] His stress on mutuality is very much in line with that of Rawls. I see Habermas and Rawls as compatible on this issue, but my choice of Rawls is largely a practical one. Whereas Rawls comes at public reason principally as a prescription of attitudes for citizens, Habermas approaches the ideal speech situation first contextually. He is interested in the removal of social impediments to the mutuality of his situation, arguing that the "freeing of discourse from coercive structures of action and interaction, which is required for the ideal speech situation, is apparently conceivable only under conditions of pure communicative action".[61] This thesis investigates realist novels that focalise protagonists, and in two cases only one protagonist, and it employs Bakhtin as an initial lens in focusing on the identity relation between the personal and the interpersonal. Rawls's concentration on personal attitudes of citizens is thus particularly promising because it fits well with Bakhtin's personal and interpersonal focus, and it also fits well with the novels' initial identity focus on protagonists. Further, the greater elasticity of Bakhtin's approach already allows for contextual factors Habermas might have in mind to Rawls's model of debate to emerge critically. Rawls and Habermas seem largely compatible on the substance of public reason. It is simply the suitable approach and emphasis of Rawls that account for his selection over Habermas in the design of the reading process of this thesis. This concludes the contextual survey of Bakhtin and Rawls as it relates to explaining the concentrated constructive reading process designed and applied in this thesis. The proceeding and penultimate stage of this introduction concerns liberalism and realism in the novel.

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[60] Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001): 97.

[61] Habermas, *Pragmatics*, 98.

## Liberalism and realism in the novel

It is helpful in further clarifying the work of this thesis to set it in relation to contemporary approaches to liberalism and realism in the novel. This thesis treats realism as concerned with the plausible staging of human affairs and social situations in the novel, as I stated in the early discussion of Goodlad in this introduction, and in this way my analyses begin with a straightforward presumption that the perspectives of the protagonists are central in interpreting the novels unless the novels by other means reverse that presumption. Some critiques of liberalism in the novel have concentrated on protagonists whose agency appears very powerful and simply autonomous in the role of the narrative hero. Tessa Roynon in her discussion of Toni Morrison contends that the latter's treatment of "the individual hero" can be summarised thus: "Together with the novelist's oeuvrewide concern with the relationship between communities and individuals, this process of motivated intertextuality contributes to the challenge to individualism that the novels constitute."[62] The liberalism of Rawls in his notion of public reason that provides part of the theoretical framework for these readings concerns personal freedom in citizens recognising their own values but also places a social responsibility on them to engage with others in determining which are their shared values. These inward and outward perspectives significantly nuance the idea of the rugged individual hero, a role which none of the protagonists in this corpus of novels simply performs. Even the most self-confident of them, *Saturday*'s Henry Perowne, provides a perspective that is variously ironised by the narrative strategies of the novel.

To develop this reflection on the nuancing of individualism in this thesis, two areas of contemporary critical discussion in relation to liberalism can be identified as useful: one economic and one that relates the formal to the social in the novel. The economic discussion comes primarily from the perspective of Marxist criticism of neoliberalism as the contemporary phase of development in the capitalist economic system. Wendy Brown, following Foucault, argues that in the period of the Washington consensus, "an image of man as a creature of needs satisfied through exchange gives way to an image of man as an entrepreneur of himself".[63] She goes on to argue that alternative ideas of the person as a legal personality for instance with rights and freedoms gives way to an economic valuation of humanity and that the effect is "to attenuate

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62 Tessa Roynon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 106.

63 Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015): 80.

radically the exercise of freedom in the social and political spheres".[64] Brown's argument for a dynamic of economisation leaves open the possibility of the complete erasure of personality and the individual agent. This deterministic reading of the contemporary scene is not one that the interpretation of the novels in this corpus corroborates. To the extent that Brown detects an alarming dynamic in capitalism in relation to personal freedom, the novels offer a dramatisation of this process. The alienation of city life at large in *Disgrace* and in *Paradise* the strained attempt in Ruby to hold economic forces at bay through isolation are particularly vivid illustrations of the scale of the economic challenge these novels present. However, it is the tracing of the ongoing efforts of the protagonists to exercise their agency in challenging circumstances that provides the dynamic of personal identity formation, which is the centre of attention of the artistry of the novels in the readings of this thesis. The resistance to the seductions of the environments she inhabits in Lianne's perspective in *Falling Man* and the solidarity of the protagonists in *The Robber Bride* are two instances of this embattled liberal identity struggle that the novels depict.

In positioning liberalism and its social implications in relation to the novel form and the realist mode of expression, I can clarify my approach further. There are two broad stages of the novel's treatment of liberalism in its realist mode of expression that I identify: a critical stage and a potentially reconstructed stage, and these two stages correspond to the Bakhtinian and Rawlsian parts of the reading. Here, I will situate this approach in relation to some contemporary critical discussion of liberalism in the novel, with particular reference to the reflections of Andrzej Gasiorek and Peter Blair. Both of these commentators address a critique of liberalism in the novel in the period I discuss in this thesis. Gasiorek draws on a liberal tradition in the novel that he sees to some extent running from the work of E.M. Forster through Iris Murdoch to Zadie Smith. Gasiorek argues in relation to Forster's ambivalence about liberalism: "His hybridised writing drew on fantasy as much as on mimeticism, creating uneasy novels that explored the limitations of liberalism, the dangers of narcissism and the consequences of moral obtuseness."[65] While my readings of the novels in this thesis confirm the critical perspective on dangers that liberalism runs the risk of enacting, I see this critique as capable of emerging from close attention to the realist mode of expression rather than from its interaction with other modes. Derek Attridge explains the centrality of the idea of responsiveness to the other in the process of reading that constitutes the literary experience. He argues that such a response is "a performance of it that, while it inevitably strives to convert the other into the same,

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64 Brown, *Demos*, 108.

65 Andrzej Gasiorek, "'A Renewed Sense of Difficulty:' E.M. Forster, Iris Murdoch and Zadie Smith on Ethics and Form," in *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. David James (Cambridge University Press, 2011): 172.

strives also to allow the same to be modified by the other".[66] In recapitulating this point in another work, Attridge adds in a footnote that far from devaluing the realist tradition as in some sense less imaginative and different to the reader's expectations than some other modes of expression, it "could even be said that the realist work is more, not less, demanding than the modernist work, in that its otherness is often disguised, and requires an even more scrupulous responsiveness on the part of the reader".[67] I aim in this thesis to provide a reading that does justice to the complexity of the realist mode of expression in these novels, not least in their tonal, perspectival and figurative richness as they complicate the viewpoints of the protagonists.

Returning to Gasiorek's detection of a substantive critique of liberalism in Forster, this critical stance on attitudes that liberalism is in danger of enacting is central in my own reading and is part of the difficulty I label the reparation dilemma, in which the protagonists are in danger of turning away from the heterogeneity of the world they encounter. Blair in his account of the history of the liberal tradition in a South African context detects a similar critique emerging in some novels in the 1960s, in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre's highlighting of the deeply entrenched character of apartheid in the nation. Blair notes that a dilemma concerning the exercise of agency on the one hand and an impasse in the face of powerful social structures on the other is at the heart of Richard Rive's fiction for instance. He argues that the "focus on the ethical dilemma of the individual, and his hesitancy about commitment, set Rive apart from other black protest writers".[68] A concentration on the difficulty of imagining solutions to social problems coming from liberalism, with its accent on the personal, is similarly a concern in the novels of this corpus, as they all address a dangerous social situation that the protagonists are only with difficulty attempting to mitigate, if at all. The empowered women of the convent in *Paradise* are the clearest example of protagonists encouraged to act socially, but even here the success of their venture is doubtful.

Nonetheless, I argue that the novels in this corpus hold out tentative hope for an adaptation in liberalism that might contribute to the formation of durable personal identities and social bonds. Gasiorek argues that the kind of work that Zadie Smith offers, with similarity to Forster and Murdoch, moves beyond simple negation to something dynamic:

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[66] Attridge, *Singularity*, 124.

[67] Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee & the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 11.

[68] Peter Blair, "The Liberal Tradition in Fiction," in *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, ed. David Attwell and Derek Attridge (Cambridge University Press, 2012): 486. Blair sees Nadine Gordimer as offering a similar critique in her 1966 *The Late Bourgeois World*, where "the dilemma is unresolved, Elizabeth's liberal principles leaving her stalled at a bleak impasse" (Blair, "Liberal," 487).

> Literary value is in this account particularistic: it is intensely personal; bound up with socially situated readers' prior ethical commitments; dependent on variable emotional responses; uncertain and unresolved (Keats's negative capability is a touchstone); and subject to constant revision through rereading, discussion and debate.[69]

The Rawlsian part of the reading of these novels emphasises ways in which the processes of and attitudes for debate in the liberal tradition might be reimagined. This work when set in contrast with the difficulties of the historical situation cannot be said to be envisaged as offering an easy solution on its own to social problems, without other socially-minded action that is most clearly suggested in *Paradise*, but its potential in this direction arises in two respects. One is its clear connection with the dialogic processes of durable personal identity formation traced in the narratives. An iterative process is imagined here as dialogic identity formation and socially-minded debate can be said to reinforce and adapt one another. Lianne's observer status in debate between her mother and the latter's partner implies a fluid and ongoing process in stages, where increasingly confident identities can engage in debate while still being open to change.

The other manner in which the social responsiveness of debate can be imagined is in the substantive issues of social connection that are shown to be susceptible to being addressed by committed and patient debate in the novels, whether it is the Iraq War in *Saturday* or African and American identities among divided black communities in *Paradise*. Blair argues that post-apartheid fiction concerning liberalism in South Africa can be divided into elegiac and reconstructed camps. The latter camp concerns pluralism being placed at the heart of liberalism and the former includes Coetzee and Shaun Johnson:

> Like Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, *The Native Commissioner* can thus be considered an elegy for liberalism, but its retrospective laying to rest of a different cast and vintage of that ideology might also be regarded as an indispensable countersign to the new, reconstructed liberalisms exemplified here by Gordimer, Duiker, Rose-Innes and Mpe.[70]

My own reading seeks to complicate Coetzee's position in relation to liberalism in the post-apartheid scene. In his novel's subtle return to the educational sphere and its need for reconstruction as a site of debate, *Disgrace* I argue should be seen as part of the imaginative effort to reconstruct liberalism that Blair sees in

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69 Gasiorek, "Renewed," 179.

70 Blair, "Liberal," 494.

operation in other writers of the period. In their presentation of agency exerting itself in straitened circumstances, the readings in this thesis respond with nuance to the argument of Bernard Bergonzi in the generation preceding the period of liberal ascendancy. Bergonzi argued that the "liberal and individualistic virtues" of the novel were "on the retreat over a large part of the globe".[71] Although the exercise of agency in building durable personal identities and social bonds in this international corpus of novels is presented as challenging in the period of liberal ascendancy, the potential for this agency is not erased and is imaginatively concentrated in the time-spaces of debate as a site for possible reconstruction of the liberal tradition. Attention in this introduction now turns to its final part, a discussion of the validity of this reading approach as a research method.

## The value of concentrated constructive reading

In *Narrative Analysis*, Catherine Riessman discusses criteria for the validity of qualitative research using personal narratives. Although this involves the collection of narratives from a sample of respondents as data, I will use her criteria to discuss literary narratives and ways of thinking about their value, as her criteria all relate to literary reading when adjusted in particular ways. Riessman identifies four criteria for validating narrative studies as research methods: persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence and pragmatism.

Riessman's first criterion is that interpretation must be "convincing and reasonable".[72] She develops this idea by asking for theoretical claims to be "supported with evidence"[73] and for the consideration of "alternative interpretations".[74] The analytical chapters that follow this introduction involve close reading of the novels, as is consistent with the constructive process akin to Ladin's that I adopt to allow for interpretation. I also engage with other critics of the novels, and I discuss how the designed reading process I follow navigates the text in ways that relate to, nuance or differ from other approaches to reading the novels in question. The duty of transparency on the part of the researcher is one to which I aim to demonstrate my commitment in the chapters that follow.

The question of plausibility is a profound one. In the field of literary studies, I would begin by citing Kant. In his *Critique of Judgement*, Kant argues that the particularity of the aesthetic experience resides in its

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[71] Bernard Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1979): 51.

[72] Catherine Riessman, *Narrative Analysis* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1993): 65.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

being devoid of "personal conditions to which [one's] own subjective self might alone be party"[75]. He further argues that when experiencing the aesthetic, one feels "a claim to subjective Universality"[76] and that "[one's judgement] may be presupposed to be valid for all".[77] Kant's argument can be clarified further by considering Peter Lamarque's analysis of the literary. Lamarque acknowledges his inspiration coming from Wittgenstein's analysis of "a rule-governed practice and his frequent analogies with games".[78] For Lamarque, the literary involves literary reading, and to "participate it is enough to know and conform to the conventions".[79]

What I find useful in Kant, and Lamarque's position as a clarification of Kant, is the idea that the literary involves an acknowledgement of an attitude. The attitude I take is that my reading of a literary text is not merely a reflection of my own interests, but that it has in it something communicable to people other than myself. Kant's focus on this attitude and the presupposition that it contains seem wise in having nuance and flexibility. Far from saying that literary reading involves certainty, Kant, and Lamarque after him, recommend an attitude of trusting in the broad communicable content of the literary text when meaning is extracted and then testing the validity of that meaning in open presentation of that meaning to the wider reading community. In other words, literary reading involves acting as if certainty is possible in order to arrive at a position that can then be tested for its ability to gain broad support when introduced into the wider reading public. In this way, I approach the reading of these novels trying in good faith to find what concentrated constructive reading can take from them, and then to present that finding openly and in detail for public scrutiny. My thinking is then in two parts: a confident performance of a reading that trusts in its own validity, and then a critical awareness that that reading may be subject to refinement when encountering the complex of perspectives that it will meet in the reading community. The relationship between these two thought processes is dynamic, as I recognise that my reading may be challenged, but I also trust that it will be found persuasive. The recognition of the demands of the reading public creates an obligation of openness on me concerning the rules I see operating in the concentrated constructive reading process that this thesis designs and applies. This seems to me to be the nuanced way of approaching the value of literary reading.

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[75] Immanuel Kant and James Meredith, *The Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952): 51.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Lamarque, *Philosophy*, 61.

[79] Ibid.

Riessman's second criterion for assessing validity of narrative research is correspondence. In gathering qualitative data, Riessman argues that "credibility is increased" if the research is taken back to the original correspondents.[80] How this criterion relates to literary reading, I would argue, is both in returning to the text and in considering the critical context. In this sense, it is closely related to the plausibility criterion Riessman mentions, and this is unsurprising in a context in which the relationship between reader and text is crucial in defining the literary. In other words, plausibility and correspondence will be similar criteria in studying an area that is constitutively relational.

The idea of correspondence does, though, invite reflection on another matter: one of scope. It is not the contention of this thesis that liberal chronotopic reading is a useful design for the reading of any literary text. As in the case of the novels under examination, prior knowledge of the text in question would allow a reader to formulate a working hypothesis about its usefulness as a means of extracting meaning from a literary text, but the reading and interpretation of the text by this means and the consideration of that reading in light of existing criticism would determine the success or failure of the venture. As I stated earlier in this introduction, I am confident that liberal chronotopic reading could be helpfully undertaken in novels other than those in this selection, and certainly in the period of liberal ascendancy. It would seem likely to me that realist novels written in other parts of the world, and especially parts of the world in the Anglophone West or with strong cultural ties to it, would often have significant engagement with liberalism broadly, particularly its interpersonal as well as economic dimensions. I would argue for three spheres of relevance in the work of this thesis, from broadest to narrowest: concentrated constructive reading, liberal chronotopic reading and the novel of liberal lament. It seems likely to me that the idea of hybrid, synthetic reading of a concentrated constructive kind, with a constructive first stage and a concentrated second, is a design process that could usefully be undertaken in relation to a wide, perhaps infinite, range of literary texts, provided the design were suitable for engaging with enough significant content in the texts under examination. Liberal chronotopic reading would have the adaptability I have just indicated, and perhaps even an extension beyond the period of liberal ascendancy, either before or after, as liberalism's history is long. However, the novel of liberal lament seems most likely to be period-specific, as this genre involves a consideration of and attitude to a particular historical relationship between the economic and interpersonal aspects of liberalism. For example, one would expect the postwar Keynesian social democratic economic model of liberalism in any novel of that earlier generation to generate a different relationship in the text between economic and interpersonal aspects of liberalism. However, liberalism's long history might allow for the novel of liberal lament to be

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[80] Riessman, *Narrative*, 66.

seen to be a useful generic description of novels from earlier time periods in liberalism, such as in the late nineteenth century. However this may be, it would of course be the subject of further research.

There is one other aspect of correspondence that could be considered: correspondence to aspects of the text's wider context. One of these contexts is the reading's correspondence to the author's intention. My attitude to the writers in question has two important aspects to address here. One is that I do not seek to pronounce on their intention or to claim that my reading of their novels is precisely their own intention. However, I try as far as I can to be aware of work done on the intentions of the authors, with a view to reconciling my reading as at least not ruled out as a possible reading of their novels, even if I do not aspire to rule my reading in as the definitive reading of authorial intent. The admission of the scope of this project is important here. I follow David Damrosch in making a plea on behalf of comparative researchers. Damrosch asks for an acknowledgement in comparative research that "work in world literature should be acknowledged as *different in kind* from work within a national tradition".[81] He does not want the specialist's work to be ignored by the general comparatist, but he feels that the former's "knowledge is best deployed selectively, with a kind of scholarly tact. When our purpose is not to delve into a culture in detail, the reader and even the work itself may benefit by being spared the full force of our local knowledge."[82] The concentrated constructive reading of this thesis allows for a particular and I trust significant engagement with the novels of this corpus, since this is a project the method of which is literary reading, and thus broadly historical, cultural and authorial research projects concerning the same texts differ from it necessarily. My personal hope is that projects focused on literary reading can illuminate and build on other types of research, just as I am certain that these other projects will have interesting applications in relation to literary readings such as the one in this thesis.

Thinking more broadly about historical context, I would argue that concentrated constructive reading does demonstrate correspondence between the interpretation and the historical situation. In a 2008 article entitled "Globalization and Literary History," Walter Veit proposes a moderate approach between the attitudes of René Wellek and Fredric Jameson to formalist and historicist approaches to the relationship between literature and history.[83] I trust my introduction has already indicated my sympathy both with

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[81] David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003): 286.

[82] Damrosch, *World*, 286-87.

[83] Veit notes Wellek's argument that "causal explanation as deterministic scientific explanation by deduction from a general law or demonstration of necessary efficient cause fails if applied to literature" (Walter Veit, "Globalization and Literary History," *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 [2008]: 418). On the other hand, he quotes Jameson's call for a "history of situations to which these works (eg. *Ulysses*) are responses" (Veit, "Globalization," 419).

Wellek's demand for an appreciation of literary richness and with Jameson's call for historical relevance, and I agree with Veit's own proposed approach to the question. He argues:

> … in the process of understanding, the cognitive self is as much affecting its object as it is affected by it, while both are situated in a context of past understandings and tradition that dominate the horizon of experience just as much as the horizon of present and future experience.[84]

As I have stressed in this introduction already, I see the reading offered in this project as a kind of responsive formalism, which recognises my own cognitive and relational involvement in the process of reading the text, not least in detailing its design, a design that in turn generates the literary interpretation that is the outcome of this thesis. The concentration on Rawls within a broader Bakhtinian framework is designed to allow for a discussion of meaning in the novels that draws out the relevant material as it relates to the liberal tradition in the historical situation the particular novel addresses, and further to be able to do so critically. I trust that openness about this design will allow the correspondence between the texts and the liberal tradition in its historical situation to be scrutinised by readers who wish to revisit either and both in evaluating the argument of this thesis.

Riessman's third criterion for validity in narrative research is coherence. Riessman defines this criterion as follows: "Coherence must be as 'thick' as possible, ideally relating to all three [global, local and thematic] levels."[85] She refers to qualitative data in samples of personal narratives as she explains each of these levels. The global here refers to "the overall goals a narrator is trying to accomplish".[86] The local is "what a narrator is trying to achieve in a narrative itself, such as the use of linguistic devices to relate events to one another".[87] The thematic "involves content: Chunks of interview text about particular themes figure importantly and repeatedly".[88] Literary reading is very well suited to meeting this criterion of coherence. The local criterion of exploring linguistic devices and their relations is well met by close reading of the presentation of time-spaces in the constructive part of this reading, for instance. The thematic identification

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[84] Veit, "Globalization," 426.

[85] Riessman, *Narrative*, 67.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

of patterns is central to the construction of an overall chronotope in the readings of this thesis. The global question of aim is the interpretive level, as illustrated in Ladin's identification of memory as the overarching idea that ties the various strands of the narrative together in Proust.

I will say two more things about the thought underpinning the constructive process this thesis reading undertakes. The first concerns this global level. The approach in this thesis to arriving at this higher level is itself a recognisably literary process. Bakhtin's contemporary György Lukács emphasised the figurative power of the literary in his *Studies in European Realism*. Lukács argued: "The central category and criterion of realist literature is the type, a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular both in characters and situations."[89] The protagonists themselves are one obvious example of this quality of typicality in the novels under examination in this thesis, but the time-spaces also work figuratively, or ideationally, as representative types of broader social categories. Constructive reading of the kind undertaken in this thesis works in this way. Bakhtin himself in the chronotope essay saw the literary as proceeding towards a unity of "the image of man".[90]

Working within the field of linguistic pragmatics, Anne Furlong has followed a similar trajectory from within the framework of relevance theory, a theory of language developed by Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber about interpretation as an aspect of human communication. Furlong builds on their work about human processing of language encountered for relevance in making interpretations to argue that a more complicated version of it operates in literary interpretation. She argues that textual repetitions work "vertically or horizontally,"[91] both of which she sees in operation in literary texts. The latter involve "a single explanatory narrative thread"[92] whereas the former is engaged when the reader is "encouraged to construct a context that focuses on the underlying patterns rather than on the lives of the characters and the events of the novel".[93] For Furlong, this is a crucial aspect of the literary, as she argues that "this kind of [vertical] repetition is more likely to encourage the reader to look for ways of seeing patterns among complex entities".[94]

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[89] György Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (London: Hillway Publishing, 1950): 6.

[90] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 85.

[91] Jeff Bursey and Anne Furlong, "Cognitive Gothic," in *Paper Empire*, ed. Joseph Tabbi and Rone Shavers, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007): 131.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

Riessman's final criterion is pragmatism. This is a future-facing criterion, determined by "the extent to which a particular study becomes the basis for others' work".[95] This cannot be known in advance, but I will venture to suggest three possible applications this work might have in future research: in thought about human identity, politics and literature. Identity formation is a philosophical concern which Andrew Escobedo helpfully illustrates in a summary of the approaches of Derek Parfit and Christine Korsgaard, the former of whom conceives of identity as non-essential, through the analogy of a nation, full of diversity and complexity, and the latter who responds that even if this is true, it is also the case that the unity of the person can be conceived through acts of agency, in which case the analogy is more that of a state deliberating and then deciding than of a nation of diverse and different subjects.[96] A synthesis of these perspectives might conceive of identity as relational, in the sense that the self can unify and disperse according to the manner in which it addresses itself to the other selves, memories and experiences it encounters and reflects upon. In this way, identity, at least as a personal matter, can be seen as a dynamic concept moving through time between centrifugal and centripetal forces, the latter of which concern the manner in which the encounters with diversity are resolved and acted upon, even if the dispersal might follow the unity again soon thereafter. Literary reading of the constructive chronotopic type undertaken in this thesis allows for this process to be dramatically imagined and explored.

The political applications of this research would also involve literary dramatisations of areas of theoretical interest in political studies. This particular liberal chronotopic reading process allows for exploration of issues related to John Rawls and his liberal idea of debate. This is so partly because of the treatment of identity. Liberal chronotopic reading offers a dynamic means of thinking about the relationship

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[95] Riessman, *Narrative*, 68.

[96] Escobedo writes:

> Derek Parfit, for example, has influentially (and controversially) developed a model of selfhood that more or less dispenses with personal identity, arguing that the question of what psychological relations the self bears—including relations to other people—trumps the question of which self is the real "me". In this model, as Parfit has put it, persons are more like nations than Cartesian egos, a variety of memories, reflections, and anticipations occupying the same territory, with contested borders and colonies. Not all philosophers have been happy with this radically decentralized notion of self. Christine Korsgaard, without disputing the anti-essentialist dimension of Parfit's picture, has criticized it by offering a Kantian model of agency in which the very act of choosing among competing desires and values assumes a continuity between one's present self and those of the past and future. In her view, persons are less like nations and more like states, formal and deliberative organizations that attempt (sometimes unsuccessfully) to resolve conflicts through a hierarchy of values. In part, the difference between these two views rests on the difference between conceiving of persons as subjects of experience and conceiving of them as agents of action (Andrew Escobedo, "Can Analytic Philosophy and Literary Criticism Be Friends?" *Spenser Review* 45.3.1 [Winter 2016] http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/spenseronline/review/item/45.3.1 [accessed August 13, 2019]).

between identity formation and debate, with the possibility for creative new ideas about the latter in relation to the former emerging as a result. One example of this involves the order of thinking about identity formation and debate. The sequential thinking of identity formation and debate, with the former practically seeming to be the precondition for the latter, is in fact complicated by liberal chronotopic reading of these texts. *Paradise* in exploring the relationship between the somatic rituals of the convent and the formal town hall debates of Ruby suggests a fluid relationship between identity and debate, in which the former may precede the latter, but then the debate might necessitate a revisiting of identity formation before returning to debate.

Research into the literary could also be inspired by reading processes like the one in this thesis. Attridge notes a problem in literary studies, related to the distinction between form and content:

> … unless we can rescue literary discourse from these oppositions, form will continue to be treated as something of an embarrassment to be encountered, and if possible evaded, on the way to a consideration of semantic, and thus historical, political, and ideological, concerns.[97]

Thinking in terms of appropriately designed reading processes for exploring the significance of a body of literary texts may be a way of resolving this difficulty. Appropriately designed reading processes should allow the text's formal qualities to find expression while still revealing the semantic potential of the texts in question. That is the aim of this thesis and the work undertaken in the proceeding analytical chapters.

What perhaps ties these three areas – the identitarian, the political and the literary – together is the idea of human cognition. Korsgaard argues in relation to the idea of human identity as a unity that "the conception of ourselves as moral agents is fundamental to the standpoint of practical reason, the standpoint from which choices are made".[98] The ability of the literary to bring linguistic, social and personal ideas together in an imaginative and dramatic manner could make it a particularly useful way of generating further ideas about research into human cognition. The appropriate design of reading strategies for literary texts might in this way make a contribution to research that could not easily be replicated otherwise.

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[97] Attridge, *Singularity*, 108.

[98] Christine Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 18, no. 2 (1989): 132.

# Chapter One

## Key critical contexts for *Saturday*

The critical commentary on *Saturday* can be divided into two main topical categories: readings that concentrate on the political engagement of the novel in its contemporary scene on the one hand, and on the other hand readings that see its principal investments in other cognitive and aesthetic concerns, which in turn illuminate the political perspective of the novel as well. In the former category, readings that concentrate on the novel's engagement with liberalism and readings engaging with heterogeneity, whether of a cosmopolitan, international or transnational kind, can be distinguished; in the latter, readings that stress the idea of doubt and others that focus on the relationship between the aesthetic and the affective can also be distinguished. My own reading, with its mapping of the dynamics of the narrative in terms of the dialogic formation of personal identity and social bonds, relates more closely to the second broad category of readings. Critics have drawn on a range of resources and perspectives in analysing the novel. Their methods include biographical engagement, adopting postcolonial perspectives on the novel, analysing the novel in relation to particular literary traditions and indeed thinking chronotopically or formally about the novel. My own reading is most closely aligned with the last two of these approaches of course, but the insights of other perspectives feature in particular ways in my reading as well.

Among critics who engage with liberalism in *Saturday*, Andrew Foley does so directly and positively. Foley argues that *Saturday* is a novel that puts happiness at the centre of its complicated engagement with its protagonist's perspective, and in its narrative and social complications and uncertainties shows the continuing relevance of liberal thought to the contemporary situation. For Foley, this is particularly apparent in Perowne's willingness to meditate in an ambivalent manner on the injustices of the social situation he sees emerging both from his confrontation with Baxter and from his thinking about debate concerning the Iraq War. This attitude of ambivalence attests to the ongoing relevance and importance of the liberal political outlook.[99] Michael Ross draws the opposite conclusion on the novel's presentation of liberalism's engagement with the complexity and injustice in its historical situation. Ross reads *Saturday* in the liberal

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[99] Foley argues: "That a liberal like Perowne (or McEwan) should feel ambivalence when confronting these issues should by no means be taken to be indicative of the inadequacy of their liberal political outlook, however" (Andrew Foley, "Liberalism in the New Millennium: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," *Journal of Literary Studies* 26, no. 1 [2010]: 159).

tradition of the Condition of England novel and sees its first-person concentration on Perowne as imagining a hardening attitude to centrifugal forces of various kinds that threaten to destabilise the liberal order in England. Ross reads the narrative as sounding a series of alarms about class divisions and international conflict from the comfortable middle class perspective of its protagonist, whose comfort is restored in the narrative events of the novel.[100] In a nuanced reading of liberalism in *Saturday*, Frances Ferguson argues that the novel offers a specific valuation of the rationality of the liberal tradition while also offering a critique of its excesses. She sees a combination of rationality and the affective power of love as generating a potentially binding and valuable force in its survey of its frightening social scene after 9/11. Ferguson notes how Perowne's rationality inspires the questions that initiate his social engagement: "*Saturday* presents a rational man not only observing the world and speculating about it but also observing himself and the observational networks that he and we participate in."[101] The affective furthers this exploratory engagement in potentially deeper and more searching ways for Ferguson, as she argues in relation to the news: "For the news prompts Henry to participate in an emotion of attention even when he's not certain what his views are."[102]

My own reading from its particular perspective arrives at points of relevance to all three of these critics. My concentration on the potential for social bonds in the formal rules of debate is a particular and detailed process I envisage whose dynamic can be seen to augment and develop the claim Foley makes for the liberal attitude of ambivalence. My reading's identification of the process of the reparation dilemma corroborates to some extent Ross's analysis of the novel's treatment of the danger of indifference to heterogeneity in liberalism, but my analysis of the novel's manner of critiquing and standing above Perowne's perspective is in part how the novel invites a reading quite different from the disengaged conclusion at which Ross's reading arrives. Ferguson's detection in the novel of a concentration on questions of exploration is robustly engaged with in my own reading of the potential for the formation of personal identity and the forging of social bonds, indicated in the missed opportunity of Perowne's failed debate with his daughter Daisy.

Readings that concentrate on heterogeneity in society as presented in the novel exhibit a similar range of attitudes to the novel. Laura Colombino argues that the relation between city spaces on the one hand and

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100 On these alarms, Ross argues: "What they portend is a narrowing and hardening of the liberal vision that had once energized the Condition of England novel" (Michael L. Ross, "On a Darkling Planet: Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and the Condition of England," *Twentieth Century Literature* 54, no. 1 [Spring 2008]: 93).

101 Frances Ferguson, "The Way We Love Now: Ian McEwan, *Saturday*, and Personal Affection in the Information Age," *Representations* 100, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 47.

102 Ferguson, "Love," 49.

the human body and its movements on the other is central in reading *Saturday*. She sees a return of a humanistic idea in the novel's imagined heterogeneous world. Noting the protagonist's large-scale, long story reflections on "catastrophe and reparation," Colombino emphasises the novel's stress on endurance in "the transcendence of human nature, human species and civilisation beyond the fear of individual annihilation".[103] In a very different reading, Elizabeth Wallace reads *Saturday* in light of Paul Gilroy's idea of postcolonial melancholia, a psychological idea arguing that Britain is failing to come to terms with and is in fact suppressing thoughts about the loss of its empire. Wallace sees the centrality of Perowne and his rationalisation of his social position in order to turn away from the signs of suffering at the margins of his vision as indicating that the novel fails to engage critically with the sort of cosmopolitan environment it purports to describe. Wallace accuses McEwan of "refusing to take up and directly engage with the postcolonial melancholia that haunts his novel".[104] Lucienne Loh also engages with postcolonial theory in arguing that the sort of social situation Wallace sees in *Saturday* is in Loh's reading an appearance that is in fact critiqued and subverted by the novel. Loh argues that while *Saturday* appears to present a reinforcement of an oppressive situation in which powerful Western social structures represented by Perowne triumph against resistant forces as represented by Baxter, the novel can and perhaps should be read as offering a critique of oppressive structures of this kind in its careful delineation of some of the workings of oppressive social arrangements in the narrative.[105] My own reading in this chapter agrees with Loh's presentation of a risk identified critically in the novel's treatment of the historical situation in the period of liberal ascendancy rather than a failure to engage as Wallace argues, and my argument for a potential change in society that the novel detects, unlike Colombino's conceptual focus on humanism, concerns a mutually-agreed and constructed set of rules of debate in a practical manner as the site of the novel's imaginative energy.

A critic who notes the political debates concerning the novel but who nonetheless sees another reading as possible, one concerning doubt, is Dominic Head. Head argues that *Saturday* can be read as principally engaged with the task of unsettling ideas that are presented as norms in the text. This unsettling is

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[103] Laura Colombino, "The Body, the City, the Global: Spaces of Catastrophe in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," *Textual Practice* 31, no. 4 (2017): 799.

[104] Elizabeth K. Wallace, "Postcolonial Melancholia in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," *Studies in the Novel* 39, no. 4 (2007): 479.

[105] On the inclusion of Baxter and the Iraq War as different perspectives on power structures in the West:

> McEwan subtly demonstrates the motivations for radical Islam positioned more narrowly within a broad spectrum of radical cosmopolitanism, which aims to realign the disproportionate degree of power, and readdress the prejudices, held by those who believe in the innate superiority of western civilisation (Lucienne Loh, "How the Other Half Lives," in *The 2000s*, ed. Nick Hubble, Nick Bentley and Leigh Wilson [London: Bloomsbury, 2015]: 134).

particularly focused on the strong claims of both art and science in the uneasy ambivalence of Perowne between these two poles.[106] Another critic who stresses the fluidity of thought that arises from doubt as the imaginative centre of the novel is Richard Brown, who argues: "*Saturday* extends McEwan's unsettling treatment of political and psychopathological aspects of contemporary Britain, alongside an investigation of family life and an enquiry into the borderland zones between rationality and unreason, the self and its others, faith and doubt".[107] The attitude of doubt is lamented in its absence by the novel's presentation of the failed debate about the Iraq War between Perowne and his daughter Daisy in my reading; the humility that might have undergirded the discussion is highlighted as a potentially significant factor in imagining more productive means of forging meaningful social bonds and durable personal identities.

A formal reading of the novel that concentrates on the aesthetic and the affective comes from Peggy Knapp. Knapp argues that the form of the novel is significant in the manner in which it mediates the imaginative and intellectual means of apprehending the aesthetic. This effect is achieved partly through the presence of temporality in the realist narrative form, which operates at the linguistic level of the sentence, Knapp argues. She stresses moments of apparently suspended time, weighty with emotion, in contrast to its regular procession for most of the novel: "In sex he is 'freed from thought, from memory, from the passing seconds' (52); in the long instant in which he intuits Baxter's affliction with Huntington's, and in the interval in which Baxter's knife is held against Rosalind's throat, 'no time, not in time' (277)."[108] Kathleen Wall ties the political to the aesthetic as she sees in the novel's critique of the protagonist's limited appreciation of aesthetic value a strong affirmation of the aesthetic's power to affect both the person and by extension the intersubjective and social realm. In concentrating on the effect of the Matthew Arnold poem on Baxter, and on Perowne's witnessing of this effect, she argues: "Similarly the life-saving beauty of 'Dover Beach' teaches Perowne something about Baxter and justice, namely that Baxter, at least, is attentive to beauty, and that this makes him worthy of just attention".[109] Sebastian Groes also sees the novel as powerfully imagining the aesthetic as a means of working towards a better social realm in the urban sphere in particular. On the

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[106] Head argues: "Perowne's rapid lesson in poetic interpretation, hearing his daughter's recitation of the poem and then urgently revising his sense of its connotations, might be said to constitute an object lesson in the need for rationalism to be tempered with imagination" (Dominic Head, *Ian McEwan* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007]: 190).

[107] Richard Brown, "Politics, the Domestic and the Uncanny Effects of the Everyday in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," *Critical Survey* 20, no. 1 (2008): 91-92.

[108] Peggy Knapp, "Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and the Aesthetics of Prose," *Novel* 41, no. 1 (Autumn 2007): 131-32.

[109] Kathleen Wall, "Ethics, Knowledge, and the Need for Beauty: Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 762.

public square of which he is mostly fearful in the novel, Groes observes Perowne's momentary change after he is moved by Theo's band's performance: "Perowne, swayed by the musical harmony, is able to forge his connection with the wider public, providing him with a brief glimpse of transcending the bounds of his scientific materialism".[110] My own reading also registers the affective as an integral part of the novel's presentation of personal identity formation.[111] However, both in its intense concentration on the familial in the Bakhtinian part of my reading and in its derailing of the debate in the Rawlsian part, the affective is a force that must be acknowledged but also moderated by thought and agreed rules of engagement if formal debate is to have any chance of achieving the changes in personal and social identities that the novel intimates that with difficulty it might.

## *Saturday*: liberal contentment and unease in a complex world

In *Saturday*, a London neurosurgeon Henry Perowne navigates his one day off in the week. The importance of the day at its outset is that it provides an opportunity to effect a reconciliation between his newly-published poet daughter Daisy and her fractious poet grandfather John Grammaticus at a family reunion dinner at Perowne's grand townhouse in central London. The social significance of the day is the protest against the impending Iraq War and the date is set as 15 February 2003. Perowne in the course of his day tries to give some attention to news concerning the war and the protest, but the momentum of the day and his own tiredness from the working week move him through a conversation with his guitarist son Theo and a later attendance of his band's performance, a squash match with his work colleague Jay Strauss, a visit to his mother's nursing home and preparations for the dinner. However, during the course of the day, a car collision with a violent man called Baxter sees Perowne narrowly evade a serious beating by use of his wits before facing Baxter again when the latter invades the family home during the reunion. A combination of the family's resources culminates in Baxter being foiled and badly injured. Perowne is then called to operate on the man. He does so and the novel ends with Perowne resolving to persuade his lawyer wife Rosalind the following morning not to press charges against Baxter.

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[110] Sebastian Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*," in *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (Continuum: London, 2009): 113.

[111] Another critic who stresses the affective but does not concentrate directly on the aesthetic is Peter Childs, who argues that *Saturday* most significantly imagines the necessary process of meditation and empathic connection (or failure thereof) in its protagonist (Peter Childs, "And Now, What Days Are These?" in *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* [New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006]: 144-51).

The plot matters, but the chronotopic reading offered by the approach employed here lays weight on the concept of home, which is a time-space and thus not only a temporal matter of plotting. Bakhtin himself stresses the idea of home in relation to Dickens, his exemplary author of what he calls the family novel. Bakhtin offers a broad description of Dickens' imaginative worlds in chronotopic terms:

> Idyllic elements are scattered sporadically throughout the family novel. A constant struggle is waged between depersonalized alienation in relations between people and human relationships built either on a patriarchal or an abstractly humanist foundation. Scattered throughout the great, cold, alien world there are warm little corners of human feeling and kindness.[112]

In *Saturday*, chronotopic reading identifies something like 'warm little corners of human feeling and kindness' as central in the time-spaces that matter as models of sociality in the identity formation of Henry Perowne. The concept of home refers most obviously to his family home, but also to another space in which he feels perfectly at home, his surgery. However, in Bakhtin's treatment of Dickens, the home time-space draws its significance in part from its contrast with other spaces, and that is true of *Saturday* as well. Noting the contrast between the home time-space and the street time-space in which Perowne encounters Baxter, the novel's antagonist, will make this significance clearer. For the purpose of the overall argument of this thesis, these time-spaces illustrate well the notion of spaces of repair and the reparation dilemma I described in the introduction. Some contemporary reviewers stressed the treatment of personal matters in *Saturday*. Barbara Beckerman Davis felt that Perowne's "fear of dependence gives the book its terrible sense of loss,"[113] while Steven Kellman argued that the novel "concludes its diurnal dash through a day lacking certitude, peace and help for pain with the solace of two lovers".[114] While my chapter does not wish to dismiss these meditations on personal matters, it does seek to relate them to the novel's social commentary, and indeed to argue that this is what chronotopic reading is particularly well suited to do.

Broadly, this chapter has two large movements, the descriptive chronotopic reading of the novel's imagination of the actual historical situation it dramatises, and the prescriptive projection into future potentiality offered by attention to Rawlsian public reason and *Saturday*'s model of sociality that emerges

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[112] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 233.

[113] Barbara Beckerman Davis, "*Saturday*," *Antioch Review* 64, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 578

[114] Steven Kellman,"*Saturday*," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 133.

from the chronotopic first movement. The aim will be both to interpret the novel and to establish the first part of the thesis argument.

## Spaces of repair

All of the novels in this selection employ a third person narrative perspective, but in two of them, *Disgrace* and *Saturday*, the thoughts and feelings of one clear protagonist are focalized. This has implications for chronotopic reading, of course. Bakhtin makes clear in his 1973 "Concluding Remarks" to the chronotope essay that the chronotope is a means of determining centrality and periphery in the novel. His idea is that "the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh ... It serves as the primary point from which 'scenes' in a novel unfold, while at the same time other 'binding' events, located far from the chronotope, appear as mere dry information and communicated facts."[115] The clear focalization of Henry Perowne in *Saturday* is thus an important structural feature chronotopically, as it helps to draw attention to the model of sociality that informs his identity formation and the time-spaces that allow for this modelling. I am not the first to notice the potential for reading *Saturday* in chronotopic terms. Laura Colombino in her 2017 article "The Body, the City, the Global" notes the "tight spatio-temporal dimensions of the novel – strictly confined to the thoughts of a single mind on a single day in a fairly limited area of the metropolis".[116] Thinking in terms of relevance, time-spaces serve as presumptive central areas of attention and concern to the reader with a chronotopic focus, with the interpretive process that follows necessarily attending to these central areas and needing to address their significance in generating an interpretation of the novel.

The time-space of home in *Saturday*, even if limited to the family home and not including Perowne's comfort in his surgery, is in fact a time-space with its own centre and periphery. The centre is the bedroom. This is signalled structurally in the novel. The title of the novel foregrounds the day-length structure of the narrative, which both begins and ends in the bedroom, with Perowne first waking and lastly going to sleep. It becomes apparent as well that the significance of a Saturday for Perowne in the context of his weekly routine is that it is the only day of the week on which he does not work.

The bedroom's importance in identity formation is made apparent very early on in the novel. Its spatial dimensions confer a significant sense of freedom on Perowne: "The bedroom is large and uncluttered. As he glides across it with almost comic facility, the prospect of the experience ending saddens him briefly, then

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[115] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 25.

[116] Colombino, "Global," 787.

the thought is gone."[117] The narrative uses various means to convey a sense of implied generosity towards the protagonist, and the gentle teasing of the phrase "comic facility" is one of these. This is not least because it seems as though Perowne might be teasing himself in this way as well; he has moments of this kind throughout the narrative. One aspect of the sense of freedom conveyed by the description above is crucial in understanding what we mean by character and identity in this thesis. Korsgaard's response to Parfit outlined in the introduction was seen to lead to a conception of personal identity in terms of energy, as an interplay of sometimes ascendant centrifugal forces and sometimes ascendant centripetal forces. When the latter are ascendant, the reader has the impression of a unity of character and identity. In a purely physical sense, then, character and identity signal concentrated and directed energy in this thesis. In more literary terms, they signal an actor, in the sense of an agent performing an action. Perowne's sense of his own freedom to think, reason and act is framed by this bedroom space, and his playfulness here is part of that freedom as well. His confident sense of self is of course communicated in the status symbol of his grand townhouse as well,[118] and perhaps most strikingly of all in his standing naked at his window to look out over the street.

The realist mode of fiction also enables the chronotopic reader to detect the centrality of this bedroom time-space. John Sutherland in writing on solidity of specification, a realist concern, remarks: "The concreteness of the worlds created by literary works depends on the richness of accidental detail."[119] In her aesthetic treatment of *Saturday*, Peggy Knapp likewise stresses detail as a realist aspect of the novel, highlighting in particular the surgical terminology the novel deploys as "a curious and vivid hyperrealism [she] will refer to as over-specification".[120] I would argue that this over-specification, as Knapp usefully names it, is evident in the bedroom in particular. While dozing, Perowne is described visualising his wife's morning routine as he hears her getting ready for work:

> He wakes, or he thinks he does, to the sound of the hairdryer and a murmuring voice repeating a phrase, and later, after he's sunk again, he hears the solid clunk of her wardrobe door opening, the vast built-in wardrobe, one of a pair, with automatic lights and intricate interior of lacquered

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[117] Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (London: Vintage, 2006): 4.

[118] In writing on modernist art, Stephen Kern refers to the aesthetic theory of Theodor Lipps in architecture to argue that a relationship between spatial openness and a personal sense of freedom is plausible: "Our bodies unconsciously empathize with architectural forms. We feel free when there are no external constraints on our bodily movements, and buildings with large open spaces offer that freedom" (Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003]: 157).

[119] John Sutherland, *50 Literature Ideas You Really Need to Know* (London: Quercus, 2011): 11

[120] Knapp, "Aesthetics," 125.

> veneer and deep, scented recesses; later still, as she crosses and re-crosses the bedroom in her bare feet, the silky whisper of her petticoat, surely the black one with the raised tulip pattern he bought in Milan; then the business-like tap of her boot heels on the bathroom's marble floor as she goes about her final preparations in front of the mirror, applying perfume, brushing out her hair.[121]

This passage once again gives a sense of the large scale of the bedroom, with its vast wardrobe and deep recesses. It further solidifies the bedroom with the auditory details of the tap of heels and the movement of the petticoat in traversing the room. The bedroom is conspicuous in its degree of specificity as a space in the novel and is thus centred in chronotopic reading of the narrative. The familiarity of routine is implied in Perowne's imagining his wife's movements, and the intimacy of this shared private space further consolidates his sense of self. Routine gives a sense of stability to this time-space of the bedroom, and this stability is true for his personal identity formation in the privacy and intimacy of home as well. This process of constructing an identity out of a time-space is apparent also in the continuity of the quotation as a single sentence; the clauses build sequentially an imaginative impression both of the space and of the routines and rhythms of a personal life.

One important aspect of *Saturday* in contrast with the other novels in my selection is the relative level of contentment experienced by the protagonist in daily life. In his 2010 article "Liberalism in the New Millennium," Andrew Foley argues that *Saturday* is a literary text that takes seriously an exploration of happiness.[122] I am arguing that the chronotopic concentration on happiness is most intense in the bedroom space. This concentrated happiness centres the reader's impression of Perowne's identity in *Saturday*.

Returning to the thesis at large, this exegesis of the bedroom time-space in *Saturday* has helped to delineate one of the key concepts in the argument advanced here. The private home time-space is a prime example of what I will be calling across the novels in this selection spaces of repair. Returning once again to our idea of identity from the philosophical dispute between Parfit and Korsgaard in the introduction as a matter of centrifugal and centripetal forces, spaces of repair as a matter of novelistic presentation are the spaces in which personal identity can by centripetal force unify and take shape imaginatively, somatically and intellectually after the centrifugal forces of daily life's varied experiences, interactions and reflections have pulled that personal identity in various directions. In the novel, and indeed in all of the novels in this

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[121] McEwan, *Saturday*, 55.

[122] Foley, "Liberalism," 135-62.

selection, spaces of repair are practically necessary for the reassembly of a coherent identity, which is itself the precondition for directed action. The workings of this unity as a matter of novelistic presentation are made clearer when home is set against the secondary home of the surgery.

I have already introduced the idea that the surgery is a kind of second home for Perowne. It is in the novel's climactic detailing of Perowne's surgery on Baxter that the significance of the surgical space is most clearly delineated and extended. The operating theatre is barely described at all in the narrative and is in fact usually designated simply as the theatre, an interestingly ambiguous term in a text that plays with scientific and artistic perspectives, suggesting the idea of performance in Perowne's work. Instead, this space is simply an arena for action: the frenetic and highly-skilled work of neurosurgery and the attendant exhilaration and gratification it gives to Perowne. The chronotopic impression of the operating theatre shifts between that of a performance stage and a sort of cathedral of reverence in the climactic operation on Baxter. A sustained instance of the latter sense occurs as Perowne arrives at the neurological suite entrance:

> Home from home. Though things sometimes go wrong, he can control outcomes here, he has resources, controlled conditions. The doors are locked. Peering through the glass he can see no one about. Rather than ring the bell, he takes a long route down a corridor that will bring him through intensive care. He likes it here late at night – the muted light, the expansive, vigilant silence, the solemn calm of the few night staff.[123]

The solemnity conveys a sense of gravity to the space not unlike the weight accorded by different artistic means to the bedroom. Both give a sense of solidity to Perowne, who seems purposeful and powerful in this space.

Chronotopic reading is an interpretive process and it traces models of sociality within time-spaces as matters of identity formation. While Perowne is at home, he mentally reviews the week and the cognitive processes of identity formation are foregrounded. The leisurely pace of the narrative's unfolding of Perowne's routines with his wife gives way to a far more frenetic presentation of Perowne's hectic surgical experiences in the hospital. These experiences are at the same time organised, analysed and interpreted in the course of the mental review that the repair space of home enables Perowne to conduct in concentrated fashion, in the absence of distractions and unpredictable interactions. In a characteristic description combining the sense of urgency of the moment of surgery and the reflection and rationalisation of the

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[123] McEwan, *Saturday*, 246.

experience as part of identity formation, the narrative details a complicated procedure: “He clipped the neck of a middle cerebral artery aneurysm – he’s something of a master of the art – and performed a biopsy for a tumour in the thalamus, a region where it’s not possible to operate.”[124] One notable aspect of this description is the parenthetical praise of Perowne, suggesting a shared awe and admiration between narrator and protagonist for the wonders of modern medicine. In this light, an invitation to share that awe is extended to the reader.

This sense of wonder has philosophical implications for Perowne too, as his thoughts return to scientific research into the nature of consciousness and its potential for unravelling its mysteries while he operates on Baxter: “It’s already happening, the work is being done in laboratories not far from this theatre, and the journey will be completed, Henry’s certain of it. That’s the only kind of faith he has. There’s grandeur in this view of life.”[125] Perowne’s characteristic Enlightenment progressivism that shapes his view of life and his mental processes in the narrative is thus powerfully reinforced by this space. The final sentence in the quotation is a line from Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, which he is reading at the time of the narrative events. The ironic distancing in the narrative is skilful here. Perowne’s poet daughter Daisy has prescribed his reading, and it is Darwin rather than the more obviously literary readings Perowne identifies with. As in the previous quotation, it seems inaccurate to say that the narrative satirises Perowne, but it certainly plays with his perspective, albeit respectfully. The strength of Perowne’s sense of self is intensified in the operating theatre. The dynamic forward momentum of the first sentence, with active clauses barely separated by commas, implies the centrality of this sort of thinking about science to the directed conscious energy of Perowne’s personal identity. Indeed, returning to our initial observation of Perowne as an actor, a dynamic figure, these sentences bring the ideas of his Enlightenment optimism and the exertion of his professional medical activity together as the central motif of the dramatisation of Perowne’s consciousness in the novel, a dramatisation that is *Saturday*’s central focus when read chronotopically. This twin chronotopic shaping of a self-confident consciousness at home and at work conveys a type: the accomplished and industrious modern urban professional.

There is a strong argument for extending our understanding of Perowne as a type to the geopolitical situation of the period in question. The novel’s inclusion of an incident in the climactic part of the narrative in the hospital involving Perowne’s Guyanan trainee Rodney Browne and a British teenage patient Andrea Chapman is suggestive. The latter in particular responds to the values of Enlightenment progressivism in the

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[124] McEwan, *Saturday*, 8.

[125] McEwan, *Saturday*, 255.

emotional attachment she forms to Rodney, which she enthusiastically shares with Perowne as he sits at her bedside while she recovers from her operation, as she breathlessly explains that "[Rodney] comes and sits where you are, and says to me about how if I want to be a doctor I need to get serious about studying and that, and stop clubbing and that".[126] Andrea's presence in the narrative seems a marker of social change in the sense that a young person is seen to embrace the values of Enlightenment progressivism in enthusing about science and the mental discipline attending it. Rodney Browne's nationality extends the apparent spread of these values geographically just as Andrea Chapman's age extends them generationally into the future. Of course, the text also implies extension negatively. There is no reason in the text not to see Perowne's characteristics as a liberal urban professional as transferable to professionals of this type in other contexts around the world at the time in question. In other words, Perowne's values are not delimited in any way to his city or his nation in the text.

What a chronotopic reading of *Saturday* offers at this stage, then, is an imagined and dramatised process in which the workings of personal identity formation for modern professionals consolidate a unified and self-confident liberal consciousness that can readily be imagined as the value system of a growing and increasingly influential international middle class. The imaginative work of the novel as a matter of chronotopic reading seems to depend also on a conception of spaces of repair, especially at home but also at work, in which this identity can reconvene and reconstitute itself repeatedly with potential for re-entry into the complex surrounding world with a view to shaping it in light of its liberal values. This concludes my initial survey of home as a time-space of chronotopic centrality in the novel.

This survey of the home time-space in *Saturday* chimes well with work done in investigations into that novel's situation in the context of McEwan's career as a writer. Dominic Head's 2007 book *Ian McEwan* argues for an understanding of McEwan's art in terms of "double consciousness, which connects experience and knowledge".[127] Head identifies this focus on consciousness in modernism and sees McEwan's potential contribution to postmodernism as "an intensification of modernist self-consciousness".[128] Specifically on *Saturday*, Head describes the novel as "an extravagant performance that celebrates the developing human capacity to know the self, in both literature and science".[129] This chapter's foregrounding of realism and identity chimes well with Head's reflections on McEwan's work and this stage of his career. Peter Childs in

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[126] McEwan, *Saturday*, 261.

[127] Head, *McEwan*, 207.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Head , *McEwan*, 196.

his 2006 book *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* furthers the sense of McEwan's interest in bridging art and science. Childs sees McEwan feeling that the "'two cultures' schism in British intellectual life between art and science is deeply regrettable".[130] He further argues that investigations into McEwan could focus on "issues such as consciousness, evolutionary psychology, madness and mental degeneration".[131] This chapter does see issues of identity and consciousness as central in reading *Saturday*, but just as Head and Childs argue for a bridge between art and science in this novel, this chapter will argue for another bridge, between personal identity and the wider world. I have already noted how in *Saturday*, as in Bakhtin's treatment of Dickens, the appreciation of the potential of the home time-space depends on contextualising it with a contrasting outer world. It is to this contrast that the attention of this chapter now turns. I have already noted how in *Saturday*, as in Bakhtin's treatment of Dickens, the appreciation of the potential of the home time-space depends on contextualising it with a contrasting outer world. It is to this contrast that the attention of this chapter now turns.

## The reparation dilemma

As a matter of plot dynamics, if Perowne is the novel's protagonist, Baxter is its antagonist. The space in which Perowne first encounters Baxter also serves chronotopically as the novel's major contrasting time-space, and indeed revises the reader's perspective of Perowne's home time-space. Indeed, all of Perowne's characteristic spaces in the course of the narrative are contrasted by the street space where he encounters Baxter. Whether it is the house, the operating theatre or the squash court, most of Perowne's other interactions in the novel occur in somewhat sealed and safe spaces. His car vantage point in driving around London might be seen in the same light. This unprotected open space is foregrounded in being different. When Perowne's car collides with Baxter's, the street in which they confront one another is not described at length, save for little details. One such example occurs as Baxter's gang members force Perowne towards a wall:

> They turn him and slam his back against a chain-locked double door in a recess. He sees on the wall to his left a polished brass plaque which says Fire Exit, Spearmint Rhino. Just up the street

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[130] Childs, *Fiction*, 151.

[131] Ibid.

> is a pub, the Jeremy Bentham. But if it's open this early, the drinkers are all inside in the warmth.[132]

Bakhtin's Dickensian contrast between a great cold alien world and warm little pockets of human kindness seems apposite here, represented respectively in the first pair and second pair of sentences. The heaviness of the door seems to imply a cold hard reality with which Perowne has been confronted in this space, and the recess suggests a hidden quality to it as well. Baxter's world is a very different one from Perowne's, and the novel conveys a clandestine, illicit quality to this world, vaguely suggested by the strip club and pub references, not least in a daytime context. The name of the liberal utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, and its association with the warmth of the pub crowd who are oblivious to what is happening outside, seems incongruous in this scene, an ironic reference that implies a troubling potential for Perowne's liberal thought in this environment.

The association of Baxter with the street is reinforced by Perowne's son Theo presciently warning his father later when hearing of the encounter and Perowne's escape: "These street guys can be proud."[133] The contrast is stark in chronotopic terms. Where Perowne's world is safe, self-affirming and warm, Baxter's is cold, exposed, dangerous and precarious. The gang members appear the only social support for Baxter, whose degenerative neurological condition he has to hide from them in order to continue to earn their support.

Of course, this contrast must have implications for our reading of the home time-space. What I see the chronotopic contrast in *Saturday* offering imaginatively is a further thought about spaces of repair: what I call the reparation dilemma. This dilemma involves the dynamic possibilities of the private space model of sociality that I have called a space of repair. The dilemma is that the process of retreat into a controlled private space is a necessary one, but the very same process can lead either to a recuperation of the same identity that entered it in the first place or a reconstitution of a somewhat altered identity, with little predictability about how either of the two different outcomes might be reached. Korsgaard's response to Parfit is once again instructive. The centripetal force of identity formation as the practical need for coherence, which is the precondition for action, has to be held at bay at least temporarily by the centripetal forces of the challenging experiences encountered outside of the space of repair.

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[132] McEwan, *Saturday*, 92.

[133] McEwan, *Saturday*, 152.

The particular challenge *Saturday* presents to holding those forces at bay involves the specific contours of Perowne's identity as already drawn. He has constructed an identity for himself that is socially validated, and socially useful in his medical activity. It also generates personal contentment and involves a great amount of energy and activity. The centrifugal forces of Perowne's experiences in the world thus run up against all of these countervailing forces in the narrative. When Perowne after the attack sits in his car waiting for his wife to answer her telephone, he muses on his motivation and realises that what he ultimately wants is "the sound of her voice in an everyday exchange, the resumption of normal existence".[134] The powerful normative rhythms of Perowne's identity here come to stabilise the disruptive effect of the encounter with Baxter. This tension between reflection on the experience and resumption of his usual identity-reinforcing rhythms continues in the latter half of the narrative. The dramatisation of this tension finally plays itself out in the narrative's climax.

When Baxter invades the family home in the novel's climactic section, punching Perowne's father-in-law and breaking his nose in the process, holding a knife to Rosalind's throat and forcing Perowne's daughter Daisy to strip naked in public, the narrative presents Perowne's emotions surprisingly, but in a manner that fits the chronotopic contrast already outlined. Where one might expect outright hostility, Perowne is shown to feel a disquieted sense of guilt about this man. He even enters into a reverie, itself chronotopic, about the likely future of Baxter with his condition: "At some point he'll find himself writhing and hallucinating on a bed he'll never leave, in a long-term psychiatric ward, probably friendless, certainly unlovable, and there his slow deterioration will be managed, with efficiency if he's in luck."[135] Here is an empty space that is stripped even of the appearances of home that at least adorn Perowne's mother's own dismal nursing home room, another site that haunts Perowne in his gloomier broodings on his own ageing and mortality.

Even in his moment of triumph, when he and Theo finally overpower Baxter and send him falling down the staircase, Perowne's thought is not on the manner in which Baxter has sought to overpower his family, but rather on how the power dynamics if anything point in the other direction asymmetrically. He interprets a look Baxter gives him as he falls:

> He, Henry Perowne, possesses so much – the work, money, status, the home, above all, the family – the handsome healthy son with the strong guitarist's hands come to rescue him, the beautiful poet for a daughter, unattainable even in her nakedness, the famous father-in-law, the

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[134] McEwan, *Saturday*, 99.

[135] McEwan, *Saturday*, 211.

> gifted, loving wife; and he has done nothing, given nothing to Baxter who has so little that is not wrecked by his defective gene, and who is soon to have even less.[136]

Whereas the first clause builds the great advantages Perowne has in his relatively contented life, the repetition on "nothing" in the second clause is particularly telling, as Perowne's conscience tells him he is in some sense failing in his responsibilities. This makes little sense as an interpersonal matter between these two men, or indeed as a formal matter of narrative between protagonist and antagonist, although it is true that Perowne used his medical knowledge to trick Baxter into a state of confusion that enabled Perowne to escape the earlier potential beating. More likely, this is an interpretive matter. If Perowne's identity formation typified the advance of liberalism in the post-Cold War generation, his guilt about Baxter seems to typify a liberal anxiety about suffering at the margins of its own advance.

Where liberalism seems in the text to absorb Perowne's trainee Rodney Browne and the teenage patient Andrea Chapman, it is not clear at all in the text how a man like Baxter can be brought into anything like pockets of human kindness, to borrow Bakhtin's phrase on Dickens again. This is a man who lacks Perowne's social connections, his financial and professional status, his education and his health, contrasts all made clear and stressed in a chronotopic reading of the novel. Perowne's efforts at the end of the novel to save Baxter's life in surgery do not in any way address the neurological condition from which Baxter suffers. Given the novel's stress on Enlightenment optimism, not least medically, this failure seems significant also.

The chronotopic attention of the novel is of course centred on the question of the model of sociality, and in particular identity formation. The contrast in the home time-space and the street time-space casts the spaces of repair argument in a new light. Perowne's guilt directs attention to his potential in his space of repair to reform his identity in light of his experience of social processes of liberalism, of which he is a beneficiary and an agent, and his reflections on these processes and values in light of his experiences of their apparent failure to accommodate others like Baxter whom he encounters. The novel seems to leave that matter doubtful and thus encourage the thought of the reparation dilemma.

Perowne certainly feels some guilt about Baxter, and he resolves to tell his wife in the morning that he does not want to press charges against the man for the home invasion. However, the processes of identity formation traced in the novel highlight strong forces in the direction of consolidation of identity rather than transformation. First, there is the novel's quotidian structure. Baxter has been a significant feature of Perowne's day, but even in its dramatic quality, the encounter was only one feature among several, most of

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[136] McEwan, *Saturday*, 227-28.

which concerned work and family. The ephemeral aspect of the daily structure makes a reader's confidence in any long term changes in Perowne's personal identity seem doubtful. Secondly, Perowne, as we have seen, derives a great deal of satisfaction and self-confidence from his identity. This identity enables him to act in his work and family interactions, and thus his interests are very much served by maintaining it. Thirdly, as a result of this, Perowne finds himself on a sort of energetic and emotional conveyor belt, which moves more quickly through his activities than he can realistically process them. The novel throughout stresses his tiredness and half-attentive efforts to concentrate on the news about the war preparations or on the reading his daughter has left him, as the central energetic focus of his life revolves around his work and his family. For all of these reasons, the reader is left with the impression that the space of repair, necessary though it appears to be for the reflection that allows for Perowne to acknowledge the risks of the values he embraces, could very easily through those very processes of reflection lead Perowne to an unchanged identity that makes no real allowances for or accommodations of the risks he identifies.

One aspect of the novel that brings this dilemma into focus is the manner in which it is framed by an extract from Saul Bellow's *Herzog* and the Matthew Arnold poem "Dover Beach". Each offers a different but related way of thinking about the reparation dilemma. The Bellow extract offers a paragraph that is divided into two sections. The first imagines the individual in postwar life feeling disempowered, in "a society that was no community and devalued the person". The second imagines the impulse to engage socially to ease the sufferings of those less fortunate: "Would you ask them to labor and go hungry while you yourself enjoyed old-fashioned Values?" This tension captures the conflict in Perowne's life between the weight of work and family, and its attendant tiredness on the one hand, and his genuine but often frustrated desire to understand and positively affect the troubled world around him. A similar tension, at perhaps a different angle, is captured in the final stanza of the Arnold poem. There is a sense of desperation in the narrator's clinging to his lover: "Ah, love, let us be true / To one another!" This is contextualized in the surroundings of their warmth and attachment to one another later in the stanza: "And we are here as on a darkling plain / Swept with confused alarms as of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night." Here, the impetus is the other way, as the horrors of a violent and dangerous world fling the individual into the comfort of home.

In attempting to nuance the interpretation, there seems to be textual support for a less severe version of the picture outlined so far. The contrast between interior and exterior spaces has already been established as a matter of chronotopic artistry in the novel, but the treatment of Baxter is not the only way in which this contrast is addressed. Perowne's grand townhouse faces out into an open square. One telling episode involves a group of men he periodically sees selling items in the square in which his house is located. In the

past, Perowne's reaction was prejudicial, warily describing the men as "two West Indians and two, sometimes three Middle Easterners who might be Turks".[137] He suspected they may be drug dealers but his son Theo corrects him that they are simply men selling cheap holiday packages and electronic products. The narrative registers Perowne's consequent sense of guilt: "Whenever Perowne sees these people he vaguely feels, as he does now, that he owes them an apology. One day he'll buy something from them."[138] Here, Perowne is shown to go from an attitude of fear and judgement directed at others, interestingly only in passing and thus also suggesting a dismissive attitude as he goes about his daily business, to an attitude of reflection and a willingness to engage warmly and constructively with these other men. The process might be called dialogic, but at one remove. It is Theo who effects the change.

The sort of incremental change the reader sees in Perowne in this episode might seem to challenge an overly circular reading of the reinforcing power of Perowne's identity as a largely unchanging one. However, this central process of reinforcement remains the one that appears durable in the narrative, and the contrast with the specific intervention Theo makes is suggested not least in Theo's increasingly fleeting presence in Perowne's life, a process implied also in Perowne's final musings on his son's likely relocation to New York with his band in the future. Also, the intractable cases of difficult situations and identities for Perowne's identity to accommodate, represented by Baxter, remain part of that interpretation. On this reading, the novel indicates the difficulty with absorbing particularly complicated identities outside the network in the period of liberal ascendancy. As a representative of urban gang culture, Baxter can be seen to represent one kind of hard case for a liberal network around the world.

The implications of this difficulty can be elaborated further. The model of sociality that Bakhtin's dialogic ethic seeks seems sadly frustrated by a conclusion that suggests that those in the international liberal middle class largely fail to venture out into public spaces as a means of reforming their identities in light of the complexity around them. The novel does indicate the ethical pull of increased openness while acknowledging the complex and powerful forces pulling in the other direction. The interaction between liberal identity and the heterogeneity of the world that the novel describes as the contemporary situation of the period of liberal ascendancy has three parts then. The first is the expansionary aspect of the ideology, suggested by Andrea Chapman and Rodney Browne, as liberalism is indeed winning converts in the period. The second is the specific identification of troubling blind spots of liberal ideology itself that might be countered in interventions like that of Theo in his father's life. The third, and this is the central focus of

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[137] McEwan, *Saturday*, 145.

[138] McEwan, *Saturday*, 146.

chronotopic reading of *Saturday*, is the powerful reinforcing pull of the reparation dilemma in liberal identity, which tends to concentrate the distinction between liberal identity and the heterogeneity of the world. This is the actuality that chronotopic reading of *Saturday* identifies in the period of liberal ascendancy.

*Saturday* has generated critical debate partly because of this somewhat bleak assessment of its contemporary scene. On the one hand, Lucienne Loh for instance argues in defence of *Saturday* that to "read contemporary British fiction through conflicting and, at times, elusive forms of radical cosmopolitanisms contributes to this democratic discourse".[139] Elizabeth Wallace on the other hand argues against *Saturday* that the "reader receives the impression that the effort needed to project into the situation of others is beyond the ordinary".[140] Even if the reading of this thesis chapter only drew out the description of the actuality *Saturday* identifies, I would still argue that the novel's clarity on the difficulties of forming durable liberal identities while accommodating difference would be a useful contribution to thought about sociality in the historical moment. If it were the case that *Saturday* appeared to endorse the problem contained in the reparation dilemma, the critics of the novel would have a stronger case. I hope to challenge this rather gloomy assessment of *Saturday* in the following Rawlsian concentration of the Bakhtinian area of attention still further.

This concludes the descriptive chronotopic reading of *Saturday* in this chapter. It remains to concentrate the dialogic image as an area of attention through the lens of John Rawls's notion of public reason, and thus to arrive at the prescriptive aspect of the interpretation of *Saturday* that the procedure of this thesis identifies.

## Debate and the potential of rules

Rawls's notion of public reason, it will be remembered, is a prescription Rawls offers for the ethical basis of a constitutional democracy. He envisages deliberation and reasoning as a process into which citizens may enter, with a view to finding shared values and then establishing cultural and legal norms for social living on the basis of those shared values. *Saturday*'s conception of the reparation dilemma appears to speak to Rawls's idea as a precondition to engagement of that kind. If spaces of repair are relatively controlled spaces in which identity can reconstitute itself in light of experiences in the wider world, the establishment of

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[139] Loh, "How," 135.

[140] Wallace, "Postcolonial," 471.

personal values that inform that identity will come prior to a meaningful engagement with others about shared values. That is a reflection purely at the level of putting the two conceptual models, Rawls's and the model of sociality interpreted chronotopically in *Saturday*, in conversation with each other, an inter-conceptual reasoning observation. However, there is more to say if we revisit the text of *Saturday* with a Rawlsian focus of attention, our prescriptive concentration of the descriptive work of chronotopic reading.

There is a literary-interpretive insight I wish to establish before detailing and locating the centre of *Saturday* in the reading procedure undertaken in this thesis chapter. In his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, William Hazlitt offers a reading of *Othello* that lays stress on the penultimate scene between Emilia and Desdemona rather than the final scene in which Othello murders Desdemona. Hazlitt notes that if "Othello had overheard [Emilia's conversation with Desdemona], it would have prevented the whole catastrophe; but then it would have spoiled the play".[141] What Hazlitt locates in the penultimate scene is the play's greatest power: "Not the unjust suspicions of Othello, not Iago's unprovoked treachery, place Desdemona in a more amiable or interesting light than the conversation (half earnest, half jest) between her and Emilia on the common behaviour of women to their husbands."[142] The idea of interpreting literature somewhat against the plotting is then not a new one. Hazlitt recognises the need for plot and its importance, but he also lays weight as a matter of audience attention on the backwards trajectory of thought that the play exerts on the reader's imagination to go from the catastrophe back to the possibility of what might have been in light of the power of the play's penultimate scene. Some of the criticism of *Saturday* lays great weight on the novel's ending, and this is an emphasis I wish not to undo but to complicate.

With this literary-interpretive insight in mind, there is one sense in which Rawls's notion of public reason powerfully affects and advances our reading of *Saturday* as it emerged from the chronotopic approach. The chronotopic reading drew attention to the contrast between the private home time-space and the public street time-space, and as a result brought Perowne's son Theo into the analysis. A Rawlsian revisiting of that reading draws attention to Perowne's daughter Daisy. Daisy is a presence in the narrative even before she arrives for the family dinner, as Perowne tries to redress his scientific biases through reading literature at the instigation of his poet daughter. However, when she does arrive, the home space is momentarily transformed into a debate chamber. Perowne and Daisy have a heated argument about the Iraq War, although neither changes the other's mind. Remembering Attridge's idea of literature as a performance, there is something theatrical in the staging of the argument in the text's handling: "He eases himself onto one

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[141] William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915): 48.

[142] Ibid.

of the high stools by the centre island, and gestures for her to do the same. She ignores him and remains by the door, arms still crossed, face still closed."[143] This is a complicated positioning for Perowne, seeming to imply an uneasy ambivalence between a sort of enlightened scepticism and simple uncertainty, both of which attitudes he adopts at various points in the day. If enlightened scepticism, it is the impression of formal adjudication according to debating rules implied by the central positioning he takes that determines the meaning. If simple uncertainty, it is the implication of sitting on the fence, also plausible given his argument against the war with his colleague earlier in the day. Daisy's stance is resolute and his is more tentative, although it is also a choice of an apparently neutral vantage point. The failure of this argument appears to be a failure to conform to Rawls's prescription in a sense, as neither tries to understand the other's point of view and they end up awkwardly reverting to preparations for dinner and avoiding further conversation on the topic.

The argument itself is a classic case of a derailed debate. Both parties rant and pontificate rather than discuss; both parties engage in personal attacks rather than grapple with each other's substantive points. Daisy's polemic uses rhetorical questions: "Why is it that the few people I've met who aren't against this crappy war are all over forty? What is it about getting old? Can't get close to death soon enough?"[144] The reversion to family role is another indication of the conversation coming off the rails, as the published poet here resorts to childish diction, not least in the mild curse "crappy". Perowne similarly takes on the well-worn attitude of the droaning, lecturing parent in his retort:

> Why else are you all singing and dancing in the park? The genocide and torture, the mass graves, the security apparatus, the criminal totalitarian state – the iPod generation doesn't want to know. Let nothing come between them and their ecstasy clubbing and cheap flights and reality TV. But it will, if we do nothing. You think you're all lovely and gentle and blameless, but the religious nazis loathe you.[145]

The second sentence in Perowne's quotation only lists the horrors of the regime in Iraq, just as Daisy only mentions the coming war. The two utterances thus situate the speakers poles apart, and everything else about their discourse indicates the coming failure to engage with each other's perspective. Although this is a clear

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[143] McEwan, *Saturday*, 189.

[144] McEwan, *Saturday*, 191.

[145] Ibid.

case of a debate gone wrong, it actually indicates rather well the potential of debate in its presentation of the polar opposite of constructive debate. The familial roles they both take on are significant as reminders that debate is performative: it involves taking on the role of the debater, whereas these roles that are the direct relation Henry and Daisy Perowne normally have towards each other are yet another failure in terms of following the norms of debate. The idea of debate as a kind of game is implied here too: the parent-child roles are simply inappropriate for the activity. The features of this exchange are exactly antithetical to the conventional ideals of liberal debate, ideals which are therefore quite apparent in their absence. Furthermore, the two utterances do locate the substantive discussion points that might have been explored, if only the interpersonal aspects of the conversation had been better managed. Finally, the initial positioning of the speakers before the attempted debate already alerts the reader to the conventions to which they might have adhered. If the two parties had taken their cue from the tentativeness of the initial positioning, and carried with them an attitude of reasonable doubt into their discussion, things might have been different, the presentation of the episode seems to imply.

One aspect of the existing criticism of *Saturday* that I find relates closely to my own is the work done on McEwan's own attitude to the themes of his novel. Richard Brown notes McEwan's preface to his 1989 *A Move Abroad* as relevant to reading *Saturday*: "The uneasy state of mind itself *becomes* the political and the political is experienced as an uneasy state of mind in his work."[146] On the specific issue of the Iraq War, Brown refers to an interview McEwan gave on the *South Bank Show* in 2005 in which he said that "he had not been on the march himself and that he was, he thought, about 55 per cent against the war".[147] The stress I lay on doubt in my interpretation of the novel is at least something that characterises the thinking of its author in some of his public pronouncements on his writing. As I said in my introduction, my reading does not, indeed cannot, aim to offer a definitive reading of authorial intention, but my hope is to offer a reading that is not patently at odds with it, insofar as it is known.

At first glance, the failed debate between father and daughter seems to have grave implications for any transformative prescription the novel might be seen to offer in relation to the social situation in the period of liberal ascendancy. The challenges in a global environment are laid bare by a novel that draws attention in Baxter, the men in the square and the Iraq war protest, to the complex aspects of an urban gang culture and underclass, issues of discrimination and prejudice fuelled by international political tensions and terrorism, and to international conflicts and intranational divisions between generations respectively. The novel seems

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[146] Brown, "Politics," 81.

[147] Brown, "Politics," 88.

to frame a question about whether dialogue can in fact bridge these divisions and allow for a sociality that is collaborative and mutually constructive in forming personal and social identities, but it also asks what else there is to do as a practical matter if not that. The failure of Perowne's particular debate with Daisy is not necessarily a rejection of debate itself. The liberal philosopher Bertrand Russell argues in *Problems of Philosophy* that doubt is an ethical concept that is not absolute scepticism:

> … from blank doubt, no arguments can begin. Hence the criticism of knowledge which philosophy employs must not be of this destructive kind, if any result is to be achieved … Descartes' "methodical doubt", with which modern philosophy began, is not of this kind … His "methodical doubt" consisted in doubting whatever seemed doubtful; in pausing, with each apparent piece of knowledge, to ask himself whether, on reflection, he could feel certain that he really knew it.[148]

Russell lays the stress on the practical process of doubting, akin to Bakhtin's dialogue as a processual means of changing the self. The constructive interpretation of *Saturday* arrived at in the reading process of this thesis identifies very clearly the social dangers of failing to engage in dialogue. If the chronotopic reading positioned two key time-spaces in relation to one another, the home and the street, a Rawlsian concentration of that reading adds a third: the debate chamber. This is the bridging device that might bring identity and heterogeneity, the ideas signified respectively by the first two time-spaces, together. The novel indicates how debate fails, but it also as a result quite clearly indicates how it might succeed: through a focus on the appropriate rules of and attitudes for debate and how these might improve its chances of generating meaningful and durable change. The novel certainly seems nervous about the likely success of such ventures, but that does not negate their urgency as an attempt to better the fabric of the social situation all around the world. The ready adaptability of the Perowne family living room into a debate chamber and back into a living room implies both these aspects of debate and its potential in the world. On the one hand, it is fragile and easily derailed, but on the other, it is always an option, provided that sufficient good will and imagination are to be found in potential participants. It follows that the reparation dilemma at the heart of this chronotopic reading of *Saturday* can in principle be resolved by debate because it is a respectful and collaborative exercise in mutually beneficial identity reconstruction. In this sense, *Saturday* is, if not

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[148] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959): 87.

visionary in the ontological sense of describing a better world, visionary in the sense of imagining the dynamic potential for a direction of travel that is dialogic in the best sense of the word.

# Chapter Two

## Key critical contexts for *Falling Man*

There is a remarkable degree of consensus in the critical commentary on *Falling Man* that the two preoccupations that must be accounted for in reading this novel are its meditations on existential questions and its response to the historical situation after 9/11. Within that frame, however, there are four distinct strands of discussion I will explore in relation to my own reading of the novel here. Some critics have read the novel as moving from the personal existential discussion to the historical situation, seeing the novel as moving on an outward trajectory to some social reflection; others have made the inverse observation, reading the novel as moving from the historical situation to a finally inward and personal reflection; there have been critics who have seen the aesthetic reflexivity of the novel as its most significant gesture; finally, there are those who see its grappling with the relations between the United States and the West more broadly on the one hand and the rest of the world or Muslim-majority nations specifically on the other hand as the most important area of speculation in the text. My own reading is most closely aligned with the first group of critics, but it relates to all the other three as well. Critics vary in their methods, with some reading *Falling Man* in light of particular philosophers or philosophical movements, some comparing its literary artistic method with approaches in other arts, some concentrating on its situation in certain literary traditions and still others concentrating on political commentary in the period and *Falling Man*'s engagement with it. My own method is most like the first of these, although some of the insights of the others are corroborated by my reading as well.

One approach to reading the novel as following an outward movement from the personal to the social is well illustrated by Marc Schuster, who argues that *Falling Man* traces the difficult oscillation between an embrace of an exposed hyperreal modernity and a rejection thereof in light of the clarifying and terrifying event of 9/11.[149] He elaborates:

> Yet even if the West has responded to the tragedy of September 11 by constructing bigger and better zones of purged sensation so that we all might avoid the seemingly unbearable

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[149] Marc Schuster, "Creating a Structure out of Willful Trivia: *Falling Man* and the Unbearable Ambivalence of Being," in *Don DeLillo, Jean Baudrillard, and the Consumer Conundrum* (Youngstown: Cambria Press, 2008): 191-203.

> ambivalence of living in the desert Zizek describes, art continues to remind us that the event occurred and that the desert remains.[150]

Both Schuster's association of the personal with the idea of retreat and his association of the artistic with the return to facing the social reality are cognitive processes that will be important in my own reading of the novel in this chapter, and they are recurrent ideas in other treatments of the novel as well. The idea of realising the inadequacy of existing social arrangements while struggling with this realisation is articulated in a slightly different manner by Linda Kauffman. Kauffman argues that in *Falling Man*, DeLillo ties the personal and the political together in terms of struggling with a growing awareness of inadequacy in institutions and cultural myths in the face of a complex and dangerous world. Beginning with "the repression of memory and the memory of repression," Kauffman sees what is specifically repressed as follows: "But we are all, DeLillo suggests, in free fall. The plots, myths, institutions we once relied on to provide meaning and purpose are suspended."[151] The critic tracing an outward trajectory in the novel from the personal to the social who is most in line with my own reading is Catherine Morley. Morley argues that an apparent concern in the novel with the domestic belies a subtle engagement with a wider context. The intimate and personal perspectives of the protagonists imagined as processing political events tie in with the events and other perspectives and experiences on those events to build a larger picture of engagement. Noting in particular the inclusion of the narrative of the attacker Hammad with those of Lianne and Keith, Morley argues in relation to the idea of counter-histories that it is "a desire to salvage the small, fragmentary human stories which alone can illuminate the wider picture".[152] Morley's idea of the novel as mapping the personal in order to suggest some constructive engagement with the social and its future, albeit suggestively as a matter of potential, rather than the largely critical engagement with the social that Kauffman and Schuster describe, is rather like my own engagement with the novel's concentration on dialogic spaces and finally with spaces of

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150 Schuster, "Structure," 202.

151 Linda S. Kauffman, "The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo's 'In The Ruins of The Future,' 'Baader-Meinhof,' and *Falling Man*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 353 and 369 respectively.

152 Catherine Morley, "How Do We Write about This? The Domestic and the Global in the Post-9/11 Novel," *Journal of American Studies* 45, no. 4 (November 2011): 724.

debate, where the potential for building durable personal identities with potential for also constructing social bonds is the structural configuration of the narrative my reading offers.[153]

Critics who trace an inward trajectory in the novel see its dramatic opening chapter detailing the aftermath of the attack as catalysing a process that largely concerns interiority in initially dealing with trauma and ultimately engaging in personal reflections on modes of living. Katrina Harack lays great weight on the somatic in this process in relation to the protagonist Lianne in particular: "Only after this return to her body is Lianne ready to face the world again, as herself, not a mirror of someone else."[154] Harack's stress on personal agency and empowerment as the novel's final imaginative offering compares and contrasts with two critics who choose to explore existential concerns in the novel. Taking a much more cautious approach to agency, Banu Helvacioglu argues that *Falling Man* concerns ways of thinking about and failing to think about death. The cognitive impasses that arise in efforts to consider mortality are a focus of the humour and absurdity that the novel's imaginative resources concentrate on presenting. Helvacioglu gives as an example of an interpretive blank the phrase "organic shrapnel" used to describe the material of dead bodies that is part of the explosive debris of the attacks, a phrase that recurs in the novel.[155] Martina Pavlíková sees the novel's engagement with Kierkegaard as principally offering the unlikely emergence of a hopeful mode of living if the existential pain of the moment can be faced and overcome. Like Harack, Pavlíková concentrates on Lianne and her own confrontation with dismay at human existence as a necessary stage in the process towards a more hopeful mode of living.[156] My own reading of *Falling Man* sees the precise interpretation the novel yields when read through the Bakhtinian-Rawlsian framework of this thesis as one in which the observer status in a debate suggests the linking of personal identity formation processes and social bonds of debate in a dynamic manner, and this contribution, like Harack's and Pavlíková's, is most clearly drawn from

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[153] A critic who takes yet another different approach to the question of future social change is Aaron Mauro, who stresses the pause for reflection as implying the possibility of change. Mauro argues:

> By taking advantage of the symbolic possibilities inherent in an anonymous falling figure, the horror of the image is thus contained and metonymically renamed as a fictional performance artist, David Janiak. This easy reiteration of the falling man suspends Lianne's confrontation with the horror of the image until it can be understood (Aaron Mauro, "The Languishing of the Falling Man: Don DeLillo and Jonathan Safran Foer's Photographic History of 9/11," *Modern Fiction Studies* 57, no. 3 [Fall 2011]: 595).

[154] Katrina Harack, "Embedded and Embodied Memories: Body, Space and Time in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and *Falling Man,*" *Contemporary Literature* 54, no. 2 (2013): 328.

[155] Banu Helvacioglu, "'Modern Death' in Don DeLillo: A Parody of Life?" *Mosaic* 48, no. 2 (2015): 190.

[156] Pavlíková argues: "DeLillo thus invites his readers to a Kierkegaardian *leap of faith* – a leap out of one's personal apocalyptic crisis into a new state of being; out of one's dread and despair into a new ethical or possibly even spiritual dimension" (Martina Pavlíková, "Kierkegaard's Reflection in Don DeLillo's Novel *Falling Man*," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 13, no. 1 [February 2017]: 22).

Lianne's own journey of recovery after 9/11 and its stress on humility leading to that observer status. In my tracing of time-spaces in the novel that largely present as deathly environments to be resisted before any possibility of hope can be imagined, my reading in its processes agrees to a large extent with Helvacioglu as well.

Among critics who concentrate on aesthetic reflexivity in *Falling Man*, two reader-focused approaches are closely related. Joseph Conte centralises the Falling Man performer as a response to 9/11 as seen through the eyes of Lianne, and in this way the novel centres the affective and interpretive response to 9/11 in us as readers as its centre of imaginative concentration. Conte argues: "When we regard the literary figure of Falling Man in DeLillo's novel, we are invited to consider his performance art as rhetorical persuasion."[157] This address to the reader, invited to experience the novel as Lianne experiences the Falling Man artist, is made temporal in Rachel Falconer's reading of the novel. Like Conte, Falconer focuses on how Lianne's cognition is affected by the Falling Man artist, who sharpens her perception as "the thought of the falling man 'pierces' her mind and heart".[158] Falconer stresses the cognitive process as one in which duration is significant as she argues that "both *Paradise Lost* and *Falling Man* are works about the importance of the second and third glance, where a new mode of perception develops out of the very awareness of human finitude".[159] A critic who perceives aesthetic reflexivity in the novel not principally in the presence of performance art in the literary text but in visual art's presence there is Hamilton Carroll. He stresses the intertextual relation between paintings and television news images of 9/11 as generating meaning for Lianne:

> Perception provides meaning through the agency of memory. As Lianne watches the Twin Towers' destruction over and over again on television, she provides context for the painting. In turn, the painting's latent content becomes visible as September 11 gives it meaning external to itself.[160]

Carroll places significance on memory here and thus perceives a similar concentration on process and development in understanding to Conte and Falconer. My own reading relates, by different lights, to this

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[157] Joseph M. Conte, "Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and the Age of Terror," *Modern Fiction Studies* 57, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 581.

[158] Rachel Falconer, "Is There Freedom Afterwards? A Dialogue between *Paradise Lost* and DeLillo's *Falling Man*," *Milton Studies* 53 (2012): 251.

[159] Falconer, "Freedom," 255.

[160] Hamilton Carroll, "'Like Nothing in this Life': September 11 and the Limits of Representation in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*," *Studies in American Fiction* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 126.

durational point in two respects. My concentration on the dialogic processes of identity in the time-spaces of the novel draws out in its reparation dilemma a crisis in liberal identity in the protagonists Lianne and Keith, and the reciprocal potential in the observer role in debates, which can become participatory, draws out the ongoing dialogic influence of personal identity formation and the formation of social bonds on one another.

A final perspective on the novel to which I will draw attention here as relevant to my own reading is that of critics who focus on the political context of the novel, and in particular the novel's international dimension in its treatment of the attack itself on 9/11. John Carlos Rowe laments what he sees as DeLillo's failure to escape from a national frame of reference in treating of international and transnational matters. He argues:

> That one of our most powerful social critics and insightful writers could be so captured and captivated by the national form is another reason why we so desperately need ways of thinking beyond the nation to theorize anew the political, economic, and human relations of a genuinely global order of things.[161]

Agreeing on the need for thinking across borders but disagreeing on DeLillo's lack of success, Aaron Derosa discusses Western novels like *Falling Man* in terms of their response to a binary discourse of self and other, or home and terrorist, after 9/11. He sees *Falling Man* complicating such a discourse in its presentation of 9/11 attacker Hammad, whose relative passivity in relation to the historical situation of the novel prevents us from reading him as a simple antagonist of a stereotypical kind. Derosa notes particularly: "While others decry the hypocritical Americans or the deceptive Jews, Hammad does not seem to participate in these discussions."[162] Derosa's perception of Hammad as an observer (and thus linked to rather than detached from Lianne and Keith's own relation to their surroundings after 9/11) is rather like my own detection of his presentation's time-spaces as concerned with notions of freedom and captivity, and how this presentation is mirrored in the time-spaces inhabited by Lianne and Keith, who are searching for ways of forming durable personal liberal identities and social bonds after 9/11. I

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161 John C. Rowe, "Global Horizons in *Falling Man*," in *Don DeLillo: Mao II, Underworld, Falling Man*, edited by Stacey Olster (London; New York: Continuum, 2011): 134.

162 Aaron Derosa, "Alterity and the Radical Other in Post-9/11 Fiction: DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Walter's *The Zero*," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 69, no. 3 (Autumn 2013): 166.

agree with Rowe that open and accommodating visions in art are to be welcomed, but like Derosa, I see *Falling Man* as striving towards that very goal.

## *Falling Man*: tensions in a time of liberal anxiety

In *Falling Man*, New York businessman Keith Neudecker is working in the twin towers when the 9/11 attack happens. He tries to recover from the traumatic event with his estranged wife Lianne and son Justin, but increasingly he finds himself drifting away from them, for a time engaging in an affair with a woman named Florence, before eventually spending more and more time gambling in casinos. Meanwhile, Lianne works in a dementia support group and attends to her son Justin and mother Nina in trying to adjust to the shock of the attack. She also encounters the Falling Man performance artist and tries to make sense of what she feels in seeing his act and art. Whether Keith and Lianne finally manage to repair their relationship is left unresolved. The novel also traces the thoughts of a man named Hammad, one of the attackers on 9/11, right up to the moment when his plane hits the skyscraper in which Keith works, and precipitates the narrative events that follow.

Perhaps more than any novel in this corpus, with the possible exception of *Disgrace*, the absence of conventional narrative events as plot movers is notable in *Falling Man*. The absence of a climactic event and a resolution in particular are striking. Perhaps this absence, with the attendant implication of dissipation rather than action, has led some critics to read both DeLillo and Coetzee's novels as exemplars of a kind of postmodern gloom. One aspect of postmodern thought that will be relevant to the discussion in this chapter is the literary focus of the Frankfurt School. In his 2016 book *What is a World?* Pheng Cheah distinguishes between the approach of Lukács and the Frankfurt School. Lukàcs, as we have seen in our introduction, saw literature as having the ability to construct ideas of the world, particularly through the category of the type. On the other hand, the Frankfurt School, Cheah argues, preferred to focus on "the ability of art to negate the existing world and its ideology".[163] This principle of negation will be instructive in reading *Falling Man*. In *The Western Canon*, Harold Bloom notes how Adorno read Beckett's *Endgame* as a contest "between consciousness and death,"[164] a classic postmodern formulation on a classic postmodern work. Banu Helvacioglu's "'Modern Death' in Don DeLillo: A Parody of Life?", which I have already mentioned, in

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[163] Pheng Cheah, *What is a World?* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2016): 81.

[164] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994): 511.

particular focuses on a morbid reading of *Falling Man* also. However, my chronotopic reading of the novel has a slightly different story to tell.

*Falling Man* differs from *Saturday* and *Disgrace* in having two protagonists rather than one. The third person narration focalizes the perspectives of an estranged husband and wife, Keith and Lianne, with the extent of the connection and distance between them an important part of the interpretive exercise of chronotopic reading. Why this should be the case is of course partly a matter of convention. The contrast (but also the comparison) between *Falling Man* and *Saturday* is well framed in one sense by Bakhtin's generic formulation of what he called the family novel, with Dickens as its exemplar, already discussed in the previous chapter. If the idyllic, warm pockets of human kindness Bakhtin detected in Dickens are also apparent in the *Saturday* family home, it is the concentration on the family home as a potential unity failing to coalesce that is most striking in *Falling Man*. That is not to say that the idea of a family home is unimportant in DeLillo's novel. The expectation of such a unity is an important part of the novel's method, but so is the frustration of that expectation.

## Spaces of repair: from explosion to failure

*Falling Man* begins with a remarkable opening chapter. It is chronotopically distinct from anything else in the novel. Nonetheless, it is a public space. This, though, is not public in the distinct sense that Bakhtin identifies in the ancient Greek biography, in which a model of sociality is the focus. Rather, it is a public chaos in which all elements, human and material, are thrown together in the streets in the aftermath of the collapse of the burning towers. The link between *Falling Man* and Milton's epic *Paradise Lost* has been made before. Rachel Falconer's 2012 article "Is There Freedom Afterwards?"[165] draws attention to the connection in relation particularly to Lianne's later reaction to a newspaper photograph of the Falling Man performance artist as a sort of Lucifer figure: "This picture burned a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, he was a falling angel and his beauty was horrific."[166] However, I am struck by the evocation of a Miltonian cosmos of chaos in the opening chapter of *Falling Man*. The cosmological scale is established early: "It was not a street anymore, but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night."[167] The turbulence is detailed in a myriad of images: "There were shoes discarded in the street, handbags and laptops, a man

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[165] Falconer, " Freedom," 251.

[166] Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (London: Picador, 2007): 222.

[167] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 3.

seated on the sidewalk coughing up blood. Paper cups went bouncing oddly by."[168] All of these observations are registered from the perspective of Keith's focalization, as he wanders in a daze away from the collapsed building. However, the surprising and momentary switch of perspective to that of a man who picks Keith up and drives him to Lianne's apartment registers the particular focus on chaos in the chapter: "The driver leaned towards the window on the passenger's side and examined what he saw, a man scaled in ash, in pulverized matter."[169] The weight of the final word draws attention to the ambiguity in the word chaos, which refers both to a space of seeming arbitrariness and the formless matter before the universe. This latter sense catalyses the narrative, as everything that comes after the first chapter is about how the centripetal forces of identity might cohere after the centrifugal force of this attack.

Lianne's apartment takes its chronotopic meaning in contrast to this blasted public space that opens the narrative. Remembering the focus on the model of sociality in the conception of the chronotope I outlined in the introduction, it is worth revisiting the private to public spectrum Bakhtin envisaged in his survey of the ancient Greek genres. The Greek biography will be remembered as characterised by its sense of unity in contrast to the sealed private spaces of the adventure novel of everyday life. The unity came from the sense of outwardness, as the public nature of the square allowed for a free and open exchange of ideas as a model of sociality. DeLillo's opening chapter creates even more of a unity in a sense, but not in any human dialogic manner, as human and material are thrown together to create a sense of chaos. Similarly, when reading *Falling Man* with chronotopic attention, it is tempting to think of Lianne's apartment as pushing beyond the private space model of sociality Bakhtin saw in the adventure novel of everyday life all the way back to the adventure time novel emptiness of space, in which the chronotope was purely plot-driven and devoid of sociality or identity formation. The chronotopic contrast between the opening and second time-spaces could not be more stark as a matter of chronotopic attention to the model of sociality presented in the novel. Aside from their physical proximity, Lianne and Keith have no real intimacy in the aftermath of the attack. This is registered in part as a matter of the absence of the sex that used to be a prominent feature of their relationship. Instead, Lianne "liked the spaces he made. She liked dressing in front of him."[170] This unusual period is a silence, in which discussion of the ending of their relationship before the attack is foregone in favour of the reassuring familiarity of older habits. The empty space between them is the focus, and the attendant blankness this implies brings the hope of recuperation after trauma, but it also implies, especially in

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[168] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 4.

[169] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 6.

[170] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 18.

hindsight when the rest of the narrative has been encountered, an instinctive retreat from chaos to its opposite: order.

As this elemental, post-apocalyptic sense of recovery from trauma fades and the rhythms of daily life return, the apartment continues to be a central time-space for the rest of the narrative, but one of diminishing importance. The idea of the apartment as a private space in the sense Bakhtin envisaged in the adventure novel of everyday life returns as well, with the model of sociality that implies. The distance between Keith and Lianne becomes apparent quite quickly. For Lianne, there is hope in their resumed sex life, albeit a knowing and highly qualified hope. She reflects after they first have sex: "It was back there somewhere, a laying open of bodies but also of time, the only interval she'd known in these days and nights that was not forced or distorted, hemmed in by the press of events."[171] Even if it is fleeting, what Lianne identifies is the liberating potential of this sexual intimacy as a kind of sociality, with the possibility for healing implied in its mutual openness. The tentativeness of this feeling is signalled in the emphasis on the pastness of the event, but also in the negative formulation of expressing the sensation as one of not feeling trapped or caged in any way rather than as a positive assertion of freedom. Keith's impression of living together again as registered in the narrative is quite different. His characteristically brief comment when pressed in conversation for openness is easy to read with heavy irony: "We're ready to sink into our little lives."[172] The alliterative final phrase and the alarming verb "sink", with its suggestion of drowning, both alert the reader to what Keith sees as the potential for the relationship quite in the opposite direction to liberation. He sees their relationship as a diminution of life.

The impression that hope in the apartment time-space is at best highly qualified continues as the narrative progresses. In a chapter in which the two spend most of the time not interacting but rather reading, watching the television or interacting with their son Justin, the one moment of warmth between them (with the implication that sex follows) occurs because of their continued failure to move past the events of 9/11, as Keith makes Lianne laugh in recognition when he refers to "the other life,"[173] by which he means their life before the attack. The suggestion here seems to be that only in their ability to recuperate a memory of life before the new reality can they achieve intimacy and warmth; this does not seem tenable as a basis for shared living in the future.

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[171] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 69.

[172] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 75.

[173] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 131.

The last scene in which the two are together in the apartment sees Keith arrive at a reflection that appears to sever the connection between them entirely: "She wanted to be safe and he didn't."[174] The extent to which the reader is encouraged to share this reflection is debatable and one I will revisit; however, for the purposes of defining the time-space of the apartment, the difficulty of the model of sociality it offers is once again to the fore as the narrative draws to a close. Earlier, I mentioned the Frankfurt School and their characteristic formulation of literary potential, in Cheah's estimation, as a negation of the world as it operates. Postmodern gloom was also mentioned earlier in this chapter. The potential for family life appears in the presentation of the apartment time-space to be a largely thwarted or negated one.[175] That the focus is on family life and its potential is apparent in the relationship of estranged marriage, but also in the presence of Justin, their child, in the apartment. Keith's relationship with Justin, which at times in the narrative was seen to be a beneficial one to the child, is at its close characterised by division and a growing resentment from Justin at his father's prolonged absences: "[Justin] was like a pitching machine with hair and teeth, register set to peak velocity. Keith was amused, then impressed, then puzzled."[176] The sort of somatic ritual that Justin and Keith engaged in constructively previously, pitching and catching a baseball in this case, here has another dimension to it. It is the inarticulacy and failure of dialogue that the somatic ritual implies that is to the fore, not least in Keith's apparent failure to interpret Justin's attitude, and once again the negation of family life is the focus of the time-space. In this chronotopic reading, I cannot quite agree with Katrina Harack in her 2013 article on *Falling Man* "Embedded and embodied memories" that "we might begin to recuperate identity through the body and a renewed relationship to place".[177] The novel does show that the somatic has potential, but the need for dialogue is achingly apparent in its absence, particularly here.

Some interpretive comment on the time-space of home is now appropriate. As a matter of reader recognition, the focus on Keith, Lianne and Justin forms the expectation of the traditional nuclear family. Perhaps the most prominent article to locate the significance of the domestic in *Falling Man* is Catherine Morley's 2011 "How Do We Write about This?" in which she argues:

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[174] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 216.

[175] Some reviewers criticised the novel on these grounds. Adam Mars-Jones felt the novel "gives the ... impression of having no kernel inside its various shells" (Adam Mars-Jones, "As His World Came Tumbling Down," *The Guardian*, 2007, www.guardian.com/books/2007/may/13/fiction.dondelilllo/ [accessed August 13, 2019]). By the end of this chapter, I aim to have challenged that judgement.

[176] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 213.

[177] Harack, "Memories," 332.

> The American state-of-the-nation novel has always taken *e pluribus unum* as its structural mechanism, pinning the story of the evolving nation to the small-scale dramas of individuals and families. And in the twenty-first century, as in centuries past, that seems unlikely to change.[178]

The liberalism of the Western tradition is indicated also in the freedom Lianne tentatively hopes for in the renewal of this bond. In fact, Lianne and Keith both agree that freedom is the goal of living well; it is their assessment of the potential for it in living together in which they disagree. Lianne and Keith are both professionals living in New York. In many ways, they represent the same sort of liberal international middle class that Perowne does in *Saturday*.

However, the failure of this sort of liberal sociality to generate a stable personal identity, except initially in overcoming the immediate shock of the 9/11 attack, appears to ask quite different questions of liberalism than our analysis of Perowne's home space in *Saturday* did. 9/11 is presented in *Falling Man* as an attack on Western values, and by extension the international liberal network that transmits those values. This is made particularly apparent through the character named Martin Ridnour, Lianne's mother Nina's partner. Lianne during one of Martin's arguments with Nina wonders about Martin making connections between "lost lands, failed states, foreign intervention, money, empire, oil, the narcissistic heart of the West".[179] Martin himself interprets 9/11 in terms of global power: "Weren't the towers built as fantasies of wealth and power that would one day become fantasies of destruction?"[180] The crisis in the family as a guarantor of identity formation seems to imply a crisis in liberal identity, values and agency as well, both locally and internationally. This crisis is situated as a post-9/11 realisation that the world is changed. It would appear on this reading that the potency of the attack suggests that the heterogeneity of the world outside the international liberal network has destabilised that network's sense of purpose and identity. However, the novel moves in other directions than this focus on the apartment time-space would suggest.

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[178] Morley, "How?" 731.

[179] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 113.

[180] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 116.

## The reparation dilemma: the maze and belief in the exit

In *Saturday*, I argued that the success of the home space as a space of repair for the construction of a stable and self-confident liberal identity meant that the outside world presented itself as a shock to this stability. In *Falling Man*, the chronotopic process is different. The failure of the potential home space of the apartment as a space of repair leads the protagonists to wander outward in search of alternative spaces of repair, as they try to settle on an identity that they can maintain. It is the tracing of this search that will occupy this next part of the chapter and conclude the constructive chronotopic reading of *Falling Man*. Keith and Lianne engage in quite different searches, and the importance of this separation, and the extent of it, will be a matter to revisit later on in the chapter. First, I will take the chronotopic reading of each in turn, starting with Keith.

Keith's search is anchored in memories of a kind of sociality he did enjoy before the attack of 9/11. The poker nights Keith and his colleagues engaged in are centred by Keith himself: "The poker games were at Keith's place, where the poker table was."[181] In a highly associative passage, DeLillo deploys some powerful rhetoric: "There were six players, the regulars, Wednesday nights, the business writer, the adman, the mortgage broker and so on, men rolling their shoulders, hoisting their balls, ready to sit, game-faced, testing the forces that govern events."[182] The procession of non-finite clauses extending the sentence ties together masculinity, business and power in a fascinatingly complex tone of seriousness and mirth. The sanctity of this space for these men is signalled by Keith recalling a story Martin told him about a group of poker playing men who were buried together, a story that Keith's poker group revered: "It was a beautiful story about friendship and the transcendent effects of unremarkable habit."[183] Spaces of repair are, as we noted in *Saturday*, spaces of relatively controlled conditions in which an identity can form, and the combination of the rules-governed activity of poker and conviviality of masculine jocularity allows for just such an identity formation for Keith. That this model of sociality has been brought to an end for Keith by 9/11 is signalled in various ways by the end of the narrative. Rumsey, one of Keith's poker players and apparently his closest friend, died in Keith's arms in the tower on 9/11, the novel's ending reveals. Also, Keith returns alone to his apartment near the site of the attack once to see its ruined state. In one remarkable moment standing in the derelict building, the narrative registers: "He said, 'I'm standing here,' and then,

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[181] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 96.

[182] Ibid.

[183] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 99.

louder, 'I'm standing here.'"[184] All that Keith is likely to hear at this point is his own echo, and this notion establishes the time-space patterning of his trajectory in the novel.

Keith's increasing tendency is to spend time in casinos in Las Vegas and Atlantic City as the novel progresses. Here, he replicates the rules-governed activity of the poker nights but without the conviviality. The absorption that suggests addiction is what is emphasised as Keith observes a man watching horse races on a television: "He was otherwise motionless. The lean was all there was."[185] The mechanical and cold routine is to the fore in his watching a woman play poker: "There was nothing outside the game but faded space. She blinked and called, blinked and folded."[186] There is a sad ambivalence in Keith's apparent attitude in the narrative's last references to him in the sports bar of a casino. He seems to recognise the impossibility of the sociality he once knew while still yearning for a pale imitation of it, at least as an observer. Everything in the sports bar "happened remotely, even the nearest noise"[187] while he "liked listening to the visceral burst, men on their feet, calling out, a rough salvo of voices that brought heat and open emotion to the soft pall of the room".[188] This rather melancholic pretence of sociality is a bloodless affair. In this light, the calming chronotopic description of the casino environment, ostensibly akin to Lianne's apartment, is but a mockery of recovery. Instead, the reparation dilemma that we observed in *Saturday* takes a particularly gloomy turn here, as the attempt to recreate the identity Keith enjoyed before 9/11 simply leads him into an inward gloom rather than outward into any sort of model of dialogic sociality that might allow him an identity to embrace with enthusiasm. The social time-space for Keith is then characterised by a kind of chronotopic echoing, in which the features of the model of sociality that were strong in an initial time-space are lost and an attempt is made to recreate them that succeeds only in establishing a pale imitation, a diminution of life, in subsequent time-spaces of a similar kind.

The poker night also suggests other associations in the novel, particularly in its business dimension. In his short-lived affair with a woman named Florence who also escaped from the towers on the day of the attack, he mentions that he worked in the tower for a company called Royer Properties, adding that "[we] were Royer and Stans. Then Stans got indicted."[189] In the same conversation, Florence remembers a moment

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[184] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 27.

[185] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 189.

[186] Ibid.

[187] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 211.

[188] Ibid.

[189] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 53.

on the stairs as people tried to evacuate the building: "This is where bottles of water were passed up the line from somewhere below, and soft drinks, and people were even joking a little, the equity traders."[190] The intersection of masculinity, business and power is again made in reference to the equity traders in this last reference, and corruption therein is implied in the changes at Royer Properties.

The question of interpretation is worth addressing at this point. Keith's chronotopic trajectory accentuates two particular aspects of liberalism: its economic dimension and its masculine social dimension, with an interesting intersectionality between these two dimensions. Liberalism in its economic dimension is of course associated with the theory and practice of capitalism, and there is a good deal of work in the academy focused on a critique of capitalism found in literature through a Marxist lens. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's work in their 2000 book *Empire* focuses in particular on the nature of multinational corporations in the period I have designated the period of liberal ascendancy. Their argument locates global power increasingly in these multinational corporations, which bypass the sovereignty that did exist to a greater extent in nation states in previous generations.[191]

However, there is a story within liberalism itself that might account more closely for what Keith's chronotopic trajectory in the novel represents as an economic matter. In the period after World War Two, the postwar consensus was a term used to describe the Keynesian, social democratic liberal capitalism that reigned in the Western governments of that generation. The transition within liberalism to a more laissez-faire, deregulating and small government model of capitalism from the 1980s with Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom in particular led many commentators to notice that the economic growth that was attained in the period was, unlike the growth in the earlier postwar years, concentrated in the fortunes of the wealthiest, with an attendant growth in income inequality.[192] A chronotopic reading of *Falling Man* appears to reveal an interesting relationship between these two stories. As a matter in the first instance of values and identity formation, Keith's values are shown to be akin to those

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[190] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 56.

[191] Hardt and Negri argue:

> With the decline of national boundaries, the world market is liberated from the kind of binary divisions that nation-states had imposed, and in this new free space a myriad of differences appears. These differences of course do not play freely across a smooth global space, but rather are regimented in global networks of power consisting of highly differentiated and mobile structures (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* [Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 2000]: 150-51).

[192] Tony Judt's *Ill Fares the Land* is a good example of a liberal history of the late twentieth century in the West that makes this argument for a decline in liberalism (Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010).

of the equity traders in the towers. In testing the forces that govern events in their poker nights, Keith and his colleagues appear to aspire, at least in play, to high-powered activity of the kind the equity traders, positioned at the summit of the business world by the novel, engage in. However, the impact of 9/11 in stripping away even the element of play in Keith's identity formation, while the novel refers to the remoteness of the equity traders, seems to draw attention to a widening gap between the chief beneficiaries of the economic model and the people who work within the model, sharing its values, but who increasingly find those values inadequate to their need for a personally and socially fulfilling identity. Furthermore, the extent of the detachment of the beneficiaries from those working lower down in the hierarchy appears considerable, not least in terms of recognition, emotional and otherwise. What the novel seems to do is to position itself within the liberal value system in order to point out its finite elasticity in terms of inequality. The vulnerability of many of its adherents relative to the invulnerability of its chief beneficiaries is a problem for the legitimacy of the value system. The provisional interpretation of *Falling Man* in relation to Keith's chronotopic trajectory appears to argue clearly for drawing attention to this vulnerability gap as the area for attention in making the liberal value system more legitimate. There is urgency in this observation, as Keith's spiralling life implies a network that is lost and deteriorating in its capacity for generating positive personal and social identities.

Lianne's chronotopic trajectory has some similarities but also differences. It can be divided into three phases: home, then entering into public spaces and finally returning home again. In the first home phase, Lianne's thwarted hopes of recovering a sense of freedom in the home model of sociality that Keith's return to her apartment after 9/11 might promise lead her to some rather disturbing efforts to establish a kind of home. One aspect concerns a woman named Elena in Lianne's apartment building and Lianne's building resentment and hostility toward that neighbour's music being played. The narrative focalizes Lianne interpreting "music located in Islamic tradition"[193] before confronting Elena in a manner that turns violent. Elena says the music gives peace and Lianne pushes her face while echoing her saying: "It gives you peace."[194] Lianne is described upon leaving as hearing "the sound of a solo lute from Turkey or Egypt or Kurdistan".[195] This dangerous and xenophobic reaction to a perceived intrusion in the quiet of the space of recovery of Lianne's apartment seems significant as well. The political reading in a post-9/11 context seems to address the domestic retreat inward that the United States might engage in, with an angry and retaliatory

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[193] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 67.

[194] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 120.

[195] Ibid.

outward move as a next step, not least in Lianne's sneering about Elena's claims about peace. The Iraq War build-up in the later part of the narrative sets the narrative frame as one that traces these political moves in the years after 9/11 with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. As a matter of sociality, the reparation dilemma here takes on a new sinister turn. Where Keith's journey traced an economic identity crisis in liberalism, Lianne's suggests an international identity crisis, as the foreign policy of liberal nations like the United States risks becoming reactionary.

This disturbing reading of domesticity in the novel is intensified by Lianne's aggressive handling of her son Justin's play with friends as they imagine a return of Bill Lawton (their mispronunciation of Bin Laden) to attack again. In interrogating one of Justin's friends, Katie, in the latter's home while her mother Isabel is distracted, Lianne is described startlingly holding Katie's head in place while she warns her not to continue to play these games: "She had her hands on Katie's face, cradling it, caging it, ear to ear."[196] As in the Elena episode, the overlapping of the domestic and the political implies a process of fearful inward retreat leading to violent lashing out, both as a matter of personal and social identity.

Like Keith, Lianne engages in an unsatisfying search through other time-spaces for the chance to repair her identity, including working with a dementia support group and visiting an art gallery. However, it is in public spaces that the novel indicates the potential for some sort of change in Lianne's identity. There are two particular public time-spaces that matter. The first of these is a protest against the Iraq War. Unlike Perowne in *Saturday*, Lianne is present at the protest in New York, along with her son Justin. This passage is foregrounded in opening the third part of the narrative, clearly some time after 9/11. The reading of Lianne as inward-looking and fearful is not disturbed in this passage, although Lianne begins to see this in herself:

> She was privileged, detached, self-involved, white. It was there in her face, educated, unknowing, scared. She felt all the bitter truth that stereotypes contain. The crowd was gifted at being a crowd. That was their truth. They were at home, she thought, in the wave of bodies, the compressed mass.[197]

If the narrative registers a potential for change, it is in Lianne's reaction to Justin in this environment. She reflects on Justin telling her that the sun is a star. The narrative registers a sense of wonder in Lianne considering the time of life at which one realises this astronomical truth: "It seemed a revelation, a fresh way

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[196] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 153.

[197] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 185.

to think about being who we are, the purest way and only finally unfolding, a kind of mystical shiver, an awakening."[198] What it is that so strikes Lianne about this observation is left unstated. Two thoughts suggest themselves to me: one is the humble one that this thought reminds us of our smallness as a species in the cosmos. The other is the idea of broadening one's horizons. This passage seems the beginning of a process of reconsidering the home space by the novel's ending.

The second public space that matters is the open area where Lianne unexpectedly sees the Falling Man artist in performance. The idea of shocking oneself out of inwardness is to the fore once again. Lianne imagines the rail commuters as she realises the Falling Man's intention to jump so that he is suspended in midair in his sprawling pose just as the train emerges from its tunnel: "There would be those aboard who see him standing and those who see him jump, all jarred out of their reveries or their newspapers or muttering stunned into their cell phones."[199] Reveries, newspapers and phones all contrast with the view out of the train window as a contrast between inwardness and the startling world outside in this moment, a microcosm of the novel's treatment of a traumatised liberal world order and its relationship to the outside world. Lianne cannot interpret what she has seen but tries to read the facial expression of another bystander watching. The man's "face showed a narrowing intensity of thought and possibility ... He had to learn how to see it correctly, find a crack in the world where it might fit."[200]

Lianne's public space encounters trouble her, and she is later found immersed in a newspaper article about David Janiak, the revealed identity of the Falling Man artist, where her *Paradise Lost*-evoking thought about his pose we already noted occurs in the narrative. Her final move in the narrative is towards the possibility of a home time-space again, with no promise of success in generating a stable identity, but with the potential for it suggested in one sense. Lianne's final attempt to find a space of repair in the novel consists of going to church. She finds it ultimately unsatisfying again: "God would de-create her and she was too small and tame to resist. That's why she was resisting now."[201] The stress is on the final sentence. What *Falling Man* traces chronotopically in Lianne that differs from Keith (and from Perowne in *Saturday* too) is an increasing amount of self-awareness about the reparation dilemma. Also unlike Keith, it is Lianne's humility in the first sentence and her recognition of her own capacity to be led against her best interests that afford her this insight.

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[198] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 187.

[199] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 164-65.

[200] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 168.

[201] DeLillo, *Falling Man* 235.

Earlier in the chapter, I mentioned Keith's concluding thought that Lianne wanted safety and he did not. In fact, the novel perfectly inverts that formulation by the end. Lianne sees the deathly potential in the various spaces of repair she explores and summons a perseverance to continue to explore because of her awareness of the danger. Her final thought is a familial one: "She was ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day, silver crossing blue."[202] The novel does not indicate whether Lianne's faith in this resolution is rewarded, but nor does it frustrate it. A chronotopic reading of *Falling Man* does then seem to argue for a potential in Lianne's approach, guided by reflections from her public encounters with difference. This approach increasingly navigates spaces of repair as the risky propositions they are. A self-awareness of this kind, allied with a spirit of perseverance and a hopefulness that Lianne had from the start, might allow for a better sort of personal and social identity formation in the home space than her life before these encounters and reflections allowed. The proposition as a model of sociality that a constructive chronotopic reading of *Falling Man* appears to offer is that the promise of the space of repair is best realised by a careful and considered negotiation between the restorative power of private spaces and the challenge of public encounters with difference as a means of generating a healthy identity in a changing world.

Whereas this negotiation occurs in an automatic or accidental manner in both *Saturday* and *Falling Man*, chronotopic reading makes the reader conscious of the value of this negotiation, and as a result the purposeful potential of selecting encounters for the challenge they bring to a settled identity as a means of reforming that identity becomes apparent to the reader. As in *Saturday*, this involves a distinction between the narrative and interpretive levels of understanding, as it is possible, even likely, that the co-protagonist Lianne will fail in availing herself of this opportunity. The potential of her self-awareness in relation to the reparation dilemma can be set against the doubtful potential of a parent-child relationship as a truly dialogic one that will suffice to construct an identity for Lianne. It is the chronotopic structure itself that draws attention to the value of the negotiation between private and public spaces and allows for a level of understanding of the text in the reader that exceeds the understanding of the protagonists within the text.

Before leaving the Bakhtinian reading of the novel, it is worth addressing the presentation of the 9/11 attacker Hammad in the novel. I read Hammad formally as the catalyst of the narrative, with his attack on the tower Keith works in initiating the opening chapter's chaos that precipitates everything that follows in terms of the identity formation that the chronotopic reading I have undertaken traces. Although *Falling Man* in no way minimises the horror of 9/11, and in fact devotes considerable artistic effort to representing the attack as

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[202] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 236.

one of shocking inhumanity as we have seen, the novel does use the narrative of Hammad to present heterogeneity from a liberal perspective in a similar manner to Baxter's presentation in *Saturday*. Hammad is the outsider to the liberal international network, as has already been made plain in my discussion of Martin's analysis of 9/11 as an attack on Western values. This is also true chronotopically, as Hammad's time-spaces contrast a sense of captivity and confinement in the West with a sense of freedom and transcendence while he trains in Afghanistan for his mission. In Germany, all of the spaces he inhabits are cramped. Even in a conversation in a doorway, the emphasis is on being closed in as rain falls outside: "He crossed his arms on his chest now, hands buried in armpits, and he listened to the older man's story."[203] This spatial experience of confinement is soon associated with a political confinement: "This is what they talked about, feeling crowded out by other cultures, other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital markets and foreign policies."[204] Later, when Hammad reflects while in the United States on his time in Afghanistan, where his resolve became fixed, the chronotopic emphasis is on feeling free: "This is where the landscape consumed him, waterfalls frozen in space, a sky that never ended."[205] Hammad helps to frame the narrative in a sense, as a reminder of the challenges to the liberal network that come from outside.

The presentation of Hammad has generated discussion in the academic commentary, with critics and supporters of this aspect of the novel. John Carlos Rowe in his 2011 "Global Horizons in *Falling Man"* argues that the novel "refuses to explore the possibility of any transvaluation from outside [the first-world system]"[206] and that the attackers are "represented as the nearly perfect opposite, the inevitable product, of Western ambiguity and doubt".[207] Catherine Morley on the other hand argues that in "bringing the two men together at the end of the novel, DeLillo implies the interconnectedness of East and West and the inevitable coalescence of cultures in a globalized world".[208] I see the Hammad narrative as stressing the challenges to the liberal network from outside, although I do not agree with Rowe that DeLillo is therefore guilty of dismissing transvaluation from outside the network. The chronotopic stress in Hammad's narrative is on a material contrast between confinement and freedom, which is in some ways quite similar to the search of Lianne and Keith for freedom, and so Rowe's interpretation of Hammad as a simple opposite looks mistaken.

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[203] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 77.

[204] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 80.

[205] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 172.

[206] Rowe, "Horizons," 128.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Morley, "How?" 724.

However, Hammad's full significance becomes clearer after exploring the Rawlsian part of the reading in this chapter. Having concluded the Bakhtinian reading of *Falling Man*, I now turn to this Rawlsian consideration of the novel.

## Detachment and debate

A time-space in the novel that seems relevant but is difficult to locate in a chronotopic reading of *Falling Man* is Lianne's mother Nina's apartment. However, Rawlsian public reason, with its stress on deliberation, does highlight it. The presentation of Nina's apartment is, though descriptive, not entirely unlike Lianne's apartment in its orderly and relatively empty quality. Lianne notes "art on the walls, painstakingly placed, and small bronze pieces on tables and bookshelves ... and ... it was ... hard not to whisper in such a place".[209] The impression Lianne has of her mother's apartment as more of an art gallery, and a spare one at that, rather than a home, helps to draw the reader's attention to some of the subtleties of its presentation and the model of sociality it might represent. Lianne returns to this space several times in the narrative, mainly to listen to the arguments Nina and her partner Martin Ridnour have about 9/11. Nina and Martin never succeed in convincing one another, generally arguing across one another with little effort to engage with each other's perspectives. A characteristic passage begins with Nina:

> '"It's sheer panic. They attack out of panic."
> "This much, yes, it may be true. Because they think the world is a disease. This world, this society, ours. A disease that is spreading," he said.
> "There are no goals they can hope to achieve. They're not liberating a people or casting out a dictator. Kill the innocent, only that."
> "They strike a blow to this country's dominance. They achieve this, to show how a great power can be vulnerable. A power that interferes, that occupies."[210]

Nina's spiritual and Martin's material points fail to interrelate in any way, with Nina constructing an impression of emotive and violent action in almost monologic fashion rather than responding to Martin, and Martin similarly constructing an impression of resistant reaction in monologic fashion. The turn taking of the

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[209] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 8-9.

[210] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 46.

conversation appears almost as an illusion in this case, or at best a polite formality obscuring the distance between the two perspectives.

Lianne remains silent for the most part. Her thoughts, however, remain focalised by the narrative. She reflects at one point: "What was she doing here? She was being a child, she thought."[211] This is a somewhat puzzling reflection. At first glance, it seems that Lianne admonishes herself for an insufficiently adult attitude here. She probably does intend precisely that at this early point in the narrative. However, I think chronotopic reading of the novel argues for a revised appraisal of this reflection by the narrative's end. There are some complicated interpersonal aspects to the interaction between Nina, Martin and Lianne that are worth unpicking. Lianne is Nina's daughter, and Lianne has great hope for the idea of family bonds, even when they are difficult as we have seen with Keith. When, after Nina's death, Lianne sees Martin one last time, he says of her: "You will always be a daughter, I think. First and always, this is what you are."[212] Martin, however, has ceased to be part of Lianne's life at this stage and has effectively departed from Nina's life since her terminal illness began. If Lianne has grown, it is partly in establishing a life independent of her mother. This is signalled in one sense by her tentative growth already traced in public encounters that led her away from a fixation on 9/11 and her mother's more reactionary politics. It is also signalled by her mother's death. Part of the more hopeful reading of Lianne's identity potential comes from her willingness to learn from the perspective of her son Justin, as we have seen. In this light, her self-appraisal as a child could have a different meaning. Lianne's humility as an aspect of her self-awareness could be the implication here, as the child-like sense of vulnerability and openness to new ideas are the attributes of a child that are in question.[213] Hammad's significance in this reading is linked to this conception of hopefulness for Lianne's future trajectory. Her positioning in the debate as an observer allows her to take in Martin's perspective, which matches the chronotopic presentation of Hammad. In this way, a fuller understanding of the complexity of the world is signalled in *Falling Man* as the potential gain of Lianne's humble willingness to listen.

What is Rawlsian about this is its situation in relation to a political debate. Lianne takes on the observer role and, if my reading of the implications of the child reference is right, this detached third party perspective is accorded value by the novel. Where *Saturday* drew attention to the importance of debate and

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[211] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 48.

[212] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 193.

[213] Another clue to a positive reading of a child-like state is in the improving effect Lianne observes Justin's toys having on her mother's rather severe apartment: "Justin's toys and games were scattered across the floor, subverting the timeless quality of the room, and this was nice, Lianne thought" (*Falling Man* 8-9).

its formal rules as a matter of dialogic identity formation, *Falling Man* here appears to highlight its importance as an observed performance. Rawls conceived of participants discussing shared values in public reason, but *Falling Man* seems to encourage a nuancing of this dialogue to allow, at least as an intermediate step, for a detached third party positioning that might allow for a better reflection on one's own values and perspectives before participating in the dialogue. I am arguing that the possibility for agreement that Rawls seeks to find would be enhanced by this recognition in a process of public reason of a third party role, which might synthesise the perspectives of the debaters in a way that might in turn persuade them to form new shared identities and values.

It is worth saying a little more about the public aspect of public reason at this point. The two public spaces Lianne encountered after the failure of the home space, the Iraq War protest and the Falling Man performance, both contributed attitudinal lessons that allowed Lianne to adopt this observer role in the debate between Nina and Martin. The Iraq War protest made her feel the complexity of the world and her own limitations within it, and subsequently to feel the wisdom of the humility in her son's thought about the solar system. This humility was then allied to a kind of courage in watching the Falling Man performance artist, whose performance was shocking but which Lianne nonetheless watched. The courage to watch or, in the case of the debate, to listen, allied to a sense of humility, is the specific perspective the novel offers on the value of the Rawlsian idea of public reason. The negotiation between private and public spaces as a potential source of personally and socially legitimate identities is thus a central aspect of the approach to debate in *Falling Man*.

## Conclusion: the liberal network under strain

The question of *Falling Man*'s overall chronotope can now be addressed. The personal and social identity formation of the liberal protagonists Lianne and Keith addresses the idea of the reparation dilemma as a real problem, with the potential for a deathly spiral into a hollowed out and asocial, non-dialogic shadow of an identity as the risk. To the extent that a more positive resolution of the reparation dilemma might be hoped for, the novel indicates certain attitudes of humility and perseverance as defences against the appeal of various deathly spaces of repair, but with no guarantee of success. A potential trajectory of carefully considered and knowing negotiation of spaces of repair and varied encounters in public spaces seems suggested at the interpretive level as a proposal for addressing the reparation dilemma for identity formation. To the extent that the liberal protagonists in the novel serve as representative types of the liberal social

networks internationally in the time period, then, the novel seems to encourage the reader to imagine a troubled status for this network, in which its values and identities are at risk of destabilising and entering a crisis period.

The consideration of Rawls accentuates a formal proposal to reconsider the transformative potential of debate. This process, which has its third party detached aspect foregrounded in the novel, can be seen to operate at various personal and social levels of the international liberal network, and indeed across its boundaries. This is the novel's prescription for navigating identity amid heterogeneity. However, this prescription is set alongside the challenges within and beyond the network. From within, the inequality and identity difference between the top and bottom of the network, not least in its business dimension, is a real challenge to the possibility for debate. The remoteness of those at the top from those at the bottom works against it. The novel also indicates no easy way in which debate might occur between the liberal network and some of those outside it, as represented by the 9/11 attacker Hammad.

A tension is at the heart of the chronotope in *Falling Man* as a result. The novel sees dynamic potential in the network that is its subject matter, and indeed an impetus for reconstruction of identity rooted in its traditions such as the family, while also presenting the very real challenges to this dynamic potential by forces both inside and outside the network. The chronotope is fluid and can be seen as a kind of liberal stress testing, in which the reader imagines a process of identity formation striving to reform in the face of forces threatening to pull it apart. Amid this elastic conception, a reader may detect opportunities and risks. The novel poses a challenge to liberalism: to address with energy the potential of its methods of debate as a means of encountering heterogeneity, but also to do so with urgency for fear of the crisis that failure will elicit. The chronotopic interpretation of *Falling Man* makes the novel a participant in a dialogue with the reader, urging a question for consideration – that of the potential of debate – while humbly admitting that it offers only pieces in the puzzle and not a confident prediction of success in the outcome. In his 2008 book *Don DeLillo, Jean Baudrillard and the Consumer Conundrum*, Marc Schuster ends his survey of DeLillo's career up to the point of publishing *Falling Man* thus:

> If DeLillo's oeuvre is any indication, the potential to live ambivalently – that is, the potential to allow for loss, the potential to engage in meaningful face-to-face relations, the potential to step beyond the limits of the false reality of the ideological systems that surround us and to enter the desert of the real – is always with us. The challenge, of course, lies in realizing that potential.[214]

[214] Schuster, *DeLillo,* 203.

Schuster's stress on potential and the dialogic in his reference to "meaningful face-to-face relations", as well as his outward-facing and future-facing invitation to consider the challenge of realising potential, are all aspects of *Falling Man* that this chapter's reading also foregrounds. Helvacioglu notes how DeLillo in receiving the Carl Sandberg Literary Award in October 2012 remarked: "My work is influenced by the fact that we're living in dangerous times. If I could put it in a sentence, in fact, my work is just that: living in dangerous times."[215] Living in dangerous times is an apt summary of the chronotopic tension I see at the heart of *Falling Man*.

[215] Helvacioglu, "Death," 185.

# Chapter Three

## Key critical contexts for *The Robber Bride*

Perhaps more than any other text in this corpus, *The Robber Bride*'s critical engagement has focused on the novel's psychological concerns. Two broad perspectives emerge: one focusing exclusively on this dimension of the narrative, and one weaving it into social considerations and implications in reading the novel. My own reading is closer to the second approach. In terms of method, some prominent critical readings adopt literary philosophical approaches of varying kinds, with inspiration coming from psychology, from different schools of feminism, postcolonial theory or formalist theory; some adopt generic approaches, with concentration on the literary traditions at play in the novel; and some focus more on contextual matters in the contemporary Canadian historical situation. My own reading has most in common with the first set of approaches, but it relates to the insights of the second and third types as well.

The approaches concentrating on psychological matters in the novel can be arranged on a spectrum related to personal agency, which is imagined in more independent and more dependent ways in different readings. Donna Bontatibus sees a strong approach to personal agency emerging from the novel. She argues that *The Robber Bride* involves the idea of haunting, with the various hurtful and intimidating aspects of a character's past needing to be confronted in order to arrive at a position of greater understanding and agency.[216] A more dependency-focused reading of agency comes from Jean Wyatt, whose argument centres on the concept of envy and its potential for transformative personal growth. She situates *The Robber Bride*'s engagement with this question in a developmental context and sees the limitations of a self forged by a scarring upbringing being overcome by emulating an object of excess and thus filling out an identity. Wyatt offers a strikingly direct account of the influence the antagonist has over the protagonists, arguing in relation to one of the protagonists for instance that "Tony wishes she could be in Zenia's place, and in the event, Tony

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[216] Bontatibus argues:

> Once the heroines confront the challenges that Zenia's return presents to them, they recognize the lesson that Atwood argues her protagonist at the conclusion of *Surfacing* recognizes: individuals have the freedom to choose how to act and respond in certain situations (Donna Bontatibus, "Reconnecting with the Past: Personal Hauntings in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 34, no. 4 [Fall 1998]: 370).

comes to occupy Zenia's place".[217] In an intermediate engagement with this topic, offering an interdependent approach to personal agency, Phyllis Perrakis argues that in *The Robber Bride*, Atwood dramatises a process of female subjectivity growth. Drawing on perspectives in developmental psychology and on the Gothic literary motif of vampirism, Perrakis sees Zenia functioning as both a powerful other that challenges the self of the protagonists and, in that same capacity, as a counterweight against which the protagonists can sharpen and refine their sense of self intersubjectively.[218]

My own reading has quite detailed engagement with all three of these perspectives. My interpretation foregrounds second wave feminism and the liberal feminist tradition, with Betty Friedan in particular foregrounded, in *The Robber Bride*'s dialogic processes of identity formation. Bontatibus's accentuation of personal agency in the protagonists' positions by the end of the narrative is to some extent corroborated by my own reading. Wyatt's stress on the influential power of the antagonist Zenia is present in this chapter's reading and complicates the liberal concentration on personal agency, particularly as the shocks to entrenched identities initially forged amid childhood trauma are drawn out. An interdependent reading of agency and personal identity such as that of Perrakis is closest to my own. The manner in which the three protagonists show solidarity in conversing with and supporting one another after Zenia's disruptive actions figuratively imply both the value of a dialogic process in forming durable identities and, at least in potential, the possibility for progress in building communities that draw on feminist insights from both liberal and Marxist psychoanalytical schools of thought emerging from the protagonists' and the antagonist's perspectives respectively.

My reading's argument that *The Robber Bride* builds from personal and interpersonal concerns outward to a socially-minded reflection positions it in relation to other readings that share this ambition. Two principal topics of social engagement emerge in these readings: feminism and national identity. Hilde Staels sees Atwood's ironic modes of expression in the novel as principally aimed at challenging social gender norms.[219] My own reading agrees with this critique and extends it constructively by engaging with Friedan's

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[217] Jean Wyatt, "I Want to Be You: Envy, the Lacanian Double, and Feminist Community in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 50.

[218] "[Zenia's] attunement and recognition create an intersubjective space similar to Winnicott's 'transitional realm,' a space that provides the support and protection needed to explore unknown dimensions of the self" (Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis, "Atwood's *The Robber Bride*: The Vampire as Intersubjective Catalyst," *Mosaic* 30, no. 3 [Sep 1, 1997]: 158).

[219] "With her parodic art of trickery in *The Robber Bride*, Margaret Atwood, as storyteller, dares to subvert the gender limits set by the dominant social and moral order and to liberate literary genres from rigidified conventions" (Hilde Staels, "Parodic Border Crossings in *The Robber Bride*," in *Margaret Atwood: The Robber Bride, The Blind Assassin, Oryx and Crake*, ed. J. Brooks Bouson, [London; New York: Continuum, 2010]: 49).

tripartite analysis and synthesis of intellect, emotion and ethical action in reimagining a more complex female identity than that of the novel's contemporary social norm. With different emphases, Theodore Sheckels and Fiona Tolan both see *The Robber Bride* as dramatising a fluid social situation in relation to female identity. Sheckels argues in an optimistic vein that the novel traces an evolution in the exercise of power in its narrative from the 1960s to the 1990s, in which for instance "Zenia finally teaches the women about solidarity, a hallmark of second-wave feminism that the women only slowly discover the worth of".[220] Tolan's argument is that *The Robber Bride* appears to situate itself strongly in the postfeminist position of criticism of second wave feminism, but in fact has a more nuanced engagement with that contemporary moment.[221] My own reading draws out social dynamism as Sheckels intends and sees different approaches to feminism interacting dialogically as Tolan does, but the relation between an older and ongoing liberal feminist tradition and a Marxist psychoanalytical approach is my particular emphasis in the debates within feminism highlighted in readings of *The Robber Bride*.

The other socially-minded reflection in critical commentary on *The Robber Bride* concerns national identity. Ellen McWilliams situates the traumatic upbringing of the protagonists in the tradition of the 1960s and 1970s that distinguished Canada from both its powerful southern neighbour the United States and its former colonial ruler the United Kingdom through the motif of victimhood.[222] Eleanora Rao sees this sense of Canadian national identity as complicated and loosened in the novel because Atwood's unsettling presentation of the idea of home is a critique of exclusive definitions of nationhood. She argues: "In the tension between place, cultural homogeneity, and national identity it is the migrant figure who exceeds the space of nation-state because her status remains in-between."[223] Fiona Tolan also argues that in *The Robber Bride*, Atwood engages with the increasingly multicultural character of its contemporary Canadian society to

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220 Theodore Sheckels, *The Political in Margaret Atwood's Fiction* (Ashgate Publishing: Farnham and Burlington 2012): 117.

221 Tolan argues:

> As an embodiment of postfeminist individualism, Zenia is threatening and disruptive, but by depicting Tony, Roz and Charis's response to her in Gothic terms of a competing fear and desire, Atwood points to the ambiguity of the connection between second wave feminism and postfeminism, an ambiguity easily overlooked when reading the common narrative of the aggressive postfeminist challenge to the defensive second wave (Fiona Tolan, "Sucking the Blood Out of Second Wave Feminism: Postfeminist Vampirism in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*," *Gothic Studies* 9, no. 2 [November 2007]: 54).

222 Ellen McWilliams, "Margaret Atwood's Canadian Hunger Artist: Postcolonial Appetites in *The Edible Woman*," *Kunapipi* 28, no. 2 (2006): 64.

223 Eleanora Rao, "Home and Nation in Margaret Atwood's Later Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Howells (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 107-108.

show the tensions of a postcolonial situation.[224] My own reading shows how the concentration on the protagonists is complicated in the engagement with the world of work of each of the protagonists in the final part of the reading, as it is in these time-spaces that the most heterogeneous social engagements occur. The centrality of the migrant figure of Zenia in the process of identity formation that the novel traces reintroduces the perspectives of diverse voices in the protagonists' lives, signalling the novel's wider consideration of Canadian society and its warning that the solidarity of the protagonists must be extended further and not allowed to become insular in its turn.

Ambition is perhaps the important idea that emerges from a critical survey of engagements with Atwood's novel at this stage in her career. In treating Lorraine York's 1995 anthology of essays, *Various Atwoods*, as indicative of critical engagement with the novelist at this stage in her career, Coral Howells argues:

> Many of these essays are retrospective in impulse, tracing continuities between later and earlier works in relation to thematics (wilderness, sexual power politics, Canadian nationalism) or to narrative techniques, though the influence of postcolonial theory, deconstruction, and new ideologies of multiculturalism had altered the lenses through which more traditional topics were being considered.[225]

Whether in relation to the processes of personal growth or in relation to social change, dynamic processes are traced in the critical commentary on the novel and this chapter's reading shares in the ambitious reading of both personal and social dynamism in the text.[226] Roxanne Fand's engagement with Bakhtinian dialogism in *The Robber Bride* is of course closely related to my own reading, and her central tracing of dialogue itself leads to a very ambitious personal and political reading of the protagonists: "Their collective action is not the Nietzschean scenario of the 'weak' ganging up on the 'strong,' but of the disempowered discovering and

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[224] Fiona Tolan, "Situating Canada," in *Margaret Atwood*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009): 143-58.

[225] Coral Howells, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Howells, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 9.

[226] Donna Potts offers a wide-ranging and ambitious reading of *The Robber Bride* and argues that Atwood's allusion to and adaptation of many genres and texts in the Western tradition is part of her alluding to the potential for an imagined mode of living that hybridises and transforms both colonial and patriarchal conceptions of self and society (Donna L. Potts, "'The Old Maps Are Dissolving:' Intertextuality and Identity in Atwood's *The Robber Bride*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 18, no. 2 [Autumn 1999]: 281-98).

combining their strengths and exposing the monologic weakness that may underlie the dominant".[227] I am in strong agreement with Fand, but the advantage of chronotopic reading is that it can imagine the spatial situation of the dialogues to be imagined as transformative of personhood and purposeful in building social bonds. The reading in this chapter in particular asks for consideration of the limited but significant use of polemic in debate in surprisingly catalysing more mutually respectful forms of dialogue to build both durable personal identities and social bonds.

## *The Robber Bride*: the complexities of group identity formation

In *The Robber Bride*, Tony, Charis and Roz are three Toronto women who encounter an old enemy, presumed dead, named Zenia, while meeting each other on one of their regular lunches in town. The novel traces the manner in which Zenia exposed the insecurities of each of the three protagonists. War historian Tony's unsupportive boyfriend West was seduced by Zenia, plunging Tony into despair, but he and Tony are once again in a relationship when Zenia returns. Hippie and novelty shop worker Charis' abusive US boyfriend Billy, a fugitive in Canada after avoiding the Vietnam war draft, was betrayed to the authorities by Zenia, also causing Charis a great deal of pain. Magazine owner Roz's serially unfaithful husband Mitch also had an affair with Zenia, and finally committed suicide when Zenia left him, shaking Roz to the core. The three women supported each other through these crises, and each tries to confront Zenia upon her return, to little effect. However, it transpires that Zenia has mysteriously drowned in the water feature of the hotel where she is staying, and the novel ends with the three women disposing of Zenia's ashes in the waters of Lake Ontario and seeming to resolve to deal with their insecurities by means of the strength of their friendship.

There are two aspects of the narrative organisation of *The Robber Bride* that are worth mentioning at the outset. The third person narration in *Saturday* focalises one protagonist; in *Falling Man*, two; and in *The Robber Bride*, three. In the two previous novels, the narrative perspective in relation to the protagonist(s) steered the reader's attention to central time-spaces in chronotopic reading, and in *The Robber Bride* the same is true. The second aspect is the ending. Although in *Falling Man*, I argued for a fork in the road narratively between Keith and Lianne, I will be making the opposite argument in *The Robber Bride*, as the narrative trajectory in the novel goes from the fragmentary to an impression of unity, at least relatively so.

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[227] Roxanne Fand, "Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 45, no. 1 (2003): 78.

*The Robber Bride* has been criticised for offering an overly simple happy ending,[228] and just as I sought to nuance highly gloomy readings of *Falling Man*, so I will aim to nuance overly optimistic readings of *The Robber Bride* in this chapter.

I have argued that the chronotope is Bakhtin's means of addressing the model of sociality in the novel, particularly as a dialogic means of identity formation. Chronotopic reading of *The Robber Bride* consequently interprets the novel's non-chronological plotting chronologically, as this reassembling of the plot by the novel's end is called for to explain the identity formation processes the novel explores. The chapter thus divides the narrative into four stages as a matter of chronotopic reading: the construction of a partial or damaged identity; an identity crisis; identity exposed; the potential for identity repair. Each of the three protagonists goes through these four stages in the course of the narrative. The novel's time frame differs from that of *Saturday* and *Falling Man*. Where *Saturday* focused on a day in 2003 that was significant in the period of liberal ascendancy, the protest against the war in Iraq, and *Falling Man* concentrated on the period between 9/11 and the protests agains the Iraq War, *The Robber Bride* follows the lives of three women through postwar Canadian history up to the start of the period of liberal ascendancy, in the build-up in late 1990 to the Gulf War.

## Spaces of repair: the construction of a partial or damaged identity

The first part of the novel occurs at the start of the period of liberal ascendancy with what appear to be three oddly limited characters. Tony, Charis and Roz seem to be little more than rhetorical modes of Aristotelian taxonomy: logos, pathos and ethos. These apparent caricatures are observed in the build up to and then at their regular lunch meeting, each from her own perspective drawing attention to the group members' particular personal attributes. The narrative focalises the thoughts of Charis succinctly capturing these stark differences as she reflects on how she might rely on her friends in a crisis: "Tony would know what to do, step by step, one thing at a time, in order ... But afterwards, after she felt safe again, she would go to Roz for the hug."[229] Charis being the emotionally vulnerable member of the group is signalled not only by the parenthetical emphasis on a return to safety but also implicitly in seeking this sort of mental and moral support from the other two women. It would be easy to read the opening section as biting satire, but Atwood,

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[228] Like Roxanne Fand, I disagree with Gabriele Annand in criticising the novel in a review for the *New York Review of Books* as being "obvious" (Fand, "*Robber Bride*," 79) in its ending.

[229] Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993): 72-73.

like DeLillo and McEwan, is a subtle ironist. The warmth and conviviality of this grouping are signalled affectionately, as the narrator speaks for all three in describing the appeal of this rather fashionable restaurant-by-day, bar-by-night venue called the Toxique at which they meet, a venue that "cheers them up. It makes them feel younger, and more daring, than they are."[230] A level of self-awareness and self-deprecation are here implied, hinting at depths to these protagonists that are yet to be explored.[231]

It is in the first stage of chronological reassembly of the narrative that the identity of these protagonists is established, resulting in a startling reappraisal of the rather comical first impression given by Tony, Charis and Roz. The first phase of chronotopic reading of identity formation in the novel is a childhood phase in the immediate aftermath of World War Two. The importance of this conflict to the childhoods of Tony and Roz is made particularly apparent. Tony's parents were thrown together by the war, her father a Canadian soldier and her mother an Englishwoman whose family were killed in the Blitz and who comes to resent life in Canada. The dysfunctionality of their relationship shapes Tony's childhood. Roz's wealth was inherited from the looting (albeit amid heroic rescues of Jewish refugees) of her father in Europe during the war.[232] As a matter of plotting and identity formation, just as *Falling Man* begins with a historical disturbance in 9/11 as the catalyst for what follows, so *The Robber Bride*'s historical timeline begins with the disturbance of World War Two to begin the dynamic processes of identity formation in its narrative.

The impression of partiality or incompleteness in the identities of the protagonists encountered in the first part of *The Robber Bride* is explained and made plausible in the explorations of childhood identity formation that the narrative traces. In different ways, the private home spaces of the protagonists' childhoods are frightening time-spaces, in which identity is formed as a defensive gesture amid hurtful and coercive forces. Tony's intensely mental life is shaped as a retreat from the abandonment she feels at her mother leaving home and her depressed father's attempts to lean on her for emotional support. The need to transform her bedroom into a space of repair is given urgency by Tony locking herself in when her father is begging her to talk to him:

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[230] *Robber Bride* 32.

[231] Roxanne Fand captures the quality of Atwood's irony, sharp but gentler and more affectionate than harsh satire: "Although Atwood has a strong tendency to satire, it is often with the humor that recognizes the interchangeability of positions, the vulnerability of the mocker as well as the mocked" (Fand, "*Robber Bride*," 77).

[232] Atwood herself attests to the importance of World War Two in modern Canadian history in a *Sunday Times* interview about *The Robber Bride*: "A lot of people of my age were dislocated by it. And it's the central fact of our century" (Harry Ritchie, "Come into the Garden," *Sunday Times*, Oct 10, 1993, 8).

> Her bedroom had a lock, but she would also push her bureau in front of the door, taking all the drawers out first and then putting them back when the bureau was in place; otherwise it would have been too heavy for her. Then she would just sit with her back against the bureau and her book open on her knees, trying to block out the sound of the knob turning, and of the muffled, broken voice, snuffling at the door: *I just want to talk to you! That's all! I just want …*[233]

The idea of a damaged or partial identity formation in Tony's retreat into a locked bedroom is implied by the dual signification of a sanctuary and a prison that the locking of the bedroom space suggests.

Here, Tony retreats to escape her parents' arguments as well, and this is a space that allows her to retreat into her imagination, signalled not least in the immediate immersion in reading that Tony engages in in the above quotation, and it is here that she constructs her alter ego Tnomerf Ynot (her name Tony Fremont spelt backwards) and develops her interest in battles: "*Bulc egdirb*, she murmurs to herself in the darkness. The barbarians gallop across the plains. At their head rides Tnomerf Ynot, her long ragged hair flying in the wind, a sword in each of her hands."[234] Features of Tony's identity as she understands it into adulthood are shaped here: her reverse lettering as an imaginative way into her inner mental life, her interest in battles as a precursor to her academic career as a military historian and her sense of herself as a proactive personality. This last aspect of Tony's identity is already signalled as doubtful at this stage in its instinctive formation as a defensive gesture amid fearful forces.

The hurtful and coercive forces in the private home spaces of Charis's childhood are even more alarmingly apparent. Charis moves in her childhood from her mother's home to her grandmother's farm and from there to her mother's sister Violet's home, where she is horrifically raped by her uncle Vernon in an episode that leads her, a child named Karen, to imagine herself leaving her body and settling on a new name, Charis, thereafter. The violence of Charis's childhood is signalled from the start with her mother's abuse of her in arbitrary fashion:

> *I'll teach you! Little bitch!* Then she would hit the backs of Karen's legs with one of her shoes, or else the pancake flipper or the broom handle, whatever was nearby, and thick red light would

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[233] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 184.

[234] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 174.

> pour out of her body and some of it would get on Karen, and Karen would squirm and scream.[235]

The nightmarish intensity of the description here, both verbal and physical, serves as a contrast with the relatively calm environment of the grandmother's farm, which becomes Charis's space of repair for identity formation in her childhood. The mysterious red light Karen detects in the above incident is made clearer in the episode with the grandmother, as Karen's healing light is a gift passed on to her by this rather formidable figure.

The significance of the farm as a space for identity formation for Charis is signalled early, in the soft and organic description of the farmhouse kitchen:

> There was an oval table covered with oilcloth – light green with a design of strawberries – with a huge teapot and some used plates on it. There were some chairs painted apple green, and a wood range and a saggy maroon velvet sofa piled with newspapers.[236]

The soft colours and natural imagery can be readily associated with Charis' open, responsive and fluid character as an adult. This environment offers the relatively controlled conditions that allow for identity formation. There is a rhythm to the days on the farm. In the mornings, her grandmother "was brisk and cheerful; she whistled, she talked to Karen and told her what to do, because there was a right and a wrong way to do everything".[237] In the afternoons, "she would droop and begin to yawn",[238] allowing Karen to sit at the kitchen table and draw.

Karen is a remarkably perceptive and discerning child, as her relationship with her grandmother, formidable though she is, is dialogic in forming Karen's identity. Karen forms her lifelong conviction that vegetarianism is ethical in her grandmother's kitchen when her grandmother kills the pig that often enters the kitchen and attempts to feed it to Karen. Karen reflects unequivocally that "[whatever] else, her grandmother is a killer. No wonder other people are afraid of her."[239] However, Karen is also given pause for thought in an

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[235] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 277.

[236] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 282.

[237] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 291.

[238] Ibid.

[239] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 299.

exchange about defending one's home against aggressive forces from outside in relation to her grandmother's deceased Mennonite pacifist husband evading persecution in his younger years. Karen's grandmother opines: "If people start killing your folks, you should fight back."[240] Karen suggests moving away, to which the grandmother responds: "Trouble is, what happens when there's no place else to go?"[241] This is a lesson Charis in adult life will have cause to revisit. Overall, Karen arrives at a balanced judgement on her grandmother that reflects her own personal growth: "Her grandmother is a safe place for her, although hard. Or because hard. Not shifting, not watery. She doesn't change."[242] When Karen suffers the sexual assault of her uncle, it is the strength of her grandmother that helps her to endure: it is her grandmother's gift of the Bible that inspires Karen's new name choice, a contraction of the virtue Charity. Part of the tragedy of the sexual assault is that the progress Karen made in her identity formation is undone in the identity switch to Charis, and the lessons the emotionally open, responsive and instinctively dialogic Karen won with her grandmother must be relearnt by the adult Charis.

The private home space of Roz's childhood is also characterised by an intensity that inflicts pain in the early shaping of her identity. Her childhood involves two phases, one relatively poor and one relatively affluent. The poorer phase is while her father is still in Europe and her mother attempts to run a busy rooming house while Roz goes to a Catholic convent. Roz's mother does not give her a lot of time, and this is registered chronotopically in Roz's living on the third floor, "the attic, her mother called it".[243] Meanwhile, at the convent, Roz is treated differently, taking on the name Rosalind to avoid her Jewish heritage being a cause for worse treatment, while learning to fit in by taking part in the mocking of the Displaced Persons, refugees from the war, and evading the insults of Protestant boys on her way home from school.

When her father returns from the war, the money he brings allows the family to relocate to "an enormous house with a semi-circular driveway in front and a three-car garage".[244] However, Roz is not able to feel comfortable in this environment, as her background among the wealthier children at her new school means she does not fit in. When she goes to summer camp with the wealthier students and they take part in activities, she "stays behind to clean up. God knows she's an expert at that."[245] Roz's two homes, the

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[240] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 291.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 297.

[243] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 384.

[244] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 411.

[245] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 414.

rooming house and the wealthier one, serve as spaces of repair for her identity formation as she retreats from the difficulties of school life. The lesson she draws from her childhood is that action counts, as this is how she wards off bullying at the convent and insecurity at the wealthier school. At home, the large presence of her father develops her interest in business, a natural extension of her active identity. From her father she develops her insecurity about money without heritage, as her shame at discovering he is a Displaced Person, a category she has learnt to think less of, mixes with her wonder at the transformation of her life by his wealth.[246] Meanwhile, she is haunted by the image of her mother, lost with nothing to do once the domestic aspects of home life have been taken from her in the new house with servants. Roz observes how she "wandered around in her housecoat and slippers, from room to room, as if she was looking for something; as if she was lost".[247] Roz in her adult life is defined by activity, as she tries always to succeed both at work as a businesswoman and at home as a wife and mother.

What the childhood phase of the narrative establishes in terms of identity formation is a sense that apparently partial or damaged identities emerge out of childhoods characterised by a variety of different kinds of hurtful and coercive upbringings. Spaces of repair in this phase appear as life rafts amid a shipwreck. There is an element of desperate necessity about the retreat into these spaces. Further, even at this stage, a sense emerges that these rather different and fragmented identities are complementary, at least potentially.[248] The potential Charis observes in Tony and Roz as friends in a crisis, a potential that appeared somewhat comic in the first section, takes on a very different light when read against the disturbing childhood experiences of these women. The full purposes of these dark childhood narratives and the sense of complementary identities are made increasingly apparent in the second phase of the narrative.

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[246] The narrative registers Roz's shifting consciousness about her wealth and status in the contrast even in the rooming house when the father returns in the shifting balance of centrality in her life from her mother to her father: "On the other side is her father, filling the kitchen with his bulk, his loud voice, his multilayered smell ... because her mother, who is so unbending, bends" (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 398). The imbalance between father and mother also prefigures Roz's own insecure approach to her marriage to Mitch.

[247] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 411.

[248] Eleanora Rao engages with this phase of the narrative through the concept of exile, which she sees as a feeling the women have that emerges in their unsettled childhoods. She notes the following complexity surfacing:

> It requires a reflection on the meanings of home and a sense of place, with their implications of stability and security. It means also to look into dispossession, into what has been lost, and into what the three women try to re-create (Rao, "Home," 103).

## The reparation dilemma: identity crisis

The second phase of the narrative history of the protagonists is staggered across their intervening adult years before the 1990 present time that began the narrative. The significance of the childhood formative phase becomes apparent here, as does the interpretive scaling possibility. The crucial common denominator in their lives across these decades is the antagonist Zenia.

The interaction between Zenia and the three damaged or partial identities of the protagonists is the focus of the second phase of the narrative. Zenia has offered an interpretive challenge for commentators on *The Robber Bride*. Two prominent perspectives emerge: one that Zenia's presence refers to heterogeneity in Canadian society and the other that her narrative function is to catalyse the vulnerability of the identities formed by the protagonists.[249] By the end of the chapter, I aim to have established a relationship between these two perspectives, but it is the latter perspective that is to the fore in the constructive chronotopic reading offered at this stage.

As indicated in my plot summary, Zenia's principal means of disrupting the lives of the protagonists is in driving a wedge between each protagonist and her male partner. In each case, the vulnerability of the identities these protagonists constructed in childhood plunges the protagonist into crisis. The reparation dilemma applies fiercely in this second phase of the narrative, as each protagonist, with the support of the others, retreats into a space of repair in order to reconstruct a similar but reinforced partial or damaged identity to the one with which she began the phase.

In Tony's case, the vulnerability of her identity is signalled throughout the phase by a motif of child-like imagery. McClung Hall, the university residence Tony shares with Roz and Charis in the 1960s and where she first meets Zenia, is a private space that implies a simplicity and innocence in Tony's identity. Tony avoids the other young women in the residence, as she has "various little well-worn runways that got

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[249] Eleonora Rao argues for the former reading:

> A preoccupation with questions of home and estrangement, national identity and belonging … is accompanied, however, by the recognition that such a displaced condition is different for "those from other countries," that there is an "us" (white Anglophones) and a "them" (the immigrants) … It is the homeless wanderer Zenia who shatters the sense of comfort, safety, and sanctuary attained by Roz, Charis, and Tony in their homes (Rao, "Home," 102-103).

Other commentators have seen the identity antagonism of Zenia as the crucial aspect in the narrative. Hilde Staels sees Zenia's efforts to take their male partners as crucial in disrupting the protagonists' pretence of stability in their identities (Staels, " Crossings," 45); Roxanne Fand argues for a reading of Zenia as the women's "Nietzschean best friend in being their best enemy, the one whose opposition will either make or break them by forcing them to take responsibility for their weaknesses and to take their own dark feelings into account in the process" (Fand, "*Robber Bride*," 72).

her through the weeks, like mice through a field; as long as she stayed on them she was safe".[250] The mouse analogy is only an extreme version of the diminutive images deployed in relation to Tony, but the impression of structure in the place as a safety feature also indicates the severity of the time-space as a space of repair, in which a carefully circumscribed identity can function, in Tony's case her solitary and intensely mental life formed in childhood. Tony goes to a party at the invitation of her future partner West (her letter inversion with a twist on Stew), and who it transpires is already seeing Zenia, and this party is a much more public space, where she encounters Zenia. Tony's ill-prepared identity for this less controlled space is signalled as she ascends the stairs, which "are steep; Tony climbs them one step at a time, helping herself up by the banister".[251] Her physical smallness here reflects the smallness of her identity as well, with Tony quite literally retreating into the space of repair of the bathroom at one point on entering the party, which takes place in an apartment painted entirely black as revenge on her landlord by Zenia for her impending eviction. Zenia presents a challenge to Tony, who is torn between her childish judgement of Zenia's non-conformity and her equally childish thrill at Zenia's sense of freedom. Zenia confronts Tony with the question of what obsesses her. On the one hand, Tony reflects on how her peers at McClung Hall would perceive Zenia:

> They would think [Zenia] was full of it, and also a slut, with her buttons undone like that. They would disapprove of her slutty hair. Usually Tony finds their judgments on other women catty and superficial, but right now she finds them comforting.[252]

On the other hand, Tony reflects that Zenia's "isn't a stupid question, and she knows the answer".[253] It is this latter sense that guides Tony as she decides to form a bond with Zenia.

Zenia throws Tony's identity into crisis in two stages. First, Zenia gets Tony to write an essay for her at the university and then threatens to inform the university of Tony's cheating to get money out of Tony. When Zenia sneaks into Tony's room at McClung Hall – Zenia herself lives in an apartment with West at the time – the narrative focalises Tony's thoughts on what Zenia must perceive of the place, as Tony resents Zenia getting "a good look at her absurd pyjamas"[254] while also avoiding turning on the light for fear of

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[250] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 135.

[251] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 146.

[252] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 152.

[253] Ibid.

[254] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 205.

"dons and busybodies [who] prowl the corridors, on the sniff for cigarette smoke and contraband sex".[255] The contrast between an apparently adult Zenia and an apparently childish Tony is once more to the fore.

The next stage involves West. Zenia leaves West and he too is shown to have a rather child-like identity, needing Tony's support just to stay afloat emotionally. The narrative registers that theirs is an unhealthy relationship subtly, not least in the vulnerability involved. Although the narrative states of their sex that "West is very gradual"[256] and that their "love is gentle and discreet",[257] the impression is that Tony is very passive in the act. West's apparent consideration is offset by the formal commands of his speech: "'Don't go away,' he whispers. 'Don't move.'"[258] When Zenia returns once again to take West, she patronises them both first, saying that "[they're] just like a couple of kids, she says, kids on one long picnic, playing sand castles at the beach".[259] Tony is plunged into crisis when Zenia leaves with West, and it is only Roz's support that keeps Tony going, with the implication of childishness, even an infantile identity, on Tony's part again to the fore, as "[she] ordered in groceries, and fed Tony canned chicken noodle soup, caramel pudding, peanut butter and banana sandwiches, grapejuice: baby food".[260] The support Roz offers, rather like Lianne and Keith's post-9/11 companionship in *Falling Man*, allows for physical survival but not a deep reconsideration of identity.

By 1990, the identity with which Tony emerges from her confrontation with Zenia is simply a reinforced and even more defensive version of her old identity, an emphatic example of the danger of the reparation dilemma. She is once again reunited with West after Zenia again rejects him, and Tony's new house that Roz helps her identify implies her besieged sense of self, with Tony imagining its aspect from the outside as "a fort, a bastion, a keep".[261] Her space of repair now looks even more incapable of allowing for a reformed identity, as the defensive perimeters are even more secure. West's apparent weakness masks Tony's own, as she attends to his every need, in letting him have the better working space while she appears to have the more stressful work, and in attending to all the domestic tasks as well. Tony is ill-prepared once again for Zenia's return in the third phase of the novel.

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[255] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 203.

[256] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 212.

[257] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 213.

[258] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 211.

[259] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 215.

[260] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 220.

[261] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 21.

For Charis, a sense of childishness is to the fore again in the second phase of the narrative. Charis in adult life moves in the 1970s to the Island, a reference to the largest of the islands of Lake Ontario, also known as Hiawatheng or Menecing in the Ojibwa language. Charis romantically imagines this as a kind of idyll.[262] The presentation is an excellent example of the narrative's nuanced irony, as this setting does feature in the novel's resolution, but its other function at this stage is to reveal Charis's vulnerability. Charis is living with Billy, a man she sees simply as someone who loves her, and she does not concern herself with his fugitive status as a US citizen who has avoided the Vietnam War draft. On the thought that the authorities might seek Billy, she reflects:

> Not on the Island, where there are so many trees and people don't lock the door when they go out. Not in this country, familiar to her and drab, undramatic and flat. Not in her house, with the hens cooing peacefully in the yard.[263]

The narrative certainly teases Charis's perspective here, but sympathetically, as it is her vulnerability that is at the centre of the narrative trajectory of this phase.

The teasing becomes most apparent, especially to local contemporary readers, in Charis involving herself in the political disputes of the Island tenants threatened with eviction by landlords and property developers. Charis reflects on writing to councillors but not sending the letters: "But just writing it down helps. It beams out the message, which gets into the city councillors' heads without their awareness. It's like radio waves."[264] This references the actual historical dispute between Island residents and property developers, involving protests and blockades and culminating in new legislation strengthening the rights of Island residents shortly after the novel's publication.[265] Charis is the most difficult protagonist to fathom, but complexity rather than caricature reasserts itself by degrees in the narrative.

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[262] Charis muses:

> It's infused with a vibrant, brooding, human life ... Some mornings she ... just walks around, up and down the streets that are not real streets but more like paved bicycle paths, past the dilapidated or spruced-up former cottages with their woodpiles and hammocks and patchy gardens (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 237-38).

[263] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 249.

[264] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 61.

[265] The website of the Toronto Islands Residential Community Trust Corporation explains the purpose of the new legislation (Toronto Island Community. "Toronto Islands Residential Community Trust Corporation," http://torontoisland.org/land-trust/ [accessed August 13, 2019]).

Zenia appears to be ill when she encounters Charis, an appearance left unresolved in terms of how truthful it was. Her questioning of Charis's relationship with Billy is enough to destabilise Charis's identity even before she finally reports Billy to the US authorities. Zenia's initial queries about the political aspect are pointed.[266] The emotionally open and responsive Charis is immediately affected, beginning to think more critically about Billy's unappreciative sense of entitlement to Charis's emotional and economic support in feeding and housing him, even though she herself is not in a strong position financially. She reflects simply: "Billy could be showing a bit more gratitude himself."[267] When Zenia suggests that Billy is attracted to her, Charis really suffers: "She can feel something breaking in her, collapsing, a huge iridescent balloon ripped and greying like a punctured lung. What's left, if you take away love? Just brutality. Just shame. Just ferocity. Just pain."[268] Charis here shows great self-awareness in seeing the chaos and agony that lie just beneath the surface of her thinly constructed identity.

Significantly, it is at this point that Karen returns to Charis's consciousness, "blown towards her through the darkness like an ousted ghost, towards this house where she has been islanded, thinking herself safe".[269] Charis rather quickly begins to mature at this stage. The return of Karen's identity seems to be absorbed into Charis, and Charis realises that Karen is "no longer a nine-year-old girl. She has grown up."[270] Charis begins to reflect differently on Zenia and Billy: "Also – though Charis hates to think this way – a certain amount of money. Charis doesn't really have enough money for the three of them."[271] As with her childhood trauma, Charis is thrown back again by Billy's deportation,[272] with only the support of Roz and Tony helping her through the ensuing identity crisis. They both help her to get the inheritance her grandmother left her from her Aunt Vi that allows her to buy her home on the Island. Although Charis is somewhat returned to her earlier naïve identity by Billy's deportation, the quick growth implied by Karen's return shows Charis has perhaps more ready potential for identity reformation than either of her co-protagonists. Significantly, Karen stays with Charis. The Island time-space here indicates the simultaneous

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[266] Zenia first asks: "how did you get mixed up with them? ... You never struck me as a very political person" (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 266). Later, when Charis denies being mixed up, she responds: "if living with someone isn't *mixed up*, I don't know what is" (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 267).

[267] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 268.

[268] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 272.

[269] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 273.

[270] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 316.

[271] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 319.

[272] The narrative focalises her thoughts: "She stands there, shocked and dismayed, trying to hold herself together" (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 331).

vulnerability and strength of Charis in her emotional openness. The open space of the Island is less rigid and fixed than the suburban homes of Tony and Roz, and that implies flexibility and adaptability as well as vulnerability. Also important is the catalytic role Zenia plays in the return of Karen to Charis. Charis, then, falls foul of the danger of the reparation dilemma, but with more encouragement of better in the second phase than for Tony or Roz.

It might seem least obvious in Roz's narrative to suggest that childishness is at play in the life of this successful businesswoman, but it is the surprising inclusion of precisely that dimension that so draws attention to the vulnerability of Roz's identity. Just as Roz in childhood learnt from her mother and father a sharp division between the home and the outside world, so her adult life sees her identity, shaped as it is by a sense of action, embrace both a domestic and working role with enthusiasm. However, from the start, the insecurity that underpins the action is apparent. The crucial figure in this identity formation is Mitch, Roz's husband. Mitch is from a wealthy background too, but unlike Roz, his high social status is an old one in his family. For this reason, Roz's nervousness about the origins of her father's wealth is to the fore in her thoughts around him.[273] The childish imagery appears in a crucial moment when Roz is denied sex by Mitch early in their courtship and is instead offered a marriage proposal. The narrative reveals that "[she] felt like a big loose floozie, she felt like a puppy being whacked with a newspaper for trying to climb up trouser legs".[274] The puppy image betrays Roz's vulnerability, and the shame implied echoes the shame she feels in childhood in both her school environments, first about her Jewish roots and then about her earlier relative poverty.

What the reader comes to realise is that this incident says something significant about their relationship, her sexual openness standing for her love and his marriage proposal, rather than suggesting love and commitment, actually standing for a cold indifference emotionally and a keen sense of good business in its place. Roz comes to realise this, reflecting on Mitch's true motives. She opines that "[she] was new money, Mitch was old money; or he would have been old money if he'd had any money".[275] She also learns from Mitch a lesson that ties her action at home and at work together: "The cunning bastard. He held out on me, he wore me down. He knew exactly what he was doing."[276] These statements give a flavour of Roz's

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[273] The narration reveals Roz reflecting at one point: "Mitch has always been able to make her feel as if she were just off the boat, head wrapped in a shawl, wiping her nose on her sleeve, and lucky to have a sleeve at that" (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 364).

[274] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 373.

[275] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 374.

[276] Ibid.

voice, lively, direct and sarcastic, again conveying her identity as one of action. However, the sense of independence here is misleading, as in fact Roz internalises Mitch's game playing here and venerates it in a deeply unhealthy manner. Roz justifies her forgiveness of Mitch's serial infidelity this way:

> It's the same as a business negotiation or a poker game. She's always been a whiz at poker. You have to know when to up the stakes, when to call a bluff, when to fold. So she does enjoy it, some. It's hard not to enjoy something you're good at.[277]

Roz thus constructs an illusory identity of action and decision in business-like play to mask a deeply passive insecurity.[278] This self-deception is further amplified by the apparent distinction between home and work as private and public time-spaces, when in fact both operate in terms of Roz's identity by means of this same dynamic of action masking nervousness. The narration focalises Roz's thoughts on her children at one point in relation particularly to her twin girls:

> She extends her invisible wings, her warm feathery angel's wings, her fluttery hen's wings, undervalued and necessary, she enfolds them. Secure, is what she wants them to feel; and they do feel secure, she's certain of it. They know this is a safe house, they know she's there, planted solidly, two feet on the ground, and Mitch is there too, more or less, in his own way.[279]

The final sentence in particular seems more an effort on Roz's part to convince herself than an assured statement of conviction, but the bird image is telling as well. What would normally appear an image of freedom here appears to be its opposite, as Roz's insecurity risks becoming a damaging need for control of her children.[280]

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[277] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 359.

[278] Even at the end of the second phase, when Mitch is spurned by Zenia, the game playing aspect of Roz's relationship with Mitch is apparent:

> She pours one [drink] for each of them, then sits down opposite Mitch in the matching armchair, their usual position for conversations like this. Have-it-out conversations. He will explain, she will be hurt; he will pretend to repent, she will pretend to believe him. They face each other, two card sharps, two poker players (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 452).

[279] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 362-63.

[280] In calm moments, Roz is aware of this, particularly in relation to her son, over whom she obsesses: "She's seen it, she knows how destructive it can be, she's sworn never to get like that" (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 99).

It is into this context that Zenia inserts herself. She first appears to Roz as a child of a Jewish war refugee, thus playing on Roz's concerns about her own heritage. Roz pours out her insecurity to Zenia, who listens.[281] Zenia attacks Roz's identity both in her home time-space and in her work one, but tellingly they are the same as both involve Mitch. Roz gives Zenia a job at *WiseWomanWorld*, the magazine Roz owns and manages, only to see Zenia rise through the ranks at the company. When Zenia begins to make changes of which Roz disapproves, including renaming the magazine *Woman* in a 1980s rebranding move to change the magazine's focus from a concentration on women living well to a push on advertising a sexually daring and successful ideal of womanhood, Roz asks what the latest accessory Zenia sees as marketable for women is and Zenia quips: "Men".[282] The reaction of the now male-dominated board shows Roz outplayed at her own game by Zenia: "The men on the board of directors laugh, Mitch included. So much for Roz. She has a flash of Zenia, wearing black fringed gloves with gauntlets, blowing the smoke off her six-shooter, sliding it back into the holster."[283] The image here is that of a Western, with Zenia the quicker gunslinger. Mitch's presence is significant, as Zenia's clinching blow in throwing Roz's identity into crisis is taking Mitch.

When Mitch finally commits suicide after Zenia leaves him, Roz overdoses on pills and drink, only to be brought back to herself in hospital by Tony and Charis, the latter in particular using her healing light.[284] As with the other protagonists' second phase recoveries, this is a matter of the energy to carry on living rather than genuine identity reformation. Roz's self-deception of an identity in the time-spaces of home and work, the distinction itself rendered illusory by the buried insecurity that drives her actions, seems firmly entrenched as Roz also more or less automatically succumbs to the reparation dilemma. The childish image returns as Roz is consoled when weeping by her twin girls, who engage in a clownish routine to cheer her up. Roz muses that "[it's] a trick they've learned from her. It's a trick that works."[285] Because this home time-space is underpinned by this frenetic identity, it cannot easily function as a space of repair. Roz has not yet moved out of her elaborately constructed illusion of an identity, complete with game playing and the masking of a childhood pain.

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[281] Roz talks in unguarded fashion about Mitch's attitude to his wife: "he likes the image of Roz with an apron and a watering can ... the Good Housekeeping guarantee that Roz will always be home whenever Mitch chooses to get back there" (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 429).

[282] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 445.

[283] Ibid.

[284] "Charis reaches down with her other hand and takes hold of Roz's foot, and Roz feels grief travelling through her like a wave, up through her body and along her arm and into her hand, and out into Charis's hand, and out" (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 465).

[285] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 474.

It is now possible to tie these three narrative strands together through the character of Zenia and address the question of interpretive scale in the novel, at least at this stage. There are two crucial aspects to chronotopic reading of the second phase of *The Robber Bride*: Zenia's interference in the protagonists' already unhealthy heterosexual romantic relationships and the timescale from the 1960s to the 1980s. The first of these draws attention to the novel's interest in feminism, and the second situates that interest historically in the second wave feminism of the period. In her 1963 classic of the period, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan addresses the problem within the Western liberal tradition of women's identity. The traditional conception she labels the feminine mystique: "The feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity. The mystique says they can answer the question 'Who am I?' by saying 'Tom's wife … Mary's mother'."[286] Friedan goes on to explore the implications of the housewife image as the traditional ideal of femininity still prevalent in the early 1960s:

> In a sense that goes beyond any one woman's life, I think this is the crisis of women growing up – a turning point from an immaturity that has been called femininity to full human identity. I think women had to suffer this crisis of identity, which began a hundred years ago, and have to suffer it still today, to become fully human.[287]

There are three aspects of this part of Friedan's analysis of identity that are relevant to *The Robber Bride*'s second phase. The first is the timescale, with Friedan locating the challenge in the 1960s. Zenia's intervention in the protagonists' lives begins in McClung Hall in the 1960s, and hers is emphatically an intervention that serves to challenge identity. The second aspect is the idea of growing up and out of immaturity, with Friedan seeing the feminine mystique as a childish identity offered to women. The motif of childishness, as we have seen, runs through all three protagonists' second phase narratives. The third is the idea of becoming fully human, with the inverse of that a partial or limited humanity as the state out of which to emerge. From the first childhood stage to the second stage of adult identity crisis, chronotopic reading of *The Robber Bride* has traced the construction of, and maintenance and even reinforcement of, partial or limited identities for the three protagonists. *The Robber Bride*, then, sets up its critique of women's identity in the Western liberal tradition in the second half of the twentieth century in closely Friedanian terms.

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[286] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963): 63.

[287] Friedan, *Mystique*, 70.

Friedan's description precedes a prescription. Part of Friedan's argument for women's liberation concerns agency. She argues that "[women], as well as men, can only find their identity in work that uses their full capacities".[288] Another concerns an elevation of the attribute of intelligence to the level of the attribute of emotional attachment as a value for women's personal identities in combatting the deficiencies of the feminine mystique:

> Who knows what women can be when they are finally free to become themselves? Who knows what women's intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love? … But the time is at hand when the voices of the feminine mystique can no longer drown out the inner voice that is driving women on to become complete.[289]

Friedan's tripartite approach to identity is similar to that revealed in *The Robber Bride*: logos, pathos and ethos, or intelligence, emotional openness and actions driven by the actor's ethical imperatives. Just as Friedan locates emotional openness as the attribute apart, in its valorising in traditional femininity, so *The Robber Bride* sets Charis apart, initially teasing her as naïve but increasingly seeing her as having more potential for identity reformation than either her mental or active co-protagonist, even though Tony and Roz are women who are resisting the feminine mystique more obviously than Charis. Friedan's prescription is nuanced, in recognising the need not for rejection of emotional openness in women, but in supplementing it with intelligence and action.[290]

What a Bakhtinian approach reveals is the frustrated potential of dialogue in the complementarity of these three women at the end of the second phase.[291] The partial identities of childhood have deep roots and the support each protagonist offers the other in crisis cannot surmount each protagonist's limitations within her own damaged personal identity. As a matter of scale, what the second phase of *The Robber Bride* appears to suggest is that the analysis of women's identity by second wave feminism in the 1960s was accurate, but that its prescription failed to materialise in the succeeding two decades. This also suggests that the identity crisis of the protagonists scales in the period as a liberal crisis in the West as well, with the efforts of liberal

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[288] Friedan, *Mystique*, 292.

[289] Friedan, *Mystique*, 331.

[290] Donna Potts sees the complementary character of the protagonists as significant also: "Although the three friends have remarkably little in common, their differences ironically become occasions for empathy as well as mutual compensation for each other's weaknesses and vulnerabilities" (Potts, "Maps," 295).

[291] Again, there is a clue in the partial success of dialogue in Charis, both with her grandmother as a child and with Zenia as an adult, as emotional openness is vital in dialogic identity reformation.

feminists like Friedan to liberate women being thwarted by the weighty obstacle of a cultural tradition of limited identity continuing uninterrupted into the 1980s.[292]

## Identity exposed and the potential for social identity formation

In the third phase of the narrative, *The Robber Bride* enters the period of liberal ascendancy and Zenia, once more with her catalytic function revealed by chronotopic reading, offers a second shock to the protagonists, this time exposing their limited identities. When Zenia returns, each protagonist individually resolves to confront Zenia, who is staying in a hotel in Toronto, a neutral time-space for concentration on what is a staged climactic confrontation.

Tony goes first, armed with a gun, but she fails abjectly. Zenia taunts her with a string of invective aimed at Tony's mental identity. She calls her "an armchair necrophiliac"[293] with "megalomaniac pretensions".[294] Charis seems even more exposed, Zenia's frank explanations of her manipulation of Charis receiving the childish retort that that "was mean".[295] Zenia sneers at Charis as a "dipstick romantic".[296] Roz's obsessive and controlling energy are the targets of Zenia's invective when she in turn confronts Zenia. Zenia says of her supposed seduction of Roz's son Larry that her feelings were "only maternal".[297] Zenia thus exposes Roz's obsessive attachment to her son. She also goes on to tell Roz of Mitch that he "wasn't your God-given *property*!"[298]

In their responses, Tony and Roz are akin. Tony "goes down in the elevator with the odd sensation that she's going up, and meanders across the lobby as if drunk, bumping into the leather furniture".[299] Roz "has a

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[292] Friedan is often seen as part of the Western tradition of liberal feminism, which includes figures from Wollstonecraft to Nussbaum and which argues that Enlightenment agency, reason and education valorised for men should be equally valorised for women. Rosemarie Tong in her chapter "Liberal Feminism" in her 1992 book *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* is a good example of a thinker locating Friedan in such a tradition (Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought* [London: Routledge, 1992] ).

[293] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 498.

[294] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 497.

[295] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 512.

[296] Ibid.

[297] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 527.

[298] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 528.

[299] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 498-99.

crashing headache, and on top of that she feels ill".[300] Charis is different. Charis has a vivid impression that Karen emerges from behind the curtains and chases Zenia out of the hotel room and over the balcony. However, she then returns to her body as Charis and sees nothing has happened. Charis mouths the words "I forgive you"[301] after having gathered "up all her strength, all her inner light".[302] The discovery of Zenia's body in the hotel lobby water fountain thereafter seems oddly explicable as the action of Karen, although the literal death of Zenia may be less significant narratively than the possibility of the protagonists moving beyond the harsh reality of what she exposed in their own identities.

The potential for this second shock to lead to identity reformation in a post-narrative fourth phase in the three protagonists is signalled in various ways. The three gather at the Toxique, already established as the time-space of their friendship at the narrative's outset, to recapitulate their encounters with Zenia. Their lives each show signs of improvement. There are signs that West becomes more attentive to Tony;[303] Charis and her business-minded daughter Augusta appear to become closer; it becomes clear that Roz's gay assistant Boyce is in a relationship with her son Larry, and this is something Roz accepts. Most significantly, the novel ends on the Island, with Tony reflecting on the gathering in the kitchen: "From the kitchen she hears laughter, and the clatter of dishes. Charis is setting out the food, Roz is telling a story. That's what they will do, increasingly in their lives: tell stories."[304] This kitchen ending strikes the reader as a time-space apart in this narrative: a first genuinely homely space in the novel.[305] The distinction drawn in the previous chapters between the narrative and interpretive plane seems here to be apparent and narrowed at the same time. The reference to stories seems to allude quite clearly to the interpretive plane of the reader of *The Robber Bride*, but it also brings this awareness to the narrative plane, in suggesting that the experiences of these

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[300] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 531.

[301] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 517.

[302] Ibid.

[303] This is a significant rejoinder to Atwood's critics who claim her books are sexist against men. Once again, the feminism on display in *The Robber Bride* appears to accord with Friedan's concern for the manner in which sexism in the Western tradition warps identities for men as well as women. Kate Kellaway in her interview with Margaret Atwood shortly after the publication of the novel notes how the author emphatically ended the interview with an urgent question: "'Just ask yourself,' she went on, 'do you know what a good man is?'" (Kate Kellaway, "Oracle and Private Joker," *Observer*, Oct 10, 1993,16). The identity crisis within liberalism that *The Robber Bride* identifies is not confined to women.

[304] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 564.

[305] This chapter's reading thus nuances that of Perrakis, who argues in relation to the protagonists' homes: "Atwood instead accords with Benjamin's theory that women often need to find safe spaces of their own in order to experience the emergence of their sexual subjectivity" (Perrakis, "Vampire," 162). This is ultimately a view that my own reading corroborates, but the earlier use of the homes to entrench damaged identities stresses the particular and difficult process that is undertaken to arrive at this conclusion.

protagonists might bring them to a fuller awareness of the reparation dilemma and the complementary potential of their friendship as the dialogic means of reforming their personal identities.

The interpretation of the second phase of the narrative suggested that the liberal feminist prescription of identity reformation had failed to materialise in the decades between the 1960s and the 1980s, and so it would seem that the interpretation of the novel by the end identifies more hopefulness as its historical survey enters the period of liberal ascendancy. That seems correct as a matter of constructive chronotopic reading, although it is important to notice that a second shock of recognition is needed even to allow for that potential. The idea then is of a reminder, vivid and effective, of the lessons of feminism in the 1960s as a means to an appreciation of the transformative potential for women's identities of a model of sociality of female friendship within the Western tradition of liberalism. This is still an imaginative task, however, as the vividness and effectiveness of the reminder are challenges in an intervening period in which the lessons of feminism have been in some senses co-opted and turned against themselves.[306] Indeed, what is implied is that the exposure of this inversion of feminism would make the emerging feminism more robust still as the danger of inverting it in future once this possibility is recognised is reduced. The ending thus suggests that the potential is there for a transformation. The potential is not without risk, as the shock to personal identity will require a social network to support the recovery, but the possibility of revitalising liberalism is implied. The emergence of a homely space among the protagonists occurs alongside emerging homeliness in their respective family homes as a possibility of dialogic identity reformation fanning across social spaces in the international liberal network. Charis in particular draws attention to the manner in which complementarity is social as well as historical. The historical involves a critical extraction of the necessary strengths of one's tradition[307] and a willingness to embrace difference in a spirit of change. This concludes the constructive chronotopic reading of *The Robber Bride*.

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[306] The novel draws attention to this most strikingly in Zenia's manipulation of Roz's magazine in line with the still-limited identity image of a successful woman of action in the 1980s.

[307] Her grandmother's Bible and Charis' Christian forgiveness of Zenia are both examples of this. This is signalled in the novel as a critical attitude by Charis noticing even in childhood that there are unhealthy aspects to her tradition. One of the grandmother's routine searches for Bible passages reveals a very old attitude in direct opposition to the notion of sexual liberation, Revelations 2:20, which warns against sexual activity, and which the grandmother says is a strange passage for a little girl: "And she smiled at Karen, the smile of a withered apple" (Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 300).

## Polemic and listening in public reason

Turning now to my concentrated Rawlsian reading approach, the process is similar to that in *Saturday* and *Falling Man* in shifting attention away from the ending of the narrative. However, the process is in another respect quite different. The climactic confrontation with Zenia in the hotel appears the staged debate most foregrounded by the narrative, and yet, as we have seen in our survey of Zenia thus far, in two senses at least it is not really a debate. First, Zenia in our chronotopic reading was more of a catalyst for destabilising the limited identities of the protagonists than an antagonist in her own right. The idea of dialogue between interlocutors therefore applies only with difficulty and in a purely formal sense to these exchanges. In other words, the exchange is, if dialogic, an interior dialogue, in which the protagonist is in a sense debating with herself. It is not really an exchange between the self and other that Bakhtin envisaged, or between citizens as Rawls did. The second sense in which the climactic confrontations are not debates is in their one-sided character: Zenia lambasts the protagonists, who are left with nothing to do but listen and, if they can, withstand the polemic.

The staged nature of the polemic and the self-examination it implies for the protagonists are also implied by Zenia's adaptations to the room to suit each arrival. Tony is struck by the room's "largeness and neatness,"[308] resembling her own tidiness of habit and mind. For Charis, the room is "a mess",[309] with Zenia's"flowered drapes"[310] mimicking Charis's own floral Island decor. For Roz's visit, there is simply "a suitcase open on the bed,"[311] suggesting Roz's frenetic lifestyle.

However, I said at the start of the second stage analysis of the narrative that I aimed by the end of this chapter to put the two prevalent readings of Zenia in the narrative in relation to one another. The reading that has not featured yet is the one arguing that Zenia's presence indicates heterogeneity in Canadian society. Zenia remains mysterious to the protagonists, only her name remaining constant. The story she tells each of them of her origins is unstable, but it is always the story of an immigrant. Her shifting nomadic lifestyle and the attendant poverty also suggest heterogeneity in relation to the protagonists. A speculative possibility arises that Zenia's presence might suggest that heterogeneity in Canadian society is the site of dialogic

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[308] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 492.

[309] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 510.

[310] Ibid.

[311] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 526.

potential for reforming the Western tradition of women's identity in the period of liberal ascendancy. Further associations in the novel support this speculation.

In the case of all three protagonists, it is at work that the presence of heterogeneity is most apparent. This repeats the pattern of *Saturday* and *Falling Man*, of course, with the home private space as the site of identity and more public spaces the site of heterogeneity. In the case of Roz, the need to revisit her past encounters with heterogeneity seems apparent when reconsidering the history of *WiseWomanWorld*, the magazine she owns. The novel ironises Roz's perspective on a dispute between the feminist and diverse producers of the magazine when she bought it and the increasingly male, business-minded board that runs the magazine by the 1980s. Roz remembers an incident in which Mitch touched the leg of the then-managing director Alma, who responded unequivocally: "Get your goddamn hand off my fucking leg or I'll stab you with a fork."[312] Roz feels she dealt adeptly with the situation, doing nothing at the time, but raising Alma's salary later. However, the reading by the novel's end is quite clearly that Roz's fragile identity and need to placate Mitch as part of it blinded her to what was going on. The irony is made most apparent as Roz wonders before Zenia turns the board against her: "What happened to those women? Where did they go? Why has she lost touch with them? Where did all these business suits come from?"[313]

In the case of Tony, the disputes at the university at the start of the period of liberal ascendancy between traditionalists and radical feminists are largely avoided by her. The novel contrasts the personalised and relaxed time-space of Tony's office, "larger than it would be in a modern building,"[314] with the cramped departmental coffee room, which causes Tony to reflect that the "whole department is like a Renaissance court: whisperings, gangings-up, petty treacheries, snits, and umbrage".[315] Tony tries not to engage in the politics, and reflects on seeing radical feminist graffiti and hostile graffiti in the toilets in response: "Omens of a coming tussle Tony hopes to avoid."[316]

In the case of Charis, the owner of the shop she works in, named Shanita, is a woman who explains the racial abuse she suffers from customers to Charis. Once again as the most open of the three protagonists dialogically, the novel signals Charis's responsiveness to Shanita's influence in the former's reconciliation with her business-minded daughter Augusta, whose attitude Shanita salutes in an economic recession.

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[312] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 423.

[313] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 444.

[314] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 26.

[315] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 23.

[316] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 29.

Shanita explains on difficult changes she wants to make to the shop: “This is a lifeboat, you know? It’s my life. I have worked damn hard, I know which way the wind is blowing, and I do not intend to go down with the sinking ship.”[317] As with her grandmother and Zenia, Charis comes to learn a certain worldly wisdom from Shanita. The hope implied is that the renewed friendship between the protagonists will enable Charis particularly to help her friends to revisit their challenging relationships with complexity in their working environments.

Returning to the question of debate in Rawlsian reading, Zenia’s presence as indicative of heterogeneity nuances the dialogic interpretation of *The Robber Bride*. The co-protagonists within the liberal tradition of Western society may have the potential to revitalise that tradition by reforming their personal identities through social dialogue, but the concentrated reading focus on Zenia further argues that that social dialogue and identity reformation can come from an interaction between the liberal protagonists and heterogeneous personal identities that are less firmly rooted in the liberal tradition in society as well. In this way, it follows that liberalism itself will be hybridised and evolve, as will the traditions of those outside the liberal one.

This re-emphasising of Zenia reflects insights in some of the existing critical commentary on *The Robber Bride*. In her 2006 *Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, Coral Ann Howells notes in her survey of trends in criticism on Atwood that in the early to mid-1990s there was an engagement “not in the contexts of nationalism and Canada-US relations but from a postcolonial perspective”.[318] Howells sees this as a re-emergence of an older critical commentary from the 1970s on Atwood that was then “neglected because of critical interest in more topical social and literary concerns like her feminism and her postmodern narrative experiments”.[319] This chapter sees the bridging of the concerns of different eras of Atwood criticism, and of Atwood’s oeuvre, as emerging in the reading process undertaken here. Fiona Tolan in her article “Situating Canada” further emphasises this bridging aspect of *The Robber Bride* in its ideas relating to different historical and literary concerns:

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[317] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 69.

[318] Howells, “Introduction,” 9.

[319] Ibid.

> For Atwood, the experience of being both self and other, which is particularly highlighted in Canada's postcolonial discourse, requires an acceptance of a unique duality that cannot be overcome by a misleading identification with either the colonial self *or* the postcolonial other.[320]

The stress on the dialogic, and the new identity that might emerge from it, is what this chapter's reading emphasises.

A second aspect of the concentrated reading stage that is important is the notion of polemic. Rawls envisaged the legitimacy of democracy as one of reasoned discourse between citizens, but Zenia's polemic and its usefulness offer a challenge to this Rawlsian conception. In some circumstances, it may be legitimate to suspend the normal procedures of public reason, Rawls noted, in a society that is deeply at odds with itself. Polemic is a risky tool, as it is powerful and can be used to dominate others, but its usefulness as a shock tactic in a situation of settled complacency is what is foregrounded by *The Robber Bride*. This seems particularly so in the case of identities and perspectives that are ignored. Nonetheless, the novel does not seem to go further than suggesting that polemic has a limited legitimacy in a temporary suspension of the dialogic processes that are more like Rawls's notion of public reason. The truly dialogic potential of the relationship between Shanita and Charis, for instance, is signalled in Shanita's close approximation of the identity of Roz, who is a hard-nosed businesswoman too. Shanita risks taking on the limitations of that identity in her effort to maintain her difficult position in society, and it is the emotional openness of Charis that may be a welcome complement to her own strength in the evolution of her own future personal identity. Also, structurally, the Zenia climactic polemics in the narrative lead directly to the homely gathering on the Island, implying clearly the potential for pragmatic use of polemic as a situational precursor to a productive dialogic exchange.

One further line of thought is worth pursuing here. Just as the chronotopic reading identified second wave feminism as part of the structural workings of *The Robber Bride*, so Rawlsian reading draws attention to some of the concerns of third wave feminism around the time of the start of the period of liberal ascendancy. Thinkers like Rebecca Walker and Kimberlé Cornwell argued that feminism risked ignoring other forms of discrimination if it focused exclusively on discrimination against women, and *The Robber Bride* is responsive to these concerns, with race, class, culture and sexuality all re-emphasised in the broader social networks of the protagonists. The homely impression of the Island gathering at the novel's end risks falling foul of the risk third wave feminism identifies if it is not attentive to the potential for social identity

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[320] Tolan, "Canada," 157.

formation outside of the lives of the three protagonists. The refocusing on Zenia reveals a novel that draws attention to this danger and offers its dialogic prescription in that direction.

The dialogic idea also seems to be situated within feminism, not least in the apparent need to revisit Tony's avoidance of the arguments in her university. *The Robber Bride* is an extraordinarily imaginative work of fiction in putting liberal feminism and radical feminism into a dialogic relation. Shannon Hengen in her survey of Atwood's work until just before *The Robber Bride* analyses her fiction in relation to the tradition of feminism emerging out of Marxism and psychoanalysis, in Hengen's case with a close focus on Irigaray. What Hengen detects in Atwood is something productive even in Irigaray's terms: "The process I will chart in Atwood's progressive narcissism is like what Irigaray describes as an alternative to the identity formation that perpetuates patriarchal, antifeminist, or regressive narcissism."[321] Even chronotopic reading, with its focus on consciousness, reveals how the historical plotting of *The Robber Bride* allows for consideration of repression in the identities of Tony and Roz in particular, as we have seen. Although the novel situates its diagnosis of women's identity within the liberal feminism of thinkers like Betty Friedan in the 1960s, it is also responsive to the psychoanalytical concerns of thinkers like Irigaray.

One way of thinking about this involves Roz and Tony at work. The novel offers a very complex treatment of this dimension of these women's lives. Roz seems to think as much about herself as she does about Zenia in the following exchange with Mitch:

> "It's not the same," says Mitch. "Adventurers live by their wits."
>
> "And adventuresses?" says Roz.
>
> "By their tits," says Mitch.
>
> "Point," says Roz, laughing. He set her up for it.
>
> But he's wrong, thinks Roz, remembering. It was wits for Zenia also.[322]

Similarly, Tony in dealing with patronising male colleagues in the history department is shown to reflect on their likely thoughts on this short woman who studies military history: "*A breath would blow you away*, they beam down at her silently. *You wish*, thinks Tony, smiling up. Many have blown."[323] The novel leaves the reader in no doubt that it respects pioneers like Roz and Tony, who have broken into high status positions

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[321] Shannon Hengen, *Margaret Atwood's Power* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1993): 35.

[322] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 440.

[323] Atwood, *Robber Bride*, 25.

through energy and intelligence. This sits alongside its treatment of the limitations and dangerous consequences of their identities. In its historical situation and its construction of complementary identities, *The Robber Bride* acknowledges the insights of liberal feminists like Friedan, and in its chaotic childhood treatment of the postwar generation and its structuring around a double shock to the identity administered by Zenia, it acknowledges the insights into entrenched identity of feminists in the Marxist psychoanalytical tradition like Irigaray. The ambitious energy of *The Robber Bride* seems to ask for a debate between liberal feminists and other feminists as well, with all parties standing to reform in the process.

# Chapter Four

## Key critical contexts for *Disgrace*

Three topical areas of interest have engaged readers of *Disgrace* in discussion: its national and international focus, its concentration on issues of interiority and exteriority, and its methodological self-consciousness.[324] My own reading I will seek to demonstrate in this chapter relates to all three areas, with a relational focus on the issues encompassed by the first and second major areas of interest. Readers have approached the novel in varied ways, with close readings focused on a particular theme, efforts to situate the novel in particular literary traditions, generic engagements with the aesthetic modes of the novel and readings principally linking the novel to its author's autobiographical and social context all offering prominent and significant perspectives on the text. My own designed reading process is closest to the first of these, has some affinities with the second and third, and fewer with the fourth approach. However, the insights of the contextually-focused readings have been useful in informing my reading also.

The novel's topical attention to national and international issues has perhaps been its most prominent aspect for discussion among readers. The political sensitivities of the immediate post-apartheid period in South Africa provide an initial starting point for these critical engagements. Scholars responding to the novel have sought to address the novel's engagement with issues of race and sex in a South African context. David Attwell situates *Disgrace*'s treatment of these topics, and in particular its discussion of rape, historically. He notes how Lurie's reflection on his daughter's rape is in part about drawing the reader's attention to the historical injustice of apartheid on racial grounds: "If they had been 'white thugs from Despatch' she would be less inclined to withdraw into silence. In other words, Lurie recognizes that the violence of black rape has an historical character which the violence of white rape may lack."[325] Lucy Graham argues that the rape of Lucy and Lurie's own sexual assault on Melanie further this historical engagement by reversing the South African "black peril" narrative and indicating the sexual violence against people of colour in the nation's past as part of the wider injustice. On the complexities and sensitivities of writing about rape in particular,

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[324] One reading of *Disgrace* that in a sense participates in all of these approaches comes from Malvern van Wyk Smith, who reads the text allusively for its Biblical and classical references. Van Wyk Smith sees Coetzee writing a figurative story of the process of national formation out of a troubled heritage (Malvern Van Wyk Smith, "Rape and the Foundation of Nations in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *English in Africa* 41, no. 1 [May 2014]: 13-34).

[325] David Attwell, "Race in *Disgrace," Interventions* 4, no. 3 (2002): 337.

Graham argues for a nuanced engagement in the novel, seeing respect for the victim in that the novel, even as it shows the relation of the individual acts to a broader context, does not attempt to speak for Melanie or Lucy:

> Since the stories of Melanie and Lucy are elided in *Disgrace*, the responsibility for such an imagining is left with the reader. For although the stories of Melanie and Lucy in *Disgrace* can only remain '[theirs] alone', to consign rape to a space outside articulation may contribute to a wider phenomenon of silencing.[326]

My own reading agrees with Graham's approach, and indeed my interpretation of the novel as a whole is distinctive in centralising Melanie in the end as representing a hopeful future for South Africa, at least in potential.

Engagements with the novel's presentation of South Africa's historical situation vary, with Hania Nashef offering a very bleak reading of the South African post-apartheid moment, in which apparent change is in fact a reinforcement of old problems.[327] While also identifying this risk, Rita Barnard argues that the novel holds out some hope for different possibilities in the nation's future. Her reading sees the novel as offering a critique of the South African colonial pastoral narrative with the possibility of new modes of living held out, not least in the symbolism of the novel's ending.[328] My own reading agrees with Nashef and Barnard's concentration on continuities and breaks with the nation's past, but with a focus on different matters. The contemporary scene that chronotopic reading of *Disgrace* surveys is one I characterise as a national emergency, in which the post-apartheid nation is shown trying to find unity and to redress inequality, particularly in religious and economic matters respectively. My reading also sees the novel holding out the possibility of a more hopeful future, emerging in my reading's case from what I argue is the novel's fairly robust engagement with the dialogic processes imagined as being in a state of potential change.

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[326] Lucy Graham, "Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace," Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, no. 2 (2003): 444.

[327] Hania Nashef, *The Politics of Humiliation in the Novels of J.M. Coetzee*, Routledge: New York, 2009.

[328] Barnard argues:

> In this devotion he seems to be guided, as Derek Attridge has argued, by an obscure resistance to the pervasive functionalism, instrumentalization, and homogenization that is the order of the day, both in South Africa and globally ('Age of Bronze' 114-18). Lurie's humble and self-imposed duties as 'dog psychopomp' (146) are thus a way of paying homage to the singularity of all (once) living things (Rita Barnard and J. M. Coetzee, "J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and the South African Pastoral," *Contemporary Literature* 44, no. 2 [Summer 2003]: 221).

My reading places a particular emphasis on spaces of education as the significant site of speculation for reimagined debate.

A range of approaches focused on the autobiographical and social context of the novel see *Disgrace* as engaging with both national and international issues. Two approaches concentrating on the novel's reception that see this dual engagement come from Andrew van der Vlies, and from John Kannemeyer and Michiel Heyns.[329] David Attwell has also made compelling links between Coetzee's comments as an academic about market forces distorting the practices of universities in the Western world and *Disgrace*'s presentation of this process in the city phase of Lurie's narrative. He draws special attention to the power of these international forces and the difficulty of resisting them from within a national frame.[330] My own reading identifies quite an extensive and robust engagement with this impact of market forces on South African society in the construction of almost all time-spaces in the city phase of the novel, and so the critique of this aspect of the contemporary scene is particularly trenchant in this chapter. In the reading offered here, the liberal tradition overall is presented in a critical manner and in need of a humble attitude in the post-apartheid nation. Nonetheless, there is potential identified in a dialogic engagement with the nation in the educational sphere. The novel concluding point of this chapter's reading of *Disgrace* is the reflection that the liberal tradition's educational emphasis in the liberal arts on engagement with multiple perspectives, undermined as this emphasis is by utilitarian market considerations, could have value in a more democratic and consciously heterogeneous South Africa if it contributes to building a reciprocal and mutual discussion with fluidity in the roles of teacher and student.

The relationship between interiority and exteriority has engaged readers of *Disgrace* as well. My own interpersonal approach to identity in this thesis stresses agency in dialogic terms, and Derek Attridge's concentration on the significance in the novel of the antonym of its title, grace, stresses that this concept is

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[329] On readings that see the novel as engaging with international issues in Kannemeyer and Heyns, see in particular their reference to Gerald Kaufman and Etienne Britz (John C. Kannemeyer and Michiel Heyns, *J.M. Coetzee: A Life in Writing* [Melbourne; Brunswick: Scribe, 2012]: 526 and 532 respectively). Van der Vlies draws attention particularly to Coetzee's own comments on the novel form in general and Attwell's situating Coetzee in Western discourse at large (Andrew E. van der Vlies, *J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace* [London; New York: Continuum, 2010]: 11).

[330] Attwell comments:

> Coetzee cautioned his university audience against a breezy use of the verb 'confront' ... 'Confront derives from the Latin frons, forehead, brow, and it means to stand brow to brow, face to face, with someone or something.' The force behind the corporatization of the universities was global in scale, he said, and therefore impossible to confront in this sense (David Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face to Face with Time* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015]: 191).

"not a disincentive to good works, but a spur".[331] He draws particular attention to the aesthetic as reflected in Lurie's private experiences: "Art matters, and Coetzee's powerful novelistic evocation of Lurie's experience of musical creation shows, twice over, that it does."[332] Attridge goes on to see this concept of grace as a possible social and political ideal to be desired as well.[333] Peter McDonald argues that the character of Lucy for example signifies at both a personal and social level, noting both that her "decision to accept Petrus's patronage is, then, in part a reflection of the way in which she *chooses* to see the rape" and that in figuring as both "exploiter and exploited, Lucy, unlike her father, plays many parts in the numerous histories of violation to which the novel alludes".[334] As with Attwell's and my own approach, McDonald's italicised verb in the first quotation draws attention to the significance of personal agency in the novel.[335]

A concentration in readings of *Disgrace* that is quite closely linked to the previous area of interest is the novel's methodological self-consciousness. Gareth Cornwell's engagement with generic modes of expression in *Disgrace* links it to Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* and sees a symbiotic relationship between realism and allegory at work in the novel, as he argues that "the two modes [realism and allegory] are embodied (Costello's word, again) in the process of representation in a relationship of negotiation or mutual interrogation".[336] My own interpretation agrees in effect but as I argued in my introduction, my reading follows the perspective of Bakhtin and his contemporary Lukàcs in that figurative signification can be seen as an aspect of realism rather than a necessarily different tradition. In a related but distinct treatment of the novel, Patrick Hayes situates Coetzee's attitude to realism as a nuanced engagement with Beckett: "[Coetzee's] distinction is between Beckett the programmatic anti-realist (a Beckett he denigrates) and another, more compelling Beckett whose prose is poised unsettlingly between realism and anti-realism".[337] Hayes sees in Coetzee an adoption of the comic mode of expression, and in *Disgrace* this allows him to shift

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[331] Attridge, *Coetzee*, 180.

[332] Attridge, *Coetzee*, 184.

[333] Attridge, *Coetzee*, 191.

[334] Peter McDonald, "*Disgrace* Effects," *Interventions* 4, no. 3 (2002): 328.

[335] Another notable treatment of *Disgrace* in both personal and social terms comes from Duncan McColl Chesney, who argues that Coetzee writes work that is serious in intent and form. He sees *Disgrace* as an example of this in stressing the personal within a social frame in this serious way (Duncan McColl Chesney, *Serious Fiction: J.M. Coetzee and the Stakes of Fiction* [New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2016]: 124).

[336] Gareth Cornwell, "Realism, Rape, and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 43, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 320.

[337] Patrick Hayes, *J.M. Coetzee and the Novel: Writing and Politics After Beckett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 40.

the attention from the increasingly comic Lurie to Lucy, "making Lucy the grounds of all seriousness".[338] My own reading foregrounds the largely realist mode of expression in the tracing of dialogic identity formation in the novels time-spaces, but as in Bakhtin's own essay on the chronotope, this allows for other, including comic, modes of expression to come to the fore. I argue that the narrative by degrees shifts its centre from Lurie to Lucy to Petrus and then to Melanie in its chronotopic configurations in a manner that is new in its detailing of the shifting concentration and significance of the dialogic formation of identity in the text.

## *Disgrace*: the perils of identity formation in an emergency

In *Disgrace*, a Capetonian professor of literature David Lurie, who specialises in romanticism, is a divorced parent in post-apartheid South Africa. He leads a solitary life, which he mitigates by sleeping with prostitutes. He eventually seduces and sleeps with one of his students, named Melanie Isaacs, and this leads to a scandal at the university. He is offered the chance to make a public statement apologising for his actions, but he refuses and is asked to leave the university. In his state of disgrace, he goes to the Eastern Cape to stay on the farm that his daughter Lucy is managing in a fluid proprietary situation with Petrus, a local man who has benefitted from recent land reform legislation to become a co-proprietor of the land with Lucy. Lurie begins to work at the animal welfare clinic of Bev Shaw, a friend of Lucy's. There is an attack on the farm in which Lurie is badly injured and Lucy raped. Lucy and her father find their relationship increasingly strained as he urges her to leave South Africa and she refuses. Lurie moves out, briefly visiting the Isaacs family to apologise for his actions and visiting the city once more, and it seems as though his life is winding towards its end as he moves into an improvised space at the back of Bev Shaw's animal welfare clinic as the novel draws to a close.

In my chapter on *Falling Man*, I noted the comparison with *Disgrace* that the absence of conventional narrative stages, particularly a climax and resolution, could be seen to imply a focus on dissipation rather than action. In turn, this might be seen to generate a kind of postmodern gloom in the reading of the novel. As in my chapter on *Falling Man*, I hope to nuance such a conclusion about *Disgrace* by the end of this chapter.

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[338] Hayes, *Coetzee*, 209.

As in *Saturday*, *Disgrace* uses third person narration to focalise one protagonist, but it is distinct from all the other novels in this corpus, except to some extent *Paradise*, in its time-space configuration. If the temporal axis of the time-space configuration was most prominent in *The Robber Bride* among novels in this corpus, with that novel's tracking of decades of historical change in the lives of its protagonists, it is the spatial that is most to the fore in *Disgrace* among the novels in this corpus. A Bakhtinian reading of Dickens as an exemplar of what Bakhtin called the family novel has been useful throughout this thesis, and that is true here as well. However, there is another, older chronotopic model that Bakhtin fixes on as a useful model for the structuring of *Disgrace*. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a typically startling model for Bakhtin to evoke in his history of the Western novel, but he uses its structuring of the afterlife to make a general point about the possibility for time-space configuration that it offers to the Western novelistic tradition. Bakhtin sees tension in the structure of Dante's epic as generated first by the construction of a vertical, spatial afterlife from hell via purgatory to heaven and secondly by a straining of the souls therein for a temporal progression: "[T]he images and ideas that fill this vertical world are in their turn filled with a powerful desire to escape this world, to set out along the historically productive horizontal, to be distributed not upward, but forward."[339] I will argue in this chapter that *Disgrace* concentrates its imaginative energy on the construction of a moment, the immediate post-apartheid moment in South African history, with the temporal tension that results one of pressing forward into an uncertain future. More than any other novel in the corpus, *Disgrace* offers at the interpretive level a photographic snapshot or a panoramic and geographical image: an image of South Africa in its urban, suburban and rural aspects immediately after the end of apartheid. The constructive chronotopic reading of *Disgrace* in this chapter will detail how this image emerges.

## Spaces of repair: the dead city

The presentation of the protagonist in *Disgrace* is an exceedingly complicated matter. Chronotopic reading of the city phase of the narrative, which covers the first six of the novel's twenty four chapters and Chapters

[339] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 157.

20 and 21, reveals a remarkably unattractive protagonist in David Lurie.[340] The focalisation of the novel's opening sentence employs a rich irony in conveying a sense of the mind of this protagonist as it works at the start of the narrative: "For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well."[341] The nonchalance and self-satisfaction of what is soon revealed to be an ethically uncomplicated approval of his in fact very complicated approach to sleeping with prostitutes seems aimed to generate unease in the reader's approach to the focalised consciousness that is at the centre of *Disgrace*. The irony at work in the narrative voice seems straightforwardly satirical here, unlike in *The Robber Bride*'s treatment of its protagonists. This impression will be largely unchanged by the end of this chapter, but not entirely so. Nonetheless, for the city phase of the narrative, it is significantly unchanged.

The rather artful opening sentence of the novel contrasts with the flatly declarative language of its second sentence: "On Thursday afternoons he drives to Green Point."[342] This, the reader learns, is where Lurie meets the prostitute named Soraya. The distinction between the first two sentences of the novel establishes a pattern between the novel's unfolding of Lurie's consciousness by means of free indirect discourse and its short, bald statements in relation to the spaces in which that consciousness unfolds itself. In the first chapter alone, the reader is introduced not only to Lurie's appointments with Soraya, but also to his history of "[picking] up tourists in bars on the waterfront and at the Club Italia,"[343] his intrusion on Soraya

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[340] Critics have grappled with the protagonist of this novel in various ways, with an almost dazzling array of different outcomes. Andrew van der Vlies in his 2010 *J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace: A Reader's Guide* offers a very negative reading of Lurie, arguing that "David is an inveterate snob, as his later attitude to the Isaacs family reveals on p.170" (Van der Vlies, *Disgrace,* 29). Gillian Dooley in her 2010 *J.M. Coetzee and the Power of Narrative* sees Lurie as a compromised but somewhat ethical figure in a sense, noting that Lurie's "refusal to defend himself or to even try to soften the consequences of his sexual misdeeds can hardly be regarded as a noble political crusade, although there is a certain obstinate nobility in the penance he submits himself to" (Gillian Dooley, *J. M. Coetzee and the Power of Narrative* [Amherst: Cambria Press, 2010]: 21). Malvern van Wyk Smith argues that Lurie learns in the course of the narrative and is somewhat redeemed in the process. He notes Lurie's apology to the Isaacs family late in the novel:

> … a far cry from the chirpy way in which he confronted his Cape Town inquisitors: "I am sunk into a state of disgrace from which it will not be easy to lift myself ... I am living it out from day to day, trying to accept disgrace as my state of being" (Van Wyk Smith, "Nations," 28).

In yet another move, Peter McDonald tries to particularise Lurie as not a simple type representing the difficult historical mingling of race and class in South Africa: "Lurie is not just white. He is always at the same time middle-aged, heterosexual, male, probably Jewish, etc. Likewise, Lucy's attackers are not just black. They are male, heterosexual, etc" (McDonald, "Effects," 327). My own approach in this chapter will draw out some of the subtle, multi-purpose significances to which I see *Disgrace*'s protagonist being put in the novel.

[341] J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (London: Vintage, 2000): 1.

[342] Ibid.

[343] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 7.

and her family at "Captain Dorego's Fish Inn"[344] and his subsequent sleeping with another prostitute, also named Soraya, "in a hotel room in Long Street".[345] These references name actual locations in Cape Town.[346] One effect of this pattern of references is to establish the city as a chronotope of multiple commercial spaces, focused on leisure activities. Another involves Bakhtin's distinction between private and public spaces. These appear to be public spaces in being touristic and so sites for fairly large gatherings of people. However, the textual focus is on Lurie's particular sexual interest in visiting each of them, either in terms of prostitution, casual sex or voyeurism in the episode of stalking Soraya at the restaurant chain outlet. In each case, the idea of private space in Bakhtin of closed-off, one-to-one encounters seems much closer to the mark. The novel then envisages these spaces as ostensibly public but essentially private in character.

As a matter of identity formation for Lurie, the commercial, essentially private spaces of Cape Town are significant in establishing a pattern into which the time-space that opens the narrative, the apartment where Lurie sleeps with Soraya, fits. Lurie's attractiveness to women in his younger years is emphasised as central to his self-image: "That was how he lived; for years, for decades, that was the backbone of his being."[347] It is against this background of Lurie's personal past that his increasingly difficult search for sex with women, culminating in sleeping with prostitutes, is set. The self-satisfaction of the novel's opening sentence describes Lurie's attitude to his appointments at the apartment with Soraya. The room is described from Lurie's perspective as perfectly attuned to his sexual appetite. Lurie describes his sexuality as not especially passionate, and the room strikes him as "pleasant smelling and softly lit".[348] The time-limited aspect of these sexual encounters, with the freedom to enter and leave without additional responsibility, is also prized, and this is indicated also in the description of the apartment, conspicuous in its detail when compared to the bare naming of locations that characterises the rest of the spaces in the novel's early stages: "In the kitchen of the flat in Green Point there are a kettle, plastic cups, a jar of instant coffee, a bowl with sachets of sugar."[349] Lurie seems to convince himself that this is an optimal arrangement for his stage of life and way of living.

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[344] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 6.

[345] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 8.

[346] The waterfront refers to the Victoria & Albert Waterfront complex, an upmarket tourist attraction. Long Street is a famous and fashionable bohemian location. Captain Dorego's Fish Inn is a national restaurant chain.

[347] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 7.

[348] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 1.

[349] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 5.

However, the narratorial distance established in the novel's ironic opening sentence emerges again in this space. Lurie's voyeuristic stalking of Soraya to the restaurant where he sees her with her children betrays the confusion that lurks beneath his limited, self-satisfied identity. The next time he sees her, shortly before she cuts off ties with him, he realises that the neatly comforting aspects of this apartment time-space have been complicated as he imagines Soraya's children: "The two little boys become presences between them, playing quiet as shadows in a corner of the room where their mother and the strange man couple."[350] Lurie's actual confusion, despite his professed self-satisfaction, is thus a feature even here in this time-space of relative contentment when compared to what follows it. On the one hand, Lurie tells himself that here he has attained "a moderate bliss, a moderated bliss".[351] He muses further that "he used to think he needed a wife, a home, a marriage"[352] but that his "needs turn out to be quite light, after all, light and fleeting, like those of a butterfly".[353] On the other hand, the narrative registers a different attitude at times: "During their sessions he speaks to her with a certain freedom, even on occasions unburdens himself."[354] Lurie seems to convince himself that a time-space calibrated to the smooth satisfaction of his sexual appetite suffices to maintain his sense of self, but the absence of genuine and deeper human connection and warmth expresses itself tellingly as a longing he struggles to interpret. The impression the narrative gives, then, is of an identity that seems half-convincingly stable, but is in fact caught in a tension that amounts to a crisis of identity.

This identity crisis then plays out in the seduction of Melanie Isaacs. The apparently sealed-off, private nature of the apartment in Green Point is matched by the description of Lurie's house, where he invites Melanie for dinner early in the seduction. The shaping power of Lurie's past, already noted in relation to his sexual history, is registered once more in the description of his house as Lurie and Melanie arrive there in his car: "[T]hey pass into the quiet residential pocket where he has lived for the past twelve years, first with Rosalind, then, after the divorce, alone."[355] The heavily punctuated final phrase adds emphasis to the last word in the sentence, a solitary status Lurie has held for an untold portion of the preceding twelve years. In this context, the word "pocket" registers not the usual cozy sense of comfort and calm but rather the impression of a life made small and cut-off by immersion in a dead end. The unsurprising reference to

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[350] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 6.

[351] Ibid.

[352] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 5.

[353] Ibid.

[354] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 3.

[355] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 12.

security in South Africa as Lurie "unlocks the security gate, unlocks the door, ushers the girl in"[356] is given another significance for Lurie's identity, with the house a place of solitude and even taking on the impression of being a prison.

Lurie's attempts to replicate what he convinced himself was the comfortable perfection of his arrangement with Soraya involve removing any sense of this as a home, which it once was. Any attempts by Melanie to discuss Lurie's past are met by uncharacteristically staccato statements aimed at moving away from this aspect of his life.[357] Even here, Lurie's confusion is apparent in the ambivalence he feels about removing the complication of family and yearning for the comfort it offers. This confusion in his identity continues through the sexual encounters he and Melanie have and also after he sexually assaults her. When he first sleeps with her at her apartment, he guiltily reflects afterwards that the scene was "straight out of George Grosz".[358] The Weimar decadence of this artist's work betrays Lurie's unease about what he is doing. Later, after the sexual assault, upon returning to his car, "[he] is overtaken with such dejection, such dullness, that he sits slumped at the wheel unable to move".[359] The ambivalence about family continues as she then comes to sleep with him at his house again and her status is unclear as either a lover or a daughter: "He makes up a bed for her in his daughter's old room, kisses her good night, leaves her to herself."[360] The full significance of the sexual assault is apparent later on in the narrative, but at this stage, it serves in plot terms as the catalyst for Lurie's expulsion from the university and indeed the city. It also accentuates the depth of the identity crisis in Lurie as he retreats to the country to live with his daughter Lucy.

The manner in which the presentation of Lurie's time-spaces in the city works as a matter of interpretation is a complex one. In *Saturday*, the other single-protagonist novel in this selection, I argued that Perowne signified relatively straightforwardly as an international liberal middle class figure. I will make the same case here, but less straightforwardly. The case for Lurie as a liberal middle class figure is easy to make. His liberalism is seen not least in the recurrence of the idea of freedom (and its absence captivity) in his value judgements about the kind of life he leads or seeks to avoid leading. His middle class background is signalled not least in his secure house in a residential part of the city. What is challenging in situating the

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[356] Ibid.

[357] On past marriages, he says: "I was. Twice. But now I'm not" (Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 16). On his solitude: "I live alone. If I don't cook, no one will" (Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 14).

[358] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 19.

[359] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 25.

[360] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 26.

appropriate level of Lurie's type is deciding between its national and international dimensions. The case for Lurie as an international type is not difficult; the foregoing discussion outlines the case clearly.

However, I started this chapter by noting how *Disgrace* has a time-space configuration that accentuates the spatial, but that is not to say it neglects the temporal. Telling references to Lurie's personal past helped to interpret the presentation both of the apartment time-space and the house time-space. This is true in historicising Lurie as well. The second sentence of the novel refers to Green Point, which at first seems important simply as another class reference as Green Point is an affluent part of the city. However, its historical significance was as a military encampment in South Africa's colonial past.[361] The novel subtly ties Lurie sleeping with Soraya in the pivotal first time-space of the apartment to South Africa's colonial history. In this way, the novel reorientates the reading of Lurie as a type towards the white minority ruling class of South Africa until the end of apartheid. The city as experienced by Lurie is thus largely the old South Africa, and this novel, which I will argue by the chapter's end is intent on capturing an image of South Africa in its immediately post-apartheid moment, imagines the city as a symbol of the old order of the country.

The idea of the white minority ruling class of the old South Africa introduces the specific racial politics of that country, and the novel is not straightforward in its treatment of racial language. Neither Soraya nor Melanie, for instance, is given many specific racial markers in the text, although Farodia Rassool, a member of the university panel deliberating on Lurie's conduct in relation to Melanie, refers to "the long history of exploitation of which this [abuse] is part".[362] What is significant about this reading of Lurie at this stage of the narrative is how it shapes the reader's spatial imagination of the city as part of the image of post-apartheid South Africa. The city comes to stand for the old South Africa, and its contrast with the rest of the novel is seen in its presentation as a somewhat static and rigid environment. This becomes more obvious later in the narrative, but it is apparent even in the city phase.

Where Lurie is always seen in private spaces, even when ostensibly public, there are hints that Melanie's is a less sealed-off, more public life than his. Significantly, Melanie is not from the city but from the provincial town of George, of which more later. In one passage there is the sense of her public life and Lurie's desire to pull her away into his private realm:

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[361] *South African History Online* states: "During the South African War of 1899-1902, Green Point common was used by the Military as an encampment for a large number of British troops as well as a camp for Boer POWs" (South African History Online, "Green Point," www.sahistory.org.za/places/green-point/ [accessed August 13, 2019]).

[362] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 53.

> Crossing the lobby of the Communications Building at the end of the day, he spies her at the doorway amid a knot of students waiting for a break in the downpour. He comes up behind her, puts a hand on her shoulder. "Wait for me here," he says. "I'll give you a ride home."[363]

The doorway is significant in Bakhtin, as the Russian theorist prizes Dostoevsky's public chronotopes as models of sociality that include the threshold. In detailing the chronotope of threshold, Bakhtin explains that "the staircase, the front hall and corridor ... are ... where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man".[364] This dynamism of public spaces, a dialogic dynamism, is absent in Lurie's city life, as we have seen. This life is instead asocial and non-dialogic. It is solitary and even atomistic.

The chronotopic model here is more Bakhtin's first ancient Greek category of the adventure novel, where space does not allow for the dialogic formation of identity, than the second category of the adventure novel of everyday life, in which dialogic identity formation takes place. The sense of non-dialogic space in Lurie's city life is also apparent in his working life. In the classroom when teaching about the Romantic poets, the incomprehension of his students is to the fore: "why does it have to be so complicated, they want to complain? What answer can he give them?".[365] The solitary nature of his work is even more apparent in the office, where the narrative stresses Lurie's sense of an "obligation toward [his students], their parents, and the state. Month after month he sets, collects, reads, and annotates their assignments, correcting lapses in punctuation, spelling and usage, interrogating weak arguments, appending to each paper a brief, considered critique".[366] In its association with the past, it seems to suggest a kind of social death. This impression will need to be revisited at the end of the chapter, but as a matter of the spatial image established in constructive chronotopic reading of the novel, the city represents the old South Africa as a rather static and lifeless environment, vestigial even, but which nonetheless remains a presence in the post-apartheid period.

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[363] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 20.

[364] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 248.

[365] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 21.

[366] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 4-5.

## The reparation dilemma: a national emergency

Uniquely among this selection of novels, *Disgrace* increasingly de-centres its protagonist. In all my other chapters, the chronotopic reading relies heavily on the presumption that the focalised protagonist's perspective is privileged in determining what is central and what is peripheral in chronotopic reading. However, *Disgrace* artfully complicates and ultimately removes the centrality of its protagonist in order to concentrate on other matters. Bakhtin stresses how the chronotopic history of the Western novel evolved, initially in the adventure novel of everyday life, an outsider character role. Part of the logic of the private spaces of this genre, Bakhtin noted, was that "one could only *spy* and *eavesdrop* on it".[367] Bakhtin sees the outsider who intrudes on this private space as instrumental in the development in the Western tradition of adventurer roles for those entering into a new and not yet socially accepted category:

> Such is the positioning of the rogue and the adventurer, who do not participate internally in everyday life, who do not occupy in it any definite fixed place, yet who at the same time pass through that life and are forced to study its working, all its secret cogs and wheels.[368]

In *Disgrace*, Lurie comes to take on this outsider role increasingly after he leaves the city. He feels increasingly out of place in South Africa, and the manner in which his narrative focalisation operates as a matter of reader attention shifts.

The re-centring of the novel that occurs in the rural and suburban phases of the narrative begins with Lucy, although it does not end there. Lurie's shift into an outsider role begins quite quickly when he arrives at the farm. He is struck by his daughter's deep immersion in the rhythms and activities of this life of farm work and its incongruity with the urban professional lives he and his wife have led. He reflects: "But perhaps it was not they who produced her: perhaps history had the larger share."[369]The important aspect of this statement in the novel's trajectory is to notice how the second clause shifts the reader's attention away from Lurie and toward the shaping forces of history. The farm time-space differs from the private spaces Lurie inhabited in the city. The sealed aspect that was stressed in Lurie's urban environments gives way to a more porous demarcation in the farm space: "The front boundary is marked by a wire fence and clumps of

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[367] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 123.

[368] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 124.

[369] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 61.

nasturtiums and geraniums; the rest of the front is dust and gravel."[370] Lurie's focalisation registers this more immediately in terms of concerns for Lucy's safety, but the chronotopic reader can detect another significance here.[371]

If the city was characterised by rigidity, the immediate switch in the country is to a more fluid chronotopic conception. Lucy soon introduces Petrus and his status in fluid terms as well: "Petrus is my new assistant. In fact, since March, co-proprietor."[372] The post-apartheid politics of South Africa here comes to the fore, as Petrus has benefitted from recent land reform legislation to gain property rights to part of the land that Lucy's farm occupies. This political situation is woven into the chronotopic rendering of the countryside as a fluid environment.

Lurie's outsider status in the countryside becomes increasingly apparent. If Lurie hopes to find in the farm space a dialogic environment for repairing his identity, he quickly sees that his daughter's perspective is very different from his own. When Lurie recounts his refusal to issue a public apology, Lucy disapproves: "You shouldn't be so unbending, David. It isn't heroic to be unbending."[373] The recourse to the language of flexibility in Lucy's disapproval again replicates the chronotopic contrast between the rigidity of the city and the fluidity of the country. Lurie and Lucy have their first argument in the car after a visit to Bev Shaw, whose interest in animal rights Lurie mocks. Lucy interprets Lurie's disdain as a personal judgement on her life choices: "You think, because I am your daughter, I ought to do something better with my life."[374] Significantly, they "arrive at the house in silence".[375] From this point on, the chronotopic presentation of the countryside begins to divide into two sorts. The farm time-space has its interior dimension, where Lurie and Lucy inhabit the house, and its exterior dimension, where outdoor work and activity take place. In the former, the intensely solitary impression of private spaces in the city begins to re-emerge as Lurie and Lucy struggle to converse meaningfully, while in the latter, different processes begin to become apparent.

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370 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 59.

371 Rita Barnard sees this rural setting as a place of potential in a heterogeneous society as well in her reflection on Lucy's final appearance in the novel:

> *Disgrace*'s penultimate scene may invite us to imagine the farm in the Eastern Cape as such a place, a place where the difficulties of cultural translation may be overcome, wordlessly, by bodily experiences: pregnancy, field labor, the materiality of dwelling on the land (Barnard, "Pastoral," 219-20).

372 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 62.

373 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 66.

374 Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 74.

375 Ibid.

Increasingly, these different processes focus the novel as the centre of attention shifts once more, from Lucy to Petrus.

At first, the significance of Petrus is signalled by his entry into the interior dimension of the farm house. Lurie is woken up from an afternoon nap by Petrus watching the television: "When he awakes, Petrus is beside him on the sofa with a bottle of beer in his hands. He has turned the volume higher."[376] The positioning on the sofa is yet another sign that the fluidity of the countryside chronotope is its defining characteristic in the novel, and the gesture prefigures Lurie's interactions with Petrus after Lucy asks her father to help Petrus with some of the farm work. Lurie and Petrus work together, but their talk is cautious and guarded. The focalisation of Lurie's perspective draws attention to Lurie's impression, respectful as it happens, of Petrus as a man of action rather than words. Lurie notices how in one of their conversations after the attack on the farm, Petrus at one point purposefully "puts the pipe away in his pocket, exchanges spade for broom,"[377] signalling quite clearly in these actions and objects the swift move from conversation back to work.[378]

As the novel progresses, the dynamism of Petrus increases. When he is later able to afford a tractor, Petrus is able to do his work even more efficiently. The narrative focalises Lurie once more: "In a matter of hours he has ploughed the whole of his land. All very swift and businesslike; all very unlike Africa."[379] Lurie's consciousness in his interactions with Petrus of the nation's racial politics and history is recurrent, with him observing at one point in helping Petrus working on a dam that he is effectively Petrus' "*handlanger*,"[380] an Afrikaans term for an unskilled worker or assistant. Lurie is aware of the role reversal in terms of the country's racial politics that is at work here.[381] The novel also indicates the increasingly significant presence Petrus has in the narrative in the advice Bev Shaw, like Lucy a figure shown to be more

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[376] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 75.

[377] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 119.

[378] Rita Barnard makes a similar point about Petrus's use of English:

> The language he uses-functional and technical, concerned with such things as "regulators," pressure valves, and junctions-may not be the kind of English favored by Lurie, or by Coetzee himself. But while neither burdened nor enriched by history and tradition, it is clearly not an English that is ready to expire in the mud (Barnard, "Pastoral," 217).

[379] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 151.

[380] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 136.

[381] David Attwell reads Petrus as a figure whose presentation is consistent with Coetzee's own writings about the history of the farm in South Africa: "Petrus ... is simply reversing, or appropriating, the patriarchal lineage and linear conception of history that are intrinsic to the ideology associated with the farm novel which Coetzee elucidates in *White Writing*" (Attwell, "Race," 335).

in touch with life in the country than Lurie, gives Lurie about the man: "Petrus slaved to get the market going for Lucy. Without Petrus Lucy wouldn't be where she is now."[382] In its careful tying of the country to fluidity, and its association of fluidity with the dynamic energy of Petrus, only increasing as the narrative progresses, *Disgrace* shifts its centre of attention from Lurie to Lucy and then to Petrus.

The time-space that clinches this shift is Petrus's house, which used to be the farm stable. Once Petrus begins to become more successful, he invites Lurie and Lucy to a party. Again, Lurie as outsider is focalised as an observer, but he detects the warmth of this gathering as a model of sociality in contrast to the non-dialogic time-spaces that have dominated the novel to this point:

> It is dark before the younger folk make an appearance. On the breeze comes a murmur of talk, laughter and music, music that he associates with the Johannesburg of his own youth. Quite tolerable, he thinks to himself – quite jolly, even.[383]

The final sentence, with its initially begrudging but subsequently warm praise, indicates how even from his rather detached vantage point, Lurie can detect the liveliness of the community Petrus is able to assemble. There are reminders that Petrus has come from poor beginnings in the improvements in the building, which is said to have "no ceiling and no proper floor. But at least it is spacious and at least it has electricity."[384] The country phase began with Lurie forgetting how cold winters in the country could be,[385] a subtle precursor to this revelation of the living conditions Petrus had to cope with in those months. By the end of the novel, it seems that the industry of Petrus has built up the house to a significant extent: "Petrus's house has become a reality. Grey and featureless, it stands on an eminence east of the old farmhouse; in the mornings, he guesses, it must cast a long shadow."[386] By the end of the novel, then, the dynamic rise of Petrus continues unabated.

At this point in the analysis, it is worth revisiting the interpretive question. In the first phase of the novel, I argued that the city chronotope stood for the old South Africa, a rather rigid and static environment that nonetheless remained a presence in the post-apartheid period. The country

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[382] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 140.

[383] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 128.

[384] Ibid.

[385] "He has not brought the right clothes: he has to borrow a sweater from Lucy" (Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 68).

[386] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 197.

increasingly de-centres the city in the image of South Africa generated by *Disgrace*, and it is presented as the site of the changes that increasingly shape the new post-apartheid nation. This shift is most explicit in Lurie's brief return to the city near the end of the novel, where he muses from his car: "Inexorably, he thinks, the country is coming to the city. Soon there will be cattle on Rondebosch Common; soon history will have come full circle."[387] Lurie perhaps thinks this rather literally, but the significance of this reflection within the overall chronotope of the novel is its impression of dynamism in the national moment, the post-apartheid moment in South African history.

The presentation of Petrus details this dynamism more specifically. The changes in his life are material ones, which are changes that are sought with urgency, and here the novel draws attention to the scale of the challenge facing the new South Africa in its economic dimension, specifically the poverty of so many of its citizens who have just gained a democratic franchise. The urgency of Petrus here seems to stand for a conception of the economic challenge as a national emergency, in which the political freedoms won by the citizenry must be accompanied by immediate efforts to address economic poverty, the alleviation of which would make those political freedoms more meaningful.

The impression of a national emergency in economic terms that the countryside chronotope generates finds a parallel in the brief suburban episode in which Lurie seeks to apologise to the Isaacs family in George near the end of the novel. Lurie's outsider status is signalled once again, not least in Melanie's father never giving Lurie his first name, and is instead referred to only as Isaacs or Mr Isaacs. This makes sense in plot terms as a formal detachment is the best Lurie can reasonably hope for from the father of Melanie, but it also continues the impression of Lurie as the outsider or observer in the new South Africa. If the country is shown to be changing the nation, so is the suburban or provincial town. However, what Isaacs represents as a new factor in the novel is religion. His Christianity is to the fore in all of his dealings with Lurie, starting with his initial confrontation with Lurie in the latter's office when he finds out about Lurie's seduction of Melanie: "No, Professor Lurie, you may be high and mighty and have all kinds of degrees, but if I was you I'd be very ashamed of myself, so help me God."[388] Lurie and Isaacs never see eye-to-eye over religion, but Isaacs, a schoolteacher, feels a reversal in status when Lurie returns to see him later in the novel: "'So,' says

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[387] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 175.

[388] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 38.

Isaacs softly, and the word leaves his lips like a sigh: 'how are the mighty fallen!'"[389] Isaacs here offers a biblical quotation from the book of Samuel.

The focus on status is accentuated spatially, as both of these interactions occur in offices, drawing attention to their official capacity (or lack thereof in the case of Lurie on the second occasion). The power dynamic's inversion is completed when Lurie dramatically prostrates himself before the mother and sister of Melanie in the Isaacs family home. The Isaacs episode seems to draw attention to another manner in which the new South Africa is urgently changing: as a matter of cultural identity, the importance of Christianity as a binding force in the construction of a shared identity for the new South Africa is foregrounded.

This chapter's interpretation of *Disgrace*'s historical survey in the constructive chronotopic part of this reading chimes well with how Duncan McColl Chesney in his 2016 *Serious Fiction: J.M. Coetzee and the Stakes of Fiction* situates *Disgrace* in Coetzee's career. Chesney sees *Disgrace* as an exemplar of the serious fiction that he sees characterising Coetzee's oeuvre: "It bespeaks a serious comportment towards the world and towards the artwork."[390] I have discussed this literary realism and social engagement in the novel, and Chesney goes on to argue for relating personal and interpersonal aspects of Coetzee's novel to wider social concerns. In terms of Lurie's personal and interpersonal presentation, Chesney argues for a reading involving "accepting an external alterity by accepting internal alterity,"[391] and in terms of wider social engagement he addresses "the realities of colonial and post-colonial life".[392] Chesney sees Coetzee's great quality in "the way he can interrelate these highly complex and difficult concerns".[393] This chapter seeks to demonstrate how this promise of interrelating ideas of the personal and the social can be realised through the designed reading process of this thesis.

Constructive chronotopic reading of *Disgrace* offers an image of post-apartheid South Africa, in which the urban life of the old South Africa looks increasingly vestigial but still present, while the country and suburban chronotopes draw attention to a national emergency, both economic and cultural, as the scale of the challenge of binding together this newly democratic country is being

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[389] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 167.

[390] Chesney, *Fiction,* 146.

[391] Chesney, *Fiction*, 124.

[392] Ibid.

[393] Ibid.

urgently addressed both in the alleviation of poverty and in the culturally binding power of Christianity. I turn now to a top down Rawlsian approach to this chronotopic interpretation.

## The fragility of liberalism in public reason

Revisiting this panoramic conception of the nation that emerges as the chronotope of *Disgrace* with a Rawlsian focus of attention offers fresh priorities and associations, as it has done with the other novels in this corpus. Again as with the others, it also follows some of the processes already identified in constructive chronotopic reading of the particular novel in question. The protagonist Lurie and his status in the novel, so crucial in the constructive reading, is the starting point in the concentrated Rawlsian reading as well.

Even if Lurie is de-centred by the novel, he is not effaced, at least not until the end, when he arguably is. In applying an expectation of finding an image approximating to the Rawlsian notion of public reason, Lurie's attempts to converse with his daughter Lucy seem the obvious starting point. We have already seen how this conversation has been largely frustrated, and how this suggests Lurie's association with the old South Africa and its inadequacy to the demands of the new nation. However, there is one surprising element in the interaction of the two that is subtly included in the story of their renewed acquaintance in the country phase of the narrative.

Early in his return to the farm, as he tries to make peace after one of their arguments and she suggests he involve himself in the animal welfare clinic and in assisting Petrus to occupy his time, this unusually productive dialogue begins with Lurie noticing Lucy reading something and asks what it is: "She smiles, lays her book aside. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*: not what he would have expected."[394] This was Dickens' last novel, in which the narrative focuses on a teacher who slept with a student. The interpersonal implications of this choice are obvious, as Lucy is at this stage making an attempt to understand her father. Later, at the low point in their interactions, after the attack and Lucy's rape, Lurie observes Lucy's habits in the house as she absorbs magazines: "She flicks through them impatiently, as though searching for something that is not there. Of *Edwin Drood* there is no more sign."[395] The narrative trajectory thwarts the interpersonal implications of this novel reading, but it does not necessarily disturb its potential as a significant interpretive reference in *Disgrace*. The

[394] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 76.

[395] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 114.

interpersonal significance is plain, but there is also the association of Lurie with literature and with teaching that is drawn from the reference to this specific novel. This in turn inspires other associations with a Rawlsian focus on public reason in mind.

Lurie's teaching, as we have seen, fails to be dialogic, as does so much else in the novel. Lurie is well aware of this, and in fact his failure as a teacher has a bizarre echo at the end of the novel. In a fascinating analysis of *Disgrace*, Patrick Hayes ties Coetzee to Beckett in terms of what the former saw as Beckett's comic potential: "Essential to this process is what Coetzee, referring to Beckett, spoke of as a 'comic energy' that has the 'power to surprise'."[396] Hayes notes how Lurie is increasingly an absurd comic figure, almost clownish at times, as the novel progresses, certainly as a banjo player in the improvised space in the animal welfare clinic with the dog by the end of the narrative, but even, most incongruously, as a failed hero figure attempting to rescue his daughter during the farm attack. Amid the absurdity of Lurie's increasingly strange life, I notice a moment of pathos as the dog momentarily attends to the banjo playing: "The dog is fascinated by the sound of the banjo. When he strums the strings, the dog sits up, cocks its head, listens."[397] Ridiculous though it seems, and certainly in the spirit of surprise out of comedy, for a moment Lurie seems to have found an attentive student. The moment is so fragile and fleeting, but the dialogic potential of teaching is present in the novel.

What this idea further draws to mind is a time-space much earlier in the novel, where Lurie first met Melanie outside the library. The narrative focalises Lurie's thoughts in a quite different manner to all other time-spaces in the novel: "He enjoys the late-afternoon quiet of the reading room, enjoys the walk home afterwards: the brisk winter air, the damp, gleaming streets."[398] In what is presented as an otherwise uniformly rigid, static and deathly non-dialogic spatial environment, the city in its university library time-space shows a different aspect. There is warmth, life and even tenderness in this description of the reflective potential of learning in a space of this kind. Its situation as the meeting place of Melanie and Lurie in this context seems to suggest another missed opportunity. If the teacher, rather than use this meeting as the beginning of a seduction, had instead managed to introduce the student to this feeling of connection to learning, the dialogic model of sociality might have been engaged in a quite different manner to the one the narrative trajectory actually traces. This literal moment of meeting is not the site of potentially beneficial

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[396] Hayes, *Coetzee*, 200-201.

[397] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 215.

[398] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 11.

engagement that is envisaged by the reflection being drawn out here; the library in its university context encourages one further association I will draw out in the following discussion.

Rawls was interested in public reason as a basis for democratic legitimacy in deciding on legal and cultural norms from shared values, and the potential of the educational environment for establishing this sort of legitimacy seems to be suggested here, so tentatively and faintly as to be almost invisible. How this could be, and how it fits with the panoramic description of the new South Africa already outlined, need further explanation.

What is dialogic and reciprocal as a matter of sharing an understanding of values in the description of the library in Lurie's focalisation is the role reversal, as it is Lurie in his capacity as student, not as teacher, that is to the fore in his fond description of the library time-space. What is Rawlsian here is the hint that an educational forum can be a part of public reason, provided the learning is reciprocal and mutual, with fluidity of teacher and student roles. In their 2012 *J.M. Coetzee: A Life in Writing*, John Kannemeyer and Michiel Heyns note Coetzee's professed conception of his own teaching style in a letter of 17 May 2001 to Laurel Bernard: "I'm not the kind of teacher who tells his student things. I just try to get them to read slowly and pay attention to the words."[399] The idea of encouraging an entry into dialogue with the text rather than awaiting instruction from the teacher that is implied here accords well with the idea of reciprocity in education I see *Disgrace* as offering. The sense of missed opportunity in Lurie's meeting with Melanie at the library echoes the presentation of the dialogic failure of Lurie's teaching in the university classroom and returns the reader's attention to that time-space, where the lessons as we have already noted resemble teacher-led lectures rather than collaborative and dialogic seminars. The novel is less engaged in specific prescriptions for education than it is in establishing the good will and potential that exist for such enterprises, not least in Melanie's own curiosity and eagerness to learn, signalled in her final narrative contribution being an aesthetic and educational one, in the performance of her play.

What a Rawlsian refocusing of the chronotopic reading of *Disgrace* identifies, then, is a tension and a very difficult dynamic in the post-apartheid nation. *Disgrace* identifies an emergency in the new South Africa, but it also prescribes a careful consideration of a potential danger in the treatment of that emergency. If a focus on tangible issues of community cohesion and economic deprivation, just and understandable though the novel undeniably shows them to be, comes completely at the expense of a consideration of intangible and interpersonal considerations, with their focus on intellectual, emotional and indeed moral

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[399] Kannemeyer and Heyns, *Coetzee,* 478.

development as matters of identity, that will be a cause for regret.[400] There is a liberal irony here as well. The university is shown to be undergoing "the great rationalization"[401] as Lurie's classes in romanticism are largely being replaced by more utilitarian communication courses. David Attwell notes in his 2015 *J.M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing* that Coetzee spoke openly about his impression from within the academy of the adverse effects on universities of market ideology as an international force in the post-Cold War period:

> "Now, all over the western world," he told a University of Cape Town audience, the "old model of the university finds itself under attack as an increasingly economistic interrogation of social institutions is carried out". The process referred to in *Disgrace* as "the great rationalization" was under way.[402]

The novel draws attention to international economic pressures underway in the period of liberal ascendancy, as market ideology increasingly enters areas of public life both in South Africa and elsewhere. Lurie's background in the liberal arts draws attention to the novel's reflection on the value of the Enlightenment tradition of engaging with and discussing multiple points of view in a liberal arts education, undermined as it is by the utilitarian market considerations that turn the class into a communications course. The liberal irony is that just as liberalism begins dominating social and legal norms with some of its most problematic traditions, so a resistance to liberalism as associated with a past that the new nation wishes to leave behind risks throwing away liberalism's best traditions.

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[400] I feel Derek Attridge's focus on elusive, even mystical, ideas in *Disgrace*, identifies something like this intangible element of attention I see in chronotopic reading of the novel:

> If there is a political challenge staged in this novel, and in all Coetzee's novels to date, it is to find a way of building a new, just state that is not founded on the elimination of unpredictability, singularity, excess. A state that recognizes the importance of the literary, which is to say of an inventive responding to the other that is also a responding to what has made the other other – a traceable past and constituting present – and a wagering on, a trusting in, a different future. We might call it, should it ever come into existence, a state of grace (Attridge, *Coetzee*, 191).

From a different angle, Patrick Hayes argues from a poststructuralist perspective that the later work of Jacques Derrida might shed light on Coetzee's interest in the surprising secondary and tertiary effects of his literary method in his later works:

> In the later work, though, [the socio-cultural other] is expanded to include what Derrida mischievously called "other others" – that is to say, it includes not only racially marked groups, but whatever modalities of feeling or thought that are becoming unfeelable, or unthinkable, within a given cultural field (Hayes, *Coetzee*, 53).

Liberalism's intangible dialogic qualities might be seen to operate in this manner at the margins of the emerging cultural field in their presentation in *Disgrace*.

[401] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 3.

[402] Attwell, *Coetzee,* 189.

The conclusion here can be made more specific. Returning to the idea of re-centring, a Rawlsian concentrated approach to *Disgrace* suggests one final shift, from Lurie to Lucy to Petrus and finally to Melanie. Tying the implications of the national emergency and the Rawlsian refocusing on the lost potential of Lurie's encounter with Melanie together situates her at the centre of the novel. Melanie partakes of both the cultural Christian and economic dimensions of the national emergency. If, as in the Dantean chronotope, *Disgrace* offers a spatial image that strains to enter an uncertain future, Melanie is the best candidate for the hopeful representative of that future. Her creativity is the last image the reader has of her, when Lurie ill-advisedly goes to watch her performance on stage on his return to the city. She is often associated with images of freedom and also the future. I have already discussed the doorway image and its Dostoevskyan implications, but there is another telling image when Lurie sees her on the motorcycle of her new boyfriend. Lurie sees them before "the motorcycle surges forward, bearing her away".[403]

In its most politically sensitive aspect, its treatment of rape, the narrative also centralises Melanie. The best analysis of this aspect of the novel I think comes from Lucy Graham in her 2003 article "Reading the Unspeakable". Graham situates Lucy's rape on the farm in a history of "black peril" narratives of white women being raped by black men, but Graham notices how the novel complicates this narrative with Melanie's sexual assault:

> While the commercial success of Coetzee's latest novel may be attributed to similar international appetites, it is possible to argue that in *Disgrace* Coetzee self-consciously performs a subversion of "black peril" narrative – by simultaneously scripting what Sol T. Plaatje referred to as "the white peril", the hidden sexual exploitation of black women by white men that has existed for centuries.[404]

Graham's reading ties rape in the novel to the nation's historical injustices, and in reading rape historically, the reader links it to the novel's temporal question about the nation's past and future trajectory.

Other treatments of rape in *Disgrace* discussing Lucy's rape and the resulting pregnancy in particular have stressed the damaging ongoing legacy of historical power dynamics in South Africa. Hania Nashef in her 2009 book *The Politics of Humiliation in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee* argues in relation to Petrus asking Lurie for Lucy's hand in marriage as a solution to her social vulnerability as a pregnant single woman and a

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[403] Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 35.

[404] Graham, "Reading," 437.

rape victim: "When Petrus asks David for his daughter's hand, he is affirming the new order that has evolved in South Africa. He negotiates as an equal partner over the body of a woman."[405] David Attwell in his 2001 review of *Disgrace* entitled "Coetzee and Post-Apartheid South Africa" argues in relation to Petrus and Lucy:

> [I]t is best thought of as allegorical, representing the extreme case in the working out of what it might mean for a white person to take on an African identity – certainly it is difficult not to see this as a repudiation of facile assertions by whites of their Africanness.[406]

Although Nashef and Attwell read Lucy differently along lines of sex and race, they both read Lucy's relationship with Petrus in allegorical and political terms. However, Graham's treatment has the interpretive advantage of contextualising the two sexual assaults in the novel in relation to each other in a manner that resituates the novel's centre in Melanie, a validated move as I have argued. In its treatment of both racial and sexual politics in the past of the old South Africa, the novel situates Melanie, a representative of the younger generation, as its image of the future of South Africa attempting to move away from these past injustices. The novel draws attention to youth as the natural focus of the future of the new South Africa in other ways as well. The party Petrus hosted saw a rare moment of warm dialogic sociality when the young people arrived, as we have seen. Petrus himself is shown significantly at one point to be roughly the same age as Lurie and so a less obviously future-facing figure than Melanie.

The idea of retrieving the best out of one's traditions while leaving behind the damaging aspects of it features in other chapters in this selection, notably in *The Robber Bride* and *Paradise*. In *Disgrace*, the challenge is perhaps greatest, as the Western liberal tradition's encounter with heterogeneity in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada is arguably of a different order of magnitude to the challenge facing South Africa in its post-apartheid moment in the period of liberal ascendancy. Given its difficulties in responding to the old ruling order that I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, liberalism can only expect a difficult relationship at best with the energies being exerted in the emergence of a newly democratic South Africa. Another purpose of the de-centralising of Lurie as protagonist becomes apparent here. *Disgrace* imaginatively de-centres liberalism itself in the novel's vision of the nation, but it also asks for the

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405 Nashef, *Politics,* 109.

406 David Attwell, "Coetzee and Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 4 (December 2001): 866.

new nation to have the self-confidence to allow liberalism back into a dialogic relation with this new nation. The hope implied in the transient beauty of the library description as the initial meeting place of Melanie and Lurie suggests the potential for such a dialogue.

In its recognition of change but plea for a careful revisitation of the aspects of the liberal tradition that are worth engaging with anew, *Disgrace* seems to chime with Nelson Mandela's own reflections on the future of post-apartheid South Africa in his *Long Walk to Freedom* autobiography:

> The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.[407]

Mandela's language as he articulates the future trajectory he hopes the nation will pursue is eager for dialogue in the nation's future, while being mindful of the historical power dynamics that affect the balance of that future dialogue. The lesson Lurie is supposed to learn in *Disgrace* is humility, and to some extent he does. The liberal tradition in South Africa will have to learn humility as well, *Disgrace* implies, but if it does so, there is potential for mutual benefit in the hybridity that might emerge from dialogue between that tradition and the new South Africa.

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[407] Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Little, Brown and Co, 1994): 544.

# Chapter Five

## Key critical contexts to *Paradise*

Literary critics have varied in their responses to *Paradise* along methodological and topical lines. In terms of method, deconstructive, historicist and literary-philosophical approaches have offered distinct readings of the novel. My own reading is aligned more closely with the last of these three approaches, but I hope to show my appreciation for the insights of the other approaches as well. Perspectives vary on the relative importance of the two imagined networks of the town of Ruby and the convent community, and also on the related question of whether the utopian vision of the title of *Paradise* implies a focus in its imaginative resistance to racial and sexual discrimination in the United States on a potential for completely transformative change in the future of the national culture or whether that desired future might have some continuity with specific traditions of the national culture, albeit in a manner that still changes the latter in significant and profound ways. My own reading is more closely aligned with the latter topical conclusion, although it is informed by many of the insights of the former group as well.

The prevailing perspectives on critical and potentially transformative readings are well illustrated by contrasting Ana María Fraile-Marcos's reading with that of Katrine Dalsgård. Dalsgård in particular contrasts Morrison's novel with the work of feminist black nationalist cultural critic E. Francis White, whom Dalsgård sees as arguing for a feminist revision of the dominant narrative of African-American history. Morrison by contrast, Dalsgård argues, "implies a skepticism toward *any* national historical narrative".[408] Dalsgård perceptively draws attention to a series of negations in *Paradise*, first of the traditional story of the town elders and then of the young men in particular who resist what they see as the conservatism of their fathers in relation to the inscription on the symbolically important Oven but who nonetheless "fully share their elders' belief in the inscription as the community's final signified".[409] Dalsgård sees Morrison here tackling the American tradition of exceptionalism and argues that in "her deconstruction of the self-conscious perfection

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[408] Katrine Dalsgård, "The One All-Black Town Worth the Pain: (African) American Exceptionalism, Historical Narration, and the Critique of Nationhood in Toni Morrison's *Paradise,*" *African American Review* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 237-38. Another reading that explores how good intentions in the town's founding ossified into a patriarchal structure that is then challenged by the women of the town is that of Rob Davidson (Rob Davidson, "Racial Stock and 8-Rocks: Communal Historiography in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 47, no. 3 [Autumn 2001]: 355-73).

[409] Dalsgård, 239.

underpinning the exceptionalist tradition," she "doesn't reinscribe the national American dream theoretically".[410]

Ana María Fraile-Marcos by contrast sees the two networks of Ruby and the convent as hybridising two American traditions respectively: the Puritan tradition of the jeremiad, in which a chosen people moves through adversity towards a heavenly state, and the religious traditions of the nation, particularly Protestant, Catholic and pagan faiths. Fraile-Marcos argues historically in relation to the former: "African Americans have historically used the jeremiad rhetoric with the double aim of asserting blacks as a chosen people within another chosen nation which, as such, had the covenantal obligation to be just to them".[411] As with other critics responding to *Paradise*, Fraile-Marcos sees the convent as marking an advance on the imaginative social change it presents in relation to Ruby, as she contrasts the homogeneous historical narrative of Ruby with the convent's history as "the result of various religious discursive layers".[412] Fraile-Marcos concludes that "*Paradise* draws from a cultural and literary tradition identifiable not only as American, due to the novel's emphasis on Puritan rhetoric and mythology, but also as African American, since the novel is firmly anchored in the African American tradition that appropriates the jeremiad rhetoric in order to claim African Americans' share in the American Dream".[413]

The methodological differences between Fraile-Marcos and Dalsgård are instrumental in assessing the significance of their different perspectives on the novel's treatment of its subject matter. In setting the central sites of the novel's narrative events alongside certain historical traditions, Fraile-Marcos argues for an imaginative construction of ways of living emerging from her reading, whereas in adopting a deconstructive approach to a historical tradition, Dalsgård stresses the novel's capacity for negation.[414] My own approach is closer to Fraile-Marcos's, but the broader Bakhtinian part of my reading allows conflicts to older attitudes to emerge in both Ruby and the convent, with the critical re-examination of identity undertaken having some

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[410] Dalsgård, 246.

[411] Ana María Fraile-Marcos, "Hybridizing the 'City upon a Hill' in Toni Morrison's *Paradise,*" *MELUS* 28, no. 4, *Speech and Silence: Ethnic Women Writers* (Winter 2003): 9. Fraile-Marcos identifies Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesse Louis Jackson in this tradition (Fraile-Marcos, "Hybridizing," 31).

[412] Fraile-Marcos, "Hybridizing," 23.

[413] Fraile-Marcos, "Hybridizing," 30.

[414] A critic who sets the negation and the construction in a sequential relationship in her reading of *Paradise* is Yvette Christiansë. She argues, quoting from Morrison's "Home" essay published the year before *Paradise*, that a "writing that can 'enunciate and then eclipse' the racial gaze is the horizon toward which *Beloved*, *Jazz*, and the later novels, including *Paradise*, *Love*, and *A Mercy*, all move" (Yvette Christiansë, *Toni Morrison* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2013]: 2).

similarities with Dalsgård's emphasis. This is so particularly in Pat Best's struggle with her mixed feelings about Ruby's founding myth and in Mavis's process of building a durable resistant identity.

Some of the important trends in critical work on *Paradise* that emerge in the contrast outlined above that merit further comment concern American traditions, historical events and negotiated interpretations. Philip Page in a subtle analysis of ambiguity in the novel sees *Paradise* engaging with American traditions of the family and faith. Page comes quite close to my own approach's focus on dialogue and debate in noting the novel's multiple perspectives on Reverend Pulliam's sermon on God's love as it differs from human love at the K.D.-Arnette wedding service: "What follows are many characters' reactions to and interpretations of his text, which, like readers' interpretations of the novel, are variable and tentative."[415] Page's stress on the open-ended and dynamic quality of the novel in this instance as a public performance is here quite like my own, but I would argue that the novelty of my own approach to dialogue and debate in *Paradise* is its sustained and processual character in relating time-spaces and identity to the American tradition of liberalism. In another novel response to *Paradise*, Benjamin Burr uses a deconstructive approach to argue that Biblical traditions in American society as the discursive basis for the town of Ruby offer the possibility of redemption in their interplay with the resistant discourse of the emerging convent community.[416]

There are several critical responses to *Paradise* that stress its criticism of American traditions. David Schell argues that the novel's questioning of foundational national myths introduces the possibility for transnational reflection.[417] Peter Widdowson locates the novel's climax in the bicentennial of the United States in 1976 and sees its ongoing failure to counter discrimination along racial and gender lines as a failure to fulfil its own promise.[418] In a more complicated treatment of that issue, Tessa Roynon argues that the convent women's history before arriving there and their subsequent development imply both the failure of the American Dream and its durability.[419] My own treatment of the liberal tradition I believe engages with both tendencies, the critical and the constructive. The reading identifies criticism of the liberal tradition, particularly in its economic dimension, for instance in the worrying trends the fragmented town of Ruby

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[415] Philip Page, "Furrowing All the Brows: Interpretation and the Transcendent in Toni Morrison's *Paradise,*" *African American Review* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 639.

[416] Benjamin Burr, "Mythopoetic Syncretism in *Paradise* and the Deconstruction of Hospitality in *Love*," in *Toni Morrison and the Bible: Contested Intertextualities*, ed. Shirley A. Stave (New York: Peter Lang, 2006): 159-74.

[417] David Schell, "Engaging Foundational Narratives in Morrison's *Paradise* and Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon,*" *College Literature* 41, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 69-94.

[418] Peter Widdowson, "The American Dream Refashioned: History, Politics and Gender in Toni Morrison's *Paradise,*" *Journal of American Studies* 35, no. 2 (2001): 313-35.

[419] Roynon, *Introduction*, 66.

exhibits at the narrative's end. I also identify the liberal tradition of debate, and the specifically American forum of the local town hall debate, as potentially having some purposeful role to play, perhaps in a reimagined manner, in the construction of durable resistant identities and in the wider rebuilding of society that the novel's outward-facing trajectory implies.

I appreciate the various historiographical investigations into *Paradise* that find allusive references in the text to specific periods in American history and specific practices in the United States, and particularly in African-American experiences and among women.[420] My own reading is mindful of their insights and aims to build on them in some ways. Peter Widdowson engages in a particularly detailed survey of important movements and events in the history of the United States that are mentioned in *Paradise.* The common thread in his analysis is the ongoing racial discrimination experienced by the black community. He sees the town of Ruby as representing "a distillation of all the abuses and failures of the American democratic experiment in respect of its black population".[421] Another reading that situates *Paradise* in an ongoing history of racial discrimination in the wake of the disappointed hopes of the post-Civil Rights era in the late 1960s comes from Richard Schur, who argues that *Paradise* should be seen as offering in particular a deconstruction of legal and cultural ideas that continue to embed and maintain racial discrimination in the United States.[422] Magali Cornier Michael identifies helpful engagements in *Paradise* with the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as practices among black communities such as othermothering, in which women would care for children other than their own.[423] My own identity-focused reading situates the networks in *Paradise* in a national context of ongoing discrimination in a manner that corroborates Widdowson and Schur's assessment, and my analysis of the lucid dreaming in the convent in particular, with the role of Consolata foregrounded, would reinforce Michael's connection with practices like othermothering.

The idea of negotiated reading is the final theme of the critical literature on *Paradise* to which I would draw attention. I would identify two strands of this thinking: one in terms of interiority and exteriority, or self

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[420] One significant engagement that is difficult to categorise but partakes to some extent in this approach is Linden Peach's reading of *Paradise*. His method is focused on allusions in *Paradise* to a wide range of social and artistic contexts. His variety includes referring to resistance movements to racial discrimination in the 1960s and 1970s and to the artistic tradition of the road novel (Linden Peach, *Toni Morrison* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000]: 153-76).

[421] Widdowson, "American Dream," 324.

[422] Richard L. Schur, "Locating 'Paradise' in the Post-Civil Rights Era: Toni Morrison and Critical Race Theory," *Contemporary Literature* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 276-99.

[423] Magali Cornier Michael, "Re-Imagining Agency: Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," *African American Review* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 645 and 646 respectively.

and society, and the other in terms of conclusive or open-ended interpretation. Two important readings of the novel that negotiate a relationship between interiority and exteriority come from the already-mentioned Magali Cornier Michael's 2002 article and from Linda Krumholz. Krumholz argues that the idea of coalition informs the intimate and fluid identities of the convent and that those identities are finally communal, while Michael argues that Morrison's novel explores how insight can be gained in part through an inward gaze, which in turn leads to socially-engaged action.[424] The novelty of my own reading I think is in its cumulative and constructive focus on the range of dialogic processes of identity formation across Ruby and the convent.

In terms of conclusive or open-ended interpretations, I approve of the trend Tessa Roynon identifies in her survey of Morrison criticism, in which she detects a growing tendency in the early 2000s. With specific reference to Marc Conner's 2000 book *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison* and "the aesthetics-versus-politics question," she argues: "It is a book that exemplifies the kind of 'both/and' approach, the exegesis of nuance, duality, and ambivalence or conflict within the fiction, that has slowly begun to replace the 'either/or' approaches of earlier years."[425] An appreciation of the complexity of *Paradise* is to the fore across the readings surveyed here, and the open-ended questioning that Page in particular celebrates, as noted earlier, can be detected in other readings as well. Krumholz for instance sees Morrison's attempt to imagine a paradise "not [as] a peaceful utopian moment of eternal sameness; it is a complex, dynamic, and challenging process in which insight informs action and responsibility".[426] One ambitiously open-ended reading comes in Mark Tabone's view that *Paradise* extends beyond national borders to asking a question about reimagining the global context.[427] My own reading also argues for openness temporally where Tabone does so spatially. I argue that the historical identification of a trajectory of ongoing discrimination in the United States and other textual clues, not least the resemblance of the divided camps of Ruby at the novel's end to future political factions and movements in the United States and the dramatisation in Pat Best's narrative of concerns of some third wave feminists, imply an engagement not only with the period of the narrative events but also beyond them, up to the novel's contemporary moment of publication at the turn of the millennium, in the period of liberal ascendancy.

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[424] Michael, "Re-Imagining," 643-61 and Linda J. Krumholz, "Reading and Insight in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," *African American Review* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 21-34.

[425] Roynon, *Cambridge Introduction*, 121 and 122.

[426] Krumholz, "Reading," 31.

[427] Tabone in particular references Phillip Wegner's view that "the only valid political project ... is one that would take as its aim nothing less than the transformation of our global totality" (Mark Tabone, "Rethinking *Paradise*: Toni Morrison and Utopia at the Millennium," *African American Review* 49, no. 2 [Summer 2016]: 141).

## *Paradise*: the creative tension between resistance and dialogue

In *Paradise*, Mavis, a poor woman who escapes from an abusive husband, stumbles across a large building that has been converted into a convent that is at the time of her arrival run only by Consolata, an old Catholic nun. This convent comes to serve as a refuge for a number of women who have been damaged by their experiences in various parts of the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Meanwhile, a nearby town of Ruby, founded as a refuge for black Americans fleeing discrimination, is experiencing tensions between its older generation, protective of the traditions that built their town, and the younger generation, who seek greater freedom and engagement with the outside world. The women of the convent negotiate their damaged sense of self in collaborative fashion under the guidance of Consolata, and they increasingly feel a communal sense of self-confidence. As the younger generation of Ruby and the women of the convent begin to socialise, the older generation in Ruby becomes increasingly alarmed at the threat to the cohesion of their town and a group of men plan an attack on the convent. The attack happens, although it is interrupted by another group of Ruby residents who want to avert the catastrophe, but not before Consolata is killed. Ruby is a town in danger of fragmenting at the novel's end, as a defiant younger generation and an insular and embattled older generation stand at the poles of a spectrum of opinions including many perspectives in the middle, most notably that of Patricia Best, a teacher in the town who knows the troubled history of Ruby's founding and who has some sympathy with both generations. The surviving women of the convent end the novel on the road, revisiting their old homes with renewed confidence and dignity in what seems to be the beginning of a re-engagement with the outside world.

In Bakhtin's chronotopic history of Western literature, the generic forebear that seems most generative for *Paradise* is probably the provincial town novel, or the bildungsroman, with Flaubert the archetypal writer. Bakhtin sees this provincial town in a tension between two poles, with the older pastoral idyll as the traditional model for this kind of social dwelling but the capitalist urban centre of modernity increasingly warping and dismantling these older traditions:

> We get a picture of the breakdown of provincial idealism under forces emanating from the capitalist center. We see the breakdown, the heroes' provincial romanticism, which is in no way idealized; the capitalist world is also not idealized, its inhumanity is laid bare, the destruction within it of all ethical systems (which had been formed at earlier stages of development), the

> disintegration of all previous human relationships (under the influence of money), love, the family, friendship, the deforming of the scholar's and the artist's creative work and so forth.[428]

The town of Ruby centres *Paradise* in my reading, and there are elements of Bakhtin's treatment of Flaubert that are instructive in chronotopic reading of Morrison's novel also. Although the central dramatic sites of the narrative are Ruby and the convent, the urban United States certainly serves as a powerful dynamic force in the narrative as it progresses, principally as a catalyst for the retreat of the protagonists either to Ruby or to the convent, and also as a continued magnet for the younger generation hoping to engage with the wider world outside of these refuges. The atrophic sense of community breakdown Bakhtin traces in the provincial town novels of Flaubert is also important in *Paradise*. Ruby's declining sense of purpose and community cohesion are related, as in Bakhtin's treatment of Flaubert, to the corrupting influence of financial considerations and indeed in the treatment of Patricia Best to the disruption of scholarly work.

However, *Paradise*, unlike *Disgrace*, is not primarily interested in constructing a national panoramic image as its imaginative time-space configuration. Another canonical novel in the Western tradition with the provincial town as its focus, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, comes to my mind as an instructive forebear for *Paradise*. With its narrative divided into eight sections, each with a different focalised protagonist, and several other focalised protagonists within these sections as well, *Paradise* imagines a webbed social network of relations whose complexity is foregrounded more clearly than in any other novel in this thesis selection. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, in her "George Eliot and the World of Language", argues that "all but the most carefully formulated conclusions about George Eliot are reversible".[429] This is no less true for Morrison. Ermarth notes of Eliot's focalization: "Around one centre of interest and attention, and then the next, and the next, shifting constellations of viewpoint gather, and dissolve."[430] *Paradise*'s matrix of perspectives and relations is similarly impressive and daunting.[431] Part of this chapter's work, then, will be to

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[428] Bakhtin, "Chronotope," 234-35.

[429] Elizabeth Ermarth, "George Eliot and the World as Language," in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel*, ed. Stephen Regan (London; New York: Routledge, 2001): 321-22.

[430] Ermarth, "Eliot," 321.

[431] Indeed, in his survey of the immediate critical reception of the novel, it is this narrative complexity that Philip Page sees stressed by readers:

> Louis Menand finds that 'the writing is more demanding and takes more chances" than in *Song of Solomon* or *Beloved*;' Carol Shields calls it 'a long, complex, fluent novel' and 'a great sprawl of a narrative'; and for Richard Eder 'to read Toni Morrison is to advance upon an Olympic wrestling master. We draw confidently near, only to be hurled onto our backs and set in the opposite direction' (Page, "Furrowing," 637).

counter the nervousness about allegedly conformist implications in realism in work like Keith Byerman's "Beyond Realism," in which he moves quickly from what he calls the "traditionalist"[432] realist devices of Morrison's work to what he sees as Morrison "[using] the narrative to present disordered, violent and perverse worlds".[433] I will instead argue that Morrison's realism in imagining plausible intersectional perspectives is integral to the innovative and transformative work she undertakes.

Building on Ermarth's idea of constellations of viewpoints, it can be said that although *Paradise* is interested in constructing a spatial image, it is not a bird's eye view of a nation, but a more intimate networked image of the interconnectedness of two relatively small communities, albeit with a final move outward onto a national stage, a stage that always lurks in the background of the central drama.

Ermarth's phrasing about *Middlemarch* is instructive in interpreting *Paradise*. The various focalised protagonists of the latter novel are not all similarly intersectional in their associations with the communities and networks that are the novel's principal concern. I will argue that Patricia Best, Mavis and Consolata are the three protagonists who most significantly organise the constellations of viewpoint, borrowing Ermarth's expression, in the narrative construction of *Paradise*.

## Spaces of repair: networks of conflict and conflicted identities

Patricia Best is the first of the protagonists I will discuss in the analysis of this chapter. She brings together many of the themes *Paradise* addresses in its presentation of the town of Ruby. A Bakhtinian reading of *Paradise* notes how Pat Best, rather like David Lurie in *Disgrace*, is placed in a curious role in relation to the drama of the novel. Pat Best is presented to a considerable extent both as a participant and as an observer of life in Ruby. Whereas Lurie is increasingly shown to be the outsider in *Disgrace*, Pat Best moves between the insider and outsider roles significantly in the course of her presentation in *Paradise*. Her section, the fifth of eight, is located in the heart of the narrative. This thesis has throughout discussed the narrative and interpretive planes of reader attention, and Pat Best is foregrounded in one sense as a bridge between these two planes, as she resembles the narrator in assembling a history of Ruby as her principal activity in the novel.

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[432] Keith Byerman, "Beyond Realism," in *Toni Morrison*, ed. Henry L. Gates and Kwame A. Appiah (New York: Amistad, 1993): 100.

[433] Ibid.

Pat Best's perspective as a matter of reader attention is signalled almost immediately in her narrative as hers is the broad historical sweep that matches the narrative voice when it on occasion sets the scene:

> A mineral scent was in the air, sweeping down from some Genesis time when volcanoes stirred and lava cooled quickly under relentless wind. Wind that scoured cold stone, then sculpted it and, finally, crumbled it to the bits rock hounds loved. The same wind that once lifted streams of Cheyenne/Arapaho hair also parted clumps of it from the shoulders of bison, telling each when the other was near.[434]

Pat Best is a teacher at the town school and so entrusted with the education of its children. This is the first of several ways in which she is positioned intersectionally in the novel along the central faultline in Ruby between the older and younger generation. The reference to the land before the United States is an initial clue to her perspective as the one that makes *Paradise* a national novel, but that is a point that becomes more apparent later.

Returning to the generational conflict in Ruby, Pat Best's perspective allows for the exploration of the dynamics of this conflict. Pat Best ought by most measures to be a town elder and leader, as the Best family was one of the original families to migrate to Oklahoma and settle the town of Ruby.[435] She is of the same age and generation as the leading Morgan family members who effectively lead the town. However, she is signalled as somewhat detached from this authoritative position first in her collecting notes for her history of Ruby. She encounters resistance from town elders when trying to discover the tensions and arguments that divided the town founders: "'Oh, I think those brothers had a disagreement of some kind.' That's all Soane would say about the crossed-out name of her great-uncle. And not another word."[436] The resistance Pat encounters from town elders in attempting to complicate the impression of unity conveyed to the town residents about the founding story of Ruby draws attention to the manner in which the power dynamics of

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[434] Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (New York: Vintage, 1997): 186.

[435] Peter Widdowson convincingly sees *Paradise* situating Ruby and its precursor Haven in the narrative in the context of ongoing racial discrimination in the United States, specifically in the case of these towns in the wake of the disappointed hopes of Reconstruction:

> Apropos, a further historical phenomenon that Morrison bases her families on is the 'Exoduster' movement. Southern blacks had been migrating westwards throughout the 1870s, but by 1879, with Reconstruction clearly in ruins, thousands more from Louisiana and Mississippi, full of religious fervour and fear of white vengeance, began the trek to Kansas and other more westerly states, including Oklahoma (Widdowson, "American Dream," 323-4).

[436] Morrison, *Paradise*, 188.

Ruby are addressed in the novel. The authoritative version of the town story, its founding myth, is managed by the town elders, who are presented in various ways as uniformly protective of the values and traditions they hope to pass on to the next generation of town residents. In what is otherwise a remarkably polyphonic novel, the public speech of the leaders in the older generation about the town's founding is conspicuously stereophonic.

The men who invade the convent in the novel's dramatic opening preview of the narrative climax are the first focalised perspectives to convey the sense of unified heroism of the black Americans who reject the discrimination of the urban United States as they recount the story of the founding journey in 1949:

> Before first light in the middle of August, fifteen families moved out of Haven – headed not for Muskogee or California as some had, or Saint Louis, Houston, Langston or Chicago, but deeper into Oklahoma, as far as they could climb from the grovel contaminating the town their grandfathers had made.[437]

Soane Morgan, wife of Deacon Morgan, later uses very similar language as she considers Ruby's position as a brave and protected place for black Americans in contrast to the dangers of the modern urban United States: "Safer in the army than in Chicago, where Easter wanted to go. Safer than Birmingham, than Montgomery, Selma, than Watts. Safer than Money, Mississippi, in 1955 and Jackson, Mississippi, in 1963. Safer than Newark, Detroit, Washington, D.C."[438] Soane's language is complicated here, as these are her private and wounded thoughts about her son's death in service, but her recourse to the language of the town's founding, and of course her unwillingness to admit of any difficulties to Pat about the historical record, indicate the power of the tradition and the values that tradition transmits in the minds of the older generation.[439] The significance of Soane's privately ironic use of the language of Ruby's tradition is to reveal its public unity as a performative matter.

The situation of Ruby spatially in the novel in a context of discrimination does structural work that chimes well with Morrison's own stated intentions for her authorial work. In the preface to her 1992 *Playing*

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[437] Morrison, *Paradise*, 16.

[438] Morrison, *Paradise*, 100-101.

[439] David Schell succinctly summarises the novel's extensive engagement with the efforts of the elders to preserve and transmit the traditions of the founding myth: "Plays are performed which depict the event, oral narratives are passed down through generations, heroes are memorialized, books of genealogy are kept, and the communal oven of Haven is rebuilt brick by brick with the (apparent) words of their ancestors" (Schell, "Foundational Narratives," 76).

*in the Dark*, Morrison sees the import of her work in national terms as a search for freedom in a context of injustice: "Living in a nation of people who decided that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom and mechanisms for devastating racial oppression presents a singular landscape for a writer."[440] Morrison's narrative frames the search for the possibility of the traditional American liberal value of freedom in a social context of discrimination in its time-spaces: Ruby and the convent are two experimental and imaginative time-spaces set against a larger national time-space in the background, the smaller, centralised time-spaces exploring the possibility of freedom and the larger, peripheral time-space carrying the ongoing and catalysing threat of discrimination.

The crucial manner in which Pat Best is separated from the authoritative elders of the town, however, goes to the heart of Ruby's founding: its racial politics. The beginning of the blurring of the lines of the personal and the social in her quest to discover the complexities of Ruby's founding comes in Pat's detailing of the concern the black Americans who founded Ruby had about the negative impact that they perceived the presence of mixed race Americans among them had on their status:

> This time the clarity was clear: for ten generations they had believed the division they fought to close was free against slave and rich against poor. Usually, but not always, white against black. Now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black. Oh, they knew there was a difference in the minds of whites, but it had not struck them before that it was of consequence, serious consequence, to Negroes themselves. Serious enough that their daughters would be shunned as brides; their sons chosen last; that colored men would be embarrassed to be seen socially with their sisters.[441]

Pat Best's somewhat peripheral status in the town is thus registered racially as well, as her deceased white mother comes to preoccupy Pat's thoughts and her reflections on her own status in the town.

A great irony in the presentation of Pat Best is that her peripheral status in the town is part of her centrality to the narrative, not least in her position of semi-detachment allowing her to engage in her historical research into Ruby's origins. This in turn mirrors language Morrison herself has used about the work she undertakes in her fiction of creatively reimagining the discourse of race in American society. Once again, in her *Playing in the Dark*, she explains how she sees her literary work as interested in specific and

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[440] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992): xiii.

[441] Morrison, *Paradise*, 194.

intimate questions of values being worked out in a particular culture: "How do embedded assumptions of racial (not racist) language work in the literary enterprise that hopes and sometimes claims to be 'humanistic'? When, in a race-conscious culture, is that lofty goal actually approximated? When not and why?"[442] Pat Best's significance in the narrative involves this questioning, even questing, role in her scholarly work, but it also involves the workings of identity formation in her parts of the narrative.[443]

Her narrative is intersectional in terms of Ruby's time-spaces as well. It opens in December of 1974 with her involvement in preparations for the town Christmas play, in a clearly public space. However, her history of Ruby is written in her own bedroom, a clearly private space. The Bakhtinian division in the ancient Greek tradition of Western literature between public and private is central to the imaginative construction of the town of Ruby in *Paradise*. Throughout the novel, Ruby's balanced presentation alternates between its public and private aspects. The focus on the thoughts of residents in their homes allows for the particularities of the network to be revealed, and the public gatherings create the sense of community that the older generation is so eager to preserve in the town. Put another way, the centrifugal and centripetal forces of Ruby are foregrounded respectively by the private and public presentation of the town for the most part. Pat Best's own involvement in private and public time-spaces illustrates this well.

Pat Best's bedroom is not described in detail, although one aspect of it, or at least what is visible from its vantage point, is startlingly foregrounded to great effect: "Pat went to the window and raised it. Her mother's grave lay at the edge of the yard."[444] That Pat's mother is buried in her own garden works figuratively, and the grave features again at the climax of Pat's narrative. The figurative significance of this grave in her garden is to accentuate Pat's family's exclusion from the public imagination of Ruby, and by extension the mixed racial identity that her family carries. It also reflects Pat's own difficulty in wrestling with her mixed racial identity and how that identity complicates her other identity as a member of the Ruby town community.

Otherwise, the bedroom time-space serves simply and conventionally as an intimate private space for the working out of Pat's thoughts and feelings about her identity. This is registered as Pat, in her apparently public-minded history project, turns the page on which she records her father's marriage to her mother and begins to write an imaginative letter to her father that is in reality more of a cathartic exercise for herself:

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[442] Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, xi-xii.

[443] Page draws attention in a footnote to Pat Best's centrality in readers' experiences of the novel as well: "Indeed, in conversations I have had with readers of this novel, many have mentioned having the impulse to construct genealogical charts of the Ruby families" (Page, "Furrowing," 4).

[444] Morrison, *Paradise*, 189-90.

"Daddy, they don't hate us because Mama was your first customer. They hate us because she looked like a cracker and was bound to have cracker-looking children like me."[445] Pat Best's vulnerability here is signalled in her informal register, with the racially abusive term and her child-like terms for her parents particularly striking. Her bedroom's function as a space of repair for her vulnerable identity continues as she reflects on a traumatic and fateful incident in October of that year, when she attacked her daughter Billie Delia with a pressing iron, an incident that precipitated Billie Delia's moving for a time to the convent, thus beginning her move away from the Ruby traditionalists and toward the rebellious younger generation. Pat Best in processing her personal feelings about her mother and the attitude she has to Ruby comes to reflect on the complexity of her anger towards her daughter on that occasion: "The Royal Ease in her hand as she ran up the stairs was there to smash the young girl that lived in the minds of the 8-rocks, not the girl her daughter was."[446] Her distinction between her motives as a member of the Ruby community and her personal motives as a mother draws attention to her conflicted identity, and when she cries she tellingly wonders "who exactly the tears were for".[447]

Pat Best's exploration of the conflict in her identity in this space of repair does not ultimately result in a simple choice, but she does come to see the terms in which the conflict operates more sharply. Her section's climax arrives in her decision to burn her historical record of Ruby's founding in the garden next to her mother's grave. This might seem an odd choice in light of her increasing sense of outrage at her family's erasure from the historical record, and indeed it is one she is almost immediately shown to be uneasy about, as the section closes with her staggering under the weight of her choice: "Dear God," she murmured. "Dear, dear God. I burned the papers."[448] In order to make some sense out of her decision to burn the papers, it is worth revisiting the public aspect of her identity. At the Christmas play, Pat Best pushes back against Reverend Misner, the preacher who is seen as having most influence over the rebellious younger generation of Ruby. Pat Best takes issue with Misner's encouragement of the younger generation's demands for more engagement with the outside world:

> "Bible class? More like a war class. Kind of military, from what I hear."
>
> "Militant, maybe. Not military."

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[445] Morrison, *Paradise*, 196.

[446] Morrison, *Paradise*, 204.

[447] Ibid.

[448] Morrison, *Paradise*, 217.

> "No budding Panthers?"
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> "Is that what you think?"
>
> "I don't know what to think."[449]

Pat's final statement is an honest admission of her conflicted perspective, but her confrontation with Misner contains within it a sense of her public duty as a town elder to hold the community together. At one point, she challenges Misner's grand visions of re-engaging with the world with an appeal to the importance of local cohesion: "This is their home; mine too. Home is not a little thing."[450] Read in this light, Pat Best's decision to burn her divisive account of the town's founding is based on the practical consideration that the traditional story, however flawed, does bind this community together in a context of vulnerability. However, as can be seen in her immediate doubts about her decision, Pat Best's identity does not become simply conservative; instead, she finds herself in genuine doubt, caught between a rebellious sense of injustice and dishonesty on the one hand and a loyal sense of practical community-building on the other.[451] In this way, she comes to represent the intergenerational tension at the heart of Ruby's presentation in the novel.

One might also note how this aspect of Pat Best's presentation is one aspect of the novel's method for speaking to its contemporary period: the period of liberal ascendancy. In a chapter entitled "Postmodern Blackness" in her 1990 book *Yearning*, bell hooks notes a tension in the attitude of some African-Americans to racial discourse. She argues that an "unwillingness to critique essentialism on the part of many African-Americans is rooted in the fear that it will cause folks to lose sight of the specific history and experience of African-Americans".[452] She further argues for a difference between "a repudiation of the idea that there is a black 'essence' and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle".[453] Pat Best agonising over what to do with her research into the founding of Ruby

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[449] Morrison, *Paradise*, 207.

[450] Morrison, *Paradise*, 213.

[451] I am struck here by the affinities between her presentation and Morrison's meditations on the complicated tensions involved in the artistic freedom of fiction writing in her "Home" essay that many critics have seen as suggestive of her thinking while writing *Paradise*:

> There alone [in fiction writing] the delight of redemption, the seduction of origination. But I have known for a good portion of the past twenty-nine years that those delights, those seductions, are deliberate interventions necessary to both do the work and legislate its mystery (Morrison, "Home," in *The House that Race Built*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano [Vintage Books: New York, 1998]: 3).

[452] bell hooks, *Yearning*, (Boston: South End Press, 1990): 29.

[453] Ibid.

dramatises this tension in some contemporary African-American attitudes to racial discourse. Pat Best recognises the usefulness of the founding myth as a means of establishing solidarity in a community that is subject to ongoing discrimination while also worrying deeply about the ethical implications of the reductiveness of the racial identity it imagines. Aside from introducing contemporary concerns about racial discourse in the period of liberal ascendancy, Pat Best's perspective also provides the vantage point for the novel's anticipation of economic developments in the period of liberal ascendancy that will be analysed in detail in the section on the reparation dilemma in the novel.

The first section of the novel is devoted to the narrative of Mavis, one of the young women who finds a sanctuary in the convent near the town of Ruby. Mavis is the first woman to take up residence with Consolata, and the only one to see the mother superior before she passed away. Her attachment to the convent is thus significant, and she comes to take it upon herself to integrate the other young women into the life of the convent. For these reasons, this chapter concentrates on this major protagonist in its analysis of the novel's treatment of the women of the convent.

Mavis historicises *Paradise* as well. In the preliminary section when the men attack the convent in 1976, a 1968 calendar adorns one of the walls. The reader is also told at the start of the Mavis narrative that the year is 1968. The counterfactual imaginative history *Paradise* constructs emerges from an actual historical awareness of this date. Whereas in the United States, the various left resistance movements of the late-1960s suffered a setback with Richard Nixon's Republican Party winning the 1968 presidential election in a conservative backlash to the counter culture of the decade, *Paradise* imagines a pair of enclaves in Ruby and the convent where the resistance can be imaginatively explored in a plausible historical development. The Mavis narrative sets a template for three of the four other young women who come to find themselves at the convent – I will address the difference in the fourth as well – in telling a story of indignity and degradation in the United States and then establishing the convent as a sanctuary in that context.

In the case of Mavis, her shame at her own poverty is one aspect of the indignity of her life in Maryland before the convent. The Mavis narrative begins shortly after a tragic incident, where Mavis left two children in the back of a car with the windows up and they died. A journalist comes to interview Mavis, whose sense of shame at the appearance of her house is to the fore: "When the journalist came, Mavis sat in the corner of the sofa, not sure whether to scrape the potato chip crumbs from the seams of the plastic cover or tuck them further in."[454] Mavis is degraded by Frank, the man she lives with. He humiliates her sexually in the bedroom with the door open and the children watching. Mavis is described hoping Frank will not want

[454] Morrison, *Paradise*, 21.

sex but finding that the "sheet was off before she could complete it. When he pulled her nightgown up, he threw it over her face, and she let that mercy be."[455] Meanwhile, the children were in the doorway, "snickering behind the door".[456] This shockingly warped and abusive arrangement initiates the decision Mavis takes to steal Frank's car in order to escape. Mavis identifies with liberal American attitudes, as she, along with the hitchhikers she helps during her journey, maintains hope for freedom out west, in California. She continually refers to this state, and even wills herself into a position of freedom by imagining herself as already beyond "her own pre-Californian existence".[457]

In a near-starvation state, Mavis contemplates giving up at one point on her journey, as she slips into a state of debilitation and self-loathing:

> Had to be taught how to dry herself in the weeds. Too rattle-minded to open a car's window so babies could breathe ... From the very beginning [Frank] had been absolutely right about her: she was the dumbest bitch on the planet.[458]

Mavis, however, is inspired by stories told by hitchhikers on her journey with similar experiences to hers and decides to try once more. She asks herself simply: "Would the road girls just sit there?"[459] In this sense, her liberal identity has one last moment of repair in the recollection of shared hopes, and this time it is rewarded. This dramatic revival accentuates the importance of this unlikely space of repair as the catalyst for the narrative that follows, as the convent might never have taken shape had Mavis not arrived there in time to see the mother superior. In the corpus of novels in this thesis selection, *Paradise* makes a distinct contribution in imagining spaces of repair for liberal identities in more socially precarious positions than the protagonists focalised in the other novels. It is striking that the urgency and imaginative energy required to make the space of repair work in the case of Mavis are repeated in the transformative power of the space of repair the women finally succeed in constructing in the convent towards the end of the narrative. This chapter will return to that point later.

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[455] Morrison, *Paradise*, 26.

[456] Ibid.

[457] Morrison, *Paradise*, 33.

[458] Morrison, *Paradise*, 37.

[459] Ibid.

At this earlier point in the narrative, Mavis walks for three hours before coming upon the convent. The horror of the life Mavis led before arriving at the convent is purposeful at this point, as the miraculous aspect the convent takes on in her imagination comes to be an important aspect of the novel's meditation on change. Mavis, at a point of exhaustion, first sees the convent as a kind of mirage on the horizon:

> It looked small and close and it took a while for her to discover it was neither. She had to negotiate acres of corn to arrive. Either the house was backwards or it had no driveway. As she drew closer she saw it was stone – sandstone, maybe, but dark with age. At first there seemed to be no windows, but then she made out the beginning of a porch and saw the reflection of huge windows on the ground floor.[460]

The size of the convent and its abundance of crop are two of its features as they strike all the young women who arrive there. The convent as a space of repair seems registered figuratively by the crop, as the ability to cook delicious meals becomes a motif in the novel for the healthier life these women lead there.[461] The size of the convent is a complex signifier, registering a sense of freedom positively but also alluding to the strange history of the building, as a venue for the decadent parties of a wealthy man before becoming a convent. I shall return to this aspect of the convent time-space later in this analysis.

Returning to the miraculous impression the convent time-space makes on Mavis, her amazement is first registered in relation to the crops. Her response to realising that a garden she had thought full of weeds in fact contained melons and an "empire of corn beyond"[462] is simply to say: "Wow."[463] The miraculous impression is sealed by the literally luminous presence of the mother superior, whom she meets shortly before the woman's death. Mavis is rendered speechless by the experience: "Mavis moved closer, into the circle of light, resting her hand on the metal foot of the bed."[464] Contrasting time-spaces characterised Pat Best's narrative, as we have seen, but the public-private interplay in the Ruby resident's life is replaced in the

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[460] Ibid.

[461] Morrison in her "Home" essay describes her own complex feelings about the convent as a sanctuary, indicating how they were both nourished and ultimately resisted in the narrative: "I was tempted to convert it into a palace where racism didn't hurt so much; to crouch in one of its many rooms where coexistence offered the delusion of agency" (Morrison, "Home," 4).

[462] Morrison, *Paradise*, 41.

[463] Ibid.

[464] Morrison, *Paradise*, 47.

case of Mavis with a move from a chaotic, invasive space to a calm private space in which healing is the focus.

Nonetheless, this becomes once again a site of contestation for Mavis when the other women begin to arrive. Mavis has particular difficulty with Gigi, whose Christian name is Grace. She is the refugee apart in the sanctuary, at least ostensibly, as she is a consciously counter-cultural figure as opposed to the variously frightened and damaged young women she encounters in Mavis, Seneca and Pallas. Mavis first encounters Gigi when she returns from an errand and inquires about Consolata's eating in her absence: "'You haven't been eating?' Mavis shot a cold glance at Gigi."[465] The association of food and health in the convent time-space is apparent here again, but the dramatic significance of the exchange is the tension between Mavis and Gigi. This occurs at the end of Grace's narrative, signalling how Mavis is the protagonist who intersects the various lives of the convent community. Pallas observes the two women in wordless fury fighting each other later on in the narrative:

> Under a metal-hot sky void of even one arrow of birds they fought on the road and its shoulder. / Pallas sat up, mesmerized by the bodies roiling dust and crushing weeds. Intent bodies unaware of any watcher under a blank sky in Oklahoma.[466]

Just as the convent time-space presents a dichotomy historically between its debauched former purpose and its spiritual later one, so the peaceful healing and antagonistic conflict between the young women in that space speaks to a tension in their identities at this middle stage of the narrative. This too is historical, as the damaging forces of their past lives have not been wholly undone by the healing properties of this new environment.[467]

The perspective that brings this tension into closer focus is that of Consolata. Mavis venerates Consolata and so her own narrative shocks the reader as it begins. Consolata is known to drink, but her narrative begins with her in a state of despair, drinking in the cellar of the convent. The opening sentence of

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[465] Morrison, *Paradise*, 76.

[466] Morrison, *Paradise*, 168.

[467] Magali Cornier Michael argues that these women's common experience of discrimination in the wider nation is what creates the pre-condition for the healing process that the novel subsequently traces:

> The group of women who find themselves at the Convent possess one common subject position: Each has sought escape for a variety of reasons from the dominant patriarchal and materialist culture and has found refuge in the Convent, a place marginalized from both white American culture and the local African-American community (Michael, "Reimagining," 652).

her narrative starkly introduces a protagonist at the lowest of ebbs: “In the good clean darkness of the cellar, Consolata woke to the wrenching disappointment of not having died the night before.”[468] This woman, who must represent strength to the younger women, and indeed succeeds in doing so later, is in the middle part of the narrative shown to be even more damaged than the young women for whom she has provided a sanctuary. The time-space of the dark cellar clearly registers this figuratively. This is of course a private space, as Consolata’s more public facing interactions with the young women in the convent mask her despair in her private thoughts. Consolata has been devastated by two blows, it becomes clear. She only cryptically hints at this in public, when Gigi asks on arrival at the convent about the identity of the corpse for whom the hearse arrived on the mother superior’s death: “‘A love,’ said the woman. ‘I had two; she was the first and the last.’”[469] The other is her failed romance with Deacon Morgan, a town elder in Ruby. Consolata thus becomes intersectional in the narrative networks as a bridge between the convent and the town. It is her perspective that impresses on the reader the novel’s sense of decline in Ruby’s cohesiveness as a community of moral purpose. Consolata remembers the day she first met Deacon Morgan in 1954, shortly after Ruby’s founding:

> Small girls with red and purple flowers in their hair were jumping up and down. A boy holding for dear life onto a horse’s neck was lifted off and declared winner. Young men and boys swung their hats, chased horses and wiped their brimming eyes. As Consolata watched that reckless joy, she heard a faint but insistent Sha sha sha. Sha sha sha. Then a memory of just such skin and just such men, dancing with women in the streets to music beating like an infuriated heart, torsos still, hips making small circles above legs moving so rapidly it was fruitless to decipher how such ease was possible. These men here were not dancing, however; they were laughing, running, calling to each other and to women doubled over in glee. And although they were living here in a hamlet, not a loud city full of glittering black people, Consolata knew she knew them.[470]

The conviviality Consolata here senses in joyous, shared activity in a public space implies a community cohesion and happiness that is conspicuous in its absence in Ruby’s contested state by the period of the main

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[468] Morrison, *Paradise*, 221.

[469] Morrison, *Paradise*, 73.

[470] Morrison, *Paradise*, 226.

narrative events. The significance is plain for the convent as well, as her impression is that this time-space too is in terrible decline, especially since the death of the mother superior, who taught Consolata how to be a Catholic sister. Her own deterioration and the conflict we have seen between the young women show the perilous state in which this fragile space of repair finds itself in the middle part of the narrative. The conflict in Consolata's identity at this stage concerns on the one hand her awareness of her own grief and her personal sense of devastation, signalled in the private time-space of the cellar, and on the other hand her public-minded awareness of the similar pain the young women in her care have experienced and her desire to help them.

What *Paradise* traces in its early and middle stages, before its climactic events, is a webbed social network, as I have argued. The potential for a shared ethical life is shown to be a dangerous affair, depending on a number of contingencies. The faith of Mavis in the miraculous qualities of the convent depends in part on an impression of divinity in the mother superior, although Consolata reveals that this luminosity actually comes from an ability she herself possesses to heal others by touch and imparting this light to them as a byproduct of the healing. However, it is the necessary faith of Mavis in the story she tells herself about the convent, even as a mistake, that allows for the potential for a model of sociality and identity reformation that emerges in the climactic stages of the narrative of *Paradise.* The power of narrative as a potential force for good is once again registered here, especially in a context of conflicted identities, as in Pat Best's concerns about exposing the traditional story of Ruby's founding.

## The reparation dilemma: the unlikely survival of the possibility of change

The climactic attack on the convent throws these two small communities into stark relief. A role reversal takes place, precisely the opposite of what the attack was intended to achieve. The relatively fragmented and precarious community of the convent is not dispersed as was hoped but is galvanised, just as the relative unity that still held Ruby together is destabilised further.

Ruby's instability at the end of the novel is registered once again from Pat Best's perspective, as the narrative focalises her impressions of the various sites of opinion in the town in the aftermath of the attack. The impression of Pat Best as the outsider, who surveys the centripetal and centrifugal forces of the town, is consolidated in the novel's closing scenes in Ruby. She notes how the centripetal tendency, as the town tries to come together after the attack, can be seen in the general relief residents feel when they realise that their

fear that "lawmen would be happily swarming all over town"[471] proves unfounded. However, fissures are opening. The heart of authority in the town, the Morgan twins, has been broken. Steward Morgan, who killed Consolata in the attack, is described from Pat's perspective as "insolent and unapologetic" as he closes himself up on his ranch and focuses on enriching his nephew K.D. and the latter's wife Arnette through the activities of his bank. Deacon Morgan, who breaks with his brother after the killing of Consolata, moves toward Reverend Misner, who is shown to favour an opening up and modernising of Ruby:

> Roger Best will get his gas station and the connecting roads will be laid. Outsiders will come and go and some will want a sandwich and a can of 3.2 beer. So who knows, maybe there will be a diner too. K.D. and Steward will already be discussing T.V.[472]

A third faction is the radical younger generation, whose graffiti on the Oven, the symbol of the town's founding, is significant: "No longer were they calling themselves Be the Furrow of His Brow. The graffiti on the hood of the Oven now was 'We Are the Furrow of His Brow.'"[473] The argument between the older generation, who feel that the younger generation are disrespectful towards the Christian traditions of the town community, and the younger, who feel that this tradition has failed to act against injustice in the wider nation, is captured in this changed motto from a biblical injunction to an activist statement of identity.

Most critical attention on the novel's ending sees a significant shift of attention away from Ruby and towards the convent, and I will discuss this shift in more detail later. I have two responses to register at this point. One is to say that it is in one sense a justified move, as the community identity of the convent does come to have a significant catalytic potential, as I will argue shortly. However, the town of Ruby continues to have a relevance that relates to the convent, as it has throughout the middle part of the narrative. The second point about the town of Ruby is that it historicises *Paradise* once again at the end of the novel. The national political scene in the United States that *Paradise* surveys is rendered both descriptive and anticipatory (at least in the sense of anticipating and interpreting the subsequent events in the nation's history up to the time of the novel's publication in the late 1990s). The narrative draws to a close in 1976, and the three camps it identifies are as follows: a traditionally conservative, financially-minded position, careful of its legacy and future inheritance in Steward Morgan and his nephew; a politically ambitious, outward-facing and

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[471] Morrison, *Paradise*, 298.

[472] Morrison, *Paradise*, 306.

[473] Morrison, *Paradise*, 298.

modernising position in Reverend Misner and Deacon Morgan; and the radical left resistance camp, also outward-facing and young, idealistic and energised. These three strands seem to anticipate the coming end of the Keynesian postwar consensus and the coming Washington consensus in the West that was the concern of *Falling Man* as well. Steward Morgan's entrenched conservatism and financial concentration seem to anticipate the Reagan conservatism and economics of the 1980s, and the synthesis of Misner's modernising agenda and the radical left optimism of the younger generation, a synthesis signalled in Misner's courting this latter constituency, seems to anticipate Bill Clinton's triangulation ideology for the Democrats in the 1990s, itself an accommodation of Reagan's conservatism, just as Misner's outwardness embraces the consumerism of the 1980s. In this way, the novel's presentation of Ruby comes to have as one of its purposes the imaginative construction of the political factions in the 1970s in order to indicate how these factions came to shape the politics of the period of liberal ascendancy.

Admittedly, this is an ambitious argument for interpreting the novel as facing forward in a questioning manner beyond the events and time period of its narrative plotting. To strengthen the claim, I would first draw attention to the manner, already discussed in this chapter, in which the novel imaginatively engages with some of the concerns of third wave feminists like bell hooks in Pat Best's agonising dilemma about the town's history. I would also note the structure of the novel, with the discrimination highlighted in the urban sphere imagined as always outside and always exerting pressure on the two communities that are the novel's central narrative focus. This urban sphere as representing the ongoing reality of the nation at large intrudes significantly in this aftermath for the town of Ruby in a manner that invites the question of what happens next. In a sense, the novel's creative blending of historical comment and imagination of potential is what drives this. By the end of this chapter, I will have said more about this, but the following paragraph's discussion of the convent women's transformation begins that imagination of potential, which I argue implies an ongoing process into the future. Morrison herself indicates in an interview with Carolyn Denard soon after publication of *Paradise* that the concerns of the 1960s and 1970s still weigh on her mind and on the minds of others at the end of the millennium. Morrison explains in response to a question about the contemporary relevance of the novel:

> I want to suggest something about negotiation that is applicable for the 90s. There are a lot of neo-cons, a lot of activists, a lot of pacifists, people for integration, people against integration,

> who are still out there. These are current issues, and people change their minds on them a lot. And part of that is seeded in, or many of these ideas are seeded in, *Paradise*.[474]

I would argue that the negotiation Morrison refers to as ongoing is part of what the presentation of Ruby at the end of the narrative signifies.

The aftermath of the attack on the convent community is what has generated most critical comment, and this is understandable.[475] The young women who survive seem to stand for the novel's ongoing hope in the promise of resistance and renewal at the narrative's close. The new confidence of the young women by the novel's end emerges even before the attack, as the narrative adopts a surprising change in seeming to allow the narrative voice to address the reader directly, as it imagines how a friend visiting these women might now see them: "But if a friend came by, her initial alarm at the sight of the young women might be muted by their adult manner; how calmly themselves they seemed."[476] This impression is reinforced by their actions after the attack, as they take to the road in the car Mavis brought to the convent, where they engage confidently with the lives they left behind. Mavis returns to her daughter Sal and her healing is signalled in their affectionate language to each other. When Sal says she loves her, Mavis responds: "'I know that, Sal. Know it now anyway.' Mavis pushed a shank of black and yellow hair behind her daughter's ear and kissed her cheek. 'Count on me, Sal.'"[477] The sense of a stronger Mavis, now able to be a positive influence in the life of her daughter, is to the fore in this passage. Carolyn Denard in "The Convergence of Feminism and Ethnicity in the Fiction of Toni Morrison" clearly states the hopeful and regenerative ambition of Morrison's work that can be seen at this point in the narrative: "Thus [Morrison's] role, as ethnic cultural feminist, has been to try to alleviate these prejudices and misconceptions and to seek ways to reinforce the value that racism and sexism would take away from the beauty, the work, and the cultural values of black women."[478]

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[474] Carolyn Denard, "Blacks, Modernism, and the American South: An Interview with Toni Morrison," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 31, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 13.

[475] Mark Tabone in "Rethinking *Paradise"* argues: "Thus, these final scenes attempt to depict a world in which, crucially, difference still exists, yet this difference is radically included rather than excluded and, moreover, this inclusivity is portrayed in positive, empowering terms" (Tabone, "Rethinking," 141). Benjamin Burr argues: "in *Paradise* Morrison implies that discourses can be deconstructively positioned in a state of syncretic play to allow redemption" (Benjamin Burr, "Mythopoetic Syncretism," 173). Tessa Roynon in the *Cambridge Introduction* argues: "Ultimately, this novel suggests that a Christianity open to syncretism, and one stripped of the dominant ideologies of racism, imperialism, and patriarchy that have pragmatically harnessed it, is a faith fraught with radical potential" (Tessa Roynon, *Cambridge Introduction,* 73).

[476] Morrison, *Paradise*, 266.

[477] Morrison, *Paradise*, 315.

[478] Carolyn Denard,."The Convergence of Feminism and Ethnicity in the Fiction of Toni Morrison," in *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*, ed. Nellie Y. McKay (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988): 178.

The heroic reading of the young women at the novel's ending is continued by the description of the car: "They drove off into a violet so ultra it broke [Pallas' mother's] heart."[479] The car is a time-space for these women that is itself figurative, as a dynamic vehicle, of their catalytic potential for changing the world around them.

Consolata's role in the transformation is crucial. She initiates a thoroughly detailed process that allows these women to heal. They begin the process with what is called "the template".[480] This involves each adopting a naked posture on the cold floor that is comfortable as Consolata "painted the body's silhouette".[481] It becomes a test of will to stay in the silhouette: "none wished to be the first to give in before those pale watching eyes".[482] The next step is "the loud dreaming".[483] Here, "monologue is no different from a shriek".[484] After these episodes, "exhausted and outraged,"[485] they go to their beds. But healing is beginning. They put cloth down in their silhouettes and begin to decorate them. In Seneca's case, "when she had the hunger to slice her inner thing, she chose instead to mark the open body lying on the cellar floor".[486] This cathartic process allows these young women to undo the damage that caused their continuing animosity in the convent and to allow the healing potential of this new time-space to do its work. In this way, the conflicted identities of the middle part of the narrative are repaired. It is also notable that the strength and confidence of the new identities for these young women are forged in a somewhat public, somewhat private space, as an experience that is both communal and interior provides the social support that allows for personal identity reformation. The car in which the young women begin their adventures at the novel's end thus has a dual signification, indicating both the potential for change they carry with them and the strength of their identities in a support network of shared experience and friendship.

The constructive chronotopic reading of *Paradise* thus concludes with a national vision that is sober but hopeful. The forces that come to shape the progression of the United States into the period of liberal ascendancy do not entirely extinguish resistance to them, nor the potential that this resistance might change

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[479] Morrison, *Paradise*, 312.

[480] Morrison, *Paradise*, 263.

[481] Ibid.

[482] Ibid.

[483] Morrison, *Paradise*, 264.

[484] Ibid.

[485] Ibid.

[486] Morrison, *Paradise*, 265.

the wider society for the better. However, a concentrated Rawlsian approach now helps to push this conclusion a little further.

## Public reason and the transformative potential of dialogue

*Paradise* has a final move outward onto a national stage, as we have just seen. As in my other novels, the Rawlsian concept of public reason allows for a sharpened focus on the dialogic qualities of the novel in the specific terms of political debate. Revisiting the interpretive process that the constructive chronotopic reading undertook, the obvious starting point would seem to be the Consolata-led identity transformation of the young women in their collective, somatic rituals, mainly because this is the most clearly transformative process presented in a novel about identity reformation in a context of prejudice and injustice. This, however, is not immediately clear in its dialogic implications. One difficulty is that it is not a linguistic process. The other is that although the process involves a shared space, it is still in a sense an intimately private affair, with each woman staying within the confines of her own chalk silhouette that comes to serve as a kind of spiritual waste basket.

The more conventional debate occurs in town meetings in Ruby. The argument about the town's direction between the older and younger generations plays out here, detailed most clearly in a passage in which the perspective of Dovey Morgan, Steward's wife, is focalised. Dovey remembers the dialogue and also how the rebellious claims of the younger generation were shut down by the authoritative figures of the older generation. Deacon Morgan implies seniority and authority in his intervention: "Act short with me all you want, you in long trouble if you think you can disrespect a row you never hoed."[487] The derailing of the conversation also happens when Sargeant Person, another town elder, invokes God in response to Roy, one of the younger generation, referring to the motto on the Oven:

> "We are the power if we just –"
> "See what I mean? See what I mean? Listen to that! You hear that, Reverend? That boy needs a strap. Blasphemy!"[488]

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[487] Morrison, *Paradise*, 86.

[488] Morrison, *Paradise*, 87.

Dovey Morgan's is a complex perspective in what it signals, as the narrative explains that "in discussion with others, including Steward, she tended to agree with whomever she was listening to".[489] The difficulty with debate is here signalled certainly, as the damaging and coercive power of rhetoric are seen in the foregoing examples. However, Dovey's openness to listening also implies potential for change through debate.

A relationship between the transformative process at the convent and the town meetings suggests itself at this point in thinking through the issue of political debate in *Paradise*. We have already seen how the process in the convent brought the women self-confidence, peace and calm in their identities. This outcome could be seen as both a preliminary stage to debate and a transformation of debate itself. One of the things *Paradise* seems to add to our nuancing of Rawls is the notion of time: debate takes time. Consolata in reflecting on her lessons learnt from Catholicism identifies a mixture of good and bad traditions, but what she most prizes is detailed in a recollection of the mother superior attending to her moral training:

> After arranging for her confirmation, she had taken the young Consolata aside and together they would watch coffee brew or sit in silence at the edge of the garden. God's generosity, she said, is nowhere better seen than in the gift of patience.[490]

The other protagonist who waits, of course, is Pat Best. The three major groups of influence in Ruby after the attack in fact number four, as there is a group of one that watches it all, Pat Best. She observes but of course knows more than any of the rest of them about the town whose future they mean to contest. This also seems to imply something about debate and time: debate must be timed wisely. *Paradise*, then, appears to insist on the imaginative and patient reconstruction of debate. Working through the insecurities and even fissures of identity, as well as anxieties about status, requires both time and imagination, and this may involve processes that are outside the normal conventions of oral debate. The positivity of the novel is found in its successful imagining of some of these processes: this is a practical process that the novel suggests is within the capacity of human energy and willpower to create.

Critics who have sought to put *Paradise* in the context of Morrison's career have observed aspects of the author's oeuvre that chime well with the interpretation being advanced here. Yvette Christiansë in her 2013 *Toni Morrison: An Ethical Poetics* sees Morrison's "Home" essay and its relationship with *Paradise* as illustrative of the themes that preoccupy her career. She argues that "[Morrison's] essay 'Home' and its

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[489] Ibid.

[490] Morrison, *Paradise*, 242.

anticipation of *Paradise"*[491] comes "to appear as self-citation. That gesture of self-citation expands across her work".[492] Christiansë goes on to define the idea of home in Morrison (and in relation to Morrison's later novel of that name) thus: "One has to recognize that at the end of *Home*, a novel occupied by the narrative of a homeward journey, the final line, 'Let's go home,' is at once an invitation to collectivity and a gesture toward a path yet to be traveled."[493] This also applies well to *Paradise*, with its forward-facing structure. Another critic interested in putting *Paradise* in relation to Morrison's career to that point is Linden Peach in his 2000 book *Toni Morrison*. He sees *Paradise* as a novel bridging complex concerns in Morrison's oeuvre:

> Without eschewing issues around power, violence, victimisation and exploitation, the possibilities of sexual freedom and questions of pleasure and personal autonomy are pursued, for instance, in the cases of Sula and First Corinthians in *Song of Solomon*, Jadine in *Tar Baby*, Dorcas in *Jazz*, and the women in the convent in *Paradise*.[494]

The reading of this chapter argues strongly for the particularly dialogic manner in which this possibility of freedom is envisaged in *Paradise*.

Returning to the conclusion of the Bakhtinian part of this reading, the apparent opposition between resistance and dialogue needs to be considered. The confident dynamism of the young women of the convent suggests a resistance that is active and direct. On the face of it, this appears at odds with the slowly deliberative and imaginative model of debate just outlined. The principal figures on either side of this apparent opposition are the young and the old. However, a third conceptual level suggests itself. This is an ethical and identity-focused level of personal attributes. That level identifies two principles: courage and caution. The interplay of these personal attributes emerges from this dialogic reading of *Paradise*. The durable and resistant identity *Paradise* advises is one that tilts toward neither end of that spectrum, but that rebalances itself as it assesses the context in which it finds itself.

This implies further that the energy of youth and the caution of experience will both be needed in a readjusting and contextually-sensitive approach to difference and values, and that the practical work of building a community cannot be the preserve of any one perspective. To the extent that the opposition

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[491] Christiansë, *Morrison*, 250.

[492] Ibid.

[493] Christiansë, *Morrison*, 251.

[494] Peach, *Morrison*, 175.

between Ruby and the convent is between concerns about racial and sexual discrimination respectively, the novel's engagement with the third wave feminism of the period of liberal ascendancy is is signalled here as well. In *Yearning*, bell hooks argues that one must, in "eradicating sexism and racism, [understand] the importance of not promoting an either/or competition between oppressive systems".[495] *Paradise* imagines the possibility of addressing these issues in serious debate between the town of Ruby and the convent.

This reading relates the idea of dialogue to the idea of other forms of direct action in resistance to ongoing discrimination not as a denial of the latter approach. Dialogue and debate are most strongly imagined in this reading at the stage of building durable and resistant identities, but there is an open-ended quality to the question of what form of resistance the women will take once they have these stronger identities, not least because their eventual actions are left unstated. I agree with Linden Peach in his judgement that the novel "dramatises the conflicts not only among the various black schools of thought - 'integrationalists,' 'separatists' and 'pan-Africanists' - but within them".[496] Dialogue and debate are presented as practical tools with potential to clarify these conflicts and that is the thought that this chapter sees emerging in reading *Paradise*. Philip Page argues that "in *Paradise*, the characters must replace their dogmatic reverence for a monologic interpretation of the past with a more balanced and flexible combination of respect for the past and the wisdom to grow beyond that past".[497] He concludes that "Americans, Morrison implies, must avoid the complacencies and the rigidities of self-righteousness and instead must remain open to ongoing renewal, flexibility, and openness to their inherent multiplicity."[498] This chapter's reading of the novel situates the communities of Ruby and the convent chronotopically in a national frame of ongoing racial and sexual discrimination, and it is left open-ended how the dialogic process within the communities or more direct forms of action might extend into the wider nation, but the potential for that extension of transformed dialogic processes can also be envisaged both in the strength and dynamic outward journey into the wider nation of the resistant identities that have grown out of the processes the novel traces and as a challenge to the United States at large if it seeks to tackle the ongoing problem of discrimination in its society.

From the specific perspective of black Americans, debate's potential for social construction is also signalled in the need for Pat Best and Reverend Misner to reconcile some of their differences, probably in a

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[495] hooks, *Yearning*, 64.

[496] Peach, *Morrison*, 155.

[497] Page, "Furrowing," 647.

[498] Page, "Furrowing," 648.

hybrid manner. In their exchange about cultural identity, in which Pat Best takes the view that an American identity is the culturally appropriate one and Reverend Misner urges an African rootedness, the textual rebalancing, without suggesting that Pat Best is entirely wrong, readjusts an overly negative reading of Misner's perspective, as their points in the argument are fairly balanced:

> "Africa is our home, Pat, whether you like it or not."
> "I'm really not interested, Richard. You want some foreign Negroes to identify with, why not South America? Or Germany, for that matter. They have some brown babies over there you could have a good time connecting with. Or is it just some kind of past with no slavery in it that you're looking for?"
> "Why not? There was a whole lot of life before slavery. And we ought to know what it is. If we're going to get rid of the slave mentality, that is."
> "You're wrong, and if that's your field you're plowing wet. Slavery *is* our past. Nothing can change that, certainly not Africa."
> "We live in the world, Pat. The whole world. Separating us, isolating us – that's always been their weapon. Isolation kills generations. It has no future."
> "You think they don't love their children?"[499]

This is the closest the communities in the novel come to having a high-quality and productive debate, with careful and concentrated focusing on the issues. It results in the end in an identification of the central issue of the weighing of competing cultural identities on a local and larger scale. This is the process that dialogic reading of *Paradise* envisages. It is Rawlsian in its assessment of the democratic potential of such a process, but it also nuances Rawls in asking for imagination not only on the process and outcomes of the debate but also on its preliminary and formative stages for the personal identities that are to enter into it. Above all, it urges patience as the time and energy devoted to the process will have to be significant. This is registered not least in the fact that this is a return to debate between the two after Reverend Misner seemed to insult Pat Best in the first exchange and she re-engages him after eliciting a clarification. The potential rewards of this patience, *Paradise* implies, are both considerable and attainable.

*Paradise* marks a development of two trends in this corpus of novels in its treatment of town hall debates. We have seen, implicitly in *Saturday*'s background protest against the Iraq War and in *Falling Man*'s

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[499] Morrison, *Paradise*, 210.

foregrounded protest on the same issue, the Bakhtinian and Rawlsian valuation of public spaces emerging in this corpus of novels. We have also seen in *Disgrace* and in the treatment of the Island in *The Robber Bride* an implied call for revaluing non-urban spaces in the period of liberal ascendancy in the West. In prizing the dynamic potential for town hall debates, *Paradise* brings these two trends together. The experimentation that is possible within these two small communities draws attention to the absence of culturally valued public spaces of debate in the urban sphere in the period of liberal ascendancy. Furthermore, in its structuring, *Paradise* retains a sense of the cultural power of the urban United States in the period. This is so not least in the gravitational pull of the technological and economic trends of the nation on the people of Ruby after the convent attack. It is also apparent in the implied need for change as the convent women revisit their former urban environments in the narrative's ending. In *Paradise*, then, the novel of liberal lament marks a clear route for potential cultural renewal in reconsidering the value of the debating spaces of small towns in the urban sphere, and thus in society as a whole.

# Conclusion

## The Novel of Liberal Lament

The attitude to literary interpretation I have taken in this thesis accords well with that of Peter Lamarque. Lamarque distinguishes between interpretive monists, who hold that there is one right answer to the puzzle of the text, and interpretive pluralists, who allow for different perspectives on a text. Interpretive reading is perhaps best thought of as a rules-governed practice, in which the reader acts as if there is one right answer to the puzzle of the text, while allowing that the final contribution of the particular interpretive reading is an entry into a community of readers, who may offer competing and different readings of the text. Lamarque explains:

> It seems desirable, though, to leave room for finely balanced opposed perspectives, each having an equal call on our attention and each illuminating the work at hand. Such is the peculiar nature of the kinds of "objects" that are literary works. The monist forces us to choose but the pluralist allows for supportable multiplicity.[500]

It is this sort of balanced approach I hope to take to the question of literary interpretation. I have tried to follow seriously the task of interpreting these texts with a chronotopic focus of readerly attention, and in that sense I acted as if there was a right answer to the interpretive question. However, I accept that this thesis constitutes a contribution to the discussion of the useful reading of literary texts rather than any final word on what these literary works mean. In the final part of this conclusion, I will explain further how I see the interpretation of the novels in this thesis working.

In my introduction, I stressed how chronotopic reading is a formalism that is responsive to the poststructural critiques of structuralism. Peter Lamarque's emphasis on readerly attention explains how this response works. The poststructural identification of multiplicity of meaning in literary texts is well made, but Lamarque shows how prescriptions of readerly attention can concentrate meaning and allow for interpretation. He argues that "the task of delimiting meaning is more important to the interpretive exercise than that of multiplying meaning. Too much meaning at the level of explication is more likely to hinder than

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[500] Lamarque, *Philosophy*, 168.

aid literary appreciation."[501] Chronotopic reading is in the first instance a prescriptive instruction to a reader to attend to the manner in which identity is formed dialogically in particular spaces in the text. In this way, it seeks to delimit meaning in order to aid literary interpretation. Chronotopic reading also serves as a readerly prompt when engaging in the conventional literary reading practices of associative thinking, such as text patterning, and figurative reading. The time-spaces presented in the novel can themselves be set in relation to one another comparatively and also thought of in terms of scale to arrive at their figurative significance.

What this conclusion seeks to do is to take this interpretive attitude of delimiting meaning one stage further. The interpretations of the individual novels in this thesis selection can be synthesised into a corpus reading. The genre of realism is particularly instructive in consideration both of the analytical chapters of this thesis and in the synthesis that follows. One way of thinking about chronotopic reading as a useful form of reading in our present moment is as a practical way of approaching the desired literary outcomes of responsive formal theories like that of Attridge. Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* advises a performative way of thinking about literature, as we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, but he makes particular comments about literature in its realist mode of expression as well:

> Thus the tradition of realist fiction should be understood – in so far as it is literature and not a type of history read for its vivid representation of past events – as a staging of objectivity, an invitation to experience the knowability of the world.[502]

Attridge's use of the word experience in its verbal form is significant. The analytical chapters of this thesis and the synthesis that follow attempt to demonstrate how I was experiencing the literary realism of these texts in the readings undertaken here.

## The relation of two images

The concentrated constructive reading of the novel of liberal lament generates and sets in relation to one another two moving images as the interpretive creation of these fictional narratives. The first moving image, arising out of the constructive or Bakhtinian part of the reading, is of liberal identities forming and being

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[501] Lamarque, *Philosophy*, 145.

[502] Attridge, *Singularity*, 97.

profoundly challenged and disrupted by a heterogeneous world. In each case, this image is situated and involves a tension between the practical demands of identity formation on one hand and, on the other hand, the challenge offered to that process of identity formation by the particular form of complexity that the novel under examination brought to that liberal identity.

Taken as a corpus, the novel of liberal lament identifies multi-dimensional challenges to liberal identity in the period of liberal ascendancy. One dimension involves challenges within the liberal value system itself, with the straining of the ties that bind the levels of the business community together in *Falling Man* and the fragmentation of liberal attitudes in the decades preceding the period of liberal ascendancy anticipating the free market ideological trends of the 1990s in *Paradise* as two prominent economically-focused historical situations that the novels emphasise. Another dimension involves geographically local challenges within a national context to liberalism, with immigration in Canada in *The Robber Bride*, British gang culture in *Saturday*, racial and sexual forms of discrimination in the United States in *Paradise*, and in the attempt to face the enormous ethical and economic challenges posed by the emergence of South Africa out of apartheid and into a democratic situation in *Disgrace* all prominent examples of this type of challenge in the novels. A final dimension involves international challenges to liberalism in the period, particularly involving conflict between Western nations and nations in the Muslim-majority world, with 9/11 attacker Hammad in *Falling Man* and the Iraq War protests in *Saturday* as the prominent examples of this conflict in those narratives.

The tension that emerges in identity formation is necessarily profound, certainly as a matter of legitimacy and even as a matter of viability. The novels often indicate the likely failure of identity formation that is socially legitimate in this context, with Perowne in *Saturday*, Keith in *Falling Man* and Lurie in *Disgrace* all showing ways in which the reparation dilemma might lead to a failure in liberal identity to adjust successfully to encounters with complex social environments. One means of resisting the reparation dilemma's problem of persevering with an older identity is indicated in trusting the power of resistance, with Lianne in *Falling Man* attempting this, but with success again doubtful. Another possible means of resisting the problem in the reparation dilemma involves finding strength in numbers, with the protagonists in *The Robber Bride* and the women of the convent in *Paradise* in particular both suggesting the ways in which group solidarity could represent a more viable and legitimate basis for forming identity in a challenging social context. Even here, though, the long-term chances of success are far from certain.

The first image that emerges from the novel of liberal lament, then, is a very troubling one. Identity formation is a practical necessity for action, and so the initial challenge is that the liberal tradition in which

the protagonists situate themselves provides a ready basis for identity formation out of the confusion that results from encounters with heterogeneity. However, this identity formation may simply involve ignoring the ways in which the encounters with heterogeneity demand a response and a change from liberal identity. In this way, viability and legitimacy are separated, and the historical situation in the period of liberal ascendancy can seem to be one of liberal embattlement, in which liberalism disengages from the world and the social challenges it represents. The other aspect of this image as one of tension involves the strained attempts of personal identity to respond to the multi-dimensional social challenges that liberalism encounters. Liberal identity appears a rather small thing in this light. Personal efforts to think through the problems of the social challenges confronting them can be daunted by the scale and complexity of the challenge. Patricia's silence about the history of Ruby in *Paradise* is a striking example of this recognition. The image that emerges could thus be described as a liberal identity crisis.

The second image that emerges from the novel of liberal lament, particularly from the concentrated Rawlsian part of that reading, is of the imaginative construction of forms of and arenas for debate. Beginning with arenas, what is striking in the novels is the motif of the makeshift debate chamber. The family living room in *Saturday* transforms through the moving of furniture and positioning of participants; Nina and Martin's arguments in the former's apartment in *Falling Man* are formalised by Lianne's adopting the attitude of an audience; Zenia's climactic polemic performance in *The Robber Bride* is dramatised by the anonymity and adaptability, to suit the performance to each protagonist, of the hotel room space; Lurie's highly unusual performance space of the outdoor area of the animal welfare clinic as an unlikely teaching space comes about entirely accidentally in *Disgrace*; and the convent's open floor as a therapeutic space for somatic ritual is an adaptation, as is everything else about that building, which was originally a wealthy man's playground in *Paradise*. Two helpful thoughts arise out of this presentation of makeshift debate chambers. One is that human ingenuity in challenging circumstances is remarkably adept at fashioning environments that might serve to address the need for debate. The other is that the makeshift character of these spaces draws attention to its opposite: a purpose-built debating space. The novel of liberal lament thus appears to lament the absence of a variety of spaces for debate in liberal societies in the period of liberal ascendancy, but also thereby to indicate that this is what is needed for liberalism even to attempt to address the heterogeneity of the world.

In terms of forms of debate, the novels imagine debate first as a rules-governed practice. This is the focus of *Saturday*, with the attitudes of openness, willingness to listen and reasonableness that Rawls advises the focus in their absence in that novel's failed debate between Perowne and his daughter Daisy. There is

nothing in any of the other novels to challenge this conception either. In *Paradise*, for instance, the derailed debates and the partially successful one between Patricia and Reverend Misner in Ruby are derailed or partially successful to the extent that they fail or succeed in adopting attitudes of openness, willingness to listen and reasonableness. The lament in *Disgrace* is for the lack of reciprocity in the classroom that might have transformed the potential of Lurie's meeting Melanie Isaacs.

Within this attitudinal framework of reciprocity, however, the image of debate is a complex and fluid one. Its necessary adaptability to specific situations is suggested in the sequential implications of Lianne's observer status in *Falling Man*, as her identity is sharpened as an observer in what seems a precursor to entry into debate. Thus, debate seems an activity with applications at various stages in the processes of identity and social formation. The polemic and the somatic in *The Robber Bride* and *Paradise* respectively bring the scope for imaginative reinvention of debate to an ambitious point in the novel of liberal lament. Thinking of debate as an activity that occurs in stages, the appropriateness of polemic and somatic activity of particular sorts in a sequence with more traditional forms of reasoned and rhetorical debate seems to offer the potential to bridge the demands of historically situated identity formation on the one hand and social construction on the other.

The relation between the two images of the novel of liberal lament has already been indicated in discussion of the latter. To the extent that the challenge of the liberal identity crisis outlined in the first image could be met in the treatment of the novels, it is through a re-energised and reimagined process of debate. The failure of liberalism to meet this challenge in the period of liberal ascendancy accounts for this corpus's generic title of the novel of liberal lament. The period of liberal ascendancy, of course, immediately precedes our own, and discussion of the light the novel of liberal lament casts on our own contemporary situation will be the focus of the last part of this thesis. Before proceeding to that last reflection, however, I would like to revisit the value of this type of concentrated constructive reading, liberal chronotopic reading, in light of the overall corpus reading just articulated.

In terms of its outcomes, what the designed reading process of this thesis manages is a powerful synthesis. By beginning with particularity, in constructing specific identities in specific times and places, it is situated. In this sense, Morson and Emerson seem justified in arguing that "if ethics is (as Bakhtin contends) a matter of particular, concrete cases, and not of rules to be instantiated, then novels may be the richest form of ethical thought".[503] However, in ending with processual images, one of debilitation or disintegration and one of action and interaction, the reading also achieves a generalisable quality. It comes close to meeting

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[503] Morson and Emerson, *Bakhtin*, 366.

Aristotle's famous but often elusive assessment of the literary. Aristotle says how history differs from literature: "The distinction is this: the one says what has happened, the other that kind of thing that would happen. / For this reason poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars."[504] This reading model manages a remarkable combination of both the historical particularity Morson and Emerson see in Bakhtin and the generalisable quality, in the dialogic human processes that form the final images of chronotopic reading, that Aristotle claims for the literary.

In thinking about the relationship between these two stages, Northrop Frye's notion of transvaluation in the literary is apposite: "The goal of ethical criticism is transvaluation, the ability to look at contemporary social values with the detachment of one who is able to compare them in some degree with the infinite vision of possibilities presented by culture."[505] The appropriateness of the design of the reading process to the texts under examination is the important aspect of this transvaluative reading experience in my estimation. The close fit between Bakhtin and Rawls, and between Bakhtin and Rawls on the one hand and the novels on the other, allows for this emergence of two planes, the historical and the potential. Put another way, the possibility of debate emerges out of the challenged realities of dialogic identity formation in the novels. In this way, transformation can, albeit with difficulty, begin to be imagined in the literary.

## Futurity in the novel of liberal lament

I write this thesis in 2019, over a decade after the close of the period of liberal ascendancy with the 2008 global financial crash. This period in which we now live has been seen as a much more contested one for liberalism than the period that preceded it, and in that sense, the novel of liberal lament might be argued to be prescient. Western societies have seen their liberal political centres eroded by the populist right and the radical left, as evidenced in elections throughout the period. Similarly, the rise in population, affluence and influence of parts of the world outside the traditional liberal centres of the West has made the multi-directional forces imagined in the novel of liberal lament increasingly apparent. The straitened path advised by the novel of liberal lament of a co-ordinated, organised, collaborative and imaginative process of debate has of course not been taken, and the difficulties for liberalism envisaged in the gloomier descriptive image of liberal identity in grave danger of disintegrating feel much closer to the mark. A non-fiction text that makes its call for liberalism to attempt to revive its consultative ideals in recent years is Timothy Garton

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[504] Aristotle and Malcolm Heath, *Poetics* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1996): 16.

[505] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957): 348.

Ash's 2016 book *Free Speech*, which defines its first principle for liberal living in this historical moment thus: "We - all human beings - must be free and able to express ourselves, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, regardless of frontiers."[506] Garton Ash goes on to argue that free expression is "the [freedom] upon which all others depend".[507] The advantage of literary reading of novels like the ones in this corpus over a non-fiction treatment like that of Garton Ash, I would argue, is that the flexibility of literary reading allows a reader to imagine the particular and principled aspects of identity and society in dialogic terms of debate in a memorable manner, as its literary quality combines the linguistic and the narrative processes that are both the subject and medium of the artistic form of the novel. For concerned liberals wherever they are to be found, the novel of liberal lament remains an urgent call to action. In all probability, it has become even more urgent.

For those who place themselves outside the liberal tradition, the novel of liberal lament arguably offers an even more productive challenge. Wayne Booth in his book *The Company We Keep* argues that literature can offer a powerful and significant rhetorical perspective on an issue for a reader. He says that these rhetorical perspectives can be put into conversation with each other to aid readerly thought about a particular topic and he gives the example of the radical left perspective of Norman Mailer and the political conservatism of Edmund Burke:

> … after you read Mailer read ... but I know of no "opposing" account of those same events that can stand up to his passion. The fortunate thing is that the antidote need not be focused on the same events; after reading Mailer, read Edmund Burke.[508]

What I find useful in Booth's point is the idea that delimited meaning in literature can concentrate on a particular position or perspective, and this of course means identifying what it does not address as well. The novel of liberal lament offers a picture of liberalism both in actuality and in potential, and in both dimensions shows its vulnerability and strength. What is intriguing to the non-liberal and liberal reader alike is the inversion of these judgements on robustness in the two dimensions. In other words, liberalism is economically strong and interpersonally weak in actuality in the period of liberal ascendancy, but economically weak and interpersonally strong in potential. For the non-liberal, the novel of liberal lament

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[506] Timothy Garton Ash, *Free Speech* (London: Atlantic Books, 2016): 119.

[507] Ibid.

[508] Booth, *Company*, 365.

offers a challenge. Even amid its weakness, liberalism still offers a very strong call to debate as the best of its tradition. The novel of liberal lament persuasively indicates areas for attention in any attempt to make such ambitious debate work. Non-liberals wanting to challenge themselves about whether there is anything worth taking from liberalism would find the novel of liberal lament a useful and challenging tool in clarifying their thoughts.

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